**The Manichaeans of Kellis : religion, community, and everyday life**
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# Part I.
# Approaching Religion in Everyday Life

## Chapter 2. Everyday Groupness: Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Groups and Everyday Life

> In the laudable effort to emphasize the diversity of early Christian groups and movements, we tend to create stable "name brands," which interact and compete with each other like so many brands of breakfast cereal on a grocery store shelf (David Brakke).[1]

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have set out a challenging task: to find and reconstruct the religious practice of individuals at a village level on the basis of fragmentary ancient material, against the backdrop of fundamental changes in the type of religion attested over the course of Late Antiquity. In this chapter, I will introduce "everyday groupness" as a feasible approach undergirded by current debates in religious studies and sociology.[2] As William H. Sewell Jr. points out: "It now appears that we should think of worlds of meaning as normally being contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable."[3] These characteristics ask for an alternative approach in which the historical existence of coherent religious groups, cultures, or traditions is no longer naively accepted, nor aggressively rejected as an essentialist construction. Religious affiliations and individual practices of meaning-making in antiquity were both strongly linked to social and conceptual groupings, as well as permeable, flexible, and contradictory. To fully appreciate these complex dynamics, this chapter will outline a number of fundamental academic debates under three headers: everyday life, individuals, and religion. Together, these insights will enable us to critically reflect on the common-sense notion of religious groups and lay the groundwork for Part II, the chapters of which will build a more detailed historical analysis of Manichaeism in a local village setting.

### 2.2 Everyday Life

The conventional focus on Manichaeism as a religious system has for a long time prioritized the theological and cosmological texts of the elite, with the downside that everyday life remained elusive. These sources primarily represent the perspective(s) of the theological and institutional elite.[4] The way in which a Manichaean way of life was experienced by ordinary

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[1] D. Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 9.

[2] The specific phrase and the approach are strongly influenced by the work of Eric Rebillard, for example in his *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200-450 CE* (London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[3] W. H. Sewell, "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 53. Inconsistency and ancient religion are explored by H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion: Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1-35.

[4] This conventional focus is visible in the various introductions to Manichaeism. M. Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. P. A. Mirecki (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008). He hardly treats Manichaeism as a

people, or put into practice outside theological debates, has often been left unexplored. The reason for this negligence is the scarcity of source materials, which mostly derive from religious specialists or individuals with access to enough resources to produce tangible artifacts that could stand the test of time.[5] Of course, theological tractates and liturgical documents are not unimportant, since they had bearing on the daily lives of all Manichaeans. At the same time, however, these texts are deeply colored by rhetorical and theological agendas. They did not aim to faithfully represent the practices of ordinary villagers, peasants, woolworkers, merchants, or slaves. Instead, they sought to redefine and refocus these practices. One of the central concerns of this dissertation is to shift the focus of study away from these documents, toward the religious lives of ordinary people, following the so-called "quotidian turn."

### 2.2.1 The Quotidian Turn: Toward Everyday Life

In the last decades, the intersection of daily life and religion has returned to the forefront of the study of religion. Topics previously associated with the German *Alltagsgeschichte* of the 1970s or the French *Annales* school of the 1960s have been revived in the late 1980s and '90s by historians and sociologists interested in "local religion," "lived religion," or "everyday religion."[6] In his landmark volume *Lived Religion in America*, David Hall argued that historians of religion became aware that they "know next-to-nothing about religion as practiced and precious little about the everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women."[7] Along similar lines, Robert Orsi, Nancy Ammerman, and Meredith McGuire decided to refocus on what living religious lives in the midst of society meant for individuals.[8] They raised questions about the practices of the laity instead of those of the preachers and about religion in almost mundane places: at home, the workplace, or the garden, instead of at the centers of religious learning.

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historical and social movement (with the exception of a section on the church hierarchy). Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism* has a short section on the community, but primarily focused on the relation with the cosmological myth. Both introductions do not discuss the history of the Manichaean religion.

[5] With terms like "institutional" and "elite," I also refer to the wealth standing behind elaborate written documents. Wealthier people are, moreover, more frequently visible in papyri because their societal role and property often involved interactions put into writing. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History*, 14-15.

[6] T. A. Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn: Interpretive Categories and Scholarly Trajectories in the Study of Religion since the 1960s," *Journal of Religion* 95, no. 3 (2015): 365n16 cites the relevant literature. For late antique history, we now have K. Sessa, *Daily Life in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[7] D. D. Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii.

[8] R. Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, ed. D. D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4-12; R. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); M. B. McGuire, *Lived Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); S. Schielke and L. Debevec, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. S. Schielke and L. Debevec (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 1-16.

This dichotomy between "ordinary" people and the religious "elite" is highly problematic. There can be no denying that preachers or religious leaders have a different perspective on religion than slaves, merchants, or women, but the emphasis on lived religion should not drive a wedge between different social strata. Therefore, adherents of the "quotidian turn" have stressed the dialectical relationship between everyday behavior and textual, institutional elite religion. Scholars should discern religion and religious practices in the unmarked moments and places that are not traditionally associated with religion, while still recognizing the role of religious leaders, texts, and institutions. The challenge in many of these studies lies in the combination of a firm shift in focus toward non-institutional, everyday experiences and a dialectical notion of tradition. This results in two methodological challenges. The first is that scholars of lived religion have to "excavate" the factors involved in the negotiations of what we call "religion" in the context of complex, overlapping social relations and affiliations. The complex mosaic of relations, expectations, and individual choices stands in strong contrast to the straightforward discourse of (some of) the religious specialists, who tend to work with a perspective of coherence and perfection.[9] By critically reading against the grain and focusing on alternative types of source materials, we can sometimes reconstruct everyday realities behind the elite discourse. To recover a "people's history" of Christians in Late Antiquity, Burrus and Lyman state: "[W]e must learn to interpret the surviving texts and other artefacts with less reliance on patristic categories and limits."[10] To achieve this shift in focus, papyri offer excellent source material, allowing us to reach beyond the theological, cosmological, or literary representations into the messy reality of daily life.

The second methodological challenge is to avoid an easy nineteenth-century dichotomy, where "popular religion" becomes "presented as in some way a diminution, a misconception or a contamination of "*un*-popular religion."[11] Many individuals had a certain level of agency in the complex world of late antique religions, but this should not result in a

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[9] The "complex mosaic" is Meskell and Preucel's term for overlapping identities. L. Meskell and R.W. Preucel, "Identities," in *Companion to Social Archaeology*, ed. L. Meskell and R. W. Preucel (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 129. A stimulating illustration of the difference in approach is found in the *Warner v. Boca Raton* trial (1999) in Florida. The court was asked to define "religion" and to rule whether or not certain vertical memorials on graves were "religious." Winnifred F. Sullivan described: "for the City, religion was something that had dogmas and rules and texts and authorities. Religion was something you obeyed, something about which you had little choice because of the imposition of an external authority. For the City, religious people were passive agents of their traditions. For the plaintiffs, religion was field of activity, one in which an individual's beliefs and actions were the result of a mix of motivations and influences, familial, ecclesiological, aesthetic, and political." W. F. Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 36. In the end the court recognized the "religious" nature of the plaintiffs' choices, but decided it was not a central tenet of their "religion" and was therefore not protected by the law(s) on religious freedom.

[10] V. Burrus and R. Lyman, "Shifting the Focus of History," in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, ed. V. Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5.

[11] P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19.

negative evaluation of the educated elite or the texts they wrote.[12] Most everyday religious practices draw upon the repertoire of institutional or textual religion, even when ordinary people adapt and appropriate elements according to their own needs.[13] Archaeological and papyrological finds can therefore reveal otherwise invisible religious choices or practices, but these always stood in relation to more institutionally defined religion. One of the common strategies to neutralize the negative effect of the dichotomy is stressing how doctrine, regulations, and institutions belong to the circumstances of everyday life.[14] To make this point, scholars of lived religion draw on practice theories: a highly diverse set of authors and ideas that share a common shift from "culture as discourse to culture as practice and performance."[15] They build on the central premise that "through their activities, individuals internalize cultural symbols and meanings" and at the same time, through these activities "they also reproduce and transform these symbols and meanings in the social world."[16] This recursive and re-creative nature of tradition is central in the work of Giddens, Bourdieu, Sahlin, Sewell, and others. When applied to everyday religious choices, it becomes apparent that individuals not only draw on cultural and religious repertoires, but by doing so also replicate and transform these repertoires or traditions. To study "everyday religion," according to Nancy Ammerman, does not exclude religious institutions, but primarily deals with them "once they get used by someone other than a professional."[17] In this way, the aim is to look *beyond* the scope of officially sanctioned beliefs and practices, not to exclude or discredit them beforehand. The more institutional features of a religion are still studied, but now primarily when they are "appropriated" and put into practice by individuals, an approach Jörg Rüpke propagates for the study of lived ancient religion.[18]

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[12] W. A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); E. Badone, ed. *Religious Orthodoxy & Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 12; Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn."; S. Sharot, *A Comparative Sociology of World Religions. Virtuosos, Priests, and Popular Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13-19.

[13] "Ordinary people" is used as a shorthand for ancient individuals who did not write elaborate religious treatises, nor held religious positions of power. As Bagnall and Cribiore state, we must keep in mind that the real majority of "ordinary people" are invisible in our ancient sources. Most written accounts, even in the exceptional case of the papyri from Egypt, derive from a well-to-do subsection of society. R. S. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt. 300 BC-AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2006), 10-11.

[14] R. Orsi, "Afterword: Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, or what was supposed to have disappeared but did not," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. S. Schielke and L. Debevec (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 152.

