CHAPTER 5

An Alternative View
Lived Religion As Popular Culture

Introduction

We shall begin with a brief trip away from Provence to the Auvergne for a story originally told by Gregory of Tours: a tale of how the bishop of Javols managed to transform a cult paid to a sacred lake into a chapel in honour of St Hilary of Poitiers. According to Gregory, each year 'a crowd of rustics' feasted at the lake for several days, making a series of offerings to this same lake, including textiles, wool and models of food, as well as animal sacrifices. In consequence, says Gregory, each year thunder storms ensued, demonstrating the divine displeasure these activities caused. Eventually, a new (unnamed) bishop arrived and came to preach an end to this practice. When the crowds ignored his exhortations, he built a church near the lake in which he placed the relics of Hilary of Poitiers, and urged the people to transfer their devotions:

> 'Do not, my sons, do not sin before God! For there is [to be] no religious piety to a lake. [*Nulla religio est in stagno*.] Do not stain your hearts with these empty rituals but rather acknowledge God and direct your devotion to his friends. Respect St Hilary, a bishop of God, whose relics are located here. For he can serve as your intercessor [for] the mercy of the Lord.' The men were stung in their hearts and converted. They left the lake and brought everything they usually threw into it to the holy church. So they were freed from the mistake that had bound them.[1]

According to Gregory, the crowd were instantly converted, left the lake behind and brought their offerings to the new church. Thanks to the *translatio* of the relics to the site, moreover, the storm never came again at this time of year.

This story raises several points that are useful for approaching the themes of this chapter. Firstly, there is the bishop's blunt statement to

[1] Greg. Tur. *Glor. conf.* 2, trans. Van Dam.

the crowd: *Nulla religio est in stagno*.[2] Talal Asad used this example in an influential essay to demonstrate the very constructedness and lack of universality of the category 'religion'; as Asad cogently argues, such a case neatly demonstrates how it is *power* that constructs religion.[3] In the bishop's soundbite we can see, in a neat (if borrowed?) formulation, the claim of religious (episcopal) authority to define what was and what was not *religion*.[4] This account is but one particularly clear example of what was a widespread phenomenon in late antiquity, whereby preachers and their audiences came into conflict over definitions and boundaries. The sermons of Caesarius constitute a body of texts brim-full of material that deals with the issue of proper religion. How religion should (and should not) be lived is a key theme of the *Admonitiones*. The power to decide this belonged to the bishop, to the church, the authorized proponents of the word of God. This power dynamic lies at the heart of this part of the book and indeed in much of the religious historiography of this period. All too often, however, previous scholars have taken on the views of ecclesiasts regarding what does and does not count in the study of religion, in the history of religious change and especially in that of christianization. In order to understand this history properly, we need to deconstruct the power relations that authorized certain religious practices or beliefs, while excluding others: thus we return again to the notion of popular culture as *unauthorized* culture.[5] In the previous chapter I explored how clerical discourse constructed a negative picture of popular culture on the one hand, while on the other it made tangible efforts (albeit with limited success) both to curtail and to substitute elements of this culture. This chapter moves away from a purely top-down approach, focused on the ecclesiastical elite, to consider a more diverse range of evidence, including material culture, as well as approaches drawn from anthropological, archaeological and religious

[2] The turn of phrase here is not very original: according to Sulpicius Severus, when Martin of Tours cut down a sacred pine tree, he told the protesting villagers *nihil esse religionis in stipite*, Sulp. Sev. *V. Martini* 13.

[3] 'For medieval Christians, religion was not a universal phenomenon: religion was a site on which universal truth was produced, and it was clear to them that truth was not produced universally', Asad 1993: 45 n. 29; this discussion is an expansion of Asad 1983.

[4] The Latin word *religio* cannot, of course, simply be translated as 'religion': for a useful discussion, see Beard, North and Price 1998: 214–17.

[5] Orsi 2002: xiii–xiv: 'These are issues of power – the power of our theories of "religion" to constitute some ideas and practices as religious and others not, some practices and perspectives as essential to a particular religious and cultural world and others marginal.' See again Asad 1983: especially 246: 'The connexion between religious theory and practice is fundamentally a matter of power – of certain disciplines *creating* religion, interpreting true meanings, forbidding certain utterances and practices and authorising others.'

studies, in order to build up a picture of popular culture on rather different terms.

I shall be focusing here largely on the capacious and contested category of 'religion', for several reasons. The nature of the available evidence is of course important, but there are also significant methodological advantages. Firstly, as I have shown, clerical discourse set out to define a particular zone as the 'religious' and to denigrate elements that lay outside its boundaries. An important aim of this chapter is to seek to understand many of these aspects in their own terms, and thus to provide an alternative to ecclesiastical definitions of 'religion'. Secondly, this focus provides an opportunity to make use of an especially fruitful approach: I shall be focusing on what Robert Orsi and others have suggestively called 'lived religion':

> The study of lived religion explores how religion is shaped by and shapes the ways family life is organized, for instance: how the dead are buried, children disciplined, the past and future imagined, moral boundaries established and challenged, homes constructed, maintained, and destroyed, the gods and spirits worshiped and importuned, and so on. Religion is approached in its place within a more broadly conceived and described lifeworld, the domain of everyday existence practical activity, and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprised, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears and limitations.[6]

Looking at 'lived religion' entails a switch of focus away from the problems that have bedevilled traditional models of 'popular religion', as well as enabling a far more realistic and integrated understanding of the cultural 'work' done by religion in late antiquity.[7] Building on the examination of the countryside in Chapter 3, my analysis seeks to embed this lived religion in its rural context. In this way, lived religion provides a valuable frame for the understanding of popular culture *tout court*.

In my study of 'lived religion' in late antique southern Gaul I shall focus on the countryside in particular, as it is here that we see most clearly the traces of lived religion in the daily life, rituals and practices of the non-elite world. The aim is to look at both individuals and communities as actors and agents in their own right, acting to construct their own 'lived religion'.

[6] Orsi 2002: xiii–xiv.

[7] 'Lived religion' is an approach that has indeed been increasingly attractive to scholars of ancient and late ancient religion. See, for instance, Jorg Rüpke's European Research Council project, 'Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning "Cults" and "Polis Religion"', as discussed in Albrecht et al. 2018, as well as Rüpke 2016. See too the recently established journal *Religion in the Roman Empire*, especially the programmatic introductory essay, Raja and Rüpke 2015; for example, '"religion" is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs, as well as communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s)', pp. 12–13.

We can see how they did this through intersecting with the power structures (both secular and sacred) around them, as well as with the natural world, making use of objects as well as texts and oral culture. As with my approach to popular culture more broadly, I shall argue that we need to understand the domain of religion as dynamic, as operating in tension with these structures, in accordance with pressures and influences from above as well as below.

To return to the stagnant lake in the Auvergne: my aim in this chapter is not least to seek to understand how a pond *did* contain religion: to examine the ways in which 'religion' is constructed in diverse ways by different agents. My interest is not so much with whether and how the church (either locally or more broadly) sought to make accommodation with such sites,[8] but rather to seek to understand how local people *themselves*, as active agents, constructed their own religious environments, and what adaptations they made in a context of both religious and social change. The natural environment will be one of the prominent themes of this chapter, as I examine how individuals and communities alike created and modified their religious practice in the context of the natural, calendrical and agricultural elements of their lives.[9]

The rituals and practices under examination were not the unique preserve of any one class or type of person. However, and crucially, religion in the late antique countryside was constructed in a profoundly unequal social and economic landscape. Even if, as we shall see, landlords and peasants could choose similar solutions to such perennial environmental challenges as the threat of hail, both the seriousness of the threat and the scale of resources available at their disposal to meet this threat were highly disparate. Moreover, as we shall see, ecclesiastical and legal structures responded differently to given religious behaviours, depending on the social status of the practitioners involved. Religious choices and practices cannot be understood in a social vacuum. Indeed, for the framework of lived religion to be truly viable, it must itself be embedded in its social and economic framework. My model of lived religion therefore envisages a social and cultural domain embedded in the *habitus* and the social and economic structures of late antique southern Gaul. 'Religion', as an embedded domain, provided a site for contestation as well as oppression; for communal as well as individual expression and action. 'Lived religion'

[8] Compare Brown 1981: 126 and 2003: 161–4 and further Barnish 2001 on ecclesiastical engagement with water sites more generally.

[9] For an excellent example of scholarship in this vein, focused on late antique Egypt, see Frankfurter 2017: especially 233–56.

comprises a substantial part of the culture and experience of our late antique subjects.

