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Religion and the City

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES and religious ideas have made cities, cities have changed such practices and ideas and eventually turned them into "religions," and both cities and religions continue to shape each other. This is the summary of the prologue and the basic claim of this book. I do not claim that cities created religion. In most definitions of religion, there is sufficient evidence to assume that phenomena like rituals, religious specialists, sanctuaries, and divine figures antedate urbanization. Neither do I claim that religion was the only factor in the rise of urbanism. Defense, exchange, and the concentration of resources and subjects could all lead to the growth of the foundation of large settlements. What I do claim is that probably everywhere religion was a factor, and often an important factor, in the rise of cities.

Why should this have been the case? Religious action provides additional agency to its practitioners and additional opportunities to form groups, create networks, and set new standards for interacting with visible humans on the basis of successfully dealing with more elusive powers. These are addressed and represented in religious communication, thus becoming effective and the subject of further reflection and response. In this way religious actors create a reality that allows for alternative experiences and interpretations of the everyday or even of the extraordinary. This opens a unique creativity. Nowhere but in religion does human action create such different and diverse worlds (setting aside the worlds of fantasy, which themselves often build on religious narratives and establish religious figures). Nowhere else but in religion do the formation of mutual trust between individuals, even in large groups, and radical isolation of individuals and groups stand so close together. This first chapter will further elaborate on this model. Here it suffices to specify that such religious agency profits from and supports the concentration of people, animals, and goods in large settlements and the character of such settlements as network hubs, which will be analyzed in chapter 2.

A New Lens

The hinge connecting such places and religion is neither sacrificial animals feeding large populations nor the availability of building materials for nice temples, but the very necessity to set new standards—the urban ethos and the "urbanity" of some or even all of the settlement's inhabitants and stakeholders. This is the subjective side of urbanism. It is constitutive, not "ephemeral" urbanism.[1] Even in critical reflections on the place's realities, the urban aspiration produces a basically constructive urbanistic attitude, which is the desire to live differently than in traditional forms of settlement and to embrace the manifold actions and thoughts involved in such a new form of life. It is an attitude and a way of life that produces urban space and sociality and is shaped by both. It is the mindset of those actors who cause large settlements, trading places, or sanctuaries to become "cities": a form of commonality that does not feed on kinship or common dependence. Rather, it seeks a better life in the conscious togetherness of people who are pursuing very different activities and have been shaped by very different experiences. For example, throughout their individual histories, most cities have depended on migration, even if not every migrant is inspired by specifically *urban* aspirations. Instead, their hopes and attitudes are shaped by the opportunity for social advancement, not least by the position of "middleclassness," a phenomenon that has very urban roots, as we will discover. What drives people into these urban places, which are typically full of inequalities, is ambition. They imagine themselves quickly arriving at the upper rather than the lower part of any social ladder. And some, driven into cities by force, dream of escape.

Here is an example of how urbanity (as I will continue to call this urban self-reflexivity and practice constitutive of towns and cities), religious practices, and imaginations collaborate in creating cities. In the face of diverse pasts and the attempt to create a shared past and a common present through the city's distinct identity, religious narratives about primordial or founding deities offer additional depth to the memories of one's own house or recent arrivals, as cities like Jerusalem, Rome, Varanasi, Medina, and Amritsar demonstrate. Religious aspirations, which typically reach out to divine addressees located far from the worshipper, can easily overlap with the urban aspiration to compensate for a narrower living space through the cultivation of a radical counterimage of nature and idyll, situated either in the city itself in the form of gardens, urban parks, or sanctuary enclosures, or in suburban spaces that might include places of particular beauty, green conservation areas, or weekend retreats for city denizens. Urban studies, town planning, and urban development are also part of such urbanity.[2]

Admittedly, the history of urbanity and religion's mutual influence is full of temporal and geographical contingencies. This influence presents differently in Mesopotamia than in China, and the ways of interaction in the 1st millennium BCE are different from those in the 2nd millennium CE. Nevertheless, similar constellations show up time and again, similar processes of change appear here and there, and there are comparable results in many places. Without any doubt this is true from the very early days of urbanization, that is, from the first places that were understood by their inhabitants to be radically different from villages (a term that we will use to encompass the many different forms of preceding and contemporary settlements—typically smaller than cities—that will be treated in chapter 2).

There is an important consequence to the previous reflections. Considering the dynamics of historical urbanization processes as well as the history of religion, "urban religion" cannot be used simply as a classificatory term. There is no such thing as urban or nonurban religion, nor is it meaningful to speak of urban or nonurban religions. "Judaism," for example, is not an urban religious tradition, nor is "Hinduism" a nonurban religious tradition. "Urban religion" is a term that, in this book, seeks to focus attention on the transformation of religious practices, sacralizations, and reflections as they connect and confront urbanity. It describes a process, not a property. This process changes properties, and through it a religion is urbanized, intentionally or unintentionally, by the actors.[3] The historian of religion Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli has called this process the *citification* of religion and produced a book on this process in nascent Christianities.[4] One might mirror this approach by speaking of the *religionification* of urbanity. Pragmatically, such differentiation of foci is in order. This book, however, follows a different line. If religion and urbanity shape each other, the focus must be on how that happens and the fields in which it frequently happens—how actors in their religious and urban aspirations change or connect urban and religious practices, ideas, and institutions, and how all that makes for a new story of religion and a new story of urbanity and its most important product, the city. In short, this is a story of gods and cities as one.

A story of "cities of gods" is not a sideline of human history. In practice, all religious agents have addressed the philosophical question of what constitutes a good life, and the question of how we want to live together and what needs to change—or to remain—in the interplay among individuals, human society, and the material world today arises above all in cities. This is true statistically—the majority of us (fifty-five percent in 2018 and as many as sixty-eight percent in 2050, according to the United Nations) do or will live in places classified as

cities.[5] This is also true culturally and psychologically—it is primarily institutions anchored in cities and people who see themselves as urbanites, as city dwellers (even if they do not actually live in cities) who are most concerned about these questions. It is also true historically—even small towns and cities have proven to be engines of innovation and change (for better or worse). It is to cities that we are most likely to assign the task of managing the future through local actions or by preparing (and later implementing) national, supernational, imperial, or global decisions—for instance, by the United Nations.

Talking about cities in this way is evidently problematic. At least, it is ideological, and election results that in many states split along the line between urban and nonurban indicate how explosive the mutual perception is. Dense coexistence, productivity, innovation, education, multiculturalism, open-mindedness, and even cosmopolitanism are supposed to characterize the city and city dwellers. For the others—the nonurban, the rural, people living in villages and the countryside, or those who experience the urban life as hell—the opposite is said to be true.[6] And these others are many—ruralists are even now almost half of humanity, and the city denizens excluded from urbanity are ignored in statistics. Before the high-speed urbanization of the various industrialization periods in Europe, America, Africa, and Asia, ruralists were the vast majority of people, comprising ninety percent or more.[7] A history that looks solely at cities would be a history of a minority.

A focus on the city is a focus on the places of trade and exchange, of creativity and power, of experiments in living together of humans, animals, and gods, which are different because they are *supposed to be* different. Behind the city, as indicated at the beginning of this chapter, is urbanity: ways of living, attitudes, aspirations to design and experience one's own lifeworld as a specifically different one, as an urban one. These are norms that affect everyone, even if they are not shared by everyone, perhaps not even by a majority of those who live in cities. Yet all of them have their common referent in the city in question.[8] The city, in other words, is not simply the site of historical and religious changes. It is the built, social, spatial, and temporal result of a cultural strategy and, consequently, this strategy's most important instrument. Urbanity (and the much more tangible city) is, according to the proposition pursued here, as much shaped by the other cultural strategy, religion, as it shapes the latter. Both have had consequences that extended far beyond the space and the inhabitants of cities as they created those media, institutions, and guiding principles that also defined the nonurban and confronted those not living in the city with norms that were imagined as superior.

