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Jumping Among the Temples. Snapshots of an Early Christian Critique of Polytheism's « Spatial Fix »

Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli

Gluing gods to places: from Carthage to Çatalhöyük and back

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In chapter 23 of his *Apologeticum* (Carthage, 197-198 CE), North-African Christian writer Tertullian is engaged in a long tirade on demonology. His aim is to show that there is actually no difference between pagan gods and pagan demons according to their powers and performances as marshalled and capitalized on by different religious experts. A distinction based on the places of worship is ironically assumed, only to be eventually lampooned:

The distinction between them [*scil.* gods and demons], I really suppose, depends on difference of place; so that, where a temple is in the story, you reckon them to be gods, though elsewhere you do not call them gods; so that if one leaps among the temples³ he has a different sort of insanity from the one who jumps from roof to roof of his neighbours' houses (*Locorum differentia distinguitur, opinor, ut a templis deos existimetis quos alibi deos non dicitis; ut aliter dementire videatur qui sacras turres pervolat, aliter qui tecta vicinia transilit*).⁴

Tertullian writes from Carthage, the provincial capital of *Africa Proconsularis*, one of the biggest and wealthiest cities of the Roman empire at the end of the 2nd century CE. In Tertullian's view, clearly, only madmen (*dementire*) fall under the spell of some evil forces (*daemones*) may want to wander the city from atop⁵. Yet, while lingering on this passage for the first time, my

3 *Turris* might designate metonymically/synecdochically a high building, like in HORACE, *Odes* I,4,14 (*pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas / regumque turres*). See JEAN-PIERRE WALTZING, *Tertullien, Apologétique, II. Commentaire analytique, grammatical et historique*, Liège-Paris, Vaillant Carmanne/Honoré Champion, 1919, p. 110.

4 TERTULLIAN, *Apology* 23,3; translation TERROT R. GLOVER, in TERROT R. GLOVER, GERALD H. RENDALL eds., *Tertullian, Apology; De spectaculis; Minucius Felix, Octavius*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977 (slightly modified).

5 Commentators have generally paid little attention to this passage. Waltzing interpreted the unspecified subject of the last sentence (*qui... qui*) as referring to « magicians who claimed to marshal the magic power of demons by reciting magic formulas » (JEAN-PIERRE WALTZING, *Tertullien, Apologétique, II*, p. 110). Assisted by the demons, indeed, the *magi* are said to be the agents of many sensational tricks described immediately above (*Apology* 23,1). Waltzing states that « flying men are not unknown in antiquity » but reports only two examples: a flying Hyperborean mentioned by Lucian (*Lover of Lies* 3) and the performance of Simon Magus ascending over the temples and hills of Rome before being thrown down by Peter's prayer (*Acts of Peter* 32; see JEAN-PIERRE WALTZING, *Tertullien, Apologétique, II*, p. 110).

mind soon wandered off: I could not help but think that, thousands of years before Tertullian, in nucleated settlement types like Çatalhöyük in Southern Anatolia, there were people who actually jumped from roof to roof of neighbours' houses⁶. Tertullian would be surprised to know they were not insane tenants or frenzied, self-styled⁷ magicians. Nor were they thieves, although, like robbers, they were using ladders to ease their way in and out of loam domestic buildings. They were proto-urban⁸ dwellers who, in their daily routines, had to cut across a Neolithic urbanizing site of 34 acres that contained between 3'500 and 8'000 inhabitants and was made of clusters of closely packed houses with no streets between them. In such « clustered neighbourhood settlements »⁹, open areas for communications and exchange existed only between neighbourhood blocks, access to houses was mainly over roofs, and thus people happened to gather atop the low-rise adjacent buildings¹⁰.

Within the quarters of Çatalhöyük traffic and trade did without roads, thereby challenging our (Western)¹¹ sense of urbanity that is long and deeply connected with the drawing of streets as channels designed to funnel city flows, organize urban density, and distinguish housetops from plazas. Space oddities, though, do not end here. In the 9'400-year-old settlement of Çatalhöyük, architectural points of reference were as lacking as streets. To borrow from Kevin Lynch's taxonomy of the types of elements used in city images, we can say that the absence of urban « paths » was coupled with a lack of urban « landmarks » as identifiable physical elements standing out against the city background¹². No streets, no dominant buildings: a modern *flâneur* would certainly face severe problems of orientation in strolling along this town.

Çatalhöyükians' roof walking was, at least initially, among houses only. Then, at a certain stage of the development of the site, a minority of long-lived buildings started to become distinguishable from others by architectural variations: on the one hand, they underwent a reduction of space dedicated to productive activities; on the other, they were characterized by an increase in symbolic elaboration, as attested by an exceptional storage, staging, and passing down of objects and artworks – e.g., plastered human skulls, animal installations, and adult burials. The spatial distribution of these ritually elaborated buildings seemed not to allow people to leap among them in the style of Tertullian's madmen. However, their continuity of use over time, their multiple rebuilds, and the outstanding amassing of ritual symbols suggested to the Neolithic visitor jumping onto them from the neighbouring house that these places were

⁶ See, e.g., IAN HODDER ed., *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, *passim*.

⁷ In the sense of HEIDI WENDT, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 114-145.

⁸ On the urban rank of Çatalhöyük, see JANE JACOBS, *The Economy of Cities*, New York, Vintage Books, 1969; EDWARD W. SOJA, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, pp. 36-49. Against this view, see, e.g., MICHAEL E. SMITH, « V. Gordon Childe and the Urban Revolution: An Historical Perspective on a Revolution in Urban Studies », *Town Planning Review* 80/1 (2009), pp. 3-29 (here pp. 7-8).

⁹ BLEDA S. DÜRING, *Constructing Communities: Clustered Neighbourhood Settlements of the Central Anatolian Neolithic CA. 8500-5500 CAL. BC.*, Leiden, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2006.

¹⁰ On seasonal variations in the use of the roofs as « public spaces », see PETER PELS, « Temporalities of "religion" at Çatalhöyük », in IAN HODDER ed., *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, pp. 220-267 (here p. 256). On the mobility pattern, see BLEDA S. DÜRING, *Constructing Communities*, p. 24.

¹¹ « Ever since urban development [...], rooftops (or, more precisely, the terraces found on the tops of the houses of the well-to-do) have been a central organizing feature of women's spaces in the respectable, urban cultures of much of South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa » (RUBY LAL, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 169). I am grateful to Sara Keller for this bibliographic suggestion.

¹² KEVIN LYNCH, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, pp. 49-66 and 78-83.

more than domestic units. Anthropologist Peter Pels has dubbed them « history houses » since they specialized in the accumulation of crosscutting historical memory allowing for community building¹³.

The items contained in the history houses were linked to ritual knowledge and practices performed by ritual leaders whose skills were likely to cater for a larger kinship group or for religious sodalities extending beyond a single household¹⁴. Through time, the special agents addressed, the symbols manipulated, and the events recalled by these ritual experts, as well as the shared experiences crystallized there as memories, might have succeeded in attracting people from a larger collection of buildings, perhaps from a whole neighbourhood block, and in some cases becoming special for the whole settlement. Moreover, the analysis of the components of religious life in the upper levels of the site seems to indicate a « gradual shift » towards a « doctrinal » mode of religiosity implying « more discursive styles of transmission » of religious knowledge. The hypothesis is that the distribution across the settlement of homogenising narrative traditions elaborated by the ritual leaders of the history houses might have furthered the community- and continuity-building processes¹⁵. After all, without giving rise to grand full-fledged temples, the streetless proto-city came to provide itself with structurally differentiated¹⁶ buildings for religious purposes. The history houses were such as *to fix* the communal gods to distinctive architectural spaces, that is, to glue them to certain spots which were there for everyone to see and for many to jump into.