In this chapter, then, I am using a model of 'lived religion' which is analogous to that of popular culture. Both are constructed through a series of processes: creation, appropriation, 'poaching'. Both have influences from both 'above' and 'below'. Both contain elements we might call oppositional – but neither need or indeed should be considered as inherently oppositional. Both can be shared by various sub-groups and can have diverse possible relationships to elite and official culture/s. Both popular culture and lived religion operate across unequal landscapes, and the actors involved have markedly different levels of access to resources, and indeed to power. Questions of power and inequality therefore remain important components of the analysis.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the lived religion primarily of the *rural* inhabitants of southern Gaul (whose environments and livelihoods I described in Chapter 3), at times supplemented by material from elsewhere in the late antique world. As far as possible I shall seek to analyse this religion from divergent viewpoints, particularly those of the lay non-elite, even when we are, as so often, forced to rely on clerical texts. However, in this chapter I am also able to make use of the evidence of material culture, as well as, at times, of comparative material. Even if I begin with an episode from clerical literature, I shall then expand outwards, using complementary sources, to gain a deeper, wider, indeed multi-perspectival view of lived religion in late antique southern Gaul. I shall consider two case studies: the first looks at rituals attached to the nativity of John the Baptist, which took place at harvest time; the second looks at the range of technologies associated with protection against a major scourge of the harvest, hail.

Lived Religion in the Calendar: The Feast of John the Baptist

Here I shall explore the festival of John the Baptist as an example of the enduring power of the seasons, the calendar and the agricultural cycle in the structuring of life, religion and culture. I shall demonstrate how the sources dealing with this festival reveal how individuals and communities could blend and interpret different aspects of ritual practice as part of their 'lived religion'. Finally, I shall examine how the response of clerical figures to this blending and interpretation was just as varied as the local practices to which they reacted.

Let's begin once more with Caesarius, who in the midst of a sermon on tithes (to which we shall return) switches to exhort his congregation to celebrate the upcoming nativity of John the Baptist 'with upright conscience'. He has a stark warning to give:

> I beseech and adjure you by the dreadful day of judgment to admonish your neighbours, your household, and all who are related to you, and to reprove them severely out of zeal for God. Let no one on the feast of St John dare to bathe [*se lavare praesumat*] in the fountains or marshes or rivers [*in fontibus aut in paludibus aut in fluminibus*] at night or early in the morning; that wretched custom still remains from pagan observances. Since not only souls but, what is worse, bodies very frequently die as a result of that impious bathing, people who are unconcerned over the salvation of their souls do not even fear bodily death.[10]

While he goes on to object, in familiar fashion, to the singing of impure songs at the associated celebrations, the prohibition against ritual bathing shows that here we have a festival that is highly distinctive. This feature also plunges us (as it were) into the specific rural landscape in which Caesarius' congregation lived. Marshes are a notable feature of the landscape of the Camargue, while ponds (*étangs*) dot the Berre region; the Rhône and its tributaries are also geographically notable features[11] (see Map 2). What were these people actually doing? According to Caesarius, this was remnant of 'pagan' practice. William Klingshirn suggests a much more nuanced interpretation in which the local Christians have actually *adapted* a traditional bathing activity:

> the Christians of Arles enlarged the scope of this practice to symbolize baptism as well, both John's baptism of Jesus and their own Christian baptism, and thereby acknowledged their Christian affiliation. Although they still celebrated the life-giving properties of the sun and rain by bathing in streams and lakes . . . they now did so as Christians, synchronizing the church calendar with the local agricultural calendar.[12]

[10] *Hoc etiam deprecor, et pre tremendum diem iudicii vos adiuro, ut omnes vicinos vestros, omnes familias, et cunctos ad vos pertinentes admoneatis, et cum zelo dei severissime castigetis; ne ullis in festivitate sancti Iohannis aut in fontibus aut in paludibus aut in fluminibus nocturnis aut matutinis horis se lavare praesumat: quia ist infelix consuetudo adhuc de paganorum observatione remansit. Cum enim non solum animae, sed etiam, quod peius est, corpora frequentissime in illa sacrilega lavatione moriantur, vel de corporis morte timeant, qui de animae suae salute non cogitant*, Caes. *Serm*. 33.4.

[11] More generally on water sanctuaries in Gaul and their transformation in late antiquity, see Rousselle 1976 and 1990.

[12] Klingshirn 1994: 225.

I shall use this as a starting point for the analysis of what follows: here we have a very neat example of 'lived religion'.

But first we need to step back and take a more detailed look at the festival and our evidence. The festival in question is in fact one of two feasts celebrating John the Baptist, both in the summer: the saint's nativity was celebrated on 24 June, while his martyrdom was remembered on 29 August. It was always the former festival that constituted the main focus for celebration. The question immediately arises: why was it the saint's nativity, rather than his martyrdom as usual, that was commemorated? The answer lies in the date, 24 June, one of notable calendrical and seasonal significance: it falls in midsummer, close to the summer solstice, but also half a year from the nativity of Christ, a symmetry played upon across various Christian texts, as we shall see. The popularity of this festival in late antique and early medieval Provence is widely attested. Clerical discourse concentrates both on practices distinctive to this specific festival and those we have already identified as common to clerical critiques of popular culture in general. In my discussion I shall discuss texts from late antique North Africa in addition to those from Provence, not only because of notable crossovers in practices but also because of substantial textual connections in terms of transmission and manuscript tradition.

Caesarius' three sermons on the feast of John the Baptist contain, as is typical, substantial amounts of material from other sermon collections, including both 'Eusebius Gallicanus' and a collection from North Africa.[13] *Sermo* 33 is the only of these which deals with the celebrations, and while a large part of the text derives from a sermon in the North African collection, the section dealing with the rituals themselves appears to be distinctively Caesarian.[14] The earlier North African sermons that discuss the feast include several by Augustine, one by Pseudo-Fulgentius and two further, anonymous, texts which most likely also hail from North Africa.[15] I shall also consider some later material, with appropriate caution. Celebrations of the feast of John the Baptist are castigated in the eighth-century sermon embedded in the *Vita Eligii*;[16] some intriguing behaviour is

[13] Caes. *Serm.* 33, 216 and 217; *Serm.* 218 deals with the saint's martyrdom.

[14] See Delage 1978: 168–9 and 487–93 for *Serm* XXIII A*; the North African text, entitled *Incipit sermo sancti Augustini de decimis dandis*, was unknown to Morin. The Caesarian version of the sermon appears in a number of the older manuscripts.

[15] Aug. *Serm.* 196, 293A/Dolbeau 3/Mainz 7; 293B/*Sermo Frangipane* 8 (G. Morin, *Miscellanea Agostiniana* vol. 1 (Rome, 1930), pp. 227–31); Ps-Fulgentius, *Serm.* 56 (*PL* 65.925–7); *De solstitiis et aequinoctiis* (B. Botte (ed.), *Les origines de la Noël et de l'Épiphanie* (Louvain, 1932), pp. 93–105); *De navitate sancti Iohannis* (in Dolbeau and Étaix 2003: 256–9, with very helpful discussion).

[16] *V. Elig.* 2.16. On the date and nature of the sermon, see Markus 1992: 166–7.

also attacked by Atto of Vercelli, in tenth-century Piedmont;[17] finally, the *Legenda Aurea* draws on some rather ingenious scholastic discussion of the celebrations.[18] From the later middle ages through to at least the late nineteenth century there are discussions and records of festivities related to the feast of the Baptist in Provence but also elsewhere in western Europe.[19]

As we shall see in the next chapter (dealing with the Kalends of January), the religious meaning and significance of the calendar was a subject of great importance and controversy in late antiquity. The date of the nativity of John the Baptist was undoubtedly the reason for the festival's importance. While preachers would often belittle the significance of the secular calendar, calendrical thinking was nonetheless of considerable significance to the church, which placed great importance on what we might see as the cosmic significance of the Christian calendar. Indeed, Augustine actually discusses the festivities of John the Baptist in a Christmas sermon. First, he delivers an advance warning to his congregation, admonishing them not to misbehave on the Kalends of January, and in so doing makes a fascinating digression in order to recount what he sees as a cautionary tale regarding the summer festival.

He begins: 'On the birthday of John the Baptist six months ago (for the two birthdays of the herald and of the Judge are six months apart).'[20] As the 'forerunner', John the Baptist was born half a year before Christ in what was clearly seen as a very fitting symmetry. Caesarius' *Sermo* 216 likewise plays on the calendrical significance of the two births and their relation to the solstice: 'In order that man might be humbled, John was born on the same day that the days begin to grow shorter; in order that God might be exalted, Christ was born on that day when the days begin to grow longer.'[21] The same sermon tells us that John was sent ahead 'like a lamp',[22] a simile which is prominent in the North African texts, as we shall see.

[17] Atto of Vercelli, *Serm.* 13, *PL* 34.850–1; see Filotas 2005: 176.

[18] Including burning animal bones in order to drive dragons away: *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse 1846: 363–4.

[19] See here Benoit 1935: 13–30, also discussing what seem to be related practices in the North African festival of Achoura, especially 14–16; Chambers 1903 1.116–29; Bérenger-Féraud 1983: 'feux de joie' in honour of St Jean: 135–41 in Provence, 142–86 elsewhere in France. I have made use of the very interesting discussion of Shaw 2013, discussed further later.

[20] *Natali Ioannis, id est ante sex menses (tot enim menses inter se habent praeco et iudex)*, Aug. *Serm.* 196.4. On the relative dates of birth of John the Baptist and Jesus: Luke 1.26, 36.

