Dialectics of Religion and the Roman World: Relations, Inclusivity, and Change

FRANCESCA MAZZILLI / DIES VAN DER LINDE

This collection of essays aims to explore three main themes from the ongoing scholarly discourse about religion in the Roman world, which has multiple and divergent voices, in an integrative manner: relations, inclusivity, and change. Studies of networks, competition, communication, and connectivity abound in recent scholarship and demonstrate a general turn to an emphasis on relations rather than entities. This emphasis allows studies to be more inclusive of a variety of social aspects and to understand religion in interaction with politics, economics, warfare, and civil society. At the same time, static and systemic views are largely abandoned in favour of a focus on historical processes, dynamism, and fluidity. In order to clarify the three main themes – relations, inclusivity, and change –, each of them is discussed in this introduction in three separate sections incorporating current debates. As these themes are intertwined, it is inevitable that the discussions in the sections may overlap.

Relations, inclusivity, and change form important elements of dialectical thinking. Although defining dialectics is notoriously difficult and arguably not even desirable,[1] it serves in the volume and its essays to indicate the fluidity of religion, its dynamic and interactive development in the Roman world. The notion of dialectics constitutes one of the main pillars of the critical sociology of religion. It has its roots in the works of thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and members of the Frankfurt School.[2] Recently, sociologists of religion have taken up dialectics in order to understand religious developments and

1 Wolfgang Fritz Haug, "Dialectics," *Historical Materialism* 13, no. 1 (2005): 241–66; Randall H. McGuire, *Archaeology as Political Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 39.

2 For Hegel and Marx, see Chapter 1 in this volume; Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic. Steps in Marx's Method* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics (1958)*, ed. Christoph Ziermann, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); Haug, "Dialectics". See also, George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2017).

the relations between religion and society.[3] Such studies have, for instance, stressed the role of conflicts amongst elites and imperial states in the development of ancient Jewish society and religion.[4] In a study of two Pentecostal Churches in Detroit, Bonnie Wright and Anne Warfield Rawls engaged with the dialectical relationship between belief and practice.[5] A recent volume discusses the dialectics of the religious and the secular in a range of philosophical and sociological studies.[6]

This volume does not offer an in-depth discussion of dialectics nor does it present dialectics as an overarching model for the study of religion in the Roman world; it is, instead, to be considered as a reflection based on and bringing together current scholarly themes in the field of religion in the Roman world. In this process, we think, dialectical thinking can play a stimulating role. The volume reflects on the interplay between opposite elements in religion, society, and culture in the Roman world (e. g. Roman and non-Roman, sacred and profane, society and individuals); on the dynamic relations within and among religious ideas, institutions, and practices (e. g., gods, cults, sanctuaries, rituals); on relations between religion, politics, economics, and social structures and its various agents (e. g., political figures, soldiers, social groups), and between all of the aforementioned. Interactions between opposing concepts, categories, institutions, and agents affect and transform each other. As such, they may constitute driving forces of change and the formation of new (religious) ideas, organisations, identities, and practices. These new religious ideas, identities, and practices might differ from pre-existing ones but, at the same time, include and preserve elements of both. Therefore, this volume emphasises that aspects of religion in the Roman world cannot be considered in isolation nor as coherent entities, but, instead, that they were always-already part of social systems and their interactive and often contradictory processes; and, hence, in constant flux.[7]

3 Warren S. Goldstein, ed., *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion. A Critique of Rational Choice* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Rudolf Siebert, *Manifesto of the Critical Theory of Society and Religion* (3 volumes; Leiden: Brill, 2010).

4 Warren S. Goldstein, "Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: a Critical Dialectical/Conflict Approach to Biblical History," in *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion. A Critique of Rational Choice*, ed. Warren S. Goldstein (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 205–22.

5 Bonnie Wright and Anne Warfield Rawls, "Speaking in Tongues: A Dialectic of Faith and Practice," in *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion. A Critique of Rational Choice*, ed. Warren S. Goldstein (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 249–84.

