CHAPTER 6

The Kalends of January
The Persistence of Popular Culture[1]

> Are you going to join in today in the celebration of good luck presents [*strenae*] with a pagan [*cum pagano*], going to play at dice with a pagan, going to get drunk with a pagan?[2]
>
> No matter how often you talk, Roman, you will never be able to uproot our customs, but we will continue always and forever to carry on our feasts as we have hitherto. No man will ever be able to forbid us the ancient entertainments that are so dear to us.[3]

This chapter examines one of the most striking phenomena of late antique popular culture: the festival of the Kalends of January. The Kalends, as depicted by an array of evidence, from Gaul as well as from across the Mediterranean world, provides a particularly rich and suggestive case study. The festival contains a number of elements traditionally seen as characteristic of popular culture: masquerade, satire and role reversal, as well as the eating, drinking, dancing and carousing generally involved in festivals. The Kalends is also especially suitable as a case study for *late antique* popular culture in that it seems to be a distinctively *late antique* phenomenon, first rising to prominence in our sources during the fourth century and retaining visibility in the ecclesiastical record until remarkably late on, as we shall see. I shall examine the strategies by which the late antique church sought to delegitimize and ultimately destroy the Kalends, even though seemingly without much success. I shall give an interpretation of the festival with the aid of comparative and theoretical material but also in terms of the prevailing particular social and economic contexts.

[1] Some of the material presented here appeared in an earlier form as Grig 2017c.

[2] *Acturus es hodie celebrationem strenarum cum pagano, lusurus alea cum pagano, inebriaturus es te cum pagano?*, Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26 (Mainz 62).2. Gambling and gaming are also mentioned at *Serm* 196.4 and *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.8.

[3] *Numquam tu, Romane, quamvis haec frequenter taxes, consuetudines nostras evellere poteris, sed sollemnia nostra sicut hactenus fecimus, perpetuo semperque frequentabimus, nec ullus hominum erit, qui priscos atque gratissimos possit nobis umquam prohibere ludos*, *Vita Eligii* 2.20; see Banniard 1992.

Much (if certainly not all) of the material regarding the Kalends comes from ecclesiastical sources, which provide evidence for a long-running campaign against the festival, indicative of the broader campaign against popular culture. Caesarius of Arles comes to the fore once more: as a highly vocal and hugely influential critic of the Kalends, we will find his descriptions and attacks sampled and repeated, again and again, even beyond the end of the first millennium. However, while late antique and early medieval Gaul supply a substantial body of evidence relating to the Kalends and its celebrations, I shall supplement this with material relating to the festival from elsewhere in the late antique world. While specific local contexts remain very important, it would be foolish to neglect the clearly complementary evidence relating to the celebration of the Kalends in other locations, as well as further relevant comparative 'festive' material.

Looking more widely enables us to build a more polyvalent view of the meaning and significance of the Kalends. I shall also attempt in this chapter to take more of an *insider* view: that is, as part of my analysis, I shall try to understand the celebrations from the inside, in a manner its own participants could recognize, at times reading 'against the grain'. In keeping with the aims of the book, I shall also be looking to interpret the festival in terms of broader theories of popular culture, including the highly influential theory of Carnival. However, my analysis will seek to analyse the Kalends not as an example of 'timeless' popular festivity but as very much historically contingent. As part of this analysis, as with the rest of the book, I shall be seeking to understand the Kalends in terms of its social, economic and cultural contexts and meanings, including what it can tell us about the potential relationship between popular culture and popular resistance, as well as the relationship between popular culture and contemporary social and economic change. In this way, this chapter builds upon the key themes and questions of the book as a whole.

We begin with an overview of the festival in late antiquity before turning to the dominant ecclesiastical critique: that the Kalends was a pagan festival. I then consider various different scholarly approaches, in particular considering the applicability of theories of carnival. Many of the themes thus raised come together in an analysis of the distinctive and much-attacked Kalends masquerades. Next I turn to examine the role of gift exchange, which then widens out to a consideration of the broader social and economic meanings and contexts of the festival as a whole. A conclusion brings together the main themes and questions posed by the festival and its late antique discourses.