Religion and the « spatial fix »

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To borrow from materialist geographer David Harvey, we can call this long-term strategy of tying footloose and flowing entities to fixed space « the spatial fix ». Coined in the early 1980s, the concept has been used in several publications to designate capitalism's « insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring », that is, mainly through changes of location and creation of physical landscapes at its service in two ways : a) the production of space (especially through urbanization), and b) the tying of capital

13 IAN HODDER, PETER PELS, « History houses: A new interpretation of architectural elaboration at Çatalhöyük », in IAN HODDER ed., *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, pp. 163-186. For a critical overview of the discussion and a diachronic perspective on the existence of « some form of status differentiation » amongst the Çatalhöyük's buildings, see BLEDA S. DÜRING, *Constructing Communities*, pp. 211-229. Although he distinguishes between « plain buildings » and « ritually elaborated buildings », his model of a « shrine-house continuum » is based on the archaeological evidence that even these more elaborated buildings, which had a special ritual significance, « were used for domestic activities on the same regular basis as other buildings » (*ibid.*, pp. 218 and 217 ; see also IAN HODDER, « Probing religion at Çatalhöyük: An interdisciplinary experiment », in IAN HODDER ed., *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, pp. 1-31 [here p. 3])

14 IAN HODDER, PETER PELS, « History houses: A new interpretation of architectural elaboration at Çatalhöyük », p. 178.

15 HARVEY WHITEHOUSE, IAN HODDER, « Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük », in IAN HODDER ed., *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*, pp. 122-145 (here pp. 137-142), based on HARVEY WHITEHOUSE, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*, Walnut Creek, AltaMira Press, 2004.

16 « Where actions, events, people, and places can be attributed a recognizable different/special/specific flow of agency, in cultural and societal terms this did not necessarily translate into the separate sphere I suggest identifying as religion's. This is the step from attributive to *structural differentiation* » (MICHAEL STAUSBERG, « Distinctions, Differentiations, Ontology, and Non-humans in Theories of Religion », *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22/4 [2010], pp. 354-374 [here p. 361 ; original emphasis]).

to place (i.e., creation of built environments)¹⁷. In the early 2000s, looking back at his manifold research on the geography of capital accumulation, Harvey has referred to these two strategies as «the two kinds of fixes» produced by capitalism's never-ending search for a temporary geographical resolution and spatial anchorage of its endemic problems of overaccumulation¹⁸. He interestingly points out that these three aspects, namely the *anchorage* of an entity in another one, the *remedy* of a problem, and the *short-run* character of this securing strategy, all belong to the semantic range of the English noun «fix»¹⁹. All together, they enshrine the logic of the historical geography of capitalist development.

In Harvey's theory, therefore, the dynamic entity that has to be fixed is capital as «value in motion»²⁰; the historical-geographical process that continually needs to resort to the spatial fix is capital accumulation. Now, thinking analogically for applying this notion to the much longer temporality of history of religion²¹, I am not assuming any genealogical connection in the historical development of the two kinds of fix; in other words, I am not arguing that the capitalist fix is a secularization of the religious one. Nor will I transpose all the formal aspects of Harvey's conceptualization of the fix systematically to the domain of religion²². In this sense, the usefulness of the following analogy rests more on a heuristic plan than on an analytical level.

The analogy unfolds upon three aspects. First, as systems of management of relevant flows of communication with and about the gods²³, historical religions have not only been shaped by the tension between motion and fixity but, as the development of Çatalhöyük's architectural differentiation already shows, they can be said to have practiced the technique of the fix for thousands of years before capitalism appeared. Building on the connection between the two kinds of fix theorized by Harvey (production of urban space and fixation to place), I assume that the rise and growth of nucleated large-scale societies all over the globe needed an important function like religion to «be pinned down and secured to particular loc[i]»²⁴. A critical share of the free-floating religious resources, which circulated among different agents and places within increasingly densified settlements, was to be locked up and committed to architecturally

17 DAVID HARVEY, «Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"», *Geographische Revue* 2 (2001), pp. 23-30 (here p. 24). See *Id.*, «The Spatial Fix – Hegel, Von Thunen, and Marx», *Antipode* 13/3 (1981), pp. 1-12; *Id.*, *The Limits to Capital*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982, esp. pp. 413-445; *Id.*, «The Geopolitics of Capitalism», in DEREK GREGORY, JOHN URRY eds., *Social Relations and Spatial Structure*, London, Macmillan, 1985, pp. 128-163. The conceptual foundations of the notion are already laid in Harvey's earliest analyses of the spatial dimension of capitalist accumulation: see *Id.*, «The geography of capitalist accumulation: a reconstruction of the Marxian theory», *Antipode* 7/2 (1975), pp. 9-21 (esp. p. 13).

18 DAVID HARVEY, «Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"», p. 28.

19 He provides one example for each meaning: a) «the pole was fixed in the hole»; b) «he fixed the car's engine so that it ran smoothly»; c) «the drug addict needs a fix» (*ibid.*, p. 24.).

20 DAVID HARVEY, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, London-New York, Verso, 2010, p. 90.

21 I am not the first who experimented with this analogy. Sociologist David Garbin has most recently applied Harvey's notion to so-called «Pentecostal urbanism», and specifically to the way in which contemporary Pentecostal churches in Lagos (Nigeria) have been converting resources such as «church donations and religious surplus capital into physical space, equipment and infrastructure». He also analyzes how the Corona pandemic has impacted on these strategies. See DAVID GARBIN, «Reinventing religious urbanity in a (post)pandemic world? – a view from Africa» [<https://urbrel.hypotheses.org/996>].

22 For instance, what can be called the katechontic dimension of Harvey's fix, that is, the idea that the fixation of capital to space is always temporary and eventually doomed to failure given the structural character of capital's mobility, is not present in my analogical transposition of the notion. However, as we will see, it resonates with some arguments of the early Christians' critique of the fix. I am grateful to Susanne Rau and Jacque Lévy for drawing my attention to this aspect.

23 See, e.g., JÖRG RÜPKE, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018, pp. 15-21 (*Pantheon. Geschichte der antiken Religionen*, München, Beck, 2016).

24 DAVID HARVEY, «Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"», p. 24.

differentiated physical repositories ranging from small shrines to huge temple complexes²⁵. Such spatial fix of religion necessarily produced a new sacred landscape, created a new living environment for the gods, and ushered in a new epoch in the religious division of labor.

Second, just as industrial capitalism needed to build up immovable structures such as factories and warehouses, highways and commercial centers in order for its commodity production to freely move through the markets²⁶, urbanizing large-scale societies needed to create the fixity of the temples and shrines²⁷ in order for their religious production to overcome early socio-spatial constraints and cross boundaries. Which boundaries? First of all, as Çatalhöyük's history houses show, and French historian Fustel de Coulanges first argued²⁸, kin-*cum*-domestic boundaries. Indeed, the emergence of nondomestic communal cult buildings in Çatalhöyük supports a view of religion as a spatial practice « drawing on human and suprahuman forces » and involving both crossing and dwelling²⁹. Households are unmade and turned into (mainly) non-houses in order for their specially marked items and activities to be accessed, experiences lived, and stories narrated by non-kin. In temples people can feel at home among neighboring strangers, past (deceased ancestors) and present (living neighbors).