6 Michael Ott, ed., *The Dialectics of the Religious and the Secular* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

7 For the phrase 'always-already', see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 172, 175–76.

Relations

Cultures, communities, and their religions in the Roman world were for a long time strictly classified as either Roman or non-Roman. The non-Roman could encompass any 'Other' ranging from Greek and Oriental to Native.[8] In correspondence with post-colonial criticisms, such ethnic and cultural labels have been increasingly challenged. Referring to Roman in a cultural process without any further explanation does not have any valuable meaning. Roman was a legal status that may have a political connotation but its own cultural, religious, and political identity was still uncertain.[9] The 'Other', for instance 'the East', is not a single coherent unit but it could be anything from Sicily to India and what was coming from the 'the East' did not have to bring its Oriental character to the new place. Therefore, not only was the 'Other' heterogeneous, but so was the process of the development of society and religion in the Roman world.[10] Additionally, in the 'Other' scholars have considered its dialectical quality, which consisted of a negative self-definition and a potential reversal at the same time. The formation of societies and religion also developed through contradictory or marginal voices. They were two-way processes of the response of the 'Other' to Roman dominion through which one could become Roman by staying Greek or one could be Roman by going Egyptian.[11] Nothing coexisted in absolute terms but it was more likely a multi-layered scenario.[12] This means, for instance, that Oriental gods could be a joint 'Roman-Oriental' god or that Orientalising Roman gods constituted a reinterpretation of the idea of the Otherness

8 See discussion in Chapters 3 and 9 of this volume. An example is the work by Francis Haverfield, who described religion in Roman Britain based on a strict conceptual distinction between Roman and native: Francis Haverfield, *The Romanization of Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 67–73; also: Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 2007 [1911]). For critique: Greg Woolf, "Beyond Romans and Natives," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (February 1997): 339–50; David Mattingly, ed., *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism. Power, Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire* (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997).

9 Miguel John Versluys, "Orientalising Roman Gods," in *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, eds. Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 241.

10 John North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 174–93; Andreas Bendlin, "Peripheral Centres – Central Peripheries: Religious Communication in the Roman Empire," in *Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion*, eds. Hubert Cancik and Jörg Rüpke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 45–48; Ted Kaizer, ed., *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Simon Price, "Homogeneity and Diversity in the Religions of Rome," in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds. John North and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253–75.

11 See discussion in Versluys, "Orientalising," 243–47.

12 Ted Kaizer, "In Search of Oriental Cults: Methodological Problems concerning 'The Particular' and 'The General' in Near Eastern Religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Period," *Historia* 55, no. 1 (2006): 26–47; Ted Kaizer, "Introduction," in *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, ed. Ted Kaizer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–36.

and came from cultural imagination.[13] Therefore, cults of Mithras, Isis, and Mater Magna had their own identity in a Roman context; they were not oriental, they were made oriental in some contexts.[14] In correspondence with this debate, dialectics involves sets of opposing entities concentrating on the interactive and contradictory relations between them. Additionally, it critically reflects on the entities themselves, taking them not for granted as preconceived coherent bodies but, instead, as characterised by an internal incongruency and inner movement.[15]

In line with dialectics and previous work, some of the contributions in this volume consider cults and gods in Roman provinces as neither Roman nor local but, instead, as constellations having various, sometimes contradictory, elements of both in a new distinctive shape. This discrepant character is described for the naming, iconography, and conceptualization of four deities in Roman Dalmatia in Josipa Lulić's contribution. For instance, gods with Roman iconographic traits had an indigenous name or, alternatively, a Roman god had different attributes linked with the Roman, local, and Greek culture. In Francesca Mazzilli's contribution, a dialectical interplay can be seen in the adoption of Greek names for deities in the first century AD, who were only partially linked with the previously worshipped Semitic gods in the Hauran (modern-day southern Syria). Also Eleri Cousins' chapter shows a fluidity between opposing categorisations of the divine in her discussion of the syncretic nature of a new god Mars Thincsus and its joint veneration with the German gods Alaisiagae, and the divine power of the Roman emperor on the Hadrian's Wall. The religious tension between belonging and not-belonging to Roman imperial structures was also reflected in the ethnic and military identities of the soldiers who commissioned these inscriptions. The chapters by Josipa Lulić and Eleri Cousins also emphasise the non-static and discrepant character of Roman and native religions and the problematics in defining them in these terms because of their incongruence.