[15] G. M. Spiegel, "Introduction," in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, ed. G. M. Spiegel (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.

[16] H. Kupari, *Lifelong Religion as Habitus: Religious Practice among Displaced Karelian Orthodox Women in Finland* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 10; M. Polyakov, "Practice Theories: The Latest Turn in Historiography?," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6 (2012): 218-35; S. B. B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (1984): 144-57.

[17] N. Ammerman, "Introduction: Observing Religious Modern Lives," in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. N. Ammerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

[18] The Lived Ancient Religion project (LAR) was announced in J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis Religion'," *Mythos* 5 (2011): 191-203. Further publications include: J. Rüpke,

Two recent studies of Ancient Christianity may illustrate the dialectic between institutional or textual religion and its local, appropriated versions. Kim Bowes has studied private churches and devotion in the fourth and fifth century. In this period, domestic rituals and spaces constituted a major force, which nurtured the first rural Christian communities and often had an uneasy relationship with episcopal authority and clerical hierarchy. Sometimes this led to conflict and accusations of heresy, while in other instances the "exemplary piety" of those with private churches was praised by the very same ecclesiastical authors.[19] Aristocrats, with their resources and care for the preservation and self-promotion of the household, "were not bishops' natural allies, they were their competition, fostering powerful spiritual coteries whose relationship with the episcopal church was ambiguous at best."[20] The lived religion of the elite, so to say, could bring them into direct conflict with the nascent institutional church. The same was true for the practices of the majority of the population, since Ramsay MacMullen has shown that only a small minority—five percent in his calculations—of the ancient urban Christians could gather in episcopal basilicas. The majority of the Christians gathered at alternative places like graveyards, shrines of the saints, or other outdoor locations. Such gatherings could be presided over by ecclesiastical authorities. Augustine is known to have preached at large gatherings in martyr shrines. But these authorities also attempted to regulate and restrict these practices and gatherings, and embed them in their institutional framework.[21] The worlds of institutional religion and the

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"Individualization and Individuation as Concepts of Historical Research," in *The Individual and the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. J. Rüpke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-38; J. Rüpke, "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflections on History and Theory of Religion," *Religion* 45, no. 3 (2015): 344-66; J. Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). Key publications from this research perspective are published in the new journal *Religion in the Roman Empire*. Several conference proceedings have contributed: J. Rüpke and W. Spickermann, eds., *Reflections on Religious Individuality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); J. Rüpke, ed. *The Individual and the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); E. Rebillard and J. Rüpke, eds., *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press 2015); R. Raja and J. Rüpke, eds., *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015). The final publication (with further references) is J. Albrecht et al., "Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach," *Religion* 48, no. 2 (2018): 1-26. On Manichaeism, see BeDuhn, "Am I a Christian?," 31-53. The same angle is pursued for a different region in L. K. Bailey, *The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). The relation between structure and agency was, of course, a frequently returning topic in various types of (micro)historical work on everyday life, where seemingly unique cases are taken to illustrate underlying structures. A. I. Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. J. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 108-13. Specifically focused on (Christian) Late Antiquity are the contributions in P. Eich and E. Faber, eds., *Religiöser Alltag in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013). Unfortunately, this last volume fails to establish a theoretically informed common ground.

[19] Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2 and passim.

[20] Bowes, *Private Worship*, 219.

[21] R. MacMullen, *The Second Church. Popular Christianity AD 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 60-67 on Augustine and Carthage. For a critical evaluation of this thesis, see the appendix of T. A.

everyday religious practices of ordinary people overlapped, but also collided, in Late Antiquity as well as in modern times.

With its focus on everyday life, the quotidian turn has the potential to bring an unexplored side of Manichaeism to the fore. Jason BeDuhn—reflecting on his study of the cosmology, anthropology, and ritual of ideological rationales and Manichaean regulations — has hinted at this omission. In retrospect, what was missing from his previous work

> [was what] allows us to explore how other religions actually lay out in practice, what they actually mean to their living adherents, how they are integrated into daily lives, how their ideals are modified by local conditions and expediencies—in short, the human reality of a lived religion.[22]

To fill this gap, he offered an in-depth study of Augustine as one single individual looking back on his life and constructing a narrative about his conversion(s) to Manichaeism and Nicene Christianity. Augustine, however, can hardly be considered a figure representative of all Manichaeans. With his education in rhetoric, his high social position, and role as bishop in the church of Carthage, he does not represent the lives of ordinary Manichaeans. Augustine's everyday religion was not the same as the everyday religious practices of other Manichaeans. The Kellis letters, on the other hand, offer valuable insights into the world of lay Manichaeans, who, as we will see, were not constantly in the process of constructing a religious narrative, but occasionally referred to its impact on their lives.

### 2.2.2 Challenging Groupism

Where the quotidian turn and the current lived-religion trends build on a shift in focus toward individuals, the contemporary critique on "groupism" entails a more fundamental sociological and philosophical questioning of the role of individuals and groups. Pivotal is the work of Rogers Brubaker, who defined "groupism" as "the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis."[23] While Brubaker's warning was directed to scholars working on ethnicity and nationalism, I see the same tendency in the study of late antique religions. David Brakke has, for example, questioned the marketplace or horse race model(s), both of which presuppose bounded groups: "In the laudable effort to emphasize the diversity of early Christian groups and movements, we tend to create stable 'name brands,' [MB: such as Gnostics, Montanists, Marcionites, Encratites] which interact and compete with each other

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Robinson, *Who Were the First Christians? Dismantling the Urban Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 225-42. Discussions about the impact of preaching and the knowledge of the general ancient audience are introduced in J. Maxwell, "Popular Theology in Late Antiquity," in *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*, ed. L. Grig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 278, arguing against "the separation of theology from popular religion implies that… most people were only interested in 'popular' practices, such as exorcism, and never concerned about questions about the nature of God….."

[22] BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1*, 2.

[23] R. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 43, no. 2 (2002): 164.

like so many brands of breakfast cereal on a grocery store shelf."[24] Stanley Stowers has, likewise, suggested that we need to make an explicit distinction between religion and "a religion," which requires "that the actual social and mental cohesion of claimed groups become variables that must be proven by the scholar rather than postulates from which the reality is deduced."[25]

What is it that makes these scholars of ancient religion doubt the existence of a fundamental social unit such as the religious group? First, many of the claims about communities and their characteristics derive from the heresiological rhetoric of ancient authors. In this sense, religious groups are categories of practice, invoked by people for specific polemical or political reasons, or simply to classify and explain their everyday life experiences. They attempt to establish what Benedict Anderson has called "imagined communities" with "a temporary connection between people combined with the absence of direct or daily contact."[26] Such categories of practice influence the outside world, but they do not correspond one-on-one to social formations *out there*. While theological texts appear to revolve around unified Christian or Manichaean groups, these texts may at times have been ineffective in evoking the groups they claim to represent. This became apparent with the twentieth-century discoveries, like the Nag Hammadi Library, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Medinet Madi library, showing the existence of a considerable diversity of religious discourses involved in the operative framework of identity politics and group formation.[27] The triumphal normative Christianity of Eusebius and Epiphanius was but one of the Christian narratives. These twentieth-century discoveries contain similar discourse. Rather than directly deriving from competing and homogeneous groups, these texts also constructed and evoked imagined communities. We cannot a priori assume that individual

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[24] Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 9.

[25] S. K. Stowers, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences, and Textual Mysteries," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. J.W. Knust and Z. Varhelyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36. The boundaries of religious groups in Late Antiquity are frequently discussed in the context of the interaction between Jews and Christians. D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2 "Once I am no longer prepared to think in terms of preexistent different entities – religions, if you will – that came (gradually or suddenly) to enact their difference in a 'parting of the ways,' I need to aks who it was in antiquity who desired to make such a difference…." This is the topic of the contributions in A. Y. Reed and A. H. Becker, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

[26] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

[27] K. L. King, "Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity: Representing Early Christian Differences for the 21st Century," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3-4 (2011): 219-20; K. L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 20-54; K. L. King, "Which Early Christianity?," in *The Oxford Handbook to Early Christian Studies*, ed. S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71-72.

readers would have made the text's group-identifications central to their self-understanding.[28]

Second, a large number of studies have pointed to the fuzzy boundaries between late antique religious groups, and to the existence of a wide array of shared practices that were not always approved by religious leaders. Not only was the lived experience of most individuals different from the normative theological perspective found in our sources, but inscriptions, papyri, archaeology, and other finds show crossovers and alternative demarcations.[29] Christianness, Jewishness, and Manichaeanness were occasional constructs, or to cite Sewell's adagium again, they were "contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable."[30] The groups or communities found in our sources are not neutral representations. Therefore, I would rather not start with the assumption of competing homogeneous groups or traditions.

The sociological work of Brubaker offers an important alternative. Rather than embracing the first-order classification and representations in our sources—speaking about "church," "religion," or ethnic "group"—Brubaker focuses on "groupness" to think about "phase[s] of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity."[31] This allows us to move beyond the common thesis of the discursive construction of groups into the realm of social practices; practices through which the imagined community became real. This study will look for the situations in which a Manichaean group identity became salient in Kellis. When would the Manichaeans of Kellis have felt this "Manichaeanness"?

As concepts, groupness or Manichaeanness are meant to allow for a continuum model in which practices, moments, expressions, or ideas can be more or less group-specific, more or less associated with each other and the notion of the "imagined community."[32] The term "community" is used for social constellations of various scales. It refers mostly to first-order communities of local residence and regular face-to-face interaction, but thereafter also to the transregional communities with an imagined character. A gathering during which several people come together and read from Mani's *Epistles* could activate Manichaeanness, even if we allow for a range of different individual responses to these readings. The sheer fact of the communal gathering around these texts—the act of reading and the postulated

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[28] Karen King has argued, for example, that the constructed character and rhetorical utility of categories as "Gnosticism" and "Jewish-Christianity," has been "obscured by naturalizing them as distinct social groups." King, "Factions," 224.