Given the impact of this entanglement of urbanity and religion on the history of textual, iconographic, and material traditions, attempting a comprehensive history of both would be hubris. Thus the focus must be on where the densest interactions are to be found. This is in imaginations about and practices of city foundation (chapter 3) and the spatialization of religion and the monumentality of the urban (chapter 4). In both the focus is on the massive transformation of urban space and its consequences for how people started to think about their gods up to the rise of polytheism and monotheisms. The following chapters deal with the constitution and development of urban societies, focusing on the questions of how ancestors and other dead people were integrated or excluded (chapter 5) and how social and other equalities and inequalities were performed or countered by religious rituals (chapter 6). If diversity of people has been a hallmark of cities, the complexity of urban temporalities are a necessary correlate. Time and again religious temporalities help to create unity or to allow for multiplicity, thus shaping religion into the most experienced administrator of time (chapter 7). Chapter 8 takes us to the material dimension of equalities and inequalities and the solution offered by introducing divine proprietors. This has shaped urban as much as religious institutions in a sustainable manner and turned religious administrators into important economic players and providers of urban infrastructure. One result of this is an aestheticization of religion and urban space, including the use of religious aesthetics to reflect on urbanity (chapter 9). Religious authorities also figure prominently in chapter 10. Answering the question of how people should behave in cities has triggered important religious imaginations and facilitated urban as well as extra-urban institutions like monasteries and the principle of tolerance. It is against this background that chapter 11 addresses one of the most consequential outcomes of the interaction of religion and urbanity, that is, the rise of religious individuality and its defense by and subsequent normalization through institutionalized groups and networks, that is, religions.

If the focus is narrow, the framework is wide. The beginnings of urbanization, historically and imagined (chapters 2 and 3); the building up of urban space and the definition of its boundaries (chapters 4 and 5); the ways and times to perform urbanity (chapters 6 and 7); and the orders of property and the basic norms of living together (chapters 8–11) are addressed as cornerstones of the urban and necessary building blocks for any urban history—and are unthinkable without religion, as is shown in this urban history.

The same holds true for the complementary perspective. As stated before, there was religion before the rise of cities and outside of them. Yet if we look at the

historical process of shaping urban religion, it is evident that much of what is regarded as characteristic of religious practices results from urban religion rather than continuities of nonurban culture. To show how and why this is the case is this book's task.

That said, it is surprising that religion and the city have hardly made an appearance in each other's research. To address this riddle, I will review in this first chapter the state of the art in the history of religion as well as in urban history. It can already be disclosed that the findings are poor for various reasons. One of these reasons is the way in which religion and the city are understood in many of these works. I will therefore develop a detailed model of religion that is suitable for the examination of mutual influence. The goal is a framework of perspectives that allows sources and studies in urban and religious history to be sifted for previously overlooked evidence. Looking beyond the limitations of one's own knowledge and beyond the methodologically legitimate option of stopping in the assertion of local and regional differences requires a very broad perspective. The aim of this book is not to find superficially similar phenomena or to merely juxtapose differences. Instead I am looking for shared mechanisms or constellations of mutual influence within very different local and historical constellations. This cannot be easily demonstrated even for a single city and era, regardless of one's own expertise.[9] Yet to clarify whether we are on the trail of a globally important process, a broader approach is needed. Therefore, in the following chapters I will repeatedly turn to a small but ever-expanding circle of towns and cities where the sources allow us—that is, the author, his many informants, and the global scientific community—to trace the ways in which religion has changed urbanity and urbanity has reciprocally changed religion.

What Does Research in the History of Religion Tell Us about Cities?

Previous research has almost completely overlooked this connection. One reason for the rather dichotomic interest in either religions or cities might be the biblical story of the inhabitants of Babel, in Mesopotamia, scattering after they had begun to build a tower up to heaven, the dwelling sphere of God (Gen. 11). Counter to Jewish interpreters' focus on diaspora, later Christian interpretations of this story focused on the hubris and the inacceptable self-aggrandizement of thousandfold human cooperation as facilitated by the city.[10] Thus, religion and the city seemed to be fundamental antagonists.

It is instructive to take a look at the establishment of religious studies (*Religionswissenschaft*) as a discipline in Central and Northern European universities. In 1925, the *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Textbook of the History of Religions), originally edited by the Dutch religious scholar Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920 CE), appeared in its fourth edition.[11] This was a European project, written by leading experts of the time. The work was committed to the search for origins of religion that could explain later developments. These origins were no longer sought in the early advanced civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, which were mentioned in the Bible. After about 1850, the short biblical chronology of the world had been superseded in Europe: that was a timeframe in which not even six thousand years had passed since Creation.[12] Additionally, not only psychology but also the history of religion had just discovered the soul as a scientifically tangible element and established it in "animism" as a metaphor for still vague ideas of the addressees of religious communication. Pre-animism, the experience of nonhuman, diffuse power localizable in objects, places, or actions, as described in print by the British philosopher Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943) in 1900, once again broadened the concept of religion. Now religious practices and ideas that ethnologists, historiographers, and even missionaries and colonial officials had observed or reconstructed could be put into a grid of ascending evolutionary stages of human culture (as Herbert Spencer had suggested since 1864), regardless of their chronological place in history. This was not, however, much undertaken in the new study of religion itself, which remained a small area with limited impact. Instead, it was taken up in Emile Durkheim's (1858–1917) sociology; in Max Weber's comparative cultural and social studies; and in historiography, ethnology, philology, art, and music studies. In the public determination of what was understood as increasingly determining life, religion became a factor of the highest importance.

The *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* outlined the basic function of religion: In the earliest periods, religious strategies of action and explanation were of paramount importance in securing the "external conditions of life," such as in agriculture and handicraft production, while there was a lack of specialized scientific and technical knowledge. Beyond that, however, religiosity produced the development of the most diverse "ideals." In the mirror of such lofty aspirations humans recognized their limitations, their "suffering." To gain "redemption" from this is said to have driven the development of religion.[13] To arrange these ideas (and the concepts of the divine and the practices associated with them) historically and systematically, that is, according to their contents, was the task of the new discipline. The division into "religions" was the decisive instrument for this.

Religions first appeared as spatially closed cultures, as in the case of "Egyptian," "Greek," "Chinese," or "North American" religion, then as mobile individual or world religions that transcended geopolitical boundaries. The handbook's introductory chapter, "The World of Appearances and Ideas of Religion," contained paragraphs on "Nature and Spirits," "Man," "Gods and Deity," "The Cultus," "Mythology and Theology," "Worldview and Fate of Humans," and finally "Piety," thus operationalizing the intellectual program. The introduction was followed by chapters such as "The Religion of Primitive Peoples," "The Chinese," "The Japanese," "The Egyptians," "Semitic Peoples in the Near East," and finally "Islam" in the first volume.