The Kalends of January in Late Antiquity

The Kalends of January was a date of long-standing importance in the Roman world and in the Roman official calendar.[4] On 1 January the consuls for the year were sworn in but the public rites lasted three full days, during which time the army, as well as the senate and others, swore an oath of allegiance to the emperor and gave the *vota publica* for his preservation. Donatives were distributed to the army and gifts of various kinds (including tokens, trinkets and silver coins) were given to the people. The New Year was also the occasion of *ludi* and related processions.[5] The Kalends probably constituted one of the *dies fasti*,[6] and a holiday, at least informally;[7] however, its status as a public holiday is first officially attested only in 389, in a law of Theodosius I.[8] The festival of the Kalends was closely associated with Rome and Roman traditions and for the first few centuries of the Roman empire its spread was clearly limited. Dio and Herodian feel the need to explain Kalends customs to their Greek-speaking readership,[9] although we know that celebrations had spread to North Africa by the time of Tertullian.[10] However, the plethora of sources from the fourth and fifth centuries show a wide geographical spread at this point, from locations as far distant as Amaseia (in the Black Sea region),[11] Antioch,[12] Barcelona,[13] Carthage,[14] Milan,[15] Ravenna[16] and

[4] For a full account of the history of the Kalends, see Meslin 1970, to which all recent scholarship is indebted; more recently see too Graf 1998, 2012 and 2015: 128–51; Harris 2011: 11–21; Hawkins 2012; Kaldellis 2012; Latham 2022; on the textual tradition of anti-Kalends polemic, see Harmening 1979: 121–45 and Catarinella 2014.

[5] See Meslin 1970: 53–70 on the civic activities celebrating the Kalends in late antiquity.

[6] As suggested by Ovid, *Fast.* 1.169–70.

[7] Graf 2015: 108, adducing *CTh* 6.4.20 of 372, which ordered praetors to work on 1 January or risk punishment.

[8] *CTh* 2.8.19, issued from Rome in July 389, clearly in careful consultation with the Urban Prefect Ceionius Rufius Albinus: see further Graf 2015: 105–10.

[9] Hdn. 1.16.2; Cass. Dio 57.17.

[10] Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 35 and *De idololatria* 14; visual evidence comes in the form of a third-century calendar mosaic from Thysdrus (Stern 1981: pl. vi.11), discussed further later.

[11] Asterius of Amaseia, *Hom.* 4; see further Driver 1996 and 2005.

[12] John Chrys. *Homily on the Kalends*; Libanius, *Or.* 9; *Description* 5* (see Gibson 2008: 437–41). See further Gleason 1986; Graf 2012; Hawkins 2012. A further text, this time in Syriac, Isaac of Antioch's 'Homily on the Night Vigils at Antioch', has also been discussed as a description of the Kalends: see Gleason 1986: 112.

[13] Pacianus, *Paranesis* 1 (*PL* 13.1081); compare Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 106.

[14] Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26; see Dolbeau 1992; see too *Serm.* 197–8.

[15] Ambrose, *De interpellatione Iob et David* 4[2].1.4 (*CSEL* 32.2.271).

[16] Peter Chrysologus, *Serm* 155 and 155 *bis*; the manuscript and attribution history of these sermons is tricky, as with the output of Chrysologus in general; part of sermon 155 *bis* is known (and often still cited) as the *Homilia de pythonibus. et maleficis*, and as part of the work of Severian of Gabbala, and hence published as such in the *Patrologia Graeca* (*PG* 65.27).

Turin.[17] Ecclesiastical sources from the sixth and seventh centuries and beyond show that Kalends celebrations continued to be widespread, with testimony from Andalusia,[18] Constantinople,[19] Galicia,[20] Lydia[21] and Rome.[22] The continuation of the Kalends in both the Byzantine empire and the Islamic Near East has received recent scholarly attention,[23] but obviously the main focus of this chapter will be on the evidence from late antique and early medieval Gaul, which I shall now consider.