[21] Caes. *Serm.* 216.2; the Golden Legend cites a saying in this regard (with rather odd counting): *Solstitium decimo Christum praeit atque Joannem*, *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse 1846: 364.

[22] Caes. *Serm.* 216.3 calls John a *lucerna* three times.

Our clerical texts, therefore, certainly play on the calendrical and celestial significance of the date of the festival. What do we know about non-Christian commemorations and interpretations of 24 June that might also have had resonance for the congregation? According to the traditional Roman religious calendar, 24 June was the festival of Fors Fortuna, the celebration of which in the city of Rome involved boat trips on the Tiber. Columella associates the day with market gardeners taking their produce to market. What else? Scullard drily comments: 'The day of the festival happened to be Midsummer's Day, the summer solstice, but attempts to find a connection in the ritual are not convincing.'[23] In any case, there is no sign at all of any cult of Fortuna in either Gaul or North Africa in late antiquity. Of more interest is a connection with Ceres, at least in North Africa, as we shall see. The Codex Calendar of 354, which for 24 June lists both Fors Fortuna and the Solstice, depicts a naked male figure carrying a torch, while the accompanying texts refers to the ripe corn as 'heads of Ceres'.[24] The mythographer Fulgentius makes an unambiguous connection between the story of Ceres and Prosperina and a 'day of torches' which we know from our North African homiletic sources to have been celebrated on 24 June.[25] Four of these sermons make reference to a *lampadarum dies* involving a procession with torches.[26] A mosaic calendar from Thysdrus (El Djem in Tunisia), meanwhile, appears to depict a pavilion selling items which might well be torches to customers (Figure 5.1).[27] Augustine's account intriguingly suggests an urban rather than a rural event: 'Yesterday evening, the whole city was set ablaze by stinking flames; the air was covered in smoke.'[28]

Augustine further specifies that the torches were carried by *pueri:* he says sternly that their elders should have forbidden this.[29] Put together, this evidence suggests a lively urban ritual with a key role for young men,

[23] Scullard 1981: 155–6, with references.
[24] See Salzman 1990: 91–3; Stern 1953: 252–8.
[25] Fulg. *Mythologiae* (ed. R Helm (Leipzig, 1898), 22–3); Shaw 2013: 175 comments: 'the Day of Torches is dedicated to Ceres obviously for the reason that it is at this time that the crops are sought out with torches – which is to say, the heat of the sun – to be reaped with joy'. Salzman 1990: 93 is sceptical as regards the broader applicability of this linkage: for her, the torch 'is an easily understood symbol for summer heat, hence the popular designation *dies lampadarum*'.
[26] Aug. *Serm.* 293B/*Serm. Frangipane* 8.5; *De solstit. et aequinoct*; Pseudo-Fulgentius, *Serm.* 56; *De navitate sancti Iohannis*, as discussed by Dolbeau and Étaix 2003, Magalhães de Oliveira 2012: 249–51 and Shaw 2013: 241–2.
[27] As discussed by Shaw 2013: 241: the mosaic is now in the Musée archéologique de Sousse; see Stern 1981: pl. vi.16 (Stern professed himself puzzled by the scene, interpreting the items being served as drinks: p. 437).
[28] *Hesterno die post vesperam putentibus flammis civitas tota flagrabat; universum aerem fumus obduxerat*, Aug. *Serm.* 293B/*Serm.* Frangipane 8.5.
[29] *Scimus, fratres, haec a pueris fieri; sed maiores prohibere debuerant*, Aug. *Serm* 293B/*Serm.* Frangipane 8.5.

Figure 5.1 Depiction of June on the mosaic calendar from El Djem, now at the Musée archéologique de Sousse. Photograph: Alamy.

a feature familiar from many instances of expressions of popular culture across other periods. We have nothing comparable from Provence, however.

So what can we deduce about *who* was participating in the bathing rituals in Provence? In his attack on the practice in *Sermo* 33 Caesarius explicitly presents this activity as something carried out by others: 'I beseech [*deprecor*] and adjure [*adiuro*] you . . . to admonish your neighbours, your household, and all who are related to you, and to reprove them severely out of zeal for God [*omnes vicinos vestros, omnes familias, et cunctos ad vos pertinentes*].'[30] That is, the audience he is addressing are not presented as night-swimmers *themselves*. Rather, we see Caesarius speaking to a congregation made up of *domini* and asking them to discipline their tenants and dependants. We might wonder: would the supposedly respectable landowners of late antique Provence have felt comfortable stripping off their outer garments to bathe in the ponds and waterways together with their social inferiors? Or was this a practice they were in fact happy to leave to others? On the other hand, we could also suspect that Caesarius is in fact seeking to denigrate a more widely held practice by ascribing to it lower-class associations, as he does elsewhere. Of course, we cannot be sure.

[30] Caes. *Serm.* 33.4.

The date of 24 June fell during harvest time in late antique Provence, as in North Africa.[31] Caesarius' *Sermo* 33 begins with an allusion to this crucial time: 'the days are nearly here in which we should gather the harvest'.[32] The first part of the sermon is in fact not to do with the nativity of John the Baptist at all but is rather on the subject of tithing. Caesarius is generally understood to have played a key role both in elaborating the theology and developing the systematization of tithing. He does indeed exhort tithing across no fewer than twelve of his sermons.[33] Even if part of the tithing discussion in *Serm*. 33 is 'borrowed' from an earlier sermon,[34] it certainly fits a broader enthusiasm for the tithe held by Caesarius, which would later extend across Merovingian Gaul. The pro-tithing message is hammered home, with typical vigour: that all earthly fruits belong to God, and any failure to return the full, required, one-tenth is ungrateful and sinful in the extreme.[35] The sermon alludes to poor harvests due to drought or the effect of frost or hail on the grape vintage, and suggests that such poor harvests constitute a just punishment for a refusal to tithe.[36] We can therefore see the festival as fully embedded in the context of a crucial period in the agricultural calendar but also in terms of potential tensions around extractions, to which we shall return later in this chapter.

Caesarius' sermons do not mention celebrations with torches, unlike the North African material. According to Brent Shaw: '[w]e know that the Day of the Torches was the most important social ritual that marked the time of the harvest, not only in Africa but in the later empire at large'.[37] However, secure evidence for these practices *outside* North Africa is in fact lacking – despite the suggestive appearance of the torch in the entry for June in the Calendar of 354, as we saw. Customs to do with fire did eventually accrue in

[31] The *Breviarium* of Alaric, composed in southern Gaul, includes an *interpretatio* of *CTh* 2.8.19, a law of Theodosius' on legal holidays, which actually specifies the date of the harvest holiday as beginning on 24 June: see Matthews 2010: 356.

[32] *Serm.* 33.1. Note too on the timing of the harvest: Palladius, *Op. Ag.* 7.2.2.

[33] See Shuler 2012, citing Jones 1964: 894–5: the sermons are 1, 10, 13, 14, 16, 30, 33, 34, 60, 71, 171, 229. Shuler comments (p. 58) that all of Caesarius' discussions come 'in the midst of original material' but this is not in fact the case for this section, the most extended account in the Caesarian corpus. A good part of the tithing exhortation (sections 2 and 3) is lifted from a pre-existing text, most likely North African. See here the discussion in Delage 1978: 168–9; the source text 'Incipt sermo sancti Augustini [sic] de decimis dandis' is given as an appendix, pp. 486–93.

[34] And in fact the section is not entirely 'cut and pasted' but retains original elements, such as the specification of other types of work the income from which the good Christian could tithe: *De militia, de negotio, de artificio tuo redde decimas*: *Serm*. 33.1.

[35] Caes. *Serm.* 33.2–3.

[36] Caes. *Serm.* 33.2: in a much clearer passage than in the 'source' text, and with the addition of hail – a serious threat to vine growing, as we shall see later.

[37] Shaw 2013: 141.

Provence, as well as elsewhere in rural France and western Europe, traceable from the later middle ages, but, as ever, we need to avoid assuming continuity when there is such a notable gap in the evidence.[38]

Indeed, Jules Breton's 1875 painting of a Saint-Jean *feu de joie*, as depicted on the cover of the book, depicts a moonlit bonfire celebration.[39] In late antiquity the festivities associated with the festival of St John began, as usual for a saint's feast, the night before the anniversary itself, with the 'vigil'. These night-time festivities were viewed with consistent suspicion by the church, as we have already seen. These celebrations were likely to include alcohol, and thus rowdy and indeed libidinous activity, hence the long tradition of clerical complaints about behaviour at martyrs' vigils.[40] Inappropriate night-time gatherings have certain clichéd components, as we saw in the previous chapter. The singing of bawdy songs is one of these and, sure enough, we learn that the feast provides opportunities for *cantica turpiosa vel luxuriosa*.[41] With singing comes dancing, again both a prominent feature of popular culture celebrations and a favourite target for attacks on this popular culture. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that dancing appears as a feature of the festivities in several of our accounts, beginning with that of Augustine.[42] The dancing round the bonfire in Breton's painting finds correspondence in folkloric discussions: circular dances, especially around fires, have been seen as attempts to imitate the shape of the sun, as 'magical' circumambulatory rites.[43] Night-time was indeed traditionally associated with illicit religious activity of various types.[44] Nefarious nocturnal activities were often associated specifically with women. Atto of Vercelli attacked *meretriculae* (strikingly translated by Filotas as 'little trollops'!), who were accused of

[38] For example, in the late thirteenth century Guillaume Durand links the carrying of torches and sickles with the feast of John the Baptist: Durandus *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (Lyon, 1584), p. 556, in Shaw 2013: 242; the Golden Legend describes the custom of carrying lit torches around a bonfire 'because John was a burning and a shining torch, and a wheel is spun because the sun then begins to be lower in its cycle', hence making a link back to the Solstice: *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse 1846: 364. Bonfires (often described as 'heat charms' in folkloric scholarship, associated with the sun and the solstice, e.g. Chambers 1903: 1.125–6) were traditionally lit on the beach in Provence for the festival of St Peter on 29 June, obviously a doublet for St John, as pointed out by Benoit 1935: 30.