Where does the city appear in this argument? Not until after the discussion of cults of gods and cults of ancestors (the latter includes the treatment of the house, saints, and relics), explanations of "special gods" who deify activities in certain situations (also called "gods of the moment"), "function and nature gods" (gods of different human groups included), "local gods," and an assessment of polytheism and monotheism. The word "city" is first mentioned in the context of local gods: in Egypt, as in Mesopotamia, cults of local gods persist in many cases even where localities have become towns and cities. Where cities (implicitly, Near Eastern or Mediterranean city-states) merge into larger empires, these now powerful local gods become important elements of empire-wide polytheisms.[14] In this account, religion pertains to the individual and the community, but the community is understood as a village or from the perspective of the "state," whether in Latin Europe, North America, or East Asia. The history of religion, it must also be said, is a comparative and global historical discipline from its emergence in the 19th century and its colonialisms from Portugal to Russia and onward.[15]

Almost a hundred years later, the historical perspective has not fundamentally changed. In a "History of Religions from the Stone Age to the Present," published in 2018 in German, the argument in the first part advances via burials and ancestor worship to concepts of souls and God, then turns to ritual "forms of interaction," sacred spaces and times, and myths as expressions of early worldviews. "City" appears at first only in the association of city-states and capital, then later alone as the antithesis of empire.[16] The social and spatial dimension of religion is introduced when dealing with sedentarization; caves and the monumental stone buildings and public squares of the Anatolian site of Göbekli Tepe lead to the association of temples and the identity of a "community."[17] This is consistent with the state of specialized research on the religious history of individual city-states. Especially in the study of ancient Mediterranean religions in

a world full of cities—perhaps two thousand of them—the focus is on political identity, which is underpinned by religion.[18] This is conceptualized as a civic religion, that is, a religion of the polity, not urban religion, that is, a religion of a locality.[19]

Was the city simply unimportant for religion? The consensus in handbooks produced by other research traditions seems to confirm the opposite of what I want to show in this book. Let us consider historian of religion Mircea Eliade's multivolume *History of Religious Ideas*, for example. Eliade (1907–1986), who came from Romania and taught first in Paris and later in Chicago, inquires about the content and meaning of religious testimonies and their long-term development. Not surprisingly, the results of such research traces above all technical-economic developments. The shift from nomadic forms of life to settling down from the 9th millennium BCE onward, formed an important historical turning point. The emergence of texts from the 4th millennium BCE and after forms a subsequent turning point. It is acknowledged that this latter step took place in Mesopotamia and Egypt. That both were also the earliest sites of urbanization, as attested by huge and monumentalized settlements, is not even mentioned. Instead, the position of humankind in the cosmos is the central theme, expressed in myths of the creation of humans and the origins of various social roles, especially those of rulers. Cities and people living together in cities do not feature either as objects or factors of religious thought.[20] Even if cities are seen in some interpretations as marking a cosmic center—a focal point in the spatial sense—and thus as the incursion of the divine into the profane, their urban character does not play any role.[21]

Let us make a second attempt with another internationally respected series of handbooks. A perusal of the *Religions of Mankind* reveals that cities—unlike the desert (or springs or mountains)—are not given importance either as a factor in religious development or as loci of particular forms of religion. In a handbook of the Italian tradition of *storia delle religioni,* the most important reason for the invisibility of cities becomes more apparent. It is not the lack of space in densely written handbooks, as cities are also not addressed in books on specific lines of development and individual religions. A historical approach aiming to compare not only isolated phenomena across religions but to compare religions as totalities both isolates and essentializes religious data. Such an approach must emphasize the "relative autonomy" and "self-regulation" of religious phenomena.[22] Only in this way does it become possible not to misunderstand religious ways of living and their developments as a direct consequence of changing sociocultural conditions.[23] Such a methodological decision is understandable in

itself, but problematic for the global history of religion and the city I am pursuing. I am not concerned with religion as such (whatever institutional substrate such an analytical distinction would have), but with when and where people resort to religious communication and how this course of action influences people's everyday world, their habits of living together, and their choice of urban forms of life. This may begin with the use of urban symbols in religious rituals, but it goes much further.[24] Ultimately, it results in the question of what the city should be. What is good and what is bad about the city? Indeed, it is the darker side of cities that is foregrounded in many religious narratives. The Babel story in Genesis (Gen. 11), even in its earliest forms, was not written by city fans. Perhaps religious figures' critical attitude to city life is one reason why research on the history of religion based on such texts could easily leave the city aside. The situation is different on the side of urban research, however.

What Does Urban Historical Research Tell Us about Religion?

From epiphanies and healing springs to sanctuaries, communal processions, and deities as founding figures, religious events and religious institutions play a major role in many of the stories that urban authors have told of their own cities. This is something we have yet to comparatively explore.[25] For now, it is enough to note that images in their sources directed the attention of European scholars in urban history in the 19th and early 20th centuries much more intensively to the religious than was the case in religious studies, which took no interest in the specifically urban character of such data. Even if they perceived the cities of their present as secularized, these historians were nevertheless aware of some religious elements in their past.[26]

To a large extent, this was the case with the Paris-born historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830–1889). He had begun his academic career with a dissertation on Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth in the house—and in the city.[27] This study led him directly to his larger work on the ancient Greco-Roman city, *Le cité ancient*, written in Strasbourg in the 1860s. This treatise begins with an extensive analysis of religious practices and, most importantly, religious ideas, before moving on to survey the family and city. Originally, *pace* Fustel, religion had been exclusively domestic. The family gathered around the hearth in the house and around the family tomb close to the front of the house. The practice was not public but was performed in the *foyer*, literally the hearth of the house,

at an altar that was invisible to those standing outside. This cult was not regulated; each family could do as it pleased. The family was defined and bounded by the household cult, that is, by religion: family was who celebrated together. It could be a whole clan of thousands of people, a society unto itself. Fustel's assumption that the size of societies developed parallel to the horizon of their religious ideas is essential for urban development. Cults also made possible new types of societies, such as in Athens and Rome (where Fustel grounds his study) in the form of federations such as *phratries* or *curiae*, that is, regions or quarters. The principle of such cults remained the same: a common meal is prepared at the altar and thus becomes "sacred."

How was this expansion possible? From the beginning, according to Fustel, there were two different religions. One was based on the experience of one's own life and self and located the divine forces in one's own soul and consequently in the ancestors, heroes, and domestic *lares.* The second religion related to the wider world, the external physical forces that make life possible. Accordingly, its divine forces were located in external objects, such as springs, rivers, mountains, and trees. But these objects were also endowed with the same kind of personality and will that deities possess in human actors. This duplicity already applies to domestic religion. The uniformity of living conditions and shared language produced identical deities. When, under such circumstances, families discovered that they had different ancestors but similar if not identical deities, the precondition of a new, comprehensive society was established. This was true not least because this second type of deity brought with it a different type of morality. The adoption of common deities advocated hospitality even to strangers and promoted cohesion. The domestic foyer was transformed into a small extradomestic shrine, and eventually into a temple. This was a clear sign of a larger society.

As a consequence, Fustel postulates, a certain form of city came into being. The basic units did not merge but formed bonds on a higher level: Families grew together into organized neighborhoods (called *curiae* in Rome), curies grew into tribes, and tribes grew into the city. They remained individual and independent entities, each held together by its own form of cult, its common religion. The city was not a union of individuals but an alliance of groups. To hold them together, material forces were not enough. The strongest bond imaginable was a shared faith, without this having to be apparent to those involved. (Note that sociologist Émile Durkheim was Fustel's disciple when he developed his idea of a social bond created by intense feeling in communal rituals, orgiastic celebrations with atmospheres like those in soccer stadiums or Oktoberfest tents.[28]) The result, in Fustel's work, is a city that represents a gathering of people who have the same

patron deities and perform rituals at the same altar—in the case of Rome, at the temple of Vesta. And it is the de facto political and religious community (*cité*) that meets in banquets and feasts, that decides to found a proper city (*ville*) and later to venerate the founder as a saint. Urbanity, one could read Fustel as saying, was the fundament of the city. This, for all the remaining autonomy of the earlier, more fundamental levels, has an impact all the way down: The combination of political and religious authority, of magistrates and priests, leads to an absolute rule over individual members of the urban society. (This assumption will be questioned in chapter 10 of this book by the concept of heterarchy.)

Fustel, however, analyzed not only the beginning but also the end of this religiously determined city. The religious generalization process led beyond cities' possibilities to expand, which could encompass only a small minority of the total population. People struggled, without knowing it, for a more comprehensive structure than the city could provide. Urban crises led to the transformation of the city of Rome into an empire. This was a transformation that again initially represented a rethinking of the religious framework, which destroyed the balance of the "two religions." Tension grew between ideas of the divine and divine reason on the one hand and the deceased ancestors on the other, as well as between unreflective cultic activity and the systematic reflection on basic questions of being human in philosophy.