Once again, homiletic critiques of the festival made by Caesarius form the heart of the material from southern Gaul. A brief discussion of the festival comes in *Serm.* 193;[24] briefer still is the mention given as part of a list of profane practices attacked in a sermon sometimes described as *in parochiis necessarius.*[25] It is Caesarius' *Serm.* 192, however, that contains the most extensive, and influential, critique. *Serm.* 192 appears in several important manuscript collections of Caesarius' sermons[26] as well as separately in earlier manuscripts from geographically disparate locations.[27] Caesarius' words appear almost verbatim in the work of Isidore of Seville, showing the transmission of the sermon into Hispania by the seventh century.[28]

[17] Max. Tur. *Serm.* 63 and 98 *extr.* [18] Isidore of Seville, *de off. Ecc* 1.41.

[19] Council of Constantinople 680; Council in Trullo 692 can. 62 (Hefele, *History* 5.232); see further Kaldellis 2012.

[20] Martin of Braga, *De corr. rust.* 10;16; see too the Second Council of Braga 572, can. 73 (Barlow 1950: 123–44).

[21] Lydus, *Mens.* 4.3–9 discusses the festivities, though with a largely antiquarian bent, with reference to Rome.

[22] Boniface, *Ep.* 50 (*MGH Ep.* 3: 301); Conc. romanum a. 743 can. 9 (*MGH Conc.* 2.1: 15–16).

[23] See Graf 2015: 219–24 and Kaldellis 2012 on the Byzantine. See too Connolly 2020 on the continuity of Kalends celebrations in the Islamic Near East even beyond the year 1000, involving its development into a Christian holiday.

[24] Sometimes this sermon appears as one of Augustine's, sometimes ($H^{39.50}$) as the work of Sedatus of Nîmes. Indeed, the sermon is one of those fashioned out of existing material, seemingly that of Sedatus, although the part on the Kalends does read, as Morin says, as authentically Caesarian; see further on Sedatus and the manuscript tradition Verbraken 1978.

[25] *Serm.* 13.5.

[26] It appears, in its appropriate position in the liturgical year, as one of twenty-eight sermons in the eighth-century W (Wirziburgensis) collection, and as one of sixty-eight, alongside *Serm.* 193, in G, which Morin thought had its origin in an Arles scriptorium: see Morin, *Sermones* I *CCSL* 103 p. LXVI, and in Z (eleventh century).

[27] H^{1-3}; also of interest is H^3 (Londiniensis Mus. Brit. Addit. 29,972), in fact part of a dispersed Merovingian manuscript from the late seventh century, dated on palaeographical grounds and assigned to Luxeuil: De Rubeis 2015: 95, although *Serm.* 192 is titled 'epistula s. Augustini de kalendis ianuariis'. H^{39} also includes *Serm.* 193. A very lightly altered version of *Serm.* 192 was ascribed to Bishop Faustinus of Noyon in a northern Gallic collection: see Heuclin 2002.

[28] *Jejunium Kalendarum Januariarum propter errorem gentilitatis instituit ecclesia. Janus enim quidam princeps paganorum fuit, a quo nomen mensis Januarii nuncupatur, quem imperiti homines veluti deum colentes, in religione honoris posteris tradiderunt, diemque ipsum scenis et luxuriae sacraverunt. Tunc enim miseri homines, et, quod peius est, etiam fideles, sumentes species monstruosas, in ferarum habitu transformantur: alii, femineo gestu demutati, virilem vultum effeminant*, Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiaticis officis*, 1.41.1.