[29] R. Boustan and J. E. Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, and the Shared Magical Culture of Late Antiquity," *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 1 (2017): 217-40; I. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[30] Sewell, "Concept(s) of Culture," 53.

[31] Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," 168.

[32] A. P. Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a focus on the material culture of ancient imagined communities, see E. Mol and M. J. Versluys, "Material Culture and Imagined Communities in the Roman World," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, ed. R. Raja and J. Rüpke (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 451-61; J. Scheid, "Community and Community. Reflections on Some Ambiguities Based on the Thiasoi of Roman Egypt," in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. North and S. Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 366-82.

intentionality—brings the participants closer to each other in a moment of connectedness and (more or less) commonality with distant people that shared in the same imagined community. Exactly how and when this groupness took place is subject to social, cultural, and historical contingencies. Understanding a group-identification as an event allows us to see shifting affiliations and the negotiations between multiple expectations. When the "Manichaeans" leave the room and go their own ways, this temporal awareness of a shared affiliation may fall apart or remain influential in other behavior. Some other practices, such as visiting a ritual specialist and purchasing a horoscope or a spell against fever, may have been recognized as associated spheres or could have been regarded without any connotation of Manichaeanness (see Chapter 3).

A second and related concept is the notion of social networks. While building on the relational and situational nature of groupness, it is still evident that a fundamental structure undergirds the way individuals interact. Social network theory and social network analysis have increasingly contributed to the analysis of large historical datasets, such as for example the prosopography of Oxyrhynchus and Aphrodito or the epistolary interactions of the Egyptian bishops Abraham and Pesynthius, to highlight connections that are not necessarily group-specific or defined by religious affiliation.[33] These studies conceptualize individuals, objects, and communities as interconnected nodes in a network, whose ties are either "strong" or "weak," indicating the intimacy and reciprocity of the connection, as well as the amount of time invested in interactions. Strong ties lead to cohesive groups and commonality, while weak ties are important for the emergence of potential new information and innovation in a particular section of a network.[34]

The continuum model of more-or-less groupness has been used as a lens for ancient religious practice and identification once before. Eric Rebillard, in his slim but influential *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity*, has studied the different choices made by Christians in North Africa during the persecutions. He shows how individuals could have evaluated the situation (consciously or unconsciously) and acted on one of their membership affiliations.[35] Either they thought of themselves as Christians and acted out of resistance toward the call to sacrifice, or they switched their self-identification to another identity and affirmed their membership of the imperial world by making the required sacrifices. According to Rebillard, they made the sacrifice "either unaware that it might be contradictory to their Christian membership, or because they simply did not activate their Christian membership in this context, at least not until they were challenged to do so by

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[33] G. R. Ruffini, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); R. Dekker, *Episcopal networks and authority in Late Antique Egypt: Bishops of the Theban Region at Work* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).

[34] A. Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire. The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10-11 on weak and strong ties, building on the pivotal work of Granovetter.

[35] Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*. Douglas Boin has recently called them the "quieter Christians," as their behavioral choices were less outspoken. They "juggled their identities in highly creative ways," although less focused on the confrontation with society. A. C. Jacobsen, "*Coming out Christian in the Roman World: How the Followers of Jesus Made a Place in Caesar's Empire* by Douglas Boin (Review)," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 302-03.

Cyprian and his clergy."[36] From this perspective, these ancient individuals *were* not Christians, they *did* Christian or they *became* Christian by each time embracing this specific group-identification, with its socializations. Rebillard argues that church leaders considered their Christian identity (or membership) the highest and most universal part of their identity, the one that provided unique coherence. However, it is likely that this did not yet influence all of their followers. While the opinion and writings of religious leaders may have informed practice, there are many instances in which these opinions could be neglected or rejected in favor of other relevant membership categories.[37]

## 2.3 Individuals and Their Agency

Individual agency is central in Brubaker and Rebillard's approach. Instead of regarding individuals primarily as members of a religious community, e.g., Christians or Manichaeans, they are acting subjects who can identify themselves with a group or choose to behave according to different schemes of social expectations. To understand the shift from solid group identities and corresponding behavior to a more dynamic model of inter- and intrapersonal behavior, we need additional sociological and psychological theories about group-identification and the way in which individuals draw on various cultural repertoires. Bernard Lahire's sociology of the individual and Ann Swidler's theory of culture in action will provide further building blocks for an approach toward everyday groupness.

In an effort to initiate a sociology of the individual, Bernard Lahire suggests following individuals through several fields of life to see them "switching" their behavior in different

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[36] Rebillard, *Christians and their Many Identities*, 60. In a similar analysis, Rebillard points out how Augustine promoted to the status of martyr "the Christian who sticks to his or her Christian identity as his or her unique principle of action." E. Rebillard, "Religious Sociology. Being Christian in the Time of Augustine," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 49. Further examples of these "hierarchical and lateral arrangements of category membership sets" in Augustine's letters and sermons are discussed in E. Rebillard, "Late Antique Limits of Christianness: North Africa in the Age of Augustine," in *Group Identity and Religious Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. E. Rebillard and J. Rüpke (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 293-317. A similar critique on postulated groups is visible in Heidi Wendt's approach to Roman religion and Christianity, which she approaches through freelance religious experts and the way they produce social formations. H. Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The strongest difference between the quotidian turn and Rebillard's analysis is the absence of "resistance" in Rebillard's work. Christians could have sacrificed to the emperor as little acts of resistance against Cyprian's totalizing discourse, but in light of the power relations it is more likely they felt the need to identify themselves in relation to the ideology of empire.

[37] E. Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 2, no. 1 (2016): 92. The same themes reappear in his other work, E. Rebillard, "Popular Hatred against Christians: The Case of North Africa in the Second and Third Centuries," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16, no. 1 (2014): 283–310; E. Rebillard, "Becoming Christian in Carthage in the Age of Tertullian," in *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity. Shifting Identities – Creating Change* ed. B. S. Bøgh (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 47-58; E. Rebillard, "Material Culture and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, ed. R. Raja and J. Rüpke (Chichester Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 427-36; E. Rebillard, "Expressing Christianness in Carthage in the Second and Third Centuries," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 119-34.

situations and in various types of interactions. Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular on his notion of a *habitus* constituted of multiple dispositions, Lahire describes individual action as the result of a match between situations and acquired dispositions. Dispositions are the result of socialization, in which the individual has learned how to think and behave as a Manichaean catechumen, an inhabitant of Kellis, or as a grandfather.[38] These dispositions are latently available, ready to be activated in matching circumstances. According to Lahire:

> [B]ringing them back to activity may depend on the social micro-situation, (e.g. interaction with a particular actor, a certain situation, permitting schemes or habits to be actualized that are inhibited in some other type of interaction and/or with some other actor), on the domain of practices (e.g. applying in relation to food consumption different cultural schemes from those applied in relation to cultural consumption), on social universe (e.g. doing in the family or leisure world what one cannot do in the professional world), on the social group (e.g. doing in a certain social group what one would not do in some other social group), or again on the moment in the life cycle....[39]

This is what I have called the "situatedness" of religious gestures or language, activated or considered salient in a specific time and place. For Lahire, "the activation of a particular disposition can be conceived of as the product of *the interaction of (relations between) internal and external forces*."[40] The elements of the context or situation (external forces) combined with the dispositions that have been established during past socializations (internal forces) together provide the fertile ground for the activation of the dispositions. If, however, the dispositions do not match with a particular situation, this could lead to feelings of discomfort or crisis, in particular when there is a plurality of investments or problematic engagements with competing social investments in people or groups.[41] This plurality of investments is of foremost importance when studying the role of religion in everyday life. Conflicting expectations about family life, for example, caused a stir in antiquity. This resulted in fictional biographies of apocryphal Christian heroes who dealt with family conflicts after choosing an ascetic lifestyle.[42] While these biographies may have been fictional or

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[38] B. Lahire, "From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual," *Poetics* 31 (2003): 351. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted; the habitus engenders all the thought, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions and not others." P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 95.

[39] B. Lahire, *The Plural Actor* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 57.

[40] Lahire, "Habitus," 353 (his italics). Many of these insights are, of course, deeply related to the more recent literature in symbolic interactionism. I. Tavory, "Interactionism: Meaning and Self as Process," in *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory*, ed. S. Abrutyn (Cham: Springer, 2016), 85-98.

[41] Lahire, "Habitus," 353-4.

[42] M. Frenschkowski, "Domestic Religion, Family Life and the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 18-19, no. 1 (2017): 123-55.

hagiographical, their message and attraction derived from the mismatch between various socializations.