For all today's criticism of the historical details, Fustel de Coulanges's image of the complexity and dynamism of religious change and the strong mutual influence of ideas and practices of urban coexistence—what I call urbanity—and his view of religion, which increasingly is organized in a plural of religions, remains an important foundation for thinking about cities *and* religion.

Fustel de Coulanges asked about the relationship between religion and society and its significance for the city, but half a century later the economist Max Weber (1864–1920), who was born in Erfurt and did research in Heidelberg, was interested in the relationship between the economy and society. Well acquainted with ancient cities and the work of Fustel, Weber wanted to understand the differences between the high and late Middle Age "occidental city" and ancient Near Eastern, Mediterranean, and Asian cities. Ultimately he was concerned with the question of how precisely the Western city "had developed a self-governing urban bourgeoisie" and become the primary arena of rational gainful employment and of the capitalism that shaped Weber's present and cities as he experienced them.[29] In this context, his object of study was not the city, but rather the place where one could observe the historical complexity of the interplay of diverse developments and social spheres. Because Weber, in his universal-historical

investigation, wanted to explore why something had happened in one city or group of cities that did not happen in all the others, he was interested in differentiation even when generalizing. Slavic and Chinese villages both had walls; agriculture characterized agrarian towns from antiquity to the present. Specialization could take place in the service of a prince at a court rather than in a town. Self-government could arise in individual districts or be absent altogether. Paths to urbanization could develop very differently. This also concerned religious matters. In many important respects, religion played a subordinate role in Weber's sociological reconstruction of the city.

For Weber, in ancient Mediterranean and also Asian cities, shared ritual was key to the cohesion of family groups. However, this proved to be a hindrance for wider urban solidarity. Actual or imagined descent groups, Indian castes included, can be very exclusive. Marriage and some forms of economic cooperation, especially eating together, are affected. Ancestor worship does not bring people together, as Weber notes, in line with Fustel. If the barriers to inclusion are too high—in Chinese cities or among European Jews—ties to those living elsewhere, outside the city and in their villages of origin, prevented a city community from forming. Family cohesion weakened in ancient cities, however, to the point that the warrior nobility in particular managed what many European medieval cities achieved much later: a "fraternization" (a family metaphor!) that created appropriate religious symbols and, in the long run, was able to turn the urban community into a legal entity.[30] This phenomenon also existed elsewhere, but Christianity, shared by (almost) everyone, made it possible for such a patron deity not simply to stand alongside others—clan gods, for instance—but to rise to a higher level. In this constellation, not only family groups but also individuals could become members, in other words citizens, of the city, as long as they remained faithful Christians.

Such developments were historically more often the results of lasting conflicts than organic developments. In many places kings and princes founded cities as instruments of rule and profit. Those who were affected by "legitimate," that is, royal, princely, episcopal rule and its officials (especially the middle class, which thrived on urban trade and production), united against such rule and its religious symbols. In medieval Europe, the god of the oath required for such a conspiracy to form was the same as that of the rulers; in antiquity, on the other hand, precisely such illegitimate rulers, called "tyrants," had been "promoters of new emotional cults" (and thus threatened to fragment or bypass traditional religion); resistance against them had accordingly been easily formulated as a rejection of such religious practices.[31] The reconciliation of interests between townspeople and landowners, and between town and nobility, took different forms, but the

religiously secured privileges of clerics and monasteries, as well as Islamic endowments from both rural and urban productive capital, marked permanent points of contention until the advent of secularization. This had not been necessary in ancient cities, where the city-dominating and landowning nobility filled the important priesthoods.

Weber's analysis reveals the multiple fault lines and conflicts that characterize cities and shape their development. The ideas and actions that constitute urbanity are by no means uniform or even harmoniously aligned. When it comes to religion, however, Weber's approach does not lead anywhere.

For Fustel de Coulange, religious changes had made coexistence in urban density and diversity of origin possible in the first place. For Weber, religious traditions were obstacles that gradually became obsolete. Only when serving as a novel and specifically urban form of communalization was religion conducive to urbanization. But many cities managed without religion as a kind of social bonding and political formation. For the history of a constitutive role of religion for urbanization and a subsequent history of continuing mutual influence, as pursued in this book, Weber's exceptional instances and forms of urbanity would not provide a sufficient basis.

Can we get beyond this position? Rarely have urban scholars thought about the history of religion in Weber's global-historical study, but that is now changing. Even if a new overall picture has not yet emerged, there are elements that are important in my attempt at a new history of how the city makes religion and religion makes the city.

The multifaceted image that has emerged, for example, from a recent handbook on early cities is also likely to become important to the big picture.[32] Factors beyond the ecological, economic, and political prove important against the background of our own urban experiences. What atmospheres were experienced in early cities? What images of the city prevailed in the minds of its inhabitants? Not religious organizations but religious action, that is, rituals, move into the center of our attention. But what did these rituals accomplish? Only a few people could actually participate—perhaps one to two percent of the inhabitants of Mayan cities, for example, observed the rituals performed on the huge pyramids. Nevertheless, scholars assume that solidarity was generated on a broad scale.[33] But did fear in the face of destruction and violence in such rituals actually lead to bonding effects among those exposed to the performance of a few leading ritual agents? Is it even possible to determine which relationships were fostered in this way?[34] Evidently, rituals require close examination if one wants to understand their performance for and dependence on urbanity.

The findings are clearer when looking at better documented written material. Uruk in the 4th millennium BCE, Zhungzhou and Yinxu in the 2nd millennium BCE, Mayan lowland cities in the 1st millennium CE, and Cuzco in the Andes in the 2nd millennium CE provide the same findings in this regard. They all show the urban origins of many information technologies and different techniques of storing information, such as phonological writing, iconography, and the Incas' nodal writing (*quipu*), as well as the materials that suggested such different techniques in the first place. These inventions allowed the management of growing social and economic complexity; they enabled and demanded administrative accountability. In short, they allowed control.[35] The same holds true in the religious sphere. Now it could be documented who had donated what or who had participated in which ritual, and indeed who was a member of a religious group. We have to add the subversive or counterfactual use of writing, from prophetesses and prophets to oppositional wall graffiti to this research.[36] It was not only urban administrators and celestial authorities who used these techniques to control religious actors; those who had writing techniques at their disposal could also control the deities, record them by naming them, or create them, and in this way demonstrate religious competence, even power, in front of other people as well as the gods.[37]

How did religious phenomena and their constellations change as a result? This central question in the a history of religion is not addressed in research on urban history. In general, the (preurban) form of religion as it existed before the founding of cities is assumed to be unchanged. Of course, religious practices, ideas, and organizations have a history and are subject to change.[38] Studies of early Islamic Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Cahokia (on the Mississippi), which flourished between the 11th and 14th centuries, show how memories and architecture are intertwined.[39] Here, too, however, there is the basic assumption that the structural design of cities expresses the cosmic order. But aren't such cosmologies anything but stable, subject to frequent change, often even within the same generation of rulers? And what barriers are imposed on the architectural expression of ideas by the traditions and constraints of material design, the properties of building materials? Such questions remain unanswered.