[39] In the Philadelphia Museum of Art, reproduced in Shaw 2013: 242.

[40] For example, Caes. *Serm.* 55.2; compare Augustine's famous recollection of night-time vigils as offering opportunities for sexual encounters: *Serm. Dolbeau* 2 (*Mainz* 5).5 and Jerome's warning to Laeta to keep her daughter close to her at the same: *Ep*. 107.9.

[41] Caes. *Serm.* 33.4; see too 216.4; compare *V. Elig.* 2.16.

[42] In chronological order: Aug. *Serm.* 279.13; *V. Eligi.* 2.16; Atto of Vercelli, *Serm.* 13.

[43] See Filotas 2005: 122–4, 129.

[44] *CTh* 16.10.5 (353) forbade night-time sacrifices; the Christians themselves had been accused of practising illicit late-night religion: see, for example, Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9.

abandoning the offices of the church and instead are depicted as hanging around 'in the streets and crossroads, by springs and in the countryside; they form round dances, compose songs, draw lots, and pretend that people's prospects are to be predicted from things of this sort'.[45] This passage indeed shows the long life of a number of gendered associations: associating women with popular culture and thereby with the streets, and in particular street corners (*compita*),[46] as well as associating them with dubious non-religious 'superstitious' activities, in this case with practices of divination. The other type of site that these women are supposed to be frequenting is springs (*fontes*), which takes us to another crucial aspect of the St John rituals.

The presence of a bathing ritual as a part of the festival is found in both North Africa and Provence. We have already seen Caesarius' prohibition: 'Let no one on the feast of St John dare to bathe in springs or marshes or rivers either at night or early in the morning; that unhappy custom is a relic of pagan observances.'[47] In Hippo, as we saw, Augustine recalls the occurrence of a bathing ritual a full six months after it happened: 'On the birthday of John the Baptist six months ago . . . in celebration of a pagan superstition [*de solemnitate superstitiosa pagana*], Christians came to the sea and there they baptized themselves [*Christiani ad mare veniebant et ibi se baptizabant*].'[48] Augustine and Caesarius seem to be talking about actual bathing, involving immersion: Caesarius, as we have already seen, claimed that this was a highly dangerous practice resulting in 'very frequent' deaths.[49] A connection to baptism is made explicit by Augustine, who claims that people had baptized themselves in the sea – a particularly charged claim in the context of the bitter debates over re-baptism in the Donatist controversy. Caesarius, meanwhile, calls the bathing a *sacrilega lavatio*:[50] his choice of the term *lavatio* helps him denigrate the practice by suggesting pagan connotations.[51] Augustine does not tell us what time of day the bathing took place but Caesarius is explicit that the activity

[45] *ut quaedam meretriculae ecclesias et divina officia derelinquant, et passim per plateas et compita, fontes etiam et rura pernoctantes, choros statuant, canticula componant, sortes deducant, et quidquid alicui evenire debeat in talibus simulent augurari*, Atto of Vercelli, *Serm.* 13 (*PL* 134.850D), trans. Filotas 2005: 176.

[46] See Johnston 1991 on the ritual associations of crossroads in antiquity; on crossroads, see p. 65.

[47] *ne ullus in festivitate sancti Iohannis aut in fontibus aut in paludibus aut in fluminibus nocturnis aut matutinis horis se lavare praesumat*, Caes. *Serm.* 33.4.

[48] Aug. *Serm.* 196.4.

[49] *Cum enim non solum animae, sed etiam, quod peius est, corpora frequentissime in illa sacrilega lavatione moriantur*, Caes. *Serm.* 33.4.

[50] Caes. *Serm.* 33.4. [51] See *TLL*, *lavātio*.

occurred early in the morning or late at night. The former seems to be traditional but the latter suggestion, as we have seen, lends an especially 'magical', and indeed illicit, cast to the activity. A further range of washing practices are known from later folklore, in association with St John's Day. These range from full immersion to the washing of hands and faces in open water sources, as well as rolling in the dew (hence the association with early morning). Testimonies come from the middle ages through to much more recent times, and not just in Mediterranean areas but even as far north as Cologne, as observed by Petrarch.[52]

The bathing aspect of the ritual has a number of resonances beyond evoking the natural landscape of the *territorium* of Arles. Caesarius claims that his flock were bathing *aut in fontibus aut in paludibus aut in fluminibus* (either in springs, or in marshes, or in rivers). The first of these, *fontes*, springs, are regularly attested as a locale for religious practice – religious practice that was deeply suspect in the eyes of the church. Complaints about spring worship are a standard topos, appearing in the writings of Caesarius and in those of his later excerptors and plagiarizers.[53] How seriously should we take these allegations? Coin deposit at springs is the most obvious archaeologically attested form of religious ritual associated with springs, even though the evidence of these deposits shows a sharp decline at the turn of the fourth to fifth centuries.[54] However, most of the practices attacked in late antique and early medieval sources, even assuming we accept their historicity, would be impossible to trace archaeologically: for instance, the lighting of candles and the offering of bread, as attacked by Martin of Braga.[55] Springs were of course not the only water source with religious associations: we have already come across Gregory of Tours' anecdote about the sacred swamp in the Auvergne.

A range of participant motivations are reported by both observers and critics of these bathing practices.[56] Augustine explicitly links the sea-bathing at Hippo with baptism, as we have seen: although he does not say that this is how the participants themselves described the activity, it seems the most likely interpretation. Augustine himself was certainly not minded to accept such behaviour as within the bounds of acceptable

[52] See Anderson 2008: 69–71.
[53] Caes. *Serm.* 53.1, listed as one of the subjects of his sermons: *V. Caes*. 1.55; see too Boese 1909.
[54] See Sauer 2011: especially 533.
[55] Martin Brag, *De correctione rusticorum* 16; Sauer 2011: 539 points out the invisibility of such practices in the material record and is willing to accept their historicity.
[56] Petrarch reported that the women bathing their hands and arms in the Rhine did so in order to wash away bad things in the year to come: *Epistolae familiares*, Aachen June 1333, cited by Schama 1995: 265.

religiosity (and here Caesarius, as so often, followed his lead). Looking back on the 'incident' from the distance of six months, Augustine recalls that the participants at Hippo had undergone 'ecclesiastical discipline' for their watery exploits, in response to which they had 'murmured' and objected: 'How great was it that it should be reported of us [*Quantum erat ut indicaretur nobis*]? If the priests had warned us, we would not have done it.'[57] Augustine, who been absent from Hippo at the time, declares that he is *now* giving just such a warning; that is, for *next* time. What precisely the *ecclesiastica disciplina* the guilty parties had been subjected to is unclear. However, what we can see here is a familiar pattern in relations between the bishop of Hippo and his congregations whereby he chastises them, labels their long-held practices as 'pagan' and forbids them. For us as scholars, however (and presumably also for the members of the congregations), it is evident that long-held rituals practised by *Christian* communities should not really be labelled 'pagan'.[58] The Christians at Hippo thought what they were doing on 24 June was perfectly legitimate – just as, in a famous case, Augustine's own mother Monica was participating in a long-established Christian tradition when she took cakes and wine to church at Milan.[59]

We can clearly see the propensity of Christians, in various locations and periods, to interpret the feast of John the Baptist, and the theme of baptism, in their own distinctive ways. In the tenth century the bishop of Vercelli in Piedmont, Atto, was enraged that his congregation were embracing the baptismal theme in directions of which he most definitely did not approve: he claims that they baptized grass and branches.[60] Back in sixth-century Arles, meanwhile, Caesarius unfortunately, but entirely typically, fails to give his congregation's side of the story when it came to *their* nocturnal bathing. I have already suggested that William Klingshirn's interpretation, which views the participants as active agents constructing their own form of communal, local religion, purposively, in their adaptation of a traditional bathing activity, in a new blending of the church and agricultural calendars, is the right one.[61] This makes for a very nice case study for thinking about popular culture as 'lived religion'. We might