Ann Swidler, in her ambitious theory of the influence of culture on action, suggests that in "unsettled life," culture's influence on social action becomes very explicit, frequently part of a "battle to dominate the world-views, assumptions, and habits of [individuals]."[43] During these uncertain periods, new strategies of action are developed so that people know how to behave. Explicitly formulated ideologies characterize this phase, rather than the traditions and common-sense notions of settled life.[44] When unsettled lives have changed into settled lives, culture acquires another type of influence on action. Many cultural elements, by then, have become part of the unspoken natural way of seeing the world. In "settled life," this repertoire is a toolkit from which people draw, even though it is difficult to disentangle specific cultural elements from the structural circumstances. Swidler has convincingly shown that people invoke elements from the available repertoires intermittently and often implicitly, as part of the unquestioned features of daily life.[45] Of course, the toolkits or repertoires people draw on are rarely singular or simple. They derive from various sources, become adapted to new purposes, and together create a multitude of resources and strategies. These repertoires provide individuals with multiple metaphors they can use to understand and articulate their life choices. People prefer this multiplicity because it helps them to approach situations from different angles, with the possibility to shift to other metaphors when deemed necessary, which Swidler calls "strategies of network diversification."[46] These strategies, and the process by which this multiplicity can disappear, have been observed by scholars of religion, who observed the way their interlocutors "played" with identities, tried them on, before wholeheartedly embracing a group-identification.[47] This means that single "scenes," "strategies," or narratives are good for one particular aspect of life, but carry contradictory implications regarding other facets of life. Therefore, no one strategy suffices for all of it.

The last decades have seen a surge of interest in the dynamics of multiple identifications. It has become a truism to point out that individuals self-identify with various people, roles, and social groups: with their parents and grandparents, their village context,

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[43] A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 2 (1986): 279.

[44] Swidler, "Culture in Action," 279.

[45] Swidler, "Culture in Action," 277. She cites the example of poverty-culture, where young people do not strive for new middle-class goals, but continue to strive for poverty-culture goals because this fits with (their idea of) their capacities.

[46] A. Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 183. This notion is applied to religion by R. F. Campany, "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," *History of Religions* 52, no. 2 (2012): 99-141.

[47] M. A. Davidsen, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-Based Religion* (Leiden: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 2014), 258-75 on the construction and maintenance of plausibility structures in the elven movement; T. M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 312 describes how newcomers in the "magical milieu" gradually adopt an identity as magicians through a gradual "interpretive drift" by which they begin to see themselves and the world through this group-identity.

profession etc. These acts of identification may be found in names, in self-designations, or in the usage of specific in-group language. Not all of these self-identifications function on the same level, nor are they attributed with the same status at all times.[48] Rachel Mairs has posited three general models for intersecting identities: nested, crosscutting, and separation. Nested identities are strongly related: "I am a Londoner, I am English, I am British, I am European (and/or perhaps Anglo-American)"; crosscutting identities have an interplay between the two: "I am French and a diplomat"; while separation identities bear no direct relation to one another: "I am a woman and I am an avid opera-goer."[49] Potential conflict arises from crosscutting identities that overlap and could have conflicting claims or behavioral dispositions. Looming conflict between disparate roles of identities is, however, defined by more than just the individual's desires and behavior. Individuals do not only self-identify; they are also categorized by others in social situations through processes such as stereotyping, discrimination or by legal or administrative classifications. These categorizations from the outside may or may not correspond to the self-identification of the individual. The complex social processes of self-identification, identification, and categorization fully remind us that individuals are not simply the carriers of cultural packages. Makarios and Pamour, two of the ancient Kellites who will be central to Chapter 4, may have been Manichaeans, but they were also fathers, sons, merchants, villagers, and Egyptians.

From the notion of different dispositions within individuals it is only a small step to various alternative identity theories. Historical studies of the last decades have used various social scientific theories about social identities and processes of group-identification.[50] Over time, however, the concept identity has come to designate radically different dynamics and ideas, and therefore has lost most (if not all) of its intellectual usefulness. The sociologists Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper concluded that the term is no longer able to bear the load of "the conceptual and theoretical *work* [that the term] 'identity' is supposed to do."[51] Their solution is to jettison the term and work with an array of more precise concepts,

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[48] On Identity-hierarchies, see the overview of critical terminology in R. D. Ashmore, K. Deaux, and T. McLaughlin-Volpe, "An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality," *Psychological Bulletin* 130, no. 1 (2004): 80-114. On the experience of wholeness and continuity despite multiplicity and inconsistencies, see K. P. Ewing, "The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self, and the Experience of Inconsistency," *Ethos* 18, no. 3 (1990): 251-78.

[49] R. Mairs, "Intersecting Identities in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt," in *Egypt: Ancient Histories, Modern Archaeologies*, ed. R. J. Dann and K. Exell (New York: Cambria Press, 2013), 163-92. Kim Bowes has characterized the study of "Christianization" in terms of a 'swap sale' instead of a theorized conceptualization of changing social identities and practices. She rightly points out that "this unalloyed confidence that one practice, thing, or social role was exchanged for another assumes a tacit teleology." Bowes, *Private Worship*, 10.

[50] There are too many studies to cite, but a preliminary overview for the ancient world is given in K. B. Stratton, "Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions*, ed. B. S. Spaeth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 220-51; J. Lieu, *Christian Identity in Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); P. A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009).

[51] R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, "Beyond "Identity," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1.

including the postulated sameness of a collective, the self-identification of actors with a collective, their psychological self-understanding, or the formal categorization by outsiders such as the state.[52] Such alternatives put an emphasis on the activity and process instead of the (solid) state of perceived or claimed identity. As Comaroff puts it, "identities are not things but relations," which become "properties of individuals and collectivities, and they gradually become detached even from these, taking on a life of their own."[53] Claims on a reified identity, such as a normative religious group, tend to overlook this more processual notion of identification and the gradual social construction of this reified notion.

In antiquity, heresiologists as well as religious leaders employ strategies of categorization and reification to demarcate an imagined religious community and evoke this group in social reality.[54] What has been underrepresented is the level of discursive construction in authentic Manichaean sources. Not only Augustine embarked on a journey to frame his former coreligionists, but the authors of texts like the *Kephalaia,* Mani's *Epistles,* or the Greek *CMC* shared a common set of literary devices through which they attempted to categorize and identify what it meant to be a Manichaean elect of catechumen.[55] The potential for individual choices and creative agency was, in this period, not always unproblematic. We cannot simply transpose all elements from modern social theories to our analysis of the premodern world.[56] Jewish slaves in Rome, for example, were limited in their ability to exercise their individual agency in relation to religious rituals. Their master would have had something to say about their abstinence from work on the Sabbath, or their wish to circumcise their children (his property). Some degree of individual choice, on the other hand, cannot be excluded.[57] Exploring where and how space for individual choice was created and restricted should therefore be a central concern when studying individual religious

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[52] Ibid., 17.

[53] J. Comaroff, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. E. N. Wilmsen and P. McAllister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 165. This passage is cited and discussed at M. van Beek, "Beyond Identity Fetishism: 'Communal' Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy," *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 4 (2001): 527.

[54] J. Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

[55] The awareness is best expressed in Baker-Brian's examination of the lives of Mani, in which he warns against using these sources as if they were treasure-troves of information. Baker-Brian, *Manichaeism*, 33-60.

[56] Some of these concerns were raised by Philippe Bruc, who strongly criticizes historians for their embrace of social scientific categories in P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). A potential point of friction is the textual nature of historical sources, all with their own agenda and never "objectively" representing what modern scholars would like to hear. This critique is discussed further by G. Koziol, "The Dangers of Polemic: Is Ritual Still an Interesting Topic of Historical Study?," *Early Medieval Europe* 11, no. 4 (2002): 367-88. With a rebuttal in P. Buc, "The Monster and the Critics: A Ritual Reply," *Early Medieval Europe* 15, no. 4 (2007): 441-52.

[57] For the examples and the groupness of Jews in ancient Rome, see the forthcoming proceedings of the conference "Shared Ritual Practices and Divided Historiography: Media, Phenomena, Topoi" (June 2017, Erfurt).

experience and practice.[58] Agency, moreover, is not only found in resistance, but also in every attempt to normalize, homogenize, exclude, marginalize, and hierarchize cultural and religious practices and ideas.[59] To pinpoint the agency of late antique individuals is, therefore, also an attempt to think beyond the outdated binary opposition that sees the premodern world as "traditional" and characterizes modernity as "individualization."[60] By finding a middle way between these two extremes, I will highlight tendencies toward individual distinction, as well as traditional choices that can be characterized as anachronistic for late antique Egypt (see Chapter 3).

## 2.4 Religion

The focus on religious practices in everyday-life practices leads to the question of definition. How to decide whether something is religious or not? Scholars of lived religion have exploited this ambiguity to explore otherwise overlooked meaning-making practices.[61] Mostly, they accepted as "religious practices" whatever their interlocutors perceive as such. Instead of defining the boundaries of the concept of "religion" from the outside, they ask what "makes some social events and individual actions religious in the minds of the actors."[62] As a result, the space between the interlocutors' perception of religion and academic working definitions leads to all sorts of "nagging questions" for the interpreter.

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[58] See the contributions in Rüpke and Spickermann, *Reflections on Religious Individuality*; J. Rüpke, ed. *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); B. Kracke, R. Roux, and J. Rüpke, eds., *Die Religion des Individuums* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2013); J. Zachhuber and A. Torrance, eds., *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). Late Antiquity can be characterized as the period in which an increasing number of religious options emerged. J. North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians*, ed. J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 174-93.

[59] Sewell, "The Concept(s) of Culture," 56.

[60] See for example the work of Anthony Giddens. Rüpke takes detraditionalization as defining feature of individualism. J. Rüpke, *Religion. Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29-31. Detraditionalization and de-institutionalization are two of the multiple meanings of contemporary "individualization." At least five different notions have been discerned in contemporary debates, ranging from *heterogenization*, the increasing number of variation between individuals, to *privatization*, the decreasing influence of social collectives on individuals. This lack of conceptual clarity is further complicated by the observation of new collectives. In result, modern society shows traces of privatization and heterogenization combined with "herd behavior" and social symmetry in everyday decision-making. Unqualified individualism is a myth, which can only be discussed in relation to parallel processes as the rise of "communities lite" or Maffesoli's neotribalism. M. Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996). Dutch sociologists Duyvendak and Hurenkamp, pluralization is a temporary phase, leading to alternative clusters of practices that first seemed countercultural but now have become the new traditional norm for a majority (part-time female employment outside the house, for example). See the various contributions in J. W. Duyvendak and M. Hurenkamp, eds., *Kiezen voor de kudde: lichte gemeenschappen en de nieuwe meerderheid* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2004).