Third, the translocal references inherent to religious communication in general, if understood as actions that situationally enlarge the relevant environment beyond the spatially present, reflect a dialectic akin to the central contradiction of capital's geography, which Harvey describes as follows: the fixed space necessary for its functioning at a certain point of its history – e.g., the national boundaries of territorial states – is destroyed at a later point « in order to make way for a new spatial fix »³⁰. Religion operates this dialectic rather synchronically. It *always* refers to something beyond the immediate and indisputably given situation and does so in ways that *sometimes* imply an ontological breach of the mundane realm (transcendentalism) and *occasionally* involve a clash of place meanings (spatial contestation)³¹.

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25 I could not find in the specialized literature on the ancient Mediterranean any clear-cut definitional distinction between temples and shrines according to architectural features – apart from the general use of shrines for smaller and less architectonically elaborated spaces and of temple for more spacious buildings.

26 DAVID HARVEY, « Globalization and the “Spatial Fix” », p. 25.

27 The argument is not meant to directly challenge Ara Norenzayan's evolutionary thesis on the religious-ritual origins of large-scale social formations, for which Çatalhöyük is indemonstrably used as a « case in point » (ARA NORENZAYAN, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 132). My aim is not to reverse the causal order suggested by *Big Gods* but rather to buy into a newly developed multi-disciplinary and multi-scalar approach and research agenda which focuses on the cross-temporal and cross-cultural analysis of the reciprocal formation of religion and urbanity. See SUSANNE RAU, JÖRG RÜPKE, « Religion und Urbanität: Wechselseitige Formierungen », *Historische Zeitschrift* 310/3 (2020), pp. 654-680; on Mediterranean antiquity, see EMILIANO R. URUIOLI, JÖRG RÜPKE, « Urban Religion in Mediterranean Antiquity », *Mythos*12 (2018), pp. 117-135.

28 NUMA DENIS FUSTEL DE COULANGES, *La cité antique, étude sur le culte, le droit, les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome*, Paris, Durand, 1864. For a most recent « re-reading » of Fustel's masterpiece, see JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion: A Historical Approach to Urban Growth and Religious Change*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2020, esp. pp. 30-46.

29 THOMAS A. TWEED, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 54. Tweed's « hardly transparent » definition of religion reads as follows: « religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries » (*ibid.*).

30 DAVID HARVEY, « Globalization and the “Spatial Fix” », p. 25.

31 « The trans-local references inherent to religious communication by way of its claims to agency need not wait for a radicalised axial-age-style transcendence that opposes a celestial order to the norms and power relationships of the contemporary society within which these religious activities are located » (JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion*, p. 50). For a recent reassessment of the transcendentalist grammar of so-called « Axial-Age religions », see ALAN STRATHERN, *Unerthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 47-80. For methodological reflections and historical accounts of spatial contestation as a strategy for negotiating power, see SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

In sketching out this analogy between capitalism's and religion's spatial fix, it might seem that I moved too far away in space, time, and content from Tertullian's mocking rendition of polytheism as a theo-logical absurdity premised on untenable spatial differentiations – i.e., « no temple equals no god ». Yet, serving as pivotal notion of this paper, the spatial fix makes clear that the juxtaposition of Tertullian's humoristic motif of temple-to-temple jumping, on the one hand, and the staggering city-space of Çatalhöyük with its history houses with rooftop entries, on the other, is more than a playful mental association created by my personal historical montage. This geographical concept helps visualize how differently, throughout the entangled histories of religion and urban life, the production of space and the locking into place of religious communication are imagined and worked out in different spatiotemporal contexts: for instance, in a 34-acre Neolithic site containing 8'000 permanent residents at its peak and no actual temples, or in a Roman imperial city with a hundred thousand inhabitants where temples are so numerous that people can almost leap among them.

There is no rescue in the fix: early Christians' critical sacred geography

At Tertullian's time most urban temples and shrines neither catered for all city dwellers nor allowed for the sort of continuity- and community-building that provides the cultural-historical integration of an urban population. Only a few of them, indeed, served the purpose of « memory construction » for a large-scale social formation, the city, whose population had to be linked and held together through culturally meaningful forms of « continuities produced both by habituated practices and commemorative links to the past »³². Most urban religious architecture did not have the kind of integrative and stabilizing function that mass ceremonies plainly performed in the interest of the city elites and which is captured by the scholarly coinage of « civic religion »³³. Rather, several buildings vested with a religious function challenged this very program by materializing *what was not* shared in the religious practices of both the urban elites and the urban commoners³⁴. Polytheism's spatial fix in the age of Tertullian reflected both the hierarchical and the heterarchical³⁵ dimensions of the urban form.

Three general operations can be related to the fix as performed by all this permanent urban religious architecture. First, to echo Jörg Rüpke, temples « relat[e] people and space » by « disrupting » and parceling out a continuous and continuously built city-space³⁶. Otherwise said, they craft space by breaking it down into clusters of social rules and meanings connected to a

³² IAN HODDER, « Introduction: Two Forms of History Making in the Neolithic of the Middle East », in IAN HODDER ed., *Religion, History, and Place in the Origin of Settled Life*, Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2018, pp. 3-32 (here pp. 7 and 8).

³³ JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion*, p. 6. For the distinction between « urban religion » and « civic religion », see also EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI, « Citification of Religion: A Proposal for the Historical Study of Urban Religion », *Religion and Urbanity Online* 2020, [<https://www.degruyter.com/document/database/URBREL/entry/urbrel.12124596/html>]. Accessed 2021-04-20.

³⁴ DAVID M. CARBALLO, *Urbanization and Religion in Ancient Central Mexico*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 6.

³⁵ For « heterarchy » as a principle of social organization whereby authority is vested in multiple rankings and power can be shared, checked, and counterpoised, see CAROLE L. CRUMLEY, « Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies », in ROBERT M. EHRENREICH, CAROLE L. CRUMLEY, JANET E. LEVY eds., *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*, *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6 (1995), pp. 1-5.

³⁶ JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion*, p. 6

distinguishable place with a specific time depth³⁷. Religious architecture is clearly not the only constructional antidote to a homogeneous and simultaneous city-space. However, the way in which temples break down and parcel out the continuity of built space cannot be mapped onto the geography of the most recognizable and recurrent urban landmarks (walls, fora, theatres, market places, harbors, etc.). Proposed by the Roman late Republican architect Vitruvius (*On Architecture* I,7,1-2), the ideal-functional location of a Roman deity's abode next to the urban infrastructure with which she/he is conceptually associated (e.g., Mercury in the forum, Apollo near the theatre, Hercules next to the gymnasium or at the circus, etc.) reflects a « topographical logic » unsupported by empirical evidence³⁸. The spatial fix of religion does not simply underwrite the kind of orientation provided by the standard focal points of a city map. It produces its own.