In contrast, another basic conviction is eroding. It is the question of domination and inequality. Certainly cities in Mesopotamia, as in Central and South America, provided security against external enemies. But they also preserved old inequalities and created new ones within. Religion could support as well as conflict with existing power relations.[40] The very talk of "rulers" in much of ancient history is a problematic simplification. The cities of the Indus civilization (or Harappa culture) in what is now Pakistan and India (2600–1900 BCE) and the

so-called early historic cities of the alluvial plain between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers reflect a complex economic and social composition, and do not show traces of palaces.[41] Ancient Greek cities show monumentalization without strong rulers. Based on examples such as Jenne-jeno on the middle Niger and East African cities such as Nubian Kerma (c. 3000 BCE), one could argue against the identification of urbanization with centralized power. The often-asserted connection between kingship, religious institutions, and centralized administration does not hold here.[42] Religion might have even played a role in preventing the division of labor and social differentiation from turning into power hierarchies, for example through the formation of castes or guilds, or through political and religious ideologies that suppressed displays of wealth and thus obscured hierarchy or even established heterarchy. The capitals of large imperial formations show a particularly high degree of difference in social status, ethnicities, and languages. Even in the religious sphere there were strong social differences and high levels of specialization. The assumption that religion and rule are inseparable does not fit the evidence.[43]

Religion and Power: A Problematic Perspective

In a remarkable review of the historical evidence since the last Ice Age, British archaeologist David Wengrow and American anthropologist David Graeber have fundamentally challenged the assumption of a regular connection between urban life and hierarchical inequality.[44] As they show with many findings from large settlements, inequality is not simply an inevitable consequence of urbanization. As a rule, inequality must be enforced by those who want to achieve it against resistance from those who don't. In the following chapters, this critical perspective will be invoked again and again. Equality and inequality will be seen as the subjects of ongoing ambivalence rather than as a logical consequence, which is key to understanding the mutual transformation of urbanity and religion. This is the opposite of the underlying assumption in many of the studies reviewed here. There are reasons for this. As we have seen, many histories of religion, while presented as histories of cultures and civilizations, make no reference to the city and urbanity as perhaps the most momentous cultural technique of the last six thousand years. Thus it is not surprising that "city equals domination" is easily transformed into "urban religion equals instrument of domination." The great American sociologist Robert Bellah (1927–2013) grandly asserted this evolutionary sequence in his outline of a history of religion from early human times to the so-called Axial Age, which produced individual and ultimately world religions founded by prophets.[45]

Bellah is interested in religious change, not the city. But as a sociologist of religion, he assumes a social evolution and follows it stage by stage. Central to all later developments is the transition from chiefdoms to archaic states. The fragile supremacy of the figure who, through his munificence but no longer his family lineage, takes a leading role in a society of equals is replaced by a society stratified by class, in which typically warlike success is transformed into hierarchical rule. At the top is now a king whose rule is secured by a worldview, a cosmology that explains why human inequalities are "natural."

According to Bellah, a momentous change occurs at the level of chiefdoms. The addressees of ritual acts become regular deities. New forms of human rule are explored in new conceptions of powerful nonhuman beings. Momentary power (previously addressed only situationally, such as when crossing a river, during a thunderstorm, or in fear of crop failure) gives way to a notion of enduring actors who rule humans and specific domains. Their actions are arbitrary, but also suggestible. Ritual strategies are adapted. These deities are "worshipped," and the asymmetry of the human relationship to these humanoid power holders is reflected in gestures of submission and thus aggrandizement: one kneels or prostrates oneself and refers to divine lords with elaborate appellations and honorifics. Those who worship them also try to connect with them, to share in their status.[46] These new ideas also change religious rituals. A group may continue to charge itself in ecstatic rituals, but that is not central to the cult or to worship. Communication with the deities now requires an intermediary, and it is the ruler who can best occupy this position. In the archaic "state," the ruler is a priest-king who can maintain the relationship with the god(s). To make this state permanent, such rulership must be developed quickly and institutionalized strongly.[47] In ancient India or in Rome, this priest-king status may be bifurcated with the king and the lead priest (Brahmin or pontifical): each is supreme in their own realm, but neither can perform their distinct yet mutually dependent or symbiotic roles without the other.[48]

In the archaic state, then, gods (Bellah always uses the male form) and the cult of gods reflect the hierarchical reality of society. Therefore it is also possible to speak about society and domination in a religious language of their own rather than with the terminology of kinship. Promoting goddesses and gods instead of ancestors is the paramount example of this. In a hierarchical society, monumental architecture is possible, as the necessary manpower can be mobilized. No wonder that such monumentality serves ritual or royal purposes (although in chapter 4 we will subject this assumption to a thorough critique).[49] *Pace* Bellah, cities have now become possible, either as city-states or as nodes in territorial

states whose center, the court, is not located in a single city but moves through the territory for wider jurisdiction.

Urban agglomerations, however, are not what interests Bellah. More consequential for him is the development of writing, not because of the city, but because of the archaic state and its newly more complex society. As a tool of a group of specialists, a scribal class, writing enables the systematization of thought. This is reflected, for example, in moral justifications of rule and the ruler's claim to power. However, in the long run the written fixation also allows that others turn such claims against the ruler. The Axial Age of the 1st millennium BCE, with its supposed nexus of revolutionary thought, religion, and social developments, is at hand, with its scribes, prophets, and philosophers and their ethical claims.[50] For Bellah, all this seems to have nothing to do with the city.

Another evolutionary theoretical perspective on religion connects more closely with the development of urban societies. Canadian psychologist Ara Norenzayan contends that the development of societies that exceeded the size of pre-Neolithic hunter-gatherer groups was essentially enabled by the evolution, beginning around 10,000 BCE, of a particular type of religion whose central feature was the appearance of "big gods." These gods could observe everything "from above," but they were still humanlike enough to be "intuitively graspable and emotionally effective."[51] Above all, they represented a moral concern. As such, they were able to ensure prosocial behavior among people and instill moral norms, and religions of such prosocial deities prevailed. The historical underpinnings of the argument begin with the monumental site of Göbekli Tepe, which dates to the 10th millennium BCE. Göbekli Tepe was certainly a place for rituals, but there is not the slightest indication of one or more big gods. The use of the site ended after a few centuries at the latest.

Çatalhöyük is a settlement in modern-day Turkey with wall paintings depicting both animals and female statues dating to the 7th millennium BCE. Again, interpretation of the evidence is difficult: rituals are suspected, but the form and status of a nonhuman addressee are unclear.[52] Norenzayan is careful to assert the presence of moral gods and to point out the difficulty of interpretation, but his mention of places and cultures is suggestive. The elaboration of rituals and the increasing complexity of societies go hand in hand, but this does not provide evidence for the development of Norenzayan's big gods.[53] Potentially crucial evidence remains highly speculative. The assertion that there was a priestly class in Mexico in around 2500 BCE and in the "earliest societies of Mesopotamia and India, as well as in pre-dynastic Egypt and early China (4500–3500 BC)" is not plausible either in terms of the existence of such a role or in terms of dating. Likewise, the

advent of written records is not accompanied by evidence of big gods and morality.[54] Norenzayan cannot show that early city and empire building depended on, or at least gave a central place to, a moral conception of the religious. Such a specifically religiously articulated morality was not pronounced in any of the early waves of urbanization. The Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions to which Norenzayan frequently refers were latecomers in terms of the formation of larger groups. A comprehensive description of the interaction of religion and urban coexistence in large numbers cannot be drafted in this way. And when this interaction is pursued in detail, it is not simply prosocial religious morality that will be detected but deeply ambivalent and often playful or divisive religion.

From Past to Present

This book aims to counter the disinterest and disconnect between the religious and the urbane[55] and to rectify the deliberate overlooking of the urban origin of techniques of writing and documenting, of new forms and dimensions of monumentality, and of the institutionalization of religion. It is in the course of urbanization, it seems, that religious authority gained a life of its own vis-à-vis political power. Yet why do we need to know whether religion supported rule and rule was based on cities—or not? Whether great deities as sentinels ensured conformist behavior—or not? In the nation-states of the present, religion might be a decorative—and according to many secularized thinkers, illegitimate—embellishment of rule, but it might also be transformed into a "political theology," fundamental for legitimation and in normative terms the opposite of any urbanity, namely fundamentalism of uneducated hicks, as it would be seen through the "urban lens." It is, to put it more delicately, a "patriarchal protest movement" against liberal democracies and a callback to the past.[56] Cities are often sites of potential insubordination rather than support. At best they serve as bases of imperial foreign domination, but they are also primary military targets in the event of conflict, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has demonstrated.