[61] Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn," 373. See for example the contribution about various layers of meaning during a funeral, Z. Munson, "When a Funeral Isn't Just a Funeral: The Layered Meaning of Everyday Action," in *Everyday Religion*, ed. N. Ammerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121-36.

[62] Ammerman, "Introduction," 5.

The answers are usually far from simple, especially for historians, who cannot directly consult their interlocutors.

### 2.4.1 Toward a Definition of Religion, before "Religion"

Earlier I defined Manichaeism as "a religion," even though "religion" is not exactly an uncontested concept. In fact, the concept of religion has been subject to deconstruction and controversy over the last couple of decades, to the extent that some specialists in the study of religion would rather abandon the concept than continue to use it as an explanatory category.[63] The use of "religion" for the study of premodern societies and cultures is particularly suspect. Religion, these scholars argue, is conceptually tied to the modern world and tainted by ideology.[64] Modern conceptualizations of religion, so they argue, are deeply connected to imperialism, colonialism, and the European polemics between early modern Protestants and Catholics.[65] Russell McCutcheon, one of the voices calling for the abolition of the concept, has reminded us that classifications are not neutral and that "by means of such classifications, we may very well be actively presenting back to ourselves the taxonomies that help to establish our own contingent and inevitably provincial social world as if their components were self-evident, natural, universal, and necessary."[66] In the last decade, debate on the consequences of the history of the discipline and the modern and Western connotations of our conceptual toolbox was sparked by the publication of monographs such as *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept.*[67] The fundamental question, therefore, is whether the concept of religion is too tainted to be saved, redirected, or redefined.

Despite the critique, I am convinced that we do not have let go of the notion of religion. On the contrary, there is reason enough to think that late antique authors developed concepts analogous to the Western notion of religion.[68] Although it is difficult to apply a

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[63] T. Fitzgerald, "A critique of "religion" as a cross-cultural category," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1997): 91-110. An overview of the literature is given in R. T. McCutcheon, "The Category "Religion" in Recent Publications: A Critical Survey," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 284-309; R. T. McCutcheon, "The Category "Religion" in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later," *Numen* 62, no. 1 (2015): 119-41. In this respect, the work of W. C. Smith in 1962 was both early and innovative. W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (Minneapolis.: Fortress, 1991).

[64] Ancient terminology, according to these authors, never really corresponds with our modern concept of religion. On "religio" and "threskeia," see C. A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); B. Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 25-45.

[65] Unmasking these intrinsic stains on our conceptual toolbox, scholars have shown the Christian assumptions behind, for example, the colonial constructions of Asian religions as "Hinduism." R. King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism'," *Numen* 46, no. 2 (1999): 146-85; R. F. Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (2003): 287-319.

[66] R. T. McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2003), 255.

[67] Nongbri, *Before Religion;* R. Orsi, "The "So-Called History" of the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 134-38. Nongbri's monograph was discussed during the SBL/AAR 2014 and 2016. His work proceeds along the lines of the critique brought forward by scholars as Talal Asad, Russel McCutcheon, Timothy Fitzgerald, Daniel Dubuisson, Jonathan Z. Smith and E. Judge.

[68] R. F. Campany, "'Religious' as a Category: A Comparative Case Study," *Numen* 65, no. 4 (2018): 335-6.

modern definition to antiquity, there remains room to theorize precisely this historical and contextual difference. The common-sense notion of "a religion" or a coherent religious "group," for example, belongs to the baggage of a modern concept of religion, which cannot be thrusted on the ancient world without distorting the underlying historical phenomena (see section on groupism above). Instead of thinking about coherent and stable entities (or particular brands, as David Brakke suggested), religion denotes a wide range or bundle of social practices, beliefs, experiences, and discourses that assume the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and/or processes.[69] This demarcation is preliminary, substantive, and foremost a redescriptive, outsider, or third-order categorization, which will be used as a litmus test for features in the documentary papyri that may have characterized religion in ancient Kellis.[70] The supernatural agents, whose existence cannot be verified or falsified from the perspective of the academic study of religion, may have included gods, spirits, more abstract cosmological entities, as well as earthly institutions, flora and fauna, and (s)elected human beings. As some "natural" elements of life were interpreted religiously, they will be considered "supernatural," especially when agency is attributed to these elements. The Light Mind, a cosmological power, and the Living Soul, the incarnate element(s) of this cosmological power inside the material world, are only two examples of supernatural agents in the Manichaean understanding of the world.[71] It goes without saying, moreover, that "religion" and Manichaeanness overlap only partially. The following chapters will show the existence of religious practices outside Manichaeanness and vice versa, Manichaeanness beyond what I have defined as religion.

On occasion, I will refer to certain practices with shorthands like "Greco-Roman religion" or "traditional Egyptian religions," not to affirm the existence of spatially or culturally bounded religious and social groups, but to collectively refer to a bundle of religious practices in a particular cultural and geographical area.

The debates on the definition and nature of "religion" affect the study of Manichaeans in two ways. First, they are of importance because Manichaeism is consistently portrayed as the first "world religion." With its self-conscious attitude, books, missionary history, and widespread diffusion, Manichaeism has been perceived as a group-specific

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[69] Building on the definition given by Davidsen, *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu*, 31. For the position that religion exists as a social reality, see K. Schilbrack, "Religions: Are There Any," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (2010): 1112-38; K. Schilbrack, "A Realist Social Ontology of Religion," *Religion* 47, no. 2 (2017): 161-78.

[70] For description vs. redescription see J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36-37. The concepts are used by Nongbri and Hanegraaff. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 21-22; W. Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing "Religion" from the Bottom Up," *Numen* 63, no. 5-6 (2016): 590.

[71] The Manichaean soul was conceived of as more than something in humans, but also as inhabiting the surrounding world. J. D. BeDuhn, "The Nature of the Manichaean Soul," in *Zur lichten Heimat: Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, ed. Team Turfanforschung (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 44.

religion *par excellence*: a predecessor of our modern "world religions."[72] While this argument revolves around the position of the Manichaeans in the long history of religion, it has an impact on our hypothesis of Manichaean success at Kellis. If we embrace Manichaeism as "a religion" just like our modern world religions, we will be more inclined to see organizational features as reasons for successful diffusion, transmission, and maintenance.

Second, the study of Manichaeans as a "religion" may be affected by the earlier mentioned modern bias towards the concept. Historiographically, "religion" emerged in the context of early modern Western intellectual culture, stimulated by new colonial discoveries and Protestant polemics against Roman Catholicism. This context resulted in a strong attachment to notions of "textual truth" and coherent theology, often combined with an outspoken disdain for rituals.[73] In this tradition, "real" religions resembled Protestantism and "false" religions were those that deviated from this "pure" model.[74] A number of scholars of the last decades have argued that these normative assumptions continued to interfere with the modern conceptualization of non-Western or premodern "religions."[75] As Robert Campany states: "[T]o speak of religions is to demarcate things in ways that are not inevitable or immutable but, rather, are contingent on the shape of Western history, thought and institutions. Other cultures may, and do, lack closely equivalent demarcations."[76] Taking this critique seriously means reflecting on the choices made in the reconstruction, or presentation, of the Manichaean way of life as a religion.

Here we may return to some of the issues raised while introducing Manichaeism. The example of a recent anthology of Manichaean texts illustrates the complex entanglement of

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[72] This is visible, for example, in Guy Stroumsa's description of The Cologne Mani Codex as offering "a glimpse at the very passage from sect to world religion." G. G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 64. Similar statements are made by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who credited Mani with "deliberately establishing a religion." Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 93. Jonathan Z. Smith has called Manichaeism "perhaps the first, self-conscious "world" religion." J. Z. Smith, "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 387-403. Reprinted in J. Z. Smith, *Relating Religion. Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 169; P. A. Mirecki, "Manichaean Literature," in *The Gnostic Bible*, ed. W. Barnstone and M. Meyer (Boston: Shambala, 2006), 569. A critical reflection on these statements is found in Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 66-73.

[73] Guy Stroumsa has described the birth of Manichaean studies with Isaac de Beausobre against the background of new philological knowledge and interest in Christian apocrypha and a polemical drive to understand Manichaeans as a precursor of the Reformation. G. G. Stroumsa, "Isaac De Beausobre Revisited: The Birth of Manichaean Studies," in *Studia Manichaica*, ed. R. E. Emmerick, W. Sundermann, and P. Zieme (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), 601-12.

[74] Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 85-131.

[75] Martin Stringer, for example, singles out the assumption of coherent belief, the idea of transcendence or sacred, and life-transformation M. D. Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008); Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing "Religion" from the Bottom Up," 587 for further references and an attempt to reach beyond deconstruction. 576-605. On the impact of the category on non-western religions see for example King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism," 146-85; Nongbri, *Before Religion,* 18 states, "we already intuitively know what 'religion' is before we even try to define it: religion is anything that sufficiently resembles modern Protestant Christianity."

