1. The Problem

The perspective taken in this paper is inspired by sociology of religion and recent research at the University of Erfurt on religious individualization. An important perspective onto the individual is indicated by the notion of individuation. Individuation is inseparably bound up with socialisation, both denoting the process whereby a human being becomes a full member of society. The biographical process is realised through socialisation, being integrated into ever larger social contexts (not necessarily in any formal manner), and by the individual’s appropriation of social roles and traditions and more specifically religious roles and traditions. Such an appropriation of religion is pursued discursively in the course of communication between individuals and between individuals and collectivities and in actual, empirically accessible behaviour—both within and without religious contexts. There is a range of possibilities here, variable in space and time, from participation in locally-celebrated rituals, through the creation of epistolary communication networks to convey e.g. reflections on personal stand-points, to the construction in the historiography of “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson; e.g. in Latin and Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam) and the inclusion of concepts of “individuality” and “collectivity” in such identifications. Moves of this kind are often generated by conflict-situations, and such assignments may easily become mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Within this large field, I will concentrate on the two institutions indicated by the title, membership in priesthoods or more general the taking over of a role as religious specialist and associations. The combination is not arbitrary. The widespread model of Roman priestly colleges resembled ordinary collegia in

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1 Kollegforschergruppe “Religious Individualisation in historical perspective” (FOR 1013 financed by the German Science Foundation).
2 For religious socialisation see the comparative study of Hermen 2006.
3 For the notion of appropriation see de Certeau, e.g. Certeau 1988; see Winter 2007.
4 For the notion of network in ancient religions see Remus 1996.
5 For the concept see Turner 1968; Rüpke 1996.
many respects. At the same time both enabled male and female individuals to develop a specific religious identity among their other identities, a sort of religious individuality.

The use of concepts that are not only modern, but imbued even by Eurocentric and specifically modernising associations is without alternatives, but asks for dealing with a few possible objections, before I address the history of scholarship and review historical developments within the field as is the specific task of this volume.

1) Religious individuation, even religious individuality does not imply the individual's wish to be different. Quite to the contrary, it is rather sure to say for the period under consideration that being different was not a "value of individuality" informing individuation. Dignity and honour were such values, notions of competition, being better than others in certain respects, or even being perfect. Religious practices might be among fields of competition, in euergetic engagement, in display of a cultured taste, in intensive relationships with a deity—but the balance was always delicate, too much could be regarded as deviant and superstitiosus.

2) Is it legitimate to talk about "religious" as a separate category at all? On the one hand, John Scheid has shown that every college had a religious dimension, engaged in cult. On the other hand, even colleges that seem to be primarily religious on the basis of their name display a profile of activities that was not religious beyond such minimal elements. Many Ancient Historians have analysed priesthoods as above all elements of a political or administrative career. As far as religious duties are concerned it would be not easy to tell whether magistrates or so called public priests in Roman or Greek cities were more frequently engaged in the performance of ritual. And yet, the question is not whether an office ontologically is religious, but whether it was seen and appropriated as religious. Here, semantics tell us about contemporary classifications; treatment in honorary inscriptions about individual strategies. Such contemporary classifications need not consent with our notions. Christiani were the followers of the man Christus, either as criminals or as philosophers, not of a god Christus, indicating anti-religious characters rather than religious fanatics. On the whole it was a characteristic of the Imperial period that

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7 See Rüpke 2011a (French version to be published by PUPS).
8 Scheid 2003.
10 See below, 269.