Second, temples, like panthea, relate differentiated divine potencies to one another by working out a potentially polyonymous and polytopic supernatural reality³⁹. Like cult epithets, they also « distinguish the god worshipped in one place from the same god worshipped in another »⁴⁰. The nexus between the expression of a religious polytheistic sphere and the urban form is so intricate that the increasing specificity in the identification and differentiation of the gods through allotted ritual places has been explained as a process historically related with urbanization⁴¹. Less daringly, we can say that the concrete prospect of ritually leaping among different divine residences is a *distinctive* urban condition that indexes polytheism as a form of fixating identifiable gods to specific sacralised abodes with dedicated ritual personnel. In fact, under opposite circumstances, namely when sanctuaries are scattered all over in sparsely populated areas (rural, wilderness, etc.), or when worshipping places are not recognizable as such and look merely like clustered houses, the very structure of polytheism as conscious appreciation of a divine plurality lacks transparency and clarity.

Third, this legible polytheist supply is continually increased by the expansive politics of the empire and the territorial growth of the state. The erection of city temples centralizes and materializes the religious labour historically accumulated at the geographical frontiers of the empire⁴². The absorbed surpluses of economic and religious capital incessantly produce new

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³⁷ See ROBERT D. SACK, *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 31-35.

³⁸ JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion*, p. 83. « Having laid out the alleys and determined the streets, we have next to treat of the choice of building sites for temples, the forum, and all other public places, with a view to general convenience and utility (*ad opportunitatem et usum*). If the city is on the sea, we should choose ground close to the harbour as the place where the forum is to be built; but if inland, in the middle of the town. For the temples, the sites for those of the gods under whose particular protection the state is thought to rest and for Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, should be on the very highest point commanding a view of the greater part of the city. Mercury should be in the forum, or, like Isis and Serapis, in the market place; Apollo and Father Liber near the theatre; Hercules at the circus in communities which have no gymnasium nor amphitheatres; Mars outside the city but at the training ground, and so Venus, but at the harbour » (VITRUVIUS, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, translation MORRIS HICKY MORGAN, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1914). In an unpublished conference paper Daniele Miano has called the underlying strategy of this passage a « principle of (semantic) contiguity ». He also explains that the moment of meaning-making (i.e., what does Apollo mean?) and that of place-making (i.e., where should Apollo's temple be?) cannot be separated.

³⁹ See HENK S. VERSNEL, *Coping with the Gods. Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, esp. 23-149). The « common practice » whereby « one god is allotted a place in the temple of another as a companion » and associated to him/her in a way that sometimes thwarts mythical relations and the related hierarchies (*ibid.*, pp. 115-116) does not undercut this principle.

⁴⁰ ROBERT PARKER, *Greek Gods Abroad: Names, Natures, and Transformations*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2017, p. 13.

⁴¹ CHRISTOPHER SMITH, « Enchanted Cities and Urban Discontent », *Religion and Urbanity Online* (2020), [https://www.degruyter.com/document/database/URBREL/entry/urbrel.14931871/html]. Accessed 2021-04-20.

⁴² For the city of Rome, see ERIC M. ORLIN, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

fixed urban landscape, thereby adding to what Harvey would call the «uneven geographical distribution»⁴³ of religious assets according to the city/country divide.

That being said about the three main operations of the fix, I argue that Tertullian's mockery of the polytheists' spatial classification of metahuman powers as theological nonsense is one possible way to attack, deny, and explode the very logic of the fix. Just as the one who jumps among the temples must be diagnosed with the same sort of insanity as the one leaping among other types of buildings, the construction and dedication of a temple do not turn a demon into a god any more than worshipping a deity at home, in a kitchen, a tavern, or a barn would downgrade him/her to a demonic status. The divine rank of a metahuman being is not a *place-based* and *-bound* quality. The production of new space by building a fixed place, therefore, does not help to draw distinctions and arrange hierarchies among metahuman subjects. If your god is false, there is neither rescue nor upgrade in the fix.

Tertullian's passage is not an isolated piece of apologetic humor. It belongs to a wider assorted intellectual enterprise among early Christian writers whose ultimate purpose is the deconstruction of polytheism's spatial fix. Much of the early Christian critique of polytheism as a strategy of allocating, attaching, and securing their gods to architectural containers can be profitably seen as a more or less coordinated exercise in *critical sacred geography* in the following sense: polytheists' fixing of space (i.e., both knowledge, imagination, and practice thereof) works as a veil and tool for producing and reproducing theological error. In contrast, this multifarious Christian polemic promotes an alternative spatial knowledge, imagination, and practice whose modes of inhabiting and transcending concrete spaces are such as to variously negate the polytheist spatial fix. In the following, I will discuss and reassess different thematic snapshots of this critique.

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Immaterial religion

Critiquing the fix does not mean, of course, that the early Christian practitioners were not emplaced, that is, ritually localized in indoor (mostly but not exclusively private houses) and outdoor (cemeteries) places and thus localizable for both perceptive seekers and watchful public authorities⁴⁴. Nor, since there is no «ideology without a space to which it refers»⁴⁵, were their leaders and spokespersons reluctant to construct and use ritual space to map out religious identifications that could hardly work and survive abstractly⁴⁶. However, for more than two centuries after the earliest appearance of the first urban Christians, due to legal⁴⁷ and factual

43 E.g., DAVID HARVEY, *The Limits to Capital*, pp. 415-419.

44 On such meeting places, see most recently JAN N. BREMMER, «Urban Religion, Neighbourhoods and the Early Christian Meeting Places», *Religion in the Roman Empire* 6 (2020), pp. 48-74. The mid-3rd century legislation about the restitution of confiscated cultic settings and the permission of access to «so-called cemeteries» documents that places where Christians assembled were not by principle unknown (EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History* VII,13,1). See also the information about the «razing of the church buildings (τὰς... ἐκκλησίας) to the ground» under Diocletian (VIII,4,2). For early 4th-century restitutions and restorations, see VIII,17,9 (Galerius) and LACTANTIUS, *The Death of the Persecutors* 48,7-12 (Licinius and Constantine).

45 HENRI LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, p. 44.

46 ANN MARIE YASIN, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 37-39; SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, pp. 78-83. See also below, note 83.

47 In terms of legal treatment, it has to be reminded that, apart from historically dubious information contained in *Historia Augusta, Alex.* 49,6, we do not know of any public authority, before Constantine, having assigned a *locus publicus* to Christians as such. On this see ÉRIC REBILLARD, *Religion et sépulture. L'Église, les vivants et les morts dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2003, pp. 59-61.

cross-regional circumstances, the relevant religious communication centred on the figure of Christ did not materialize so as to be «locked up and committed to a particular physical form»⁴⁸ with a clear physical lifetime. Architectural *undifferentiation* is the most remarkable manner in which early Christ religion happened to be urban.