[76] Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions," 289.

historical reconstruction and of this question. Gardner and Lieu, already cited above, discuss Manichaeism as the "first real 'religion'," whose origin and teaching was firmly based on the words of its founder (compare the Protestant critique of "extrabiblical" Catholic traditions and practices).[77] Therefore, they state: "[T]here is thus less scope in the study of Manichaeism to trace the evolution of doctrine, since all teaching was rigidly tied to the very detail of the divine word in Mani's scriptures."[78] This characterization of the unity of the Manichaean religion strongly contrasts with Richard Lim's critique on the perceived "monolithic coherence of the Manichaean movement."[79] Classifying all the local variations and fluid accommodations together as one reified "world religion," he argues, may be incorrectly constructing "an overarching ideology of unity" at the expense of diversity. By employing "Manichaeism," scholars run the risk of reproducing and legitimating the Christian normative outsider designation.[80] Gardner and Lieu are, however, aware of the problematic history of the concept of religion and they proceed with caution as they warn "not [to] impose anachronistic conceptions derived from the modern discipline of the history of religions," but to focus on what "Mani and his followers meant by the concepts of scripture and canon."[81] This appeal to the postulated origin of Manichaeism reveals a pattern in which origin equaled essence.[82] While I hesitate to accuse Gardner and Lieu of adhering to this biased heritage, I think we should reflect on the relation between the local and the general, between regional variation and the *constructed* (or *imagined*) unity of the Manichaean tradition.[83] The reconstruction of Manichaean life at Kellis may be offered as one step in this larger project.

### 2.4.2 The Transformation of Religion: Dis-/reembedding Religion in Novel Social Formations
In the previous chapter, I cited the self-promoting Manichaean claim of being a superior church organization. This claim resonates with modern academic perspectives on religious change in Late Antiquity that tend to emphasize exactly those features that loom large in Manichaean sources. To understand the appeal of the Manichaeans, as well as the

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[77] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 1 state that "we might say that Manichaeism is the first real "religion" in the modern sense, because Mani established it directly and deliberately, with its scriptures and its rituals and its organization all in place."

[78] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 10. On anti-Catholic apologetics and the study of ancient religions see J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1-35 and passim.

[79] Lim, "Unity and Diversity," 233.

[80] Lim, "Unity and Diversity," 249; Lim, "Nomen Manichaeorum," 163-5 strongly questions "Manichaeism" as a stand-alone universal religion.

[81] Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, 151.

[82] Similarly, early modern Protestants accused Catholics of adapting and modifying the pure message of the founder and thereby polluting the faith. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 32-35.

[83] On the notion of "imagined community," see Anderson, *Imagined Communities.* More generally, the social constructivism and symbolic interactionism behind most of the theoretical approaches (as discussed in Chapter 3) is built on the pivotal study of P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). Some of the historiographical and theoretical tenets are discussed briefly in Tavory, "Interactionism: Meaning and Self as Process," 85-98.

importance of our questions about organizational structures, we need to have a firm grasp of the extent of these transformations.

Religion changed fundamentally in Late Antiquity. Modern scholars have characterized these changes as the transformation of "cult religions" into "religions of the book," "locative religion" into "utopian religion," or "primary religion" into "secondary religion." Jan Assmann, for example, stressed how "secondary religions" differentiated themselves from their predecessors on the basis of postulated supernatural revelations, books, and the distinction between truth and falsehood. These new religions transformed from a group style "ineradicably inscribed in the institutional, linguistic, and cultural conditions of a society" to an autonomous mobile system that could be transplanted in other sociocultural settings.[84] Indeed, ancient religion never was a separate domain of life. It was a "community religion" defined by ethnospecific dynamics. Roman religious practices, for example, were deeply intertwined with the social, political, and cultural lives of Romans. Their religion was "embedded" because "the whole of the political and constitutional system was conducted within an elaborate network of religious ceremonial and regulation."[85] Fundamentally, Greek and Roman religion was organized along the lines of local and preexisting social groups, like the city, neighborhood, or family. While there has always been room for some religious electives, most religious practice was directly connected to these preexisting social formations. As a result, participation in these activities was often (but not always) uncontroversial and undifferentiated, albeit depending on social factors such as status, gender, or age. Secondary religion, to stay with Assmann's terminology, gradually developed out of this type of "community religion" and became organized separately as distinct groups, communities, or traditions whose beliefs and practices were group-specific. Because of their novel attachment to a strong true-false distinction, they developed complex social imaginaries in which they located and conceptualized themselves and others according to their own institutions, objectives, or practices. Membership of the transregional

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[84] Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 1-2.

[85] M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43; Similar explanations in S. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89; J. Rüpke, *Die Religion der Römer: Eine Einführung* (München: Beck, 2001), 13. For a critique on this model see B. Nongbri, "Dislodging "Embedded" Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55, no. 4 (2008): 440-60. More recent studies on Greco-Roman religion have looked for alternative angles to shed light on religious practices of individuals. They share a critical stance toward the "polis-religion" model that has dominated the field since the 1980s. E. Eidinow, "Networks and Narratives: A Model for Ancient Greek Religion," *Kernos* 24 (2011): 9-38; J. Kindt, "Polis Religion - a Critical Appreciation," *Kernos* 22 (2009): 9-34; J. Kindt, "Personal Religion: A Productive Category for the Study of Ancient Greek Religion?," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 135 (2015): 35-50; J. Rüpke, "Individuals and Networks," in *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, ed. L. Bricault and C. Bonnet (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 261-77; J. Rüpke, *Religious Deviance in the Roman World: Superstition or Individuality?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Review of various initiatives and perspectives in T. Harrison, "Review Article: Beyond the Polis? New Approaches to Greek Religion," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 135 (2015): 165–80. A strong critique on these new approaches to Roman religions has been formulated in J. Scheid, *The Gods, the State, and the Individual: Reflections on Civic Religion in Rome* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

group started to count, rather than the taken-for-granted social roles within local (village) communities.

These transformations entailed more than just the rise of one religion (Christianity) and the decline of a wide array of ancient religions (sometimes still unhelpfully designated as paganism). Instead, several new religions emerged, among which the traditions of Christianity and Manichaeism. Membership of these new religions was, in theory, the result of individual choice. This choice was frequently presented in black-and-white terms. To participate (or, to convert) was often presented as a choice against the established social formations with their religious practices.[86] The new membership-based groups—or "post-ancient religions"—have been described by Bruce Lincoln in relation to some of their most fundamental building blocks:

> [A]s ancient religion gave way to post-ancient, one could observe a discourse based on canonic corpora of sacred texts displacing inspired performances of sacred verse; practices of prayer, contemplation, and self-perfection displacing material mediations through sacrifice and statues of the deity; deterritorialized elective communities constructed on the basis of religious adherence displacing multistranded groups, within which ties of geography, politics, kinship, culture, and religion were isomorphic and mutually reinforcing; and institutions that, with some exceptions, had better (also more creative and varied) funding, a wider range of activities, and more autonomy from the state, displacing their weaker, more localized predecessors.[87]

Religion, in this perspective, became increasingly defined by distinct autonomous groups with demarcated religious identities.[88] In other words, the notion of a distinct religious identity was concomitant with the rise of differentiated religious groups with marked (often doctrinal as well as behavioral) boundaries.[89]

To be sure, I hasten to say that this transformation, including its organizational aspects, was far from complete. There are many instances in which these new religions remained tied to local social formations, just as there were numerous self-authorized religious practices, or specialists, in earlier times.[90] As a general model of the religious transformation, however, it is useful to distinguish between two types of religion: community religion as the dominant model of ethnospecific religious activity in the ancient world, and secondary or utopian religion for the nascent religions organized as distinct

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[86] A. F. de Jong, "Waar het vuur niet dooft: Joodse en Christelijke Gemeenschappen in het Sasanidenrijk," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 70, no. 3 (2016): 177.

[87] B. Lincoln, "Epilogue," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S. I. Johnston (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 665.

[88] de Jong, "Waar het vuur niet dooft," 176-7.

[89] Woolf, "Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions," 30-38; North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," 178 described a "development from religion as embedded in the city-state to religion as a choice of differentiated groups offering different qualities of religious doctrine, different experiences, insights, or just different myths and stories."

[90] On self-authorized, or freelance, religious specialists, Wendt, *At the Temple Gates*.

autonomous groups. Within this broad typology, I will use the concept "group styles," developed by sociologists Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, to think about the variety of shared cultural elements.[91] Performing a sacrifice was, for example, one of the hallmark practices of a common group style in antiquity. It created a temporary moment of groupness with a select few, but aimed to bring the favor of the gods to a larger ethnic or social collective. The actions only marginally involved religious specialists and generally needed few doctrinal or textual specifications. Philosophical school settings provided another group style, either organized as dyads or small groups, with frequent interaction between a teacher and his or her pupil(s).[92] Reading communities or virtual network groupings are other examples of loose group styles in which physical colocation or communal gatherings are infrequent or absent.[93] Large communal gatherings with intense emotional experiences, as found in some of the "mystery cults," constituted a very different group style, just like the organizational styles modeled after the commensality and regular meals of associations.

Changes in the popularity of a particular group style were caused by novel legislation or other changing social conditions like the availability of specific resources.[94] The rise of secondary religions is intrinsically combined with the popularity of a limited type of group styles. Christians, for example, organized themselves around charismatic teachers; others participated in high-class reading practices (presumably combined with symposia-style meals with philosophical discussions), or modeled their religious groupness on the Roman patronage structures and the morning *salutationes.*[95] In many respects, Manichaeans followed suit.

Eliasoph and Lichterman discern four dimensions that can be used to differentiate between group styles. First, "map" refers to the conceptual reference points of individual actors, such as other groups, individuals, or social categories. Second, expectations and

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[91] N. Eliasoph and P. Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 4 (2003): 737.