[57] Aug. *Serm.* 196.4.
[58] See Peter Brown's now classic discussion of the cult of the dead: Brown 1981: 26–32.
[59] Aug. *Conf.* 6.2.
[60] *ut herbas vel frondes baptizare praesumant*, Atto, *Serm.* 13 (*PL* 134.851A).
[61] Klingshirn 1994: 225; it is less clear to me than to Klingshirn, however, that the Provençal Christians had moved this practice from its original practice on the night of 21/22 June, as there is a lack of evidence that this date was indeed understood as the solstice at this point. Klingshirn's approach is more nuanced than that of Filotas 2005: 175: 'If the substance of the rituals is solidly pagan, the form has taken on a largely Christian cast.'

return again to Meredith B. McGuire, in her monograph *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, who writes: 'The diffuseness of the sacred and its interpenetration with the profane in people's everyday lives were . . . due, in large part, to how thoroughly a complex series of calendrical rituals structured those lives.'[62] An expansive definition of 'ritual' is most useful here: broadly speaking, rituals allow for the intersection of the sacred and the profane through practice. Rituals did not just *reflect* the diverse and changing religious landscape but also contributed to its ongoing transformation. The blending activity involved in the celebration of the festival of the nativity of John the Baptist is familiar,[63] and concepts such as 'creolization' (an important theme in post-colonial scholarship') and 'bricolage' (an influential term in post-structural scholarship and cultural studies, including, of course, the analysis of popular culture) are also appropriate here.[64] Ultimately rituals enable groups and individuals alike to both express and negotiate – and sometimes contest – important elements of their social relations and their views of what we could call the 'cosmic order'.[65] In late antiquity both the performance and meanings of ritual were frequently both challenged and reshaped, as we see in several examples across this book.

Bishops and other ecclesiasts responded to the religious adaptations and behaviours of their congregations with what we might see as a sliding scale of permissiveness. Augustine and Caesarius certainly both stood at the stricter end of the scale. Ecclesiastical responses to the *lampadarium dies* undoubtedly varied.[66] Augustine strongly railed against the torchlit procession in Carthage, as we saw, while 'Pseudo-Fulgentius' lamented the very existence of the *lampadarium dies*, proclaiming that those who named it thus themselves remained in the midst of darkness.[67] However, the author of the anonymous sermon edited by Dolbeau and Étaix is willing to make a much more positive use of the metaphor. This preacher gives what the editors call a 'spiritualised reading' of the celebrations: he

[62] McGuire 2008: 29.

[63] See McGuire 2008: 192: 'all religions are necessarily syncretic, and continually changing, as people try to make sense of their changing social worlds, including other cultures with which they come in contact'. However, in a thought-provoking intervention, David Frankfurter has recently reclaimed the term 'syncretism' in a way which allows for shifting and blending, as 'a creative process, the work of agents', Frankfurter 2017: 15–20 (15).

[64] McGuire 2008: 193–5; for the original concept, see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16–35. Robert Orsi, indeed, in his contribution to a collected volume on lived religion comments that '[t]he authors in this volume propose what may be considered a postcolonial study of religion': Orsi 1997: 18.

[65] See Bell 1997; compare Bloch 1986: 77.

[66] As noted in Dolbeau and Étaix 2003.

[67] Ps. Fulgentius, *Serm.* 56.

seemingly accepts the ritual without reserve, happily making the link to John the Baptist explicit.[68] In this instance we can see a collaborative process of religious adaptation and construction in progress, across both laity and clergy. This was the kind of process that Caesarius continually rejected but that would ultimately account for the success and persistence of the John the Baptist rituals in Provence and elsewhere.[69]

The festival of the nativity of John the Baptist clearly worked on various levels, and surely herein lay the reason for its success and longevity. Its connection with calendrical and seasonal rhythms, particularly its association with the agricultural year, was obviously crucial. As we have seen, metaphor can be very powerful. The image of John the Baptist as a torch, lighting the way for Christ and the harvest alike, persisted in clerical discourse – which we should probably understand as a way of sanctioning local practices through association with the cult of the saints. The image of the blade cutting the ear of corn, just as it cut off the head of the saint, was also resonant. Brent Shaw's in-depth study of the metaphor of reaping in the ancient world is suggestive here. Shaw comments: 'A strong connection was being struck between a text that reflected the tropes of everyday life and which connected the preacher's words with the daily experiences of the person hearing them.'[70] Shaw cites the work of Pierre Bourdieu, specifically his fieldwork in late North Africa, which formed the basis for his important book *The Logic of Practice*. Bourdieu observed the *habitus* through the seasons and the agricultural work cycle, and saw that this, in Shaw's words, 'formed a work-thought world in which people live' and 'a pattern of experiential knowledge that was represented to the villagers themselves as an annual cycle'.[71] For a religious system and its component rituals to be successful, it needed to be embedded in this thought-world and in this cycle.[72]

To counter-pose this, I want briefly to consider a case that shows the difficulty that rituals that were imposed *top-down* could face in acceptance. The ritual that later became widely known as 'the rogations' was based on an ecclesiastical ritual of purification and atonement involving a full three days of fasting, sermons and processions, performed not just by the clergy but by the entire Christian community.[73] As has often been discussed,

[68] Dolbeau and Étaix 2003: especially 253.
[69] Frankfurter 2017 demonstrates precisely this process across a number of instances in late antique Egypt.
[70] Shaw 2013: 196. [71] Bourdieu 1990; Shaw 2013: 179.
[72] On the widespread use of agricultural metaphors in preaching, see Clark 2001 and Dossey 2010: 151–3.
[73] See Ristuccia 2018 for an appropriately cautious book-length study of the festival and its role in the historiography of christianization.

one version of the ritual first gained traction during a period of political and military upheaval in Gaul, in the last quarter of the fifth century. Sidonius Apollinaris wrote to his friend Mamertus, bishop of Vienne, in 473, a time of crisis when the Gothic armies were once again close at hand. Sidonius wrote that he had followed Mamertus' practices and imported the new ritual of the rogations himself: 'Our only present help we find in those rogations which you introduced and this is the reason why the people of Clermont refuse to recede, though terrors surge about them on every side.'[74] According to Sidonius, the rituals in Vienne had successfully stopped disasters, ranging from earthquakes to packs of wild animals. Sidonius was hoping that these propitiatory rites would preserve his own congregation from the depredations of the Gothic armies. We can see further that Sidonius was not the only bishop to find the rituals effective: rogations were sanctioned for the whole of Gaul at the Council of Orléans in 511.[75]

Scholars have tried to find deeper roots for the various rogation rituals of late antiquity and the middle ages, for instance attempting to link them with the rural Italian festival of Robigalia, which fits the dates, taking place on 24 April. The Robigalia sought to protect the crops from the dangerous *numen* Robigus; however, there is no sign that this festival ever made it to Gaul.[76] An alternative connection has been made with the lustration rite of Ambarvalia, which involved purifications and processions in both the city and the countryside, but again proof is lacking – especially for Gaul.[77] Nonetheless, it is very unlikely that the clergy invented the ceremonials entirely *ex nihilo* rather than building on, indeed *appropriating*, existing rituals of procession and circumambulation, some of which were examined earlier.[78] Appropriation worked in both directions.

Nonetheless, the evidence from our period suggests that bishops had some difficulty bedding in their newly constructed ritual, despite its appropriated elements. Our ecclesiastical sources demonstrate a strong conviction that *everyone* needed to participate in order for the ritual to be effective. The canon from Orléans specifically requires the participation of the entire community, including slaves, while other sources stress the participation of both the aristocracy and even royalty.[79] Caesarius goes so

[74] Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 7.1.2; compare *Ep.* 5.14. [75] Conc. Aurel. a.511 can. 27.
[76] See Nathan 1998: 280–1; on Robigalia, see Scullard 1981: 108–9.
[77] See Nathan 1998: 281–3; see Fahey 2002: 332–56 on the Ambarvalia as well as other rural religious rites in late antiquity; Ristuccia 2018: 63–96 is appropriately sceptical.
[78] A point stressed by David Frankfurter (pers. comm.); for similar appropriations in late antique Egypt, see Frankfurter 2017: 248–52.
[79] Conc. Aurel. a.511 can. 27; Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 5.14; Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 9.21.

far as to claim that leaving church during rogation ceremonies would be akin to deserting an army in the midst of battle: this suggests both how seriously he took the notion of total participation and the difficulty he had in getting his congregation to participate as required.[80] One of the Eusebius Gallicanus preachers states outright that not everyone in the congregation is participating properly: some are abstaining, some are even expressing scepticism.[81] Gregory of Tours for his part includes several accounts of processions that did not go smoothly.[82] Rogation rituals required the entire Christian community to act as one, under the leadership of their bishop, to atone together for communal transgressions, but it is not difficult to see that the process was not always smooth or successful. As Lisa Bailey comments on these cases: '[l]ay people did not always concur with clerical perspectives and a multiplicity of interpretations and responses were possible even within a pious Christian framework'.[83] Even more pointedly, we could suggest that members of congregations were showing their resistance to participating in these clearly lengthy and somewhat wearing rituals that had been imposed on them. However, we can scarcely see the rogations as a case of 'ritual failure' in the longer term: the ritual would ultimately become a long-standing feature of the liturgical year with a smoothed-out linear account in ecclesiastical and liturgical history.