The two-way process involving the response of communities to Roman dominion was based on integration and interaction.[16] This cultural process varied according to con-

13 Versluys, "Orientalising," 259.

14 Versluys, "Orientalising," 243.

15 Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, 4–14, 26–36; Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, 23–35, esp. 30–34; compare Jörg Rüpke, "Gifts, Votives, and Sacred Things: Strategies, not Entities," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 4, no. 2 (2018): 207–36.

16 Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, eds., *Religions of Rome. Volume I: a History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Corinne Bonnet, Jörg Rüpke, and Paolo Scarpi, eds., *Religions orientales – culti misterici. Neue Perspektiven – Nouvelles perspectives – Prospettive nuove* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006); Corinne Bonnet, Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, and Danny Praet, eds., *Les religions orientales dans le monde grec et romain: cent ans après Cumont (1906–2006). Bilan historique et historiographique. Colloque de Rome, 16–18 novembre 2006* (Brussels/Rome: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 2009); Corinne Bonnet, Sergio Ribichini, and Dirk Steuernagel, eds., *Religioni in contatto nel Mediterraneo antico. Modalità di diffusione e processi di interferenza* (Pisa-Rome: Fabrizio Serra, 2008).

text and historical process.[17] Religion was no 'Reichsreligion' (the religion of Empire) but a process by which religious ideas were connected to ever-changing networks within a culturally similar space.[18] Based on the idea of interaction, scholars have applied the modern concept of globalisation to the Roman world to stress the significance of connections between different religions and cultures with their own distinctive identities where both local and global cultural traditions were integrated in Roman provinces.[19] The alternative concept of glocalisation has been used to emphasize the twofold process of adaptation of global expressions in local cultures and local ones in global culture.[20]

Relations have been framed in different terms: communication, networks, competition, and rivalries. Following the rise of network thinking and network analysis, religious groups have been studied in relation to social networks which shaped the spread of religious ideas.[21] Especially in the context of the Lived Ancient Religion-approach, religion is understood as the communication between worshippers, gods (or ancestors), and a participating or spectating audience.[22] Another form of relations that scholars have paid attention to is religious competition and rivalries between cult institutions, religious groups, or religious and philosophical ideas.[23] There is, however, an important

17 Versluys, "Orientalising," 243.

18 Jörg Rüpke, "Reichsreligion? Überlegungen zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Mittelmeerraums in der römischen Zeit," *Historische Zeitschrift* 292, no. 2 (2011): 297–322.

19 Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys, eds., *Globalisation and the Roman World. World History, Connectivity and Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

20 Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1992); Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: a Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016).

21 Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire. The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Greg Woolf, "Only Connect? Network Analysis and Religious Change in the Roman World," *Revista Hélade* 2, no. 2 (2016): 43–58.

22 Jörg Rüpke, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*, trans. David Richardson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), esp. 1–23; see also the panel "Discussing Religious Change. A Panel on Jörg Rüpke's *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 4, no. 1 (2018): 105–54; also, Jörg Rüpke, "Roman Religion and the Religion of Empire. Some Reflections on Method," in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds. John North and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22–29; ibid., "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflections on History and Theory of Religion," *Religion* 45, no. 3 (2015): 344–66; Valentino Gasparini, Maik Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, and Emiliano Urciuoli, eds., *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

23 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); ibid., "Religious Competition and Roman Piety," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 2 (2006): 1–30; Leif Vaage, ed., *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Angelos Chaniotis, "The Dynamics of Rituals in the Roman Empire," in *Ritual Dynamics and Religious Change in the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the Eighth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Heidelberg, July 5–7, 2007)*, eds. Olivier Hekster, Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner, and Christian Witschel (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 3–29; David Engels and Peter van Nuffelen, eds., *Religion and Competition in Antiquity* (Brussels: Éditions Latomus, 2014); Jordan Rosenblum, Lily Vuong, and Nathaniel DesRosiers, eds., *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman*

distinction to be made between these relational studies. On the one hand, religious communication and networks are primarily focused on harmonious relations – i. e. the kind of relations which binds (groups of) worshippers, audiences, and gods. On the other hand, religious competition and rivalries emphasise relationships of tension and conflict either with external parties or within religious groups – they focus on the kind of relations which may reflect or cause divisions, friction, and crises. It seems best to us to give equal weight to both harmonious and conflictual relations rather than selecting and isolating the one or the other *a priori*. Additionally, social structures and processes but equally outsider-groups – which are not directly engaged in the harmonious or conflictual relationship under examination yet connected with it through other means – can exert profound influences on communication, networks, competition, and rivalries.