[92] Early Christianity is, by times, studied from the perspective of the group style of the philosophical school. W. Löhr, "Modelling Second-Century Christian Theology: Christian Theology as *Philosophia*," in *Christianity in the Second Century*, ed. J. Carleton Paget and J. Lieu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 151-68.

[93] Tim Whitmarsh has argued that atheists in Ancient Greece could present themselves as if they belonged to a like-minded transhistorical community of readers, writers and thinkers, by listing their genealogy of thought over time and space. T. Whitmarsh, "Atheism as a Group Identity in Ancient Greece," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 61, where he also points out that Christian heresiologists employ similar strategies. Robert Putnam has discussed this type of groups as "tertiary groups" without shared routine or cooperative relationship, in which members do not create social capital. R. D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 291. Further discussions on the way social capital is created by civic groups are discussed by P. Lichterman, "Social Capital or Group Style? Rescuing Tocqueville's Insights on Civic Engagement," *Theory and Society* 35 (2006): 529-63.

[94] P. Lichterman, "Religion in Public Action: From Actors to Settings," *Sociological Theory* 30, no. 1 (2012): 15-36. On resource dependency and new institutionalism, see Ch. P. Scheitle and K. D. Dougherty, "The Sociology of Religious Organizations," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 3 (2008): 981-99.

[95] C. Leonhard, "Morning *Salutationes* and the Decline of Sympotic Eucharists in the Third Century," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 18, no. 3 (2014): 420-42; C. Leonhard, "Establishing Short-Term Communities in Eucharistic Celebrations of Antiquity," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 66-86.

behavior changes as "scenes" or "situations" change. Third, the understanding of the "group bonds" defines the way actors understand the relations within the group or within specific situations. Fourth, some of these actors share "speech norms" that define what is appropriate speech within group settings.[96] This set of concepts further assists our grasp on lived ancient religions and the dynamic of short-term and long-term social grouping.[97]

Secondary, or post-ancient, religion can be characterized by revised collective identities and novel group styles. Therefore, religious communities in Late Antiquity can be placed on a heuristic scale between social formations with loose bonds and fuzzy boundaries and those with strong speech norms, explicit conceptual maps, and detailed expectations about group bonds. Isabella Sandwell characterized religious difference in Late Antiquity as

> the difference between those who "loved" Christ and those who "loved" Zeus, Apollo and Calliope might well have been less than that between those who sought to impose ideas about clear cut religious identities on their world and those who continued to work with a practical sense of what was appropriate in regard to these matters.[98]

For Sandwell, the "practical sense" of authors like Libanius is juxtaposed with the totalization of a religious group identity in the work of John Chrysostom. Both authors made religious choices, but of a very different type. Chrysostom's discourse and group norms may well have been incomprehensible to those who lived their lives according to the routines of their *habitus*, without the explicit ideology of unsettled life. Forces from outside, such as the Roman imperial persecution, may have served as the catalyst of novel group styles, as Christians were forced to reflect on their social identifications and the behavioral norms and expectations of society.[99] In these situations, unreflective or "thin" practices could have been

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[96] P. Lichterman et al., "Grouping Together in Lived Ancient Religion: Individual Interacting and the Formation of Groups," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3, no. 1 (2017): 4. Building on his earlier work with Eliasoph.

[97] Several contributions in the 2017 (3.1) volume of *Religion in the Roman Empire* have used these conceptual tools, although it is noteworthy that most of them discuss short-term social grouping. On lived religion, see section 2.2.1 above. Conceptually I see strong similarities with the network approach of the framework of 'situations' within "network domains" by Mische and White. For them, a situation "involves predictable, stylized interaction that suddenly becomes fraught with uncertainty, danger and/or opportunity." The predictable nature of the previous moment depended primarily on the array of routinized stories, symbols and idioms of such network domains as family or business. A. Mische and H. C. White, "Between Conversation and Situation: Public Switching Dynamics across Network Domains," *Social Research* 65, no. 3 (1998): 698.

[98] Sandwell, *Religious Identity*, 280. Averil Cameron used "totalizing discourse" for the Christian interpretation of the world which leaves no room for alternative interpretations. A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 220-22.

[99] J. Rives, "The Persecution of Christians and Ideas of Community in the Roman Empire," in *Politiche religiose nel mondo antico e tardoantico: poteri e indirizzi, forme del controllo, idee e prassi di tolleranza*, ed. G.A. Cecconi and C. Gabrielli (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011), 199-217. In another contribution, Rives compares the religious choice of individuals in antiquity with his father's preference for Chrysler automobiles. Not all religious choices, he states, "need have any significant impact on a person's identity." J. Rives, "Religious

developed into "thick" practices that explicitly defined and characterized what it meant to be a Christian. Manichaeans have often been placed at one end of the scale, among the more rigid group styles. The validity of this "sectarian" interpretation of Manichaeism for the community in Kellis, however, will be called into question in more than one of the following chapters.[100]

If we return to the typology of a transition from primary to secondary religion, now redefined as two broad sets of group styles, we can see a twofold function of this typology. On the one hand, it serves as a reiteration of the warning against taking distinct religions for granted. In the ancient world, there were many types of religion without groups, and many group styles that differed from modern institutional religions. On the other hand, the typology illustrates how fundamental tenets of Manichaeism reverberated with this transformation. Usually, Christianity is taken as the main representative (or prototype) of this new type of religion, but Manichaeans, *par excellence*, presented their religion as mobile and universal. They thought of themselves as building on the inheritance of previous religions, all of which failed because of their close attachment to geographical regions. As we have seen, Manichaeans represented the "church" of Mani, in direct competition with previous "churches"—primarily Christianity, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism—as it superseded them in transcending all culturally specific social formations.[101] In contrast to the previous "churches," the Manichaean church suited all cultural contexts, in the East as well as the West (1 Keph. 151). This insider representation of the superiority of the Manichaean church is not immediately to be taken at face value, but it is interesting to note how Manichaeans strategically claimed novelty, which was usually considered a liability, in combination with their universalist stance. In fact, at least one scholar has argued that Mani and his early disciples were the first to produce a concept analogous to our modern category of religion. In this interpretation, the Manichaean usage of terms like "ⲥⲁⲩⲉϩⲥ" (community) and "ⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ" (church) reflects

> self-identifying communities that were not interchangeable or coterminous with ethnic or cultural identity, but organized around systems of discourse and practices that were "disembedded" from a particular society and culture; within such communities, the members could understand themselves to share a set of markers

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Choice and Religious Change in Classical and Late Antiquity: Models and Questions," *ARYS: Antigüedad, Religiones y Sociedades* 9 (2011): 273.

[100] The Manichaeans of Kellis have been described as sectarian, even by the editors of the papyri, "there are some of those communal characteristics to be found here as are known from the typology of sectarian movements, particularly in their early world-denying stages." I. Gardner, ed. *Kellis Literary Texts. Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1996), viii.

[101] Although de Jong points to Zoroastrianism and Buddhism as predecessors of Christianity as "secondary religions," replacing "community-religions." de Jong, "Waar het vuur niet dooft," 178. Building on the typology of J. Platvoet, "De Wraak van de 'Primitieven': Godsdienstgeschiedenis van Neanderthaler tot New Age," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 47, no. 3 (1993): 227-43.

and commitments that set them apart from others of the same ethnicity, and united them despite disparate ethnic and cultural backgrounds.[102]

As a result of this "religionification," Manichaeans developed densely organized and centralized groups, which may have been among the first to think of themselves—and others—along specifically religious lines and in relation to religious institutions.[103] For our purposes, I will zoom in on the performative aspect, asking how this conceptual transformation translated into everyday practice.

### 2.4.3 Disembedded Religion Reembedded: The Christianization of Egypt

The so-called "Christianization" of Egypt is another topic that has bearing on our subject. The previous section has emphasized the disembedded and universal character of late antique religion. In practice, all textual and material remains of these religions are localized. The success of the utopian and universal claims of secondary religion depended on how well they adapted to the needs of local situations and historical settings, a process that may well be compared to the modern process of "glocalization," in which globalized culture finds a place in new localities all over the globe.[104] In this way, religion is first and foremost *local.* It has to make sense in the specific village or city context. These local expressions of religion,

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[102] J. D. BeDuhn, "Mani and the Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion' in Third Century Iran," in *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings*, ed. I. Gardner, J. D. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 248 and passim; N. J. Baker-Brian, "A New Religion? The Emergence of Manichaeism in Late Antiquity," in *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Lössl and N. J. Baker-Brian (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 319-343. The element of conversion, a choice to become part of the religious community, is expressed in the *Kephalaia* as "whoever will accept faith and invite it in…," [ϥⲛ]ⲁϫⲓ ⲟⲩⲛⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲛϥⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲁϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲣⲁϥ… 1 Keph. 78, 191.1. On the waning of the negative evaluation of "novelty," see A. K. Petersen, "Between Old and New: The Problem of Acculturation Illustrated by the Early Christian Use of the Phoenix Motif," in *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst*, ed. F. G. Martínez and G. P. Luttikhuizen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 147-64.

[103] As emphasized above, I am less interested in the question of whether they were, in fact, the first to conjure up this novel way of conceptualizing themselves and others. There are good reasons to consider the Zoroastrian self-representation as an earlier example. Kerdir's inscription explicitly designates the groups of conquered people in religious terms. Nongbri's argument about the broader semantic meaning of the Middle Persian "den" is not convincing. Nongbri, Before Religion, 69-70. BeDuhn is more accommodating toward Kerdir's inscription, but states that "Mani did more than refer to or describe this plurality; he made it the subject of a theory". BeDuhn, "Crystallization of the Concept of 'Religion'," 266. For others, Manichaeans may actually stand last in a line of "boundary-creating 'cults'," see Rüpke, Religion. Antiquity and Its Legacy, 28 which also introduces the term "religionification" or "religionization" for this transformation of religion.