As we have already seen, the rituals of the nativity of St John the Baptist would also have a long history, with the accumulation of new aspects and interpretations. But for now we shall turn to my second case study, in which we can again see lived religion in operation in the late antique countryside, this time looking at the role of materiality, as well as ritual practices.

Appropriating Objects: Dealing with Hail

This time I shall begin with an account, this time from the *Vita* of Caesarius, of the following 'very famous' miracle, which occurred on an estate in the hill range of the Alpilles:

> Ceaseless bad weather kept destroying the property of a very noble man. The rain was most destructive, and powerful hailstorms devoured all the produce of the area. Every year, therefore, there was no hope of assistance for the place. It then happened that Caesarius's staff was left there again by chance.

[80] *Serm.* 207.2. [81] *Eus. Gall.* 25.2–3. [82] For example, Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 9.6.
[83] Bailey 2016: 115; Bailey's discussion of the rogations nicely picks up the fissures in the smooth picture of episcopal and ritual success given by Nathan 1998.

> The owner ordered a cross to be made from this staff [*de qua virga possessor ipse crucem fieri iussit*], and armed by his faith, he then put it up in a prominent place, so that the staff of the disciple and the cross of the master [*virga discipuli, crux magistri*] might counteract the arrival of the hailstones. The same God deigned to work so great a miracle, in honour of his servant, that after he had driven away the bad weather he made the place very fertile.[84]

This is one of a number of instances in the second part of the *Vita* that deal with miracles effected by Caesarius, whether alive or dead, particularly through the medium of his possessions;[85] it is moreover the second miracle effected by his left-behind staff.[86] What is especially interesting about this specific miracle is the way in which it can be paralleled with other practices and indeed objects.

Hail was a feared phenomenon in the pre-modern world.[87] Although only one of a range of persistent but potentially devastating environmental perils that threatened agriculture and viticulture, we can see how remedies targeted hail above all. Moreover, our evidence suggests it was the most dangerous phenomenon in our own region. As a significant sub-category of protective measures taken in a broadly agricultural context, a whole range of remedies against hail were used in the ancient Mediterranean, some of which, as detailed by the classical agronomists, are rather hair-raising (one practice mentioned by the late antique agronomist Palladius involved crucifying an owl).[88] As well as the performance of rituals, and the recitation of spells, more permanent solutions included the use of inscribed objects (charms, talismans, amulets, phylacteries – various terms are possible) in situ. These inscribed objects sought to banish the demonic force/s

[84] *V. Caes*. 2.27.

[85] Several of these miracles are facilitated by the agency of the bishop's clergy, who seem, as has been noted (e.g. by de Nie 1997: 179), to have been much keener on miracles and relics than Caesarius himself.

[86] In *V. Caes*. 2.22 Caesarius' staff is hung from the wall in a bathhouse (in the otherwise unknown parish of Succentriones) which was occupied by demons, where it successfully exorcised them for good; see Klingshirn 1994: 161–7.

[87] Rituals and remedies against hail can be found across a wide variety of locations and periods; William Christian gives fascinating accounts from early modern Spain of what were clearly very common practices, employed against a very regular scourge: Christian 1981: 29–30, 33–4, 45–6, 128. Bérenger-Féraud 1983: 288–98 discusses storm -conjuring beliefs and practices in nineteenth-century Provence. Even today the potential seriousness of hail should not be under-estimated: severe hailstorms in the summer of 2018 caused grave damage to the wine-growing regions of Bordeaux and Charentais and, most shockingly, caused the death of a child who was hit by a fallen branch. In Georgia, meanwhile, anti-hail rockets (which cause potential hail showers to fall as less harmful rain) are employed to protect the grapes and other crops in the wine-growing Kakheti region.

[88] For a comprehensive discussion, see Fernández Nieto 2010; for the owl: Palladius, *Op. Ag.* 1.35.2.

seen as responsible for hail. A number of these devices have been found, hailing from different areas of the Mediterranean, made variously from metal, lead and clay.[89] Some appear to have been buried for the purpose of efficacy, often on the boundaries of fields/vineyards, although others have holes, allowing them to be hung up, like Caesarius' staff.[90]

We have two surviving examples of inscribed hail charms from southern France, albeit dating from an earlier period; that is, from the second century CE. These tablets are made of bronze and are small in size (8 × 13.4 cm and 5 × 6.4 cm, respectively); one of them seems to have been affixed to something, judging by the hole in its centre.[91] They are inscribed not in Latin but in Greek, and seek to claim the assistance of the otherwise unknown power Oamoutha, together with the more familiar demon Abraxas. Roy Kotansky suggests that the tablets were made in the same workshop; one of them is personalized with a name, which we can assume to be the name of the vineyard owner, one Julius Pervincus. Late antique examples which are more directly comparable with the staff-charm have been found in other areas of the Mediterranean, including North Africa, Spain and Sicily. What we have here then are late antique adaptations of a widespread ancient practice.[92]

A late antique lead cross from ancient Furnos Maius in Tunisia, considerably larger than the tablets just discussed (it measures 34 cm in height, 35 cm across the arms), was clearly designed to be hung up, as indicated by piercings made at the top and bottom.[93] A significant part of the power of the charm was derived from its cross shape. In the case of Caesarius' staff-charm, its particular materiality, as a cross made from an episcopal staff, was doubly powerful. The staff (*baculus*) itself was a well-known symbol or indeed attribute of divine power: two of the inscribed hail charms analysed by Francisco Javier Fernández Nieto refer to staffs in this way.[94] The text

[89] Lead is often associated with 'black' magic: Giannobile and Jordan 2006: 74.

[90] Hail charms are collected and analysed in Fernández Nieto 2010. These charms are a sub-category of a range of measures aimed at protecting the harvest from whatever climatic challenges might arise. Examples come from across the ancient and late ancient world, but are especially prominent in Sicily, on which see Bevilacqua and Giannobile 2000 and Mastrocinque 2004.

[91] *IG* XIV 2481 (and fragmentary XIV 2494): Kotansky 1994: IIa and b, pp. 46–52; *IG* XIV 2481 is pierced.

[92] Fernández Nieto 2010 stresses continuity of practice with earlier examples; less convincing, given the evidence, is the argument of Gordon and Marco Simón that these charms are 'a primarily Christian phenomenon, encouraged by the specific exemption of such ritual efforts from suspicion of magic': Gordon and Marco Simón 2010: 38.

[93] See Audollent 1939: 36; these piercings were made after the engraving of the charm's text, which will be discussed later.

[94] See Fernández Nieto 2010: 580–2: a text from Cilicia asks Mercury to destroy locusts with *sacrosancta virga tua*, while one from Carrio in Spain refers to *meus dominissimus scetru manu*

from the *Vita* does not mention any text having been inscribed on the Alpilles staff-charm. Caesarius himself, of course, would clearly have strongly disapproved of the texts inscribed on these objects due to their entirely typical blend of invocations of a combination of angelic, demonic and other powers.[95]

Individuals and communities did their best to protect themselves against natural hazards, using a variety of available means. A range of literary evidence testifies to the role of clerics – and indeed saints – in the battle against hail. Gallic hagiographical texts include a number of stories in this vein, whereby saints prevented dramatic storms of various kinds, thus demonstrating their powers as thaumaturges.[96] Gregory of Tours tells how he himself was able to stop a dramatic storm with the aid of a gold medallion that contained saints' ashes, an object which had belonged to his father.[97] Again we see how *objects* seem to be especially effective in transmitting divine power. In the eastern Mediterranean, Theodore of Sykeon erected crosses to prevent hail on several occasions, his hagiographer giving a helpfully full account. We are told how the saint prevented hail from attacking vineyards in the village of Reake with a ritual that included a procession of supplication and a circumambulation – a common element in anti-hail rituals – of the relevant areas[98] and also involved placing a wooden cross at each of the four angles of the boundary line, the standard location for such charms.[99] Holy men did not necessarily need to use objects in order to stop hail – and in most cases we simply do not know what they used – but for other members of the community, generally less gifted with supernatural and charismatic powers, material charms were clearly highly valued.

The cross was a highly powerful symbol to be used against such a feared element as hail, but often those making or commissioning protective objects would choose to maximize the protective power available by adding other special symbols. The cross from Furnos Maius was inscribed with a large quantity of 'text', covering most of its surfaces, and including

(sic). According to Fernández Nieto, staffs were seen as 'powerful instruments' working through 'the principle of correspondence'.

[95] See, for instance, Caesarius preaching against charms, for example *Serm*. 50.1, 51.4, 52.1; compare 47.5 complaining about drinking toasts to angels and saints.

[96] Told of Martin of Tours (Sulp. Sev. *Dialogi* 3.7.3), Germanus of Auxerre (Const. Lyon, *V. Germani* 13) and Julian of Brioude (Greg. Tur. *De virtutibus sancti Juliani*, 6).

[97] Greg. Tur. *Glor. mart.* 83, also recounting how his mother had put out a fire in the same way.

[98] On circumambulation as a 'magical practice', see Filotas 2005: 122–4.