If cities are considered religiously relevant by researchers today, it is because they are very different now than they were in the past. They were radically secularized during industrialization, first in Western Europe in the late 18th century, in North America in the late 19th century, and almost worldwide in the 20th century.[57] But in the globalized modernity of the late 20th and 21st centuries, in the flashpoints of worldwide mobility, increased diversity, and placelessness, we can observe cities' religious reenchantment. That, at least, is the grand narrative that contemporary city-based disciplines are propagating.[58]

This research leaves no doubt about the necessity of considering the mutual entanglement of urban and religious development. "Religion and cities literally grew up together," say the editors Katie Day and Elise Edwards in the introduction to the *Handbook of Religion and Cities*, published in 2021.[59] The reciprocity of the interaction forms the basic assumption of the entire volume and applies especially historically, as the talk of the "co-production of religion and urban life throughout history" illustrates.[60] Like the handbook on ancient cities, this reference work also provides a representative survey of an entire field of research.

What does the interaction assumed here look like? The authors refer to religious interpretations of Jewish and Christian texts that linked the abandonment of religious lifestyle with urban welfare. The Israelite prophet Amos in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE indicted urban inequality as a consequence of sinful behavior. But Day and Edwards also point to central cities or even "holy cities" as the basis of religious traditions from Islam to Catholicism, to Buddhism, and to Hinduism. However, religious thinking with urban metaphors and utopias also quickly led to highlighting the ambivalence of cities, as we have seen in the case of Babel. In their potential, but also in their chaos, cities were just as suitable as metaphors for salvation as for sin, as much spurs to community building and land-grabbing for the "shining city on the hill" as they were breeding grounds of disease and symbols of the loss of social control. The threats posed by a city continue to lend themselves to religious community building as a survival strategy against this cesspool of sin. Harvey Cox's 1965 book *The Secular City* called for seeking and rediscovering God in precisely this environment.[61] The catalytic effect of this book on recent research on urban religion can hardly be overestimated. The call to take a closer look at where people set up religious places or act religiously outside established church spaces was directed above all against a sociology of the church that wanted to measure religion in aggregate numbers of members and ritual actors on the one hand and in the degree of individualization of religious ideas and practices on the other.[62]

As in many contemporary studies, the focus in Day and Edwards's handbook is on migration. Through immigration, cultural boundaries are drawn and redrawn; urban space proliferates as it diversifies. Above all, religious identities—even more than ethnic ones—and their architectural visibility are the decisive factors. This is not only about the addition of different influences but also about the emergence of new differences within cultural boundaries, the so-called superdiversity visible in many contemporary towns and cities.[63] It is a diversity within the diversity of what we know as Muslims (Sunnis or Shiites), Vietnamese Buddhists, or Catholic Italians. They are not the same even among themselves.

In the handbook, the initial assertion of historical continuity in the interaction of city and religion is not deepened beyond these present-day considerations. Instead, the claim is made to establish as a research perspective the religious interest in profound memory and in a justice that must also be reflected in spatial relations, in accommodations and accessible spaces in the city. Religious actors must be able to articulate themselves in the context of their urban location. Such an orientation is then, it must be admitted, not surprising after all: urbanity, the question of how to live together in a specifically urban settlement, cannot escape the normative questions of how we *want to* and *should* live together. Urbanity implies an urban ethos, in local as much as in global horizons.

As is so often the case in contemporary research, the good intentions of wanting to provide a long historical perspective are lost over the feeling that "modernity" is completely different from anything that has gone before. Thus, the handbook of religion and cities hardly lives up to the promise to keep the historical background in view, since memory and ritual connections to the past were often central in religious activity.[64] My book seeks instead to consider past and present as both involved in ongoing processes of a mutual formation of religion and urbanity. Yet many of the perspectives and questions raised in the handbook are of historical importance. For instance, consider the cosmopolitans in Mumbai, who are not only imagining abstract global connectivity and responsibility networks but are living them in neighborhoods and who are aware of such local commitment. The implicit display of religious preferences on house walls and storefronts in urban centers around the world today was performed in ancient and medieval towns centuries ago.[65] Religious plurality and the constant encounter with diverse worldviews and ways of living in the city is a fundamental question of the history of religion as well as of the present.[66]

Several questions may be mentioned here that could easily be transferred to past epochs. What different meanings and connections does the built environment open up? How do architecture and urban infrastructure, from canals to streets, not only direct movements of religious actors but also acquire religious meanings?[67] Infrastructures for water in particular—drinking water reservoirs, lakes, monumentalized riverbanks, or springs and rivers venerated as deities (from nymphs to the Ganges and Brahmaputra)—are often sacralized.[68] How do religious actors deal with ruins resulting from religious conflicts, and why do they cling to such places and their evading traces? What kind of urbanity prevails in those "cities" that move through Indonesia, for example, as sleeping and gathering places for a crowd of Muslims on pilgrimage that numbers in the tens of thousands?[69] The question of how religious actors deal with urban violence and

the limited presence of religious semantics of peace in public space is just as relevant as reflections on the theological approach to climate crisis.[70] Religious actors and researchers alike, I conclude, have to confront their own ambivalent images of urban life as scenarios of doom or salvation. Religious images and texts have to face their own genesis, their coevolution with urbanism itself and its reflection. And this new history of religion and the city, which this book undertakes, must provide the foundations, as it cannot address all these topics in its limited number of pages.

Why "Religion" Has Become a Useful Term Again

Before traveling into the past, we must remind ourselves of the subject matter. What is this "religion" that has been so frequently invoked? This word is as natural a part of conversation in many European languages as it is controversial in religious studies. Every discipline argues about its "art," "music," "society" or "culture." In religious studies, opponents to the term "religion" sometimes denigrate those who take the term too broadly or refuse to deconstruct its institutionalized premises as practicing "conceptual imperialism." Going to the soccer field, the basketball court, or the cricket stadium every week, meeting like-minded people, experiencing strong emotions—can that also constitute religion in its passionate veneration of heroes and clinging to one's in-groups? Some people are accused of defining the term too narrowly. In such definitions, Islam and liberal Protestantism become cultures, Daoism is reduced to a worldview without practices, yoga to mere gymnastics without beliefs. Such quarrels become more exciting when the disputes are outside the realm of science. A lot of money and social prestige can hang on it. If Scientology is not a church, there is no tax break for it. If rituals are folk religion, if beliefs are superstition, if practices are magic and not real religion, then those who participate in them are to be treated with caution. Alternatively, religious people should be regarded as cranks who have missed the scientific revolution of our worldview. Religion has long been a contested term in public discussion. Yet many languages and epochs have never known the term, indeed have not had an equivalent word despite the sometimes impressive presence of the phenomena often captured by it.

The lack of historical terms is the easiest to deal with. It basically applies everywhere. Society, state, politics, economy, art, music—all these show important differences and historical variations between Indo-European languages. Exploring other languages in the west and east, south and north, reveals even more diversity. However, this cannot and must not prevent us from talking about all

these matters across the borders of languages, epistemic parameters, and cultural traditions.[71] It must not preclude claims of similarity, nor must it preclude comparison at all. We need a clear definition of what is to be compared or examined—and a word for it, an abbreviation, so to speak. Taking this word from natural language usage speeds up mutual understanding, sparing interlocutors from repeating the detailed definition by referring to a previous understanding. This book will talk about religion as an abstract concept allowing comparisons between religions as certain types of grouping. It will talk about urbanity as a comparable abstraction and about the urbanities identifiable in different cities and among different denizens.