[104] P. Beyer, "Globalization and Glocalization," in *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. J. A. Beckford and J. Demerat (London: SAGE, 2007) 98-117; T. Whitmarsh, ed. *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Roman Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); G. Woolf, "Isis and the Evolution of Religions," in *Power, Politics, and the Cults of Isis: Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies*, ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 82-86.

therefore, stand in a dialectic relationship with broader frames of reference such as the traditions of institutional or rationalized religion.[105]

Recent work on the Christianization of Egypt has brought forward two very different positions on the dynamic of local traditions and nascent Christianity. On one side, Roger Bagnall perceives of late antique Egypt as a society in sharp decline, in which traditional Egyptian practices disappeared due to the withdrawal of government funding. He suggests that "the loss of the institutional base of religion must have been devastating to the sense of community."[106] Christian communities and leaders profited from this lack of organized religion and aimed to fill the leadership vacuum. The Alexandrian ecclesiastical elite survived the Decian persecutions and built a provincial structure, with bishops in most of the *nome* capitals by the time of the Diocletian persecutions.[107] Despite this institutional change, certain traditional practices continued outside the realm of the temples as an "underlying current," according to Bagnall. A radically different view is espoused by David Frankfurter, who has argued for a local model of religious change in a series of publications. On the village level, he argues, traditional practices continued for a long time, either in the hands of former temple priests turned into magicians, or as "syncretized practices" of Christian monks.[108] The local and "domesticized" religion of villages and households was a vital element of traditional Egyptian practice, which could not have easily been swept away by institutional changes.[109] Roughly speaking, one approach to the Christianization of Egypt has emphasized institutional change, while the other has focused on continuity on the level

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[105] On this understanding of local religion in contrast to models that work with popular religion or folk religion, see D. Frankfurter, "Beyond Magic and Superstition," in *Late Ancient Christianity: A People's History of Christianity*, ed. V. Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 269.

[106] R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 268. I will use the term "traditional Egyptian religious practices" instead of "paganism," which implies a singular coherent phenomenon that never existed and derives from a normative evaluation by Early Christians. Of course, my alternative is not entirely satisfactory either, as it puts the emphasis on a longstanding tradition, while many "traditional" practices were just like much innovation as the nascent Christian and Manichaean communities and practices. D. Boin, "Hellenistic 'Judaism' and the Social Origins of the 'Pagan-Christian' Debate," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2014): 167-96; H. Remus, "The End of "Paganism"?," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 33, no. 2 (2004): 191-208; C. P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 145 notes that "in another sense, paganism was indestructible, in that it had never really existed except as an entity in the eyes of its opponents." D. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt. Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 7-10.

[107] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 278; Cf. E. Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church: People and Institutions* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements, 2015).

[108] D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 27-33, on priests and magicians: page 198-237. On Christian monks, see D. Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2003): 339-85.

[109] Noteworthy are their reviews of each other's work. Frankfurter, "Review of Roger S. Bagnall."; R. S. Bagnall, "Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Roman Egypt," in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (Leiden: Brill), 23-41.

of everyday practice. Both approaches are not uncontested.[110] A middle ground, taking into account both the continuity at the local level and the changes in the institutional sphere, may help us to navigate through the complex world of competitive textual identity formation with its various local appropriations.[111]

The academic disagreement on the centrality of Christian practices and institutions affects our study on a fundamental level. Not only is there no agreement on the level of impact Christianity had in Kellis, but there is also no established method to measure the level of religious change. Is the abandonment of the temple cult to be understood as a sign of a decline in traditional religious practices? Are the newly built fourth-century church buildings an indication of a strong Christian presence in the village? Frankfurter's call for a local or regional approach to Christian culture and practices reverberates with our focus on a local group of Manichaeans.[112] Their religious practices, like those of their Christian neighbors, stood out as innovations against the long tradition of Egyptian religion. We will see that despite the evidence for growing Christianity (see section 3.3.4 on Christian institutions in the Dakhleh Oasis), Kellites continued to appeal to traditional Egyptian deities, ordered amulets and horoscopes, and worked with a rather pragmatic approach to religious difference.

One of the most striking religious inventions of the fourth century was the early monastic movement, especially prevalent in the Theban region adjacent to the oases. The valley of the Theban mountain was traditionally used for funerary practices, but transformed "from a city of the dead into a tomb for the living" when large numbers of ascetics moved into the tombs to seek spiritual growth.[113] Archaeological and textual sources inform us about a wide variety of ascetics: cave-dwelling monks, village ascetics, Melitians, and supporters of the teachings of Origen, solitary anchorites, independent monasteries, and the

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[110] Critique on Frankfurter's approach has focused on his reliance on hagiographical sources, his use of comparative anthropological material, and his lack of attention for the impact of institutional Christianity. M. Smith, "Aspects of Preservation and Transmission of Indigenous Religious Traditions in Akhmim and Its Environs During the Graeco-Roman Period," in *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest*, ed. A. Egberts, B. P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 245-47; P. van Minnen, "Saving History? Egyptian Hagiography in Its Space and Time," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1 (2006): 57-91; J. van der Vliet, "Bringing Home the Homeless: Landscape and History in Egyptian Hagiography," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86, no. 1 (2006): 39-55.

[111] J. H. F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298-642 CE)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 22-23 and passim for this middle ground position.

[112] Although Frankfurter states that "the task must then be to shift our question and analysis to the local context, to examine native religions (both centralizing cult and popular practice), Christianities, and (it is to be hoped) even Judaisms and Manichaeisms, all as regional phenomena." Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 36. Reviewed by O. E. Kaper, "Review of Frankfurter, Religion in Roman Egypt," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 58, no. 1-2 (2001): 126-32.

[113] J. van der Vliet, "Epigraphy and History in the Theban Region," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt: Nag Hammadi - Esna*, ed. G. Gabra and H. N. Takla (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 151 about the monastery of Epiphanius.

large federations of Pachomian and Shenoutan cenobitism.[114] Some of these ascetics performed religious services that were remarkably similar to the practices of other freelance (often itinerant) religious specialists, a feature that has received some attention in the debates on Christianization. What is striking in these practices, as well as in the broader material evidence for Egyptian Christianity, is the reembeddedness of Christianity in local settings. Christianity was not merely a belief system about invisible supernatural beings, but it also transformed the interpretation of the Egyptian landscape. Christian practice rejected certain elements from traditional religious repertoire, while at the same time appropriating other practices into a new Christian framework.[115]

The material from ancient Kellis speaks to some of the central elements of this debate. It reveals that the temple cult is no longer in function, even though the traditional priest is still visible in the fourth-century papyri. It attests to the relatively early construction of three church buildings in the fourth century. Its spells, amulets, and horoscopes, on the other hand, show the broad array of religious practices beyond the doors of the churches. Frankfurter's emphasis on locality and the fuzzy boundaries of religious traditions is of critical importance. Kellites involved in Manichaean practice lived in a world filled with postulated supernatural beings that could be called on in times of trouble. Through its local and regional focus, this dissertation can be read as a case study of how another late antique religion became localized, or (re)embedded, in the lives and practices of fourth-century Kellites.

## 2.5 Manichaeanness in Four Related Categories of Action

Part II of this dissertation will examine the Kellis letters in depth, to examine where and when Manichaeanness was considered relevant. Some of the outcomes will highlight situations with a strong involvement in the construction and reproduction of

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[114] A short summary of some of the material is offered in H. Lundhaug and L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 22-55 and 234-62. Among the more recent publications on Pachomius and his federation are, J. E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999); J. E. Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles in Sixth Century Upper Egypt: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Coptic Texts on Abraham of Farshut* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016); P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). On Shenoute we now have R. Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery. Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); C. T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies. Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); A. G. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Most of the sources on the Shenoutan federation have only recently become available for most scholars, mainly thanks to the work of Stephen Emmel. S. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); D. Brakke and A. T. Crislip, eds., *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); B. Layton, *The Canons of Our Fathers. Monastic Rules of Shenoute* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[115] As an example of this re-embeddedness or localization, see the use of local saints in the amulet from Oxyrhynchus, discussed in A. Luijendijk, "A Gospel Amulet for Joannia (P.Oxy. VIII 1151)," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. K. B. Stratton and D. S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 418-43.

Manichaeanness—connecting Kellis to a transregional and transhistorical Manichaean tradition—while other letters adhere to the commonplace patterns and conventions of Egyptian village life. In Chapter 10, I will summarize the findings of Part II in four basic categories of action that derive from Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idris's analysis of the production and reproduction of nationhood in everyday life. Despite the difference in focus, I believe that this fourfold structure will help to focus on the everyday practices of this late antique religion. Fox and Miller-Idris discern the following categories of action:

> (1) "[T]alking the nation": the discursive construction of the nation through routine talk in interaction; (2) "choosing the nation": nationhood as it is implicated in the decisions ordinary people make; (3) "performing the nation": the production of national sensibilities through the ritual enactment of symbols; (4) "consuming the nation": the constitution and expression of national difference through everyday consumption habits.[116]

Following this fourfold division, the chapters of Part II will highlight the specific ways in which Manichaeanness resonated—to the extent it did so at all—within everyday life. It will examine situations, first, in which the Manichaean group was discursively constructed in routine correspondence; second, in which it defined and framed the choices of individuals; third, where it was expressed in ritual enactments or performative actions; fourth, where it was and was not part of ordinary consumption patterns.

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[116] J. Fox and C. Miller-Idris, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 537-38. Summarized in Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian," 91-102.