[99] *V. Theod.* 52; Trombley 1993: 132–3 describes this as making a 'magic circle'; Theodore also said a prayer and erected a cross at Skoudris and at Apoukomis in Galatia, *V. Theod.* 144.

powerful symbols at certain emphatic points, notably at the extremities. The pentagram symbol is repeated no fewer than nine times on the object: whether these iterations signify some specific ritual act in relation to the text (i.e. was the object's 'user' meant to cross his or herself, while reciting the text?) we cannot know, but they are certainly very prominent visually. On one of the sides of this double-sided object the inscription begins with a pentagram, and then a cross (a so-called Greek cross). Indeed, pentagrams appear on a number of objects of this kind.[100]

The rituals for dealing with hail also involved a number of performative elements alongside the use of inscribed objects: speech acts in the forms of prayers/incantations[101] and ritual movements and or/gestures. The text inscribed on the lead cross from Tunisia tells us that its owner (presumably) was required to stand on the spot and turn a full circle before repeating the exorcism formula three times.[102] In the case of Theodore of Sykeon, bodily movement and material object worked together to encircle and define the protected area.[103] In the *Vita* of St Columba the saint used human markers in the form of four 'devout individuals' to mark out the area: *Ille quattuor plenos religione viros per quattuor angulos messis praeponit*.[104] Here we see just a few iterations of local lived religion: the construction of ritual practices combining adaptation, appropriation and improvisation.

A whole range of ritual practices, blending diverse elements, were widely accepted as legitimate protection against hail in late antiquity. A law of Constantine's against *magia* (which we should probably translate in this context as 'sorcery') explicitly *excluded* 'innocent' remedies against hailstorms – which, the law states, sought to protect divine gifts and human labour alike – from punishment.[105] This law was then re-issued in the *Codex Justinianus*, somewhat strikingly given its generally harsher legal

[100] See Fernández Nieto 2010: 590–1: 'the partiality for [the pentagram] felt by Christian talismans, shared only by the chi-rho symbol is due to the . . . fact that the pentagram enjoyed enormous prestige as protection because it was the pattern on Solomon's seal, the scourge of demons. For this reason, the star usually opens and closes the exorcism, rendering it protected and sealed from beginning to end'.

[101] The classic article remains Tambiah 1968.

[102] Fernández Nieto 2010 : 464; on the special power of the number three, see, for instance, Lease 1919.

[103] *V. Theod*. 52; the marking out of boundaries for protective purposes is well known: Maximus of Turin claimed that the field boundaries in his region were dotted with 'diabolical altars . . . profane auguries of the pagans . . . or the heads of animals', Max. Tur. *Serm.* 91 *extr.*2.

[104] *V. Columb*. 1.18 (*MGH SRM* 4: 78), as discussed in Trombley 1993: 132–3.

[105] *aut in agrestibus locis, ne maturis vindemiis metuerentur imbres aut ruentis grandinis lapidatione quaterentur, innocenter adhibita suffragia, quibus non cuiusque salus aut existimatio laederetur, sed quorum proficerent actus, ne divina munera et labores hominum sternerentur*, *CTh* 9.16.3; see Graf 2015: 273–5 on this distinction. This law also included the apparently similarly harmless *remedia humanis quaesita corporibus*.

response to magic.[106] However, the fate of this law was distinctively different in Alaric's *Breviarium* of 506, a document hailing (as it were) from southern Gaul.[107] Although the law itself was repeated verbatim, an *interpretatio* that was added refers specifically to a different sort of hail magic, not this time a technique that sought to avert to prevent storms but rather one that sought to *conjure* them. Rather than making an exception, this text tends in quite the opposite direction: 'Magicians, enchanters or conjurors of storms, or those who through the invocation of demons disturb the minds of men, shall be punished with every kind of punishment.'[108] That is, storm conjurors (*immissores tempestatum*) are specifically singled out for punishment.

All of these instances remind us of the huge importance of the weather to an agrarian society and the strong imperative to protect the harvest by any means necessary. How then might we understand the distinctive injunction of the *Breviarium*? We might (as others have done) see the lawmakers of the Visigothic kingdom as reflecting a particular interest in religious orthodoxy and a specific concern around witchcraft.[109] In fact, the stipulation of the *Breviarum* takes us back to the concerns of the earliest sources for Roman law: the *Twelve Tables* specified the highest penalty for those who used spells or incantations to attack or steal the harvest of a neighbour.[110] The passage from the *Breviarum* reminds us that there were two sides to being a 'cloud driver' or *tempestarius*: the ability to 'conjure' storms was just as sought after as the power to *stop* them, although evidently much more controversial.[111] We can also see a range of interpretations in late antiquity as to who exactly was to blame for hailstorms: whether sorcerers, demons or the Devil himself – or indeed a vengeful holy man. Gregory of Tours' ability to make the

[106] *CJ* 9.18.4; see Graf 2015: 286.

[107] See Mathews 2010 for helpful discussion of the *Interpretationes*.

[108] *Malefici vel incantatores vel immissores tempestatum vel ii, qui per invocationem daemonum mentes hominum turbant, omni poenarum genere puniantur*, *Brev.* 9.13.1.

[109] Graf 2015: 286 suspects the influential hand of ecclesiasts and comments that this exegesis 'reflects practice and legal thought of a time and place that obviously was more attuned to accepting demonic intervention in human affairs than the imperial law-givers were'. This *interpretatio* is also discussed by Matthews 2010: 455, noting not just the removal of the exception and the introduction of the 'summoner of tempests' but also the inclusion of 'invocation of demons', a phrase not used in the original Code, which Matthews sees as 'reflecting a distinctly more everyday kind of Christianization than that pervasive in the fourth century'. The later Visigothic *Forum Iudicum* would threaten *immissores tempestorum* with a public flogging, shaving of the head and further public shaming: see Flint 1991: 110–11.

[110] See Rives 2002 and Bailliot 2020: 176–9, both discussing the testimony of Pliny, *NH* 28.17–18 and Seneca the Younger, *NQ* 4.7.2.

[111] See Trombley 1985: 341 for references to *nephodioktai*, up to the Quinisextum Councli of 692 (Constantinople).

clouds miraculously part with his charm showed him to be 'a *tempestarius* par excellence', as Yitzak Hen comments;[112] even more worthy of the title was the eastern holy man Theodore of Sykeon, who conjured, as well as prevented, storms. On an occasion (notably *not* included in the English translation of his *Life*!) Theodore summoned hail to fall on the crops of the residents of the village of Halios because they had failed to follow his injunctions regarding a local dispute he had been called upon to adjudicate.[113]

As we are thinking about lived religion as a form of popular culture, it is time to probe more deeply into the various social and economic issues and tensions at stake in both hail rituals and their prohibition. Acceptance of the efficacy of objects and rituals to protect the land from hail was clearly shared widely across society throughout antiquity and late antiquity, as we have seen. Even wealthy and high-status individuals had an interest in procuring protection of their crops from hail. Sulpicius Severus claimed that a landowner of 'praefectorial status' sent an embassy to Martin of Tours when hail storms affected his fields particularly badly.[114] Caesarius' hagiographers stress that the *baculus*-cross was set up against the hail by a *nobilissimus* landowner.[115] (Although we might suspect that they are keen to emphasize this in order to stress the respectability of the incident.) The bronze tablets and the late antique crosses that we looked at earlier clearly required financial resources and access to ritual expertise alike.[116] However, the danger posed by hail to income was of course proportionally much greater for tenants or for small landowners, of whom there were many. With reference to the case of the grape harvest, for instance, in Chapter 3 we looked at the evidence for ownership and stewardship of small parcels of vineyard, often known as *vineolae*, by the non-elite, including former slaves.[117] If we move forward in time, into the Carolingian period,

[112] Hen 2015: 201.

[113] *V. Theod*. 150; the hagiographer does not specifically say that Theodore called the storm but remarks that the villagers realized that the storm had been caused by their refusal to obey the holy man's orders, and also that they did not scorn him again; see further Fernández Nieto 2010: 578. Elsewhere, the hagiographer notes how Theodore received payment for stopping the hail at other villages in the form of a yearly tribute of wine and grapes, both at Reake and at Apoukoumis: *V. Theod*. 52 and 144, discussed by MacMullen 1997: 136–7; Trombley 1993: 132–3; Aberth 2013: 23.

[114] *praefectorium virum*, Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 3.7.

[115] *V. Caes*. 2.27.

[116] Fernández Nieto, discussing the inscribed metal cross from Visigothic Asturia, suggests that '[w]e can surely detect here the hand of a well-to-do, far from unsophisticated Christian landowner, perhaps a priest': Fernández Nieto 2010: 597.

[117] See p. 98.

we can get a fascinating and suggestive insight into how different social and economic interests might have intersected around hail rituals.