The core emphasis of dialectical thinking on the in-betweenness, on the relational, closely connects to these studies of religious communication, networks, competition, and rivalries. A dialectical study can also include both horizontal (among sanctuaries, cults, religious groups, and agents) and vertical relations (between state and individuals; between cult officials and worshippers). Equally, it can integrate harmonious (insider-groups; religious collaborations) as well as conflictual relations (outsider-groups; religious conflicts). All the contributions from the volume approach religion in the Roman world with an emphasis on relations, not just between agents but on multiple levels (e. g. vertical and horizontal relations; conflictual and harmonious relations). In the first contribution of the volume, Siebert and Byrd, for instance, depart from an understanding of the structure of religion in the Roman world comprised by the relationship between gods, men, and cults. Several volume contributions direct their attention to communicative and/or competitive relations between human actors,[24] or internal tensions between multiple and, at the same time, syncretised identities of dedicatees and dedicators.[25] As shown in Nirvana Silnović's chapter, relations in secretive, small-sized places of cult nurtured a sense of common religious as well as social belonging in opposition to the hierarchical structure of Roman society. In these different types of relations, the emphasis placed is not on a single human, divine, or institutional actor, or group of actors, but on the interactive dialogue(s) developing between them. The chapters by Antony Keddie and Dies van der Linde emphasise the oppositional relationships of sacred and profane finances or landholdings, respectively, where the intended separation of sacred and profane is under constant strain due to people challenging it. Asuman Lätzer-Lasar and Francesca Mazzilli stress the significance of the spatial relations between cult sites and their divinities, which, at the same time, were connected with temples' benefactors and dedicators (political agents and residents of urban or

World (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Nathaniel DesRosiers and Lily Vuong, eds., *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016).

24 See Chapter 2 and 8 in this volume.

25 See Chapter 7 in this volume.

rural communities). Josipa Lulić also discusses the importance of human interactions with their surroundings with respect to the cognitive processes leading to the selection and re-elaboration of certain traits of religions with which individuals were in contact.

Inclusivity

The inclusivity of religion understood as the relationship between religion, politics, and society has been subject of much debate. With respect to the degree of inclusivity/exclusivity of religion, 'embedded' religion has in the 1990s and 2000s formed a prominent vantage point on religions in ancient societies. According to this view, closely connected with the notions of *polis* or civic religion, religion permeated most, if not all, spheres of ancient society.[26] Its all-pervasiveness begs the question whether and how we can still differentiate religion. Challenging this view, Brent Nongbri argued that:

> to say that religion is 'embedded' in the social structures of a given culture is to admit that the evidence of that culture is not particularly well-suited to the analytical category of religion, while at the same time to assert that religion is still somehow intrinsic to the culture. The word 'embedded' suggests that scholars might have to look for the components of religion in unexpected places, but it still implies a deep, enduring, and very real presence of something called 'religion'.[27]

Based on a historical study of 'religion' as a concept, Nongbri concludes that 'religion' as a conceptual category – as, in his view, nothing of the kind existed before the advent of Christian ideas of religion – is not suitable for descriptions of ancient societies but can only be used as a redescriptive category.[28] In so doing, however, he assumes that the category of 'religion' is fitting for modern societies, even though 'religion' is arguably as much embedded in modern social and political structures as in ancient societies. As a consequence, we may, for instance, find phrases like 'political religions' in studies of both ancient and modern politics and religion, however ill-defined and distant in

26 Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion," *Annali dell' Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 10 (1988): 259–74; ibid., "What is *Polis* Religion?," in *The Greek City. From Homer to Alexander*, eds. Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 295–322; Richard Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: the Civic Compromise and its Limits," in *Pagan Priests. Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 233–55; Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*; John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003); Andreas Bendlin, "Looking beyond the Civic Compromise: Religious Pluralism in Late Republican Rome," in *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy. Evidence and Experience*, eds. Edward Bispham and Christopher Smith, 115–35 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 115–23.