We must not ignore the risk that the artificial word, the technical term, can be confused with the everyday term. This attributes to the technical term associations that are too broad or too narrow for the historical or geographical object in question. The everyday usage of the term "religion" today connotes an intense religious conviction, of a knowledge legitimized from divine revelation that cannot be falsified, of a "faith." "Religion" likewise brings to mind belonging to a religious organization, even when performing rituals outside of the group's marked spaces of worship. In common understanding, membership and faith are connected, otherwise one would speak of (individual) spirituality or (secular) organization. The beginning of membership is ritually marked, as in Christian baptism. Ideally, participation in rituals and adoption of the worldview (conversion) go hand in hand. Such membership and associated worldviews are often supposed to be mutually exclusive (as the *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* implies). In such a view, religion exists only in the plural form of religions whose members belong to that religion and only that religion.

If religious practice, as defined at the beginning of the chapter, is essentially communication with nonhuman or more-than-human addressees, then this can lead to constellations or be embedded in such constellations that are not captured by the current everyday concept of "religion." Religion is not only what individuals do, but what they do in social contexts, what they do to generate trust or to exercise power. Here, recourse to other terms (and not their standard translations) is helpful. The Arabic *'umma*, for example, denotes a community—ideally worldwide—in which political and religious identity are not separate. *Dharma* in Sanskrit (or *dhamma* in Pali) denotes a world order that is maintained by appropriate human behavior; it does not separate worldview and morality. The Sanskrit word *saṁpradāya* links group formation to a particular doctrine; unlike "sect," it emphasizes a lifestyle, not boundary setting. *Sangat*, the Panjabi term of the Sanskrit *sangti*, alludes to a community or fellowship brought together

under religious precepts. The Japanese neologism *shūkyō*, a 19th-century translation and interpretation of the European concept of religion, aims at "religious doctrine," comparable to the philosophical schools addressed by *disciplinae* in Roman antiquity.[72] *Religio*, the Latin root, originally meant a case-by-case obligation to religious communication; only gradually did it become a generalization, as a result of which whole groups then paid attention to a range of such obligations.[73] Like the much older Chinese term *li*, *religio* focused on obligations to perform rituals but gained neither the emphasis on ritual precision of *li* (Latin *ritus*) nor the Chinese term's extension to moral obligations to human coexistence. Nevertheless *religio*, like *li*, could also be criticized as unnecessary ritualism.[74]

At the beginning of this chapter I defined "religion" for the purpose of this book as human communication with more-than-human interlocutors whom people assume to intervene in the world, to be actors comparable to humans but more powerful and of further reach—ancestors and deities of all possible shapes, gradations, and finally world-reigning abstractions. Now this is to be expanded to see which outcomes, that is urban changes, can be traced back to religion. It is not a question of which conditions must be fulfilled in order to speak of religion. Rather, a net must be cast to track what may be connected with elementary religious communication, what results from it, and what thus expands and in turn shapes religious action.

When talking about religion in general, we must not forget that the particular and varying contexts of thoughts or actions represent dynamic structures. Religions are always in the process of becoming and appear stable only in retrospect or in attempts at standardization.[75] This makes it even more important to theoretically or speculatively develop a detailed working model of religion in its social context that helps to identify different forms and consequences. Therefore, the yardstick for such a model is not its correctness but its suitability to pursue the agenda of this book: to understand how humans have employed urbanity and religion to live close together and to understand how this is reflected in the mutual transformation of religion and urbanity.

As stated in the introduction, my modeling of what constitutes religion is driven by an observation of the outcomes of religious action and the function of religion. In an evolutionary perspective it is the ultrasocial character of humans that comes into view when religion is used not only to establish groups but to support and shape institutions as complex as cities.[76] Religious action provides additional agency to its protagonists and creates additional possibilities for them to form groups, create networks, and set new standards for interacting with people on the basis of successfully dealing with more elusive powers. It provides venues

for extraordinary experiences that likewise might be useful for the challenges of upscaling settlements.

A Model of Religion

Classical sociology's fundamental insight is that "the human being is determined in its whole being and all its expressions by the fact that it lives in interaction with other human beings."[77] Neoclassical sociology, which no longer wanted to limit itself to the question of individual calculation and the rationality of human action, connected this with the question of the foundations and the quality of these interactions. Humans are constituted as beings who want to live together with others. The human being seeks recognition and is concerned about others; it wants to enter into dialogue and experience resonance; it is not a being that primarily seeks power and its own advantage but it offers, accepts, and expects gifts—and expects others to also offer, accept, and expect.[78] As Marcel Mauss famously put it in his book *The Gift*, reciprocity is what defines social and indeed other kinds of relationships. Without it there is virtually nothing.

I propose to speak of religion when this disposition is extended to nonhuman givers. This extension happens in what then becomes religious communication, in addressing or invoking others beyond living, corporeal human beings. The other or others, the ancestors, the spirits, and the gods are ascribed agency or responsibility in the communication and by the fact that it is communicated at all. The use of special forms of communication—praying, meditating, shouting, chanting, singing, or dancing—and special media of communication, such as water, wine, fire, light, incense, holy books, slaughtered animals, or bones of martyrs, is intended to attract attention and signal relevance. What is presented in this way can be understood as a gift that one hopes will be accepted, because this allows one to cultivate the expectation of reciprocity.[79]

If the addressees transcending human sociality are specifically addressed, this is nevertheless done under the fundamental condition of continued interpersonal relations. Religious communicators also remain in dialogue with other people, care for them, or seek recognition and resonance—perhaps through their religious action. Religious action thus always takes place in social contexts, even if it is occasionally used to compensate for a lack of sociability or to seclude oneself. These contexts must be analyzed by our model. But first, religious action, considered in isolation, needs to be broken down further. Successful communication with partners who are assumed to do things differently is not easy. After all, the aim of addressing them is dialogue. It is experienced as a relationship that is

supposed to be resonant, even if the interlocutor is created through communication, through addressing as well as through attentive listening.[80]

Religious action does not stop at addressing the other. For religious communication, people not only fall back on patterns of interpersonal communication but also make an effort to create specific preconditions for communication with the nonhuman (or not-any-longer-human) and to join in others' successful communication. This can still be seen as the use of media or gifts, but the performance of the act attributes a particular character. This character connects objects, places, and times temporarily or permanently with the Other, with that which in a simple sense transcends the everyday. Here we recognize the concept of sacralization. This sacralization of instruments, places, times, altars, temples, and feast days can come in different forms. From the perspective of religious communication, it is about optimizing the conditions of communication, increasing plausibility for the participants and spectators by emphasizing the linkage with and reference to previous religious communication that is believed to have been successful. Religious action oriented to traditions, to established knowledge, becomes part of a way of life, part of institutions.[81]

Such unilateral communication enables innovation. Communication with the invisible favors experimentation. Thus, religious communication is also open to change and hybridization; it is a constantly shifting entity even while it may be ossified by traditions and institutions. Anyone who wants to communicate religiously must attract the attention of the divine other. Creating relevance for the latter is primary, even if it contributes—secondarily—to social distinction among those who observe any such action seeking attention. This may generate new gifts, new rituals, even newly formulated addressees, that is, new gods.[82] In the absence of prompt negative feedback, creativity is favored by the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy: This solemn ritual has not only made me particularly happy but has certainly made my God happy as well! Behind such processes, however, there are also processes of converting economic and political capital into religious power. It is always about the use of scarce space and scarce time and the mobilization of third parties who are involved in religious communication as participants, spectators, or facilitators. But here, too, it is not simply a matter of ascribing value and power, but of relationships that are established, of affects that can be associated in the long term with things and places that touch, remind, and motivate. Thus, certain forms of religious action become institutionalized and habitualized, not least in the form of roles.

Alongside communication and the sacralization that embeds it, there also occurs a reflection on both. Forms of communication, that is "rituals," are

systematized, as are the conditions of successful communication and its choice of addressees. Such reflections are sometimes written, and sometimes combine with professionalization. Alongside texts that represent communication—prayers or revelations—are other texts and textual practices that explain rituals, record names of gods, or reflect about the media of sacralization and the forms of organization: metacommunication, metasacralization, metainstitutionalization. These, too, can become religious practices and instruments of sacralization, for example, when reflections on the transcendent or the copying of religious texts are understood as pious offerings, or when the presence or application of such texts serves to sacralize places and times. This can change one's relationship to such texts and their contents, which may indicate the presence of the Other and make the viewer glad or humble.