Writers as skilled as Tertullian know how to turn a «rough and ready denial of the efficacy of any spatial fix»⁴⁹ into a sophisticated theological point of honour. Consider this almost contemporary passage taken from another North-African early Christian text, the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix:

Do you suppose we conceal our object of worship because we have no shrines and altars? What image can I make of God when, rightly considered, man himself is an image of God? What temple can I build for him, when the whole universe, fashioned by his handiwork, cannot contain him? Shall I, a man, housed more spaciouly, confine within a tiny shrine a power and majesty so great? Is not the mind a better place of dedication? our inmost heart of consecration? (*Templum quod ei extruam, cum totus hic mundus eius opere fabricatus eum capere non possit? Et cum homo latius maneam, intra unam aediculam vim tantae maiestatis includam? Nonne melius in nostra dedicandus est mente? In nostro intimo consecrandus est pectore?*).⁵⁰

If taken as an argument for a spiritual way of worship, which boasts itself against the shallowness of a material religion rooted in man-made things (objects, images, buildings), this passage sounds anything but original. Minucius, indeed, draws on a long-lived polemic trope. He mobilizes the originally prophetic motif of the true/genuine cult as part of an anti-temple and anti-priestly criticism that spans the whole history of Second Temple Judaism⁵¹ and is already used by Paul in *1 Corinthians* 3,16 («Do you know that you are God's temple [ναός θεοῦ] and that God's *pneuma* dwells in you?»). More generally, one can say that, since the creation of a religious field in the Ancient Near East, the very task of the agent-prophet has been the denial of the capitalization of the fix as materialized in cult centers run by the agent-priest⁵². Early Christian writers like Minucius can be said to follow on the heels of this time-honored polemic that bears clear spatial overtones.

However, viewed from the closer perspective of an early Christian critical discourse on the spatial fix of religion, Minucius' promotion of the «religion of anywhere»⁵³ and his cross-scalar

48 DAVID HARVEY, «Globalization and the "Spatial Fix"», p. 27.

49 DAVID HARVEY, «The Spatial Fix – Hegel, Von Thunen, and Marx», p. 10.

50 MINUCIUS FELIX, *Octavius* 32,1-2; translation GERALD H. RENDALL, in TERROT R. GLOVER AND GERALD H. RENDALL eds., *Tertullian, Apology; De spectaculis; Minucius Felix, Octavius*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977. Analogous refutations of the possibility of sacred buildings premised on the same arguments can be found in CLEMENS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* VII,5,28-29; ORIGEN, *Against Celsus* VII,44; Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* VI,3-5. On this consistent position against the «"placeness" of the sacred», see TERESA MORGAN, «Faith and the City in the 4th century CE», in ASUMAN LÄTZER-LASAR, EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI eds., *Urban Religion in Late Antiquity*, pp. 69-95 (here pp. 69-71); ANN MARIE YASIN, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*, pp. 14-21.

51 JONATHAN KLAWANS, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.

52 For Weber, one of the main factors distinguishing the positions of the prophet and the priest as «twin bearers of the systematization and rationalization of religious ethics» lies in their opposed interests in the theological development of a consistent «universalistic monotheism» (MAX WEBER, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, GUENTHER ROTH AND CLAU WITTICH eds., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, pp. 439 and 418 [Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tubingen, Mohr, 1956⁴]). Thus Weber: «There are different reasons for the failure of a consistent monotheism to develop in different cultures [*i.e.*, "outside Judaism, Islam, and Protestant Christianity"], but the main reason was generally the pressure of the powerful material and ideological interests vested in the priests, who resided in the cultic centers and regulated the cults of the particular gods» (*ibid.*, p. 419; emphasis mine).

53 JONATHAN Z. SMITH, «Here, There, and Anywhere», in *Id.*, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 323-339 (here p. 325).

attack on the polytheists' production of urban religious landscape by gluing gods to places are noteworthy. His combination of the motif of the anthropomorphic temple with the topic of the everywhere-temple – that is, his miniaturization and virtualization of worship⁵⁴ as predicated upon the impossibility of locking the divinity in a man-made container of whatever size – is implicitly aimed at supporting a competitive religious practice whose tying to immobile architectural space is objectively looser than the fix operated by Roman traditional religion⁵⁵. Assuming that, if the spatiality of the divine is limitless and place-unbound, then no this-worldly building can be held as intrinsically sacred, this theological critique of the fix cannot be separated from a practical strategy of advertisement and recruitment that involves competition over the ability to attract investors.

Good and evil investments

Up until the end of the 3rd century, most physical spaces for Christian religious gatherings are architecturally *inconspicuous*⁵⁶. This also applies in cases of long-lived continuity of the ritual settings. On the one hand, the Christian god, too, lands and dwells at fixed sites (*domus dei*; ἐκκλησία οἴκου) whose type and scale range from spacious dining rooms in single-level private homes and multipartite hall structures to workplaces and tiny rental apartments in multi-storey buildings⁵⁷. On the other, all things considered, Christ religion's infrastructures are relatively cheap foci of investments. As far as big and un-fractionated congregations are concerned, the material maintenance of ritual experts and religious personnel (i.e., sub-elite missionaries, prophets, teachers, ascetic virtuosi, and then mainly clergy) certainly needs « an entire class of generous and willing donors » for sharing the financial burden⁵⁸. Yet average costs are moderate in terms of investments of the immobile sort: very low in cases of mere functional reuses of domestic settings, they increase when the scale of physical adaptations imply more extensive and permanent building renovations or church edifices are built de novo. Additional costs for ordinary manpower are pretty close to zero. Concerning this latter aspect, this passage of Justin's

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⁵⁴ See JÖRG RÜPKE, *Urban Religion*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ For the issue of the « concretization of ecclesia » – that is, the debate as to when and where the word in both Latin (*ecclesia*) and Greek (ἐκκλησία) is spoken of as a building, as well as what other appellations are used in pre-Constantinian Christian sources to convey place meanings – see SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, pp. 75-83.

⁵⁶ For discussion see L. MICHAEL WHITE, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Building God's House in the Roman World*, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, 1990, vol. 1, esp. 102-138. For the visibility of Dura Europos' Christian building in its second phase (241-256 CE), see DOUGLAS BOIN, *Coming Out Christian in the Roman World: How the Followers of Jesus Made a Place in Caesar's Empire*, Bloomsbury, London, 2015, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁷ For meeting places in multi-storied buildings (*insulae*), see HARLOW G. SNYDER, « "Above the Bath of Myrtilus": Justin Martyr's "School" in the City of Rome », *Harvard Theological Review* 100/3 (2007), pp. 335-362; BRADLY S. BILLINGS, « From House Church to Tenement Church: Domestic Space and the Development of Early Urban Christianity – The Example of Ephesus », *Journal of Theological Studies* 62/2 (2011), pp. 541-569.

⁵⁸ PETER BROWN, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2016, p. 26 (regarding mid-3rd century Rome). Costs may rise significantly when a well-off patron subsidizes a significant part of his city clergy in order to expand his control over the local congregation. It is the case of Cyprian, both wealthiest patron and bishop of Carthage between 248 and 258 CE. See, e.g., EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI, « Un banale circuito infernale: il "mercato oblativo" all'origine del campo religioso cristiano », in GIANLUCA CUNIBERTI ed., *Dono, controdono e corruzione: ricerche storiche e dialogo interdisciplinare*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, pp. 321-367 (here pp. 354-364). Feeding a throng of local Christian « real poor » or fully patronizing professional Christian thinkers (as Ambrosius did with Origen) are, of course, a different matter. A long visionary text like the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Rome, mid-2nd century CE) seems to be written for the very purpose of fundraising. See EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI, *Servire due padroni. Una genealogia dell'uomo politico cristiano* (50-313 e.v.), Brescia, Scholè, 2018, pp. 217-218.

so-called *First Apology* (Rome, 150s-160s CE) shows that there are good theological arguments for cutting the costs of human surveillance of the fix :