27 Brent Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion: a Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55, no. 4 (2008): 452. See also Chapter 8 in this volume.

28 Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion. A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

meaning.[29] It would seem, thus, that it may be the shortcomings of fixed and absolutely distinguishable abstractions like 'religion' and 'politics' themselves which form an obstacle to our understanding of religion in the Roman world – regardless of the specific descriptive language of ancient and modern societies.[30]

Relational approaches have moved beyond the complete identification or non-identification of religion with politics or society. A large number of studies have focused on the relationship and interaction between religion and politics.[31] Additionally, Anna Collar has demonstrated how the spread of religious ideas developed and was linked with the movement of people in the Roman world.[32] David Engels and Peter van Nuffelen have not restricted their volume on competition to 'religious competition'; instead, they emphasized the interaction of such competition with ethnic and cultural differences, competition for social status and prestige, and political structures.[33] These studies exhibit an analytical focus both on relations and on the integration of religion into its social totality. Still, even when acknowledging "the interweaving of the various realms of society",[34] Engels and Van Nuffelen can distinguish religious competition from cultural, social, and political conflicts – which brings us back to Nongbri's critique of scholars' acknowledgements of the impossibility of distinguishing religion from other spheres or realms all the while continuing to designate them as distinctive.

29 Ancient 'political religions': Elias Koulakiotis and Charlotte Dunn, eds., *Political Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019); modern 'political religions': Eric Voegelin, "The Political Religions," trans. Virginia Ann Schildhauer, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 5: Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science Politics and Gnosticism*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 19–73; Roger Griffin, ed., *Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See also the comments by David Engels and Peter van Nuffelen, "Religion and Competition," 14: "Given the interweaving of the various realms of society, typical for a premodern society, religious competition never was purely religious – leaving aside whether it is ever so, even today."

30 Compare Russell McCutcheon, "The Category 'Religion' in Recent Publications: Twenty Years Later," *Numen* 62, no. 1 (2015): 119–41; Nickolas Roubekas, ed., *Theorizing "Religion" in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019).

31 William Van Andringa, "New Combinations and New Statuses. The Indigenous Gods in the Pantheons of the Cities of Roman Gaul," in *The Religions of the Roman Empire. Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, eds., John North and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–38; Elizabeth Frood and Rubina Raja, eds., *Redefining the Sacred: Religious Architecture and Text in the Near East and Egypt 1000 BC–AD 300* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2014); Michael Blömer, Achim Lichtenberger, and Rubina Raja, "Between Continuity and Change: Religious Identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed," in *Religious Identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed: Continuity and Change*, eds. Michael Blömer, Achim Lichtenberger, and Rubina Raja (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015); Elena Muñiz Grijalvo, Juan Manuel Cortés Copete, and Fernando Lozano, eds., *Empire and Religion. Religious Change in Greek Cities under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Koulakiotis and Dunn, *Political Religions*.

32 Collar, *Religious Networks*.

33 Engels and Van Nuffelen, "Religion and Competition," 12–23.

34 Engels and Van Nuffelen, "Religion and Competition," 14.

These considerations concerning the inclusive and exclusive character of religion and the critical views on the category of 'religion' correspond to aspects of dialectical thinking. In addition to considering religion as part of a wider and external totality, a dialectical view may advocate the integration of such an allegedly external totality *into* the very category of religion. Religion – and all that falls under this umbrella-term – is never an absolute and coherent category, but always-already includes politics, economics, and society – i. e. social totality – within itself. As such, dialectical thinking recognizes the imperfection of our conceptual categories and stimulates scholars to begin their analysis based on that recognition.[35] It understands concepts as being in motion through the interaction with, and permeation of, their opposites. Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment* does not take Enlightenment as an absolutely distinguishable concept. Rather, it demonstrates that myth – its opposite – is already as much part of Enlightenment as rationality and enlightened thinking are part of myth.[36] The apparent conceptual opposites actually permeate each other and are already part and parcel of each other, yet non-identical.[37] In much the same manner should the reader understand the title of this volume. 'Dialectics of Religion' indicates that religion should not be considered as a closed conceptual category but as the umbrella-term for the various sanctuaries, cults, religious groups, gods, and ritual practices which themselves are already internally inclusive of political, economic, and social aspects.