If one casts religion as a cluster of the three described fields of practice of communication (including long-term sacralization), institutionalization, and reflection, and their respective world relations, one can consider for model-building purposes how this practice of religion, revolving around the ascription of actor-character transcending the visible social world, has changed and could change interactions with other people (and objects) in the four dimensions of spatiality, temporality, materiality, and sociality. Such religious action gains its dynamics from the central mechanism of this communication: human actors attribute agency to their counterparts. They can do this because it is so widespread in their social environment, regarding this ancestor or that goddess, in this situation or that context, but they can also transfer such attributions to new addressees. In both cases, through the proximity to a deity or even through its explicit response, such actors gain subjectively and often also objectively in scope of action and prestige up to the point of divinization as divine scribes, holy abbots, or bishops.[83] The levels of action are expanded in religious communication (and, building on this, religious speculation). This begins, as shown, with the circle of addressees and actors, which has suddenly been extended beyond the usual suspects—heads of families, respected neighbors, local rulers—that is, beyond the everyday into the advanced, the transcendent, perhaps even the invisible and unexpected. But it does not stop there.

For the spatial, the concept of transcendence offers a starting point. It is about transcending the self-evident through the transfer of agency to ancestors, spirits, gods, or even more abstract effective powers. This is located in urban places or cemeteries within or outside of city walls. Yet, the divine action of some addressees of religious communication goes beyond the concrete place—the space, the house, the city, and the countryside. It is transcendent. Not from the other side

of the street but from Rome or Jerusalem, from the underworld or the heavens, we see the deities stepping into action. But the growing and the growing together (*synoikism*) of cities, countryside, even wilderness and world do not only acquire another level, the cosmos; they gain another dimension that can no longer be captured by the metric units of building blocks, wall lengths, road networks, trading posts, or border demarcations. Such otherwise successful regionalizations are transformed by ancestors who walk through walls, tutelary gods whose abodes cannot be relocated, spirits who can make the wilderness spill into the landscape, or gods with whom one communicates faster than the speed of light.[84] In the triangular relationship between space, people, and the divine, the house, city, and world become housePlus, cityPlus, and worldPlus, and change both pragmatic access and emotional embedding.

With ancestors or deities, completely different dimensions of time come into play: a deep past, perhaps touching on the ancient beginnings, perhaps an overarching future also for others beyond the immediate preconditions for action and consequences of action. In temporality, both real and fictive ancestors open up common pasts for otherwise unconnected people. The same can be true for near or distant futures of perishing or redemption; stories of rescue and salvation describe other temporal frames of reference and thus also establish other relationships between people who suddenly find themselves in the same group or displaced from their usual social environment. With the changed temporalities, the way of dealing with pasts also changes; present and future also pluralize; time becomes a scarcer or more abundant resource.[85]

The religious practices of gift and representation also change relationships in the material realm. The task of making that which lies beyond the perceivable world into something visible, tangible, and thus addressable and capable of relationship creates a strong impetus to design and innovate. At the same time, the readability of such representations—whether pictures, statues, or complex ensembles of figures and objects—must be ensured by a plethora of additional conventions. The distant, the extraordinary, even the exotic are obvious proxies, or more precisely metaphors, for the transcendent.[86] But for the habitualized gaze, other materials and objects may also suggest themselves as representations of the transcendent (and, if necessary, lead to iconoclastic reactions). In gift exchange, there is a need for institutions that can appropriately manage newly acquired divine property.[87] Alternatively, there must be legal configurations that allow for releasing deities' belongings, including the world, its materiality, and the goods derived from it. This, too, changes relationships to such objects.

There are also potential consequences in the realm of social relations and in the model outlined here for purposes of verification, for a historical heuristic. Foremost among these is group formation through the additional common practices made possible with religious communication, songs, narratives, and reproduceable images. This may go beyond or modify other forms of primary or secondary group formation. Family membership is determined not by genes and genealogies but by shared worship and acts of reciprocity; in organized religions, ethnic and territorial boundaries are often programmatically crossed and global networks might be established. But the shift of responsibilities and actor roles can also work in the opposite direction, driving individualization processes through the strong relationship between the divine and the religiously communicating—or it can have a de-individualizing effect.[88]

For success, and thus social dynamics, it is not immaterial how tradition and innovation, how self-empowerment and ascribed power, relate to each other. Such ambivalences infuse religion. The conditions of the city and the engagement with the complexity of the city (in short, urbanity) contribute, as we will see, to the fact that such internal and enduring tensions and uncertainties can take on different and sometimes contradictory forms. Religious ideas and rituals not only protected city walls from within but were also an important means of challenging and transgressing them from within, even if transgressors landed in a grave outside. (Of course, with this knowledge and these techniques, city walls could also be brought down from the outside, at least in narratives, for example, in Judean Jericho or Italic Veji). Religious practices invoked urban community or underlined the autonomy of one's home. Urban community, governance, urban space and urban time, indeed thinking about what the city is and should be in the first place—again, in short, urbanity—has been shaped by religious activity. And all of this has profoundly changed religion, religious traditions, systems of orientation, and institutions, and has made them into what we think of today when we say "religion," whether defined in everyday language or in scientific terms. That, too, is what this volume aims to show.

A History of Global Reach

The history of gods and cities, of cosmic powers and small towns, of religion and urbanity is a bundle of stories. It comprises stories of individual cities or networks of cities, stories of cultural inventions and solutions that spread or were reinvented again and again, and stories of religious ideas and institutions that appeared in different cities or had to come to terms with cities or founded cities themselves.

Stories of the constant changes of what in each case was considered a city accrue; evidently, equivalent terms for urban settlements vary in their resonance. All these stories become interesting when they reveal how these changes have mutually driven each other. This is what will determine what is worth narrating here.[89] The result should nevertheless be a global story, that is, a transnational as well as translational story. Not only because hardly anything is as mobile as religious ideas, but hardly anything is as intensely perceived even from a great distance as urban designs. More importantly, religion and the city can be seen as answers to two basic human problems: How can we live together, and with whom must we live? This requires a global view, incomplete as it must be.[90] For that, we need to learn about people's answers in all their diversity.

Cities, like religions, arise, change, and often pass away—sometimes without any recognizable successor, like the cities of the Ukrainian plains of the 4th millennium BCE or the Harappa culture on the Indus of the 3rd millennium BCE. Yet, urbicide is also a contemporary phenomenon. Vanished cities leave larger remnants than vanished religions, even if the archaeological traces of the latter are sometimes more obvious.[91] But much can still be traced across spaces and eras, revealing places and phases of flourishing or decline. Just as religion is not a uniform object but can be tracked in its various forms, so the history presented here is not a biography or an evolutionary or coming-of-age history of religion. This book offers a sequence of stories that cover long periods of time, and only gradually show movement through time. We start in a world where no one yet wants to live in a settlement that differs from others in that it is supposed to be a city. And we end in a world where religions are so skeptical about cities that they do not recognize their own urban history and perceive cities as, at best, alien entities that are better avoided. But it is also undeniable that by now the world is more urbanized and more shaped by religions in their capacity as independent actors than ever before. Neither has to do with secularization or reenchantment: cities and religions have always been too different from one another than a scale built on secularization would be able to capture. But "religion" and "urbanity" as terms make them so comparable that a historical look at the changes across the diversity of case studies is fruitful for the futures of urbanity *and* religion. This requires first of all a look into the past, and in chapter 2 we look into the past before the first cities, when religion had already long existed but was not yet subject to transformations as urban religion.

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