How foolish! Human beings who know no [*mora*] restraint are said to mould and refashion gods to be worshipped, and the temples where these are set up have such people as guards (φύλακας), who fail to see that it is wrong even to think or to say that human beings are guards for the gods.⁵⁹

Contrary to the futile and expensive monitoring of idols, there is no need to « look after (δεομένους θεραπείας) » a God who is too big for a temple and too mighty for a robber. Where there is no substantial fix of religious flows, neither as religious furniture⁶⁰ nor as religious architecture, there is also no investment exposure related to it. By the same token, no substantial investment in the production of space and creation of built environment also means no revenues and thus no profit. As Tertullian knows, the spatial fix of polytheism is a huge urban business in which bidders compete for the gods and the temples that promise to yield the biggest financial return :

Public gods you dishonor equally under public law, as you make them yield you revenue at auction. Whether it is to the Capitol you go or the vegetable market, it is all one; the same tones of the auctioneer, the same spear, the same registration by the quaestor; and deity is knocked down to the highest bidder, and leased out. But lands subject to tribute go cheaper; persons assessed under the poll-tax are less noble; for these are the marks of servitude. But gods are more sacred the more tribute they pay; indeed, the more sacred they are, the bigger the tribute. Their majesty is made money-making (*dei vero qui magis tributarii, magis sancti, immo qui magis sancti, magis tributarii. Maiestas quaestuarium efficitur*). Religion goes round the cookshops begging. You exact a price for the ground one stands on in a temple, for the approach to the holy rite; one may not know the gods for nothing; they are for sale.⁶¹

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Seen through these critical lenses, jumping among the temples looks like a popular insanity that, nevertheless, pays off. Polytheisms have to be fixed to space for their own everyday functioning. Cities, in turn, offer hectares of lucrative space that need to be built, crafted, parceled out, and allotted in order for them to work as cities. Different urban agents from diverse social stations live off this material and immaterial « continual process » of dialectical relations and reciprocal transformations between the urban and the religious that is called « urban religion »⁶². Without being trained dialecticians, early Christian polemicists do sense that polytheism and the city are codependent on one another, and therefore they are interested in questioning every single bit of the urban religious machinery that anchors polytheisms to cities. A critical side of this ramified apparatus is the urban division of labor.

⁵⁹ JUSTIN, *1 Apology* 9,5; translation DENIS MINNS, PAUL PARVIS, in *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁶⁰ For possible references to early Christian altars (*altaria*) as temporarily placed and removable structures, see CYPRIAN, *Letter XLV*, 2,2; LIX, 18,1.

⁶¹ TERTULLIAN, *Apology* 13,5-6.

⁶² STEPHAN LANZ, « Assembling Global Prayers in the City: An Attempt to Repopulate Urban Theory with Religion », in KATHRIN WILDNER, JOCHEN BECKER, STEPHAN LANZ eds., *Global Prayers: Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City*, Zürich, Lars Müller, 2014, pp. 16-47 (here p. 26).

Starving the (urban religious) beast

Tertullian's treatise *On Idolatry* (Carthage, ca. 198-206 CE) can be seen as a maximalist⁶³ « guide » to a Christian urbanity: a sweeping, meticulous, and ultimately non-enforceable handbook for a proper and safe Christian everyday life among pagan urbanites⁶⁴. As such, it aims at targeting *also* every segment of the urban division of labour that contributes to fix polytheism spatially in the city – from trading and sculpturing to financing and presiding over public celebrations (festivals and spectacles). In Tertullian's view, idolatry spreads all over the city map like an atmospheric plague. Idolatrous acts cannot be understood and assessed without reference to the whole idolatrous environment that houses them. Consequently, idolatrous worship cannot be separated from technical and professional activities that make it possible⁶⁵. The writer knows that a minimalist restriction of idolatry to activities such as performing sacrifices, offering incense, and holding a priesthood (Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 2,2) is a convenient way to save jobs and revenues for Christ-believing workers, professionals, and officers. Yet this is a vain practical ruse:

For how have we renounced the devil and his angels, if we make them? What repudiation have we declared against them, I do not say « with whom », but from whom we live (*de quibus vivimus*)? What discord have we entered into with those to whom we are bound for the sake of our subsistence (... *in eos quibus exhibitionis nostrae gratia obligati sumus*)? Can you have denied with your tongue what you profess with your hands? Demolish with words what in deeds you build up (*verbo destruere quod facto struis*)? Preach the one God, you who make so many? Preach the true God, you who make false ones.⁶⁶

Demonic infection is all around. No neutral space for safe interactions is either found « ready-made » or pragmatically constructed by the author⁶⁷. Nevertheless, *On Idolatry* demands that the Christian urban population be cordoned off from the whole polytheist urban-religious system. A holistic theory of idolatry is therefore expounded to invite Christians to abstain from any activity that deals with and borders on the cult of idols, with the consequence of producing, along with a lack of effective demand, significant shortages of labour and capital to be eventually invested in the fix. Moreover, we have seen that, for Tertullian, the way in which polytheism works out spatially the untenable distinction of demons and gods is a theo-logical absurdity. It makes therefore no difference if one sculpts a temple statue (*On Idolatry* 8,3), construct a niche in a bathhouse (15,6), decorate a school (10,3), or embellish a domestic altar (8,1). The maximalist ban does not distinguish

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⁶³ Following Bruce Lincoln, a religious worldview can be said to be « maximalist » when and where it organizes the social sphere of its adherents as a whole and thus orders their lives entirely. More specifically, in order for a « form of culture » to be religiously maximalist, religion must correspond to the central domain of culture, cultural preferences are constituted largely as morality and stabilized by religion, religious authority works to secure coherent ongoing order, and minimalist religiosity is experienced as a dangerous threat (BRUCE LINCOLN, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 59). In Tertullian's view, the relation of Christian religious identity with the social order must be maximal. However, from the extra-textual perspective of urban life relationships in his contemporary Carthage, his maximalist model remains wishful thinking and his strategy is probably to « deliberately demand[s] more in order to obtain less » (STEPHANIE E. BINDER, *Tertullian, On Idolatry and Mishnah Avodah Zarah. Questioning the Parting of the Ways between Christians and Jews*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, p. 188).

⁶⁴ For the guide image, see STEPHANIE E. BINDER, *Tertullian, On Idolatry and Mishnah Avodah Zarah, passim*.

⁶⁵ « A person may say, "I make it but I do not worship." [...] On the contrary, it is exactly you makers who worship, since you make the worship of idols possible (*Immo tu colis, qui facis, ut coli possit*) » (TERTULLIAN, *On Idolatry* 6,2-3; translation JAN H. WASZINK, JACOBUS C. M. VAN WINDEN, in *Tertullianus. De idololatria*, Leiden, Brill, 1987).

⁶⁶ TERTULLIAN, *On Idolatry* 6,2.

⁶⁷ STEPHANIE E. BINDER, *Tertullian, On Idolatry and Mishnah Avodah Zarah*, p. 188.

between domestic and public-civic spheres – i.e., between the religions of « here » and « there » in Jonathan Z. Smith's cross-cultural topography⁶⁸ – and cuts across the city-space's Russian doll⁶⁹. It targets in the same way bits of idolatrous activities concerning the internal arrangement of houses and branches of tainted businesses serving the outer production of new urban built environment⁷⁰.