Contributions to this volume express this inclusivity in various ways. Jörg Rüpke's chapter, for instance, demonstrates that the rituals of the Roman military served as means of externalizing warfare and communicating legitimacy of the victorious commander, yet they also provided fuel for competition between aristocrats. On the frontiers of Britannia, soldiers originating from beyond the territories of the Roman Empire expressed their military, ethnic, and religious identities in dedicatory inscriptions simultaneously but with contradictory indications of belonging and not-belonging to imperial power structures. According to Eleri Cousins, the choice of gods, including such 'syncretic' ones as Mars Thincsus, should be understood in light of these conflicting expressions of self-definition and ambivalent relations to the structures of the Roman Empire. Apart from inclusivity of warfare and soldiers, some chapters take into account the economy of temples, in which sacred and profane interests may meet and collide. Anthony Keddie shows, for instance, that the financial organisation of the Second Temple in early Roman Jerusalem was a primary factor in the built-up to Jesus' protest and his "cleansing of the temple." At Aizanoi in Asia Minor, a dispute erupted over the boundaries of landed estates belonging to the temple of Zeus.[38] With

35 Compare the arguments of Jörg Rüpke for a critical stance towards the categories 'votives', 'altars', 'gifts', and 'vows' in studies of ancient religion: Rüpke, "Gifts, Votives, and Sacred Things".

36 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Verso, 1997).

37 Adorno, *Introduction to Dialectics*, 4–14, 26–36.

38 See Chapters 6 and 10 in this volume, respectively.

its formalistic and praxis-oriented focus, religion in the Roman world could easily be co-opted by the wealthy and powerful strata of society.[39] At Rome, for instance, the cult of Mater Magna on the Palatine Hill was, from its inception, associated with Rome's glorious victory over Hannibal and the city's mythical foundations serving the claims to power of various *gentes*. As Asuman Lätzer-Lasar demonstrates, the development of the cult of Mater Magna and its placemaking were influenced by the involvement of different actors, including emperors, consuls, and religious groups. In the communities of Roman Gaul, authority over cults and rituals was largely left to the local magistrates in power and affluent citizens would finance the construction of temples or the organization of festivals.[40] Power structures did, however, not always determine, or translate into, the development of cults, deities, or sacred spaces. Francesca Mazzilli argues that the political divisions of the Hauran did not form an obstacle for the formation of a high degree of religious unity throughout the region. A specific part of the Hauran, Leja, revealed, however, a much more autonomous path of development; politically, in its opposition to imperial power and, religiously, in its formation of cults of individuals. People belonging to different levels of social strata found their own ways of venerating their gods and goddesses. Alternative spaces for venerating Mater Magna in Rome, for instance, developed, once the Palatine had largely turned into an imperial residence.[41] People from middling to higher social strata got initiated into the cults of Mithras, which, by themselves, formed small, close-knit communities possibly reproducing hierarchical structures of Roman society, but at the same time placing themselves firmly outside of that society. Nirvana Silnović argues that the main motivation for joining Mithraic communities lay in the possibilities to advance socially and economically, rather than in a strictly religious motive. Josipa Lulić shows how a theory of religion focused on the cognitive processing of old and new knowledge reveals a view on structure and agency as essentially permeable. Being inclusive of, and acknowledging, their mutual permeability, it allows for different explanations for the idiosyncratic combinations of names, iconography, and concepts of the divine in Roman Dalmatia. All of the chapters, therefore, display a strong inclination to take into account secular aspects of social totality which permeated the character of sanctuaries, gods, religious practices, and worshippers.

39 See Chapter 1 in this volume.
40 See Chapter 8 in this volume.
41 See Chapter 4 in this volume.