Around the years 815–17 the reformist Carolingian cleric Agobard of Lyon wrote a treatise specifically to counter belief in the power of *tempestarii* to cause storms.[118] According to Agobard, it was widely believed that the *tempestarii* could both prevent and provoke storms by means of incantations, and were paid (off) with a part of the produce, a payment known as the *canonicum*. Paul Edward Dutton has made the fascinating suggestion that here we glimpse early medieval peasants acting strategically in their own financial interest. Agobard complains that people were willing to pay the *canonicum* but were far less willing to pay their tithes or alms. Dutton suggests that peasants might have made accusations of hail-conjuring as a pretext for avoiding unwelcome exactions: 'one has to wonder, in view of the popular resentment of and occasional resistance to taxation, if the tribute paid to the weather-makers was not effectively an anti-tithe, the means precisely for peasants to avoid paying tithes'.[119]

At this point we can recall the passage in Caesarius' *Sermo* 33 on tithing, where the preacher suggests to an imagined reluctant tithe-giver that if his harvest failed due to a lack of rain, or an excess of hail or frost, this would be *because of* his refusal to pay tithes, exacted by God himself.[120] According to the sermon, this exacting is a 'most just custom' – but it would not necessarily have seemed that way to his congregation. While Caesarius' congregation could probably in fact have avoided the church tithe without too much difficulty or risk (despite such threats of heavenly retribution), what about the more demanding exactions of landlords? Agobard's text involves a much-discussed fantastical and ultimately rather shaggy dog tale about an attempted assault on four outsiders who were supposed to be 'aerial sailors', in league with the *tempestarii*. Dutton suggests that the villagers had in fact secreted a large portion of wheat away from the eyes of the lord and the church and were using this story to avoid exaction of the harvest.[121] This can only be speculation but offers an intriguing instance to help us think about ways in which peasants could use 'lived religion' to their own advantage, a theme to which we will return.

We have seen that a wide cross-section of rural society was involved with beliefs and rituals as regards weather rituals. What can we say about the

[118] *Liber contra insulsam vulgi opinionem de grandine et tonitruis*: 'A book against the foolish belief of the people regarding hail and thunder', it survives in a single manuscript; see L. Van Acker (ed.), *Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia Corpus Christianorum*, Cont. Mediaevalis 52, 1981: 3–15. Helpful discussions of the text, offering varying interpretations, include Blöcker 1981, Dutton 2004 and Meens 2013.

[119] Dutton 2004: 128. [120] Caes. *Serm.* 33.2. [121] Dutton 2004: 128–9.

tempestarii themselves, and others like them? While some have seen them as independent operators, acting as rivals to the church, Rob Meens suggested the Carolingian *tempestarii* were themselves priests.[122] This seems quite probable given the persistent association of clerics with divination and amulet production as seemingly profitable side-lines.[123] However, our sources also suggest that many ritual practitioners were of sub-elite or non-elite status: it was as such that they could be so easily disparaged by our literary texts and so summarily dealt with by the legal authorities.[124] Certainly, legal and ecclesiastical strictures focused most of their ire, and their punishments, on those of lesser status. Caesarius ordered the beating of those consulting 'sorcerers, diviners or enchanters' (*caraios . . . et divinos vel praecantatores inquirere*), as well as those using various types of amulets: 'devilish phylacteries, magical signs, herbs or amber' (*fylacteria etiam diabolica, characteres aut herbas vel sucinos*).[125] The Council of Narbonne in 589 dealt with the misdeeds of 'diviners': it prescribed excommunication and a large fine of six gold *solidi* but also specified severe punishments for specifically low-status practitioners: 'Whether freed people or slaves or maid-servants [*liberi . . . servi . . . ancille*], let them be publicly and severely beaten and sold, and let the money be distributed to the poor.'[126]

As we found in Chapter 4, if we attempt to map individual religious or indeed social practices onto social status, it generally becomes clear that discursive distinctions are based not on practice as such but rather on relative authority, status and *power*. People of all classes used such remedies as they could against hail and other natural calamities. We began with Caesarius' episcopal staff, left behind on a pastoral visit to the Alpilles, *appropriated* by the local landowner. This is in fact the second episode in the *Vita* in which the episcopal *baculus* was forgotten: it was forgotten earlier during a visit to a church property (*agrum ecclesiae nostrae*) at an otherwise unknown site called Succentriones.[127] A seemingly abandoned

[122] Meens 2013: 163–4 versus, for example, Blöcker 1981: 125: 'unabhängige Dorfzauberer' (independent village magicians).

[123] Canonical provisions go back to the Council of Laodicea 360 can. 36; in late antique Gaul, see *Statuta ecclesia antiqua* can. 83; Venet. a. 461–91 can. 16; Agath. a.506 can. 42; Aurel. a.511 can. 30; see for discussion Klingshirn 2005: 113–14, but especially Barcellona 2012: 183–220; Poulin 1979. The association of clerics with fabricating amulets also appears more widely, for example Caes. *Serm.* 50.1; *V. Elig.* 2.16. On scribal practices related to amulets, see De Bruyn 2017 and Skemer 2006.

[124] See here Jones 2010: 284–6, 322–3.

[125] *Serm.* 13.5.

[126] *seu liberi seu servi vel ancille sint, gravissime publice fustigentur et venundentur, et pretia ipsorum pauperibus erogentur*, Conc. Narb. a.589 can. 14; see Jones 2010: 322–3.

[127] *V. Caes.* 2.22: the narrator recounts that it was in fact his own duty as accompanying clerk to carry the staff, a duty he confesses to having neglected. See p. 106 on Succentriones.

bathhouse was haunted by a demon or demons inciting terror throughout the vicinity by throwing stones and calling out the names of passers-by. We are told that the inhabitants of the estate (*incolae loci illius*) – no other designation is given – were delighted to take possession of the episcopal staff, which they proceeded to hang from the wall of the bathhouse, from where it repelled the 'devil's snare', just as it repelled hail in the Alpilles. It seems likely that these 'inhabitants' were low-status tenants or *coloni*, as they are given no high-status designation,[128] and it is interesting to see how they were, even if by default, able to appropriate the very symbol of episcopal authority – and use it to construct their own local Christianity,[129] very much on the model of 'lived religion.' In the previous chapter we viewed the people of the *territorium* of Arles through the prism of the 'Caesarian' corpus, which depicted an activist bishop on a mission to discipline the bodies and activities of the inhabitants. In this chapter, even through partial chinks, we can gain more of a sense of the ways in which these inhabitants themselves responded to and adapted for themselves the discourses and rituals offered by the bishop and his church. These responses were shaped by social and economic structures and the local environment alike.

What, then, does the response to hail tell us about lived religion and popular culture in late antique southern Gaul? Clearly, and indeed unsurprisingly, we find no segregated 'popular' religion. Instead, we see a range of actors, individuals and communities, using objects and rituals, appropriating and blending, taking elements from above and below, in order to construct their versions of 'lived religion'. As we have seen, actors of different social status and indeed gender were often liable to have their activities represented in distinct ways – as variously authorized or deauthorized, accordingly. This is not to say that we need to assume that non-elites were always going to be the losers. Following the examples and suggestions in this chapter, we can posit agency in the cases of peasants using magical accusations to their own advantage (as with Agobard), or using the patronage of holy men as it suited with them (as with Theodore),[130] or even appropriating the bishop's very symbol of authority (as with Caesarius' staff). On occasion, of course, these could be risky strategies for the relatively powerless. Nonetheless, with Cam Grey's work on the strategies employed by non-elites in the late antique countryside in

[128] Although referring to them as 'a band of rustics', as does Jones 2010: 313, might be going a little too far.
[129] The model suggested by Frankfurter 2017 in his study of late antique Egypt.
[130] See here Trombley 1985.

mind,[131] perhaps we need not always see peasants as entirely without resources, material and supernatural alike. What we can certainly see is that 'lived religion' constituted one of a number of strategies that could be employed as part of popular culture.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have considered a range of aspects of 'lived religion' as a deeply embedded aspect of (late antique) popular culture. I have shown how individuals and communities variously appropriated, created, adapted and even resisted aspects of religion as part of constructing their own forms, as well as through collaboration with others. I began with a famous passage from Gregory of Tours insisting that an episcopal designation of sacrality replaced existing practices embedded in the natural environment – but we saw that the picture was far more complex in practice. Next I explored the theme of adaptation and appropriation in accordance with the natural environment, turning to the field of ritual, by looking at the development of practices associated with the festival of John the Baptist in Provence and North Africa. By contrast, I considered briefly the case of an ecclesiastical ritual, the development of rogations, that seemed to have been less ripe for successful adaptation and more likely to receive lay resistance, albeit low-level. Finally, I took a story of how Caesarius' staff was appropriated into a system of protection against a natural element, envisaged as a powerful and demonic enemy. We saw here how a deeply unequal rural society responded to the threat of crop destruction. Again we could see differing interests – of non-elites, secular and ecclesiastical elites – both converging and conflicting.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that we can use a model of lived religion that is both *analogous to and part of* popular culture. In order to bring out the more distinctively dialectical and oppositional aspects of popular culture, it is time to turn to a new case study. In Chapter 6, I shall build on the themes of this chapter and of Chapter 4 before it. I shall look at the Kalends of January as a focus for the church's attempt to denigrate and shut down popular culture, but also as providing an opportunity both for its exercise and for the possibility of resistance.

[131] See pp. 77–8.