A nonsense parcelling out of space

Differently from this *undiscriminating* type of attack on the multiple forms and locations of the fix, my last example of Christian polemic concerns the parcelling out of urban space. To illuminate this aspect, I will rely on the brightest among the ancient Christian polemicists, Augustine, thereby moving quite abruptly from the early to the late antique Christian critique of the fix.

In the time between Tertullian and Augustine, so-called Catholic Christians have successfully pursued a « right to the city » as a « transformed and renewed right to urban life »⁷¹. Throughout the 4th century, a mostly preferential imperial treatment and legislation have increasingly furthered their command over the use and distribution of urban surpluses. Among other things, zealous monarchs, empowered religious leaders, and emboldened bands of monks or laymen have attempted at pursuing a religious monopoly of the urban space and – albeit less homogeneously, frequently, and abruptly than usually assumed⁷² – at sweeping the non-Christian religious architecture away from « the space of religious competition »⁷³. The imperial favoritism, in fact, has worked to push the religious protégés to fully adhere to the strategy of the fix, seek the pursuit thereof, and marshal it against both non-Christians and other Christian factions in the production, disruption, accommodation, and reuse of built religious landscape.

It comes with little surprise that, with the rise and spread of the distinctively Christian production of built space in the form of the basilica⁷⁴, the target of the polemic paradigmatically shifts from the spatial fix per se (as emplacement of holiness and housing of divinity) to the rationale, the quality, and the modalities thereof. The types of arguments generated by the competition over the fix and the related investments in immobile religious facilities gain momentum and priority over the mere denial of the idea that something like a divinity can be

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68 JONATHAN Z. SMITH, « Here, There, and Anywhere », p. 325.

69 TIM INGOLD, « Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge », in *Id., Being Alive: Essays on Movement*, London/ New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 145-155 (here p. 146). I am grateful to Asuman Lätzer-Lasar for this bibliographic suggestion.

70 Tertullian treats building and decoration activities involving idolatry in the same way (see *Idolatry* 8,1: « *Nec enim differt, an exstruas vel exornes...* »). Rather, he invites artists and artisans to accept less remunerative, but more frequently requested, job orders that are connected with branches of activities « providing the means to live without transgression of the discipline » (8,2; see 8,2-5).

71 HENRI LEFEBVRE, « The Right to the City », in *Id., Writing on Cities*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 147-159 (here p. 158) (*Le droit à la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968). For the scholarly reception and development of this sketchy notion (including Harvey), see KAFUI A. ATTOH, « What kind of right is the right to the city? », *Progress in Human Geography* 35/5 (2011), pp. 669-685.

72 ANNA LEONE, *The End of the Pagan City. Religion, Economy, and Urbanism in Late Antique North Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Also JAN N. BREMMER, « How Do We Explain the Quiet Demise of Graeco-Roman Religion? An Essay », *Numen* 68/2-3(2021), pp. 230-271 (here p. 231).

73 LILY KONG, ORLANDO WOODS, *Religion and Space: Competition, Conflict and Violence in the Contemporary World*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 3. This largely overlaps with the « concrete, physical process of displacement » that Lander calls « architectural dispossession » and defines as « the process of evicting one group from a site and allocating it to another group, whether by law or by physical force (or both). The structure that had previously stood on the site may be reused or destroyed » (SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, p. 26).

74 There is no occurrence of *basilicae* spoken of as Christian buildings before early 4th-century inscriptions and literature.

glued to a place. In this regard, recent scholarship influenced by critical spatial theory suggests to relate this discursive turning point to a broader change in the Christian positions on the «placeness of the sacred» and the religious valuation of built spaces which has unfolded gradually since the early 3rd century – rather than occurring abruptly after Constantine and the legalization of Christ religion⁷⁵. Instead of a radical about-face, therefore, the shift between these two models of critique of the fix reflects the way in which pro-Christian imperial law and violence have marshalled the theological drive towards religious differentiation and «helped to solidify» it into a more place-bound and «materialized expression of religious identification»⁷⁶. Augustine's caustic take on the Roman polytheist physical landscape, on the one hand, and his caveats on the spatial fixes of the heretics, on the other, are a case in point.

Augustine's full-scale attack on Roman polytheism has many facets, including a spatial one⁷⁷. In the fourth book of the *City of God* (Hippo Regius, 412-426/427 CE) we come across a ridiculing rendition of polytheism as a system for allotting divine urban dwellings (*City of God* IV,23). In Augustine's view, the theologically soundest method of spatial distribution of the gods in a city would be first to reserve the most distinguished places to the greatest divinities, and then honor them with the largest and most magnificent temples⁷⁸. Yet this principle was never duly followed. To start with, he observes that, before the mid-2nd century BCE, nobody bothered to build a temple for the goddess Felicitas, who had theoretically the power to bestow the highest good on all humans and whose blessing rulers must have been particularly keen to propitiate. Even then, Augustine argues, she should have deserved a more magnificent and eminent position in the Roman city-space than the location originally allotted to her, presumably in the Velabrum⁷⁹.

Suppose the gods themselves had been consulted by augury, or by whatever means they suppose that gods can be consulted, and the question had been put whether they were willing to yield their place to Felicitas (*utrum vellent Felicitati loco cedere*), if it so happened that the place where a greater and more lofty temple (*aedes maior atque sublimior*) was to be erected to Felicitas had already been occupied by the temples and altars of other gods. Even Jupiter himself would have yielded, so that Felicitas, rather than he, might possess the very pinnacle of the Capitoline hill. For no one would resist Felicitas unless he wished to be unhappy, and this is impossible.⁸⁰

However crowded the Roman sacred space was already at the time, ritual procedures to make room for higher deities were not unknown. A few centuries earlier, indeed, space was forcefully

⁷⁵ ANN MARIE YASIN, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean*, pp. 34-45; SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, pp. 74-118. For the persistence of reservations about church building as faith-enhancing factor, see TERESA MORGAN, «Faith and the City in the 4th century CE», p. 76.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷⁷ For a broader treatment of this topic, see EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI, «A tale of no cities. Searching for city-spaces in Augustine's *City of God*», in ASUMAN LÄTZER-LASAR, EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI eds, *Urban Religion in Late Antiquity*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 15-49 (here pp. 34-37).

⁷⁸ As seen earlier, Vitruvius would definitely agree. When it comes to the tutelary deities of the state (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva), their temples «should be on the very highest point commanding a view of the greater part of the city» (VITRUVIUS, *The Ten Books on Architecture* I,7,1).

⁷⁹ The temple burned under Claudius and was apparently never rebuilt. A second temple, now dismantled, was projected by Julius Cesar in 44 BCE, that is, shortly before his assassination, and then built by M. Aemilius Lepidus on the site of the Curia Hostilia. Also in this case the space available seemed to be quite limited.

⁸⁰ AUGUSTINE, *City of God* IV,23; translation WILLIAM M. GREEN, *Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans: Books IV-VII*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1963.

carved out on the Capitoline hill to accommodate Jupiter himself. Yet, by retelling the legendary story of the construction of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, Augustine shows that in this case, too, spatial primacies and divine hierarchies did not overlap, thus evidencing the lack of a clear topographical and architectural ranking of the divine in traditional Roman religion. Preexisting states of affairs in the « historical space » of the selected site interfered with the « conceived space »⁸¹ of a polytheist planning that attempted to follow hierarchical principles. In consequence, even the most powerful urban religious actor, the king, had to revise his plans :

For according to the pagan writings, when King Tarquin wished to build the Capitol, and saw that the place which seemed most worthy and appropriate (*locum qui ei dignior aptiorque videbatur*) was already occupied by other gods, he dared not do anything against their will. But he thought that they would willingly yield to so great a deity, who was also their prince, and since there were many on the site when the capitol was built, he inquired by augury whether they were willing to yield the site (*concedere locum vellent*) to Jupiter. They were all willing to move except those I mentioned – Mars, Terminus and Juventas. For this reason the Capitol was so constructed as to leave these three within, but with the indications so well hidden that even the most learned hardly knew about it.⁸²

This text lays bare the city as a stratified palimpsest of finite size upon which a « multiplicity of histories that is the spatial »⁸³ have left material footprints that may well hamper an ideal logic of planning. However, this is not the only passage of his *magnum opus* where Augustine mocks the way in which the Romans had allocated their gods within their city. A few chapters before, he was « marvell[ing] greatly » at the fact that, contrary to many other deities specialized in less critical functions, the goddess Quies received no « regular cult at state expense (*publica sacra*) » and her abode was established outside the Porta Collina. His sarcastic explanation for this disrespectful treatment is aligned with a general argument of refutation of Roman polytheism: where legions of demons rule, no quiet is actually possible for individuals as well as for cities (*City of God* IV,16).

After all, Augustine's sweeping critique of the Roman way of parcelling out the city-space among their gods fits in the wider polemical argument of the first five books of the *City of God*. He sets out to show that such a chaotically departmentalized mass of gods, whose powers are fixed to a messily spatialized number of temples, cannot provide any happiness to their

⁸¹ Both formulas belong to Lefebvre's spatiological lexicon. In Lefebvre's periodization of spatial frameworks, « historical space » evolved from « absolute space », which is the product of the bonds of kinship, soil and, shared language, and is later taken over by the capitalist « abstract space » as the homogenizing and alienating surface laid on by capitalist planners. The subject that dominated this long intermediate period is « the historical town of the West, along with the countryside under its control » (HENRI LEFEBVRE, *The Production of Space*, p. 49; see more generally pp. 229-291). The formula « conceived space », instead, belongs to Lefebvre's epistemological spatial triad, which consists of « perceived », « conceived », and « lived » space (*ibid.*, pp. 38-39). The conceived space is the « dominant [*in Marxist sense*] space of any society » (p. 39), insofar as it corresponds to « the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers » (p. 38), who have the major influence in the production of space since « their intervention occurs by way of construction – in other words, by way of architecture » (p. 42). In the capitalist era, the notion of abstract space and conceived space largely overlap in defining the free space of the commodity and landscape of complete urbanization that Lefebvre calls « urban society ». See HENRI LEFEBVRE, *The Urban Revolution*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003 (*La révolution urbaine*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970).

⁸² AUGUSTINE, *City of God* IV,23.

⁸³ DOREEN MASSEY, « Traveling Thoughts », in PAUL GILROY, LAWRENCE GROSSBERG, ANGELA McROBBIE eds., *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, London, Verso, 2000, pp. 225-232 (here p. 231).

worshippers in this life⁸⁴, and therefore cannot claim any credit for the foundation, flourishing, and the protection of the city of Rome and its empire. « For these [deities] were so occupied, each with his special duties, that no one thing as a whole was entrusted to any of them » (*City of God* IV,8). Bad spatial allocations and false religions go hand in hand.

Conclusion

« Although resident gods are expected to defend their city against human invaders »⁸⁵, polytheism's spatial fix is no more designed to protect a city population from external sieges than a state-endorsed monotheist religion is expected to push back the attackers. However, Augustine notes that, during the sack of Rome, the city's vast basilicas stood fast, were preserved by the Goths, and succeeded in providing asylum to people (*City of God* I, 1.4.734 ; II,2), whereas pagan temples never operated as places of refuge (I,2-6). The resilience of Christian buildings to shock confirms that the time is up for temple jumping. The new sport of leaping among the urban and suburban Christian basilicas, instead, implies a caveat that sounds equally absurd to most pagan jumpers: some fixes are right, others are wrong, or better: some are orthodox, others heretical⁸⁶. Moreover, to complicate the picture further, no discernible architectural feature helps to distinguish between the normatively laden spatial fixes of the orthodox and the heretic folks. As Augustine himself suggests in an anti-Manichean treatise dated around 396, one has to be very careful where to step:

Finally, the name « Catholic » holds me in the Catholic Church. It was not without reason that this Church alone, among so many heresies, obtained this name so that, though all heretics want to be called Catholic, no heretic would dare to point out his own basilica or house to some stranger who asked where the Catholic [Church] was gathered (*quaerenti tamen peregrino alicui, ubi ad Catholicam conveniatur, nullus haereticorum vel basilicam suam vel domum audeat ostendere*).⁸⁷

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Two centuries have passed since Tertullian ridiculed the idea that houses were for demons and temples for gods and showed it as an insane way of ranking the identity of metahuman beings according to the spatial features of the places of worship. Now both private homes (*domus*) and specialized ritual buildings (*basilicae*) happen to be used for both true and false worships of the

⁸⁴ JAMES WETZEL, *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 2.

⁸⁵ HENK S. VERSNEL, *Coping with the Gods*, p. 112.

⁸⁶ As hinted above, the connection between spatial differentiation according to gathering places and religious demarcation according to rituals and doctrines seemed to evolve gradually. Tertullian's polemic against less rigid Christians coming from « the workshop of the enemy into the house of God (*de adversaria officina in domum dei venire*) » (TERTULLIAN, *On Idolatry* 7,1) is an early case in point for the use of locality to draw boundaries and foster group identification (SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, p. 78). Half a century later, the North African controversies about reconciliation of the lapsed and rebaptism of the heretics can be viewed as an example of schismatic clash where « factional distinctions came to be associated with the place itself », spatial separation began to be construed as theological deviance, and church buildings tended to be used to mark out group boundaries (e.g., CYPRIAN, *Letters* XXX,6; LIX,7,3 and 16,2-3; LXIX,1,2; see SHIRA L. LANDER, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa*, pp. 43 and 82-83).

⁸⁷ AUGUSTINE, *Answer to the Letter of Mani Known as The Foundation* 4; translation ROLAND TESKE, in BONIFACE RAMSEY ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine Part I; Vol. 19. The Manichean Debate*, Hyde Park, New City Press, 2006 (slightly modified).

one God: that is, as both true and false God's dwelling-places. At the end of the 4th century, while wandering around the same cities where earlier temple-jumpers had managed to navigate the multiplicity of the gods, newcomers and foreigners would do better to ask beforehand, if they don't want to leap into the wrong cult gathering and find themselves among ritual enemies. Well-informed locals alone can direct the traffic to the requested destination (e.g., «if you look for the Catholics, they gather there, two blocks away...») but there might be no agreement between the informant and the foreigner on whether the one God actually dwells there. God can be here, there, anywhere according to the religious affiliation *and* the place attachment of the person one bumps into. An integral part of the epochal upheaval that transformed «a world well beyond the understanding of most of us into [...] a world very like our own»⁸⁸, the confessionalization of the dynamics and the implications of the spatial fixations of religious flows changed Mediterranean urban religion for good.

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⁸⁸ JÖRG RÜPKE, *Pantheon*, p. 1.