That his critique was still influential even much later in the medieval period is evident from the Golden Legend, where Jacob de Voragine directly quotes Caesarius in his text for the Feast of the Circumcision.[29] Jacob ascribes the sermon to Augustine: as common with Caesarius' sermons, the Kalends homilies were not necessarily (or even normally) circulated as the work of the bishop of Arles himself.[30] However, while these two cases do show the transmission and influence of Caesarius' preaching, the most influential Gallic text against the Kalends was in fact (as demonstrated some years ago by Rudolph Arbesmann) a canon from the Synod of Auxerre in northern France. Canon 1 of this synod, dated to between 561 and 605, stated: 'It is prohibited on the Kalends of January to dress as a young calf or a stag or to observe the custom of diabolical *strenae*.'[31]

It was this canon that was frequently repeated in Frankish and insular penitentials.[32] Nonetheless, Auxerre was not the only sixth-century Gallic council to legislate against Kalends practices. The Council of Tours in 567 prescribed fasting and liturgical offices in order to 'stamp out' the pagan habit of the Kalends (*at calcandam gentilium consuetudine*) in one canon,[33] while another attacked the worship of Janus as part of the 'ancient errors' of these same festivities.[34]

Returning to what we know about the festival itself, the celebration of the Kalends in the Roman empire involved both official, public events, put on in imperial centres and large cities by the imperial and civil authorities, and their military counterparts, but also *unofficial* activities, enjoyed across a broad swathe of society. In this way, of course, it functioned like most other Roman festivals, and indeed some of its most characteristic elements seem strikingly similar to those of calendrically adjacent celebrations. Midwinter was a period traditionally marked by extended feasting and celebration. The most obvious point of comparison for historians is the festival of Saturnalia, which ran from 17 to 23 December during the imperial period.[35]

[29] Graesse 1846: 86.

[30] See Arbesmann 1979: 90 as well as the comments of Morin (*Sermones* II: 779).

[31] *Non licet kalendis Ianuarii vetulo aut cervolo facere vel streneas diabolicas observare*, Synod. Dioces. Autiss a. 561–605 can. 1.

[32] Arbesmann 1979: 95–101; it is, however, Caesarius *Serm.* 192.2 that is quoted more or less verbatim in the *Poenitentiale Pseudo-Theodori*, as well as by Isidore: Arbesmann 1979: 105.

[33] Conc. Tur. a.567 can. 18.

[34] *Enimvero quoniam cognovimus nonnullos inveniri sequipedas erroris antiqui, qui kalendas Ianuarii colunt, cum Ianus homo gentilis fuerit, rex quidem, sed esse deus non potuit: quisquis ergo unum Deum Patrem regnantem cum Filio et Spiritu Sancto credit, non potest integer Christianus dici, qui super hoc aliqua de gentilitate custodit*, Conc. Tur. a. 567 can. 23. Compare Second Council of Braga 572, can. 73.

[35] On Saturnalia, see in particular Versnel 1994: 136–227 and Dolansky 2011.

Saturnalia was followed not long after by the Compitalia (3 to 5 January), another festival with a distinctly 'popular' flavour, at least in its urban form.[36] Unlike the Saturnalia, but like the later Kalends celebrations, the Compitalia had its own associated *ludi* in Rome. Compitalia shared several key features with Saturnalia: it involved feasting and household-wide celebrations, and was particularly associated with slaves.[37] It is Saturnalia, however, that looms large in the minds of scholars of popular culture working across many different periods who like to associate it with early modern Carnival, and to assert that it held a comparable symbolic importance in ancient popular culture.[38] It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that so few *ancient* sources link the Kalends with the Saturnalia.[39] While it is clear that the Compitalia was moribund by late antiquity, it seems likely too that the festival of the Kalends overtook the Saturnalia in popularity during this period.[40] An examination of the reasons for the success, and longevity, of the Kalends forms the heart of this chapter.

What did celebrating the Kalends involve? One of the most ubiquitous elements cited is the exchange of *strenae*, 'good luck presents'.[41] These can obviously be compared with the *sigillaria* given at Saturnalia, specifically on *Sigillaria* itself (23 December); *strenae*, like *sigillaria*, were given both horizontally and vertically, encompassing tips from employers and patrons as well as gifts among friends.[42] Gifts could also be edible: dates and honey were

[36] Compitalia was known for its popular dimension during the Late Republic, when it was considered potentially dangerous as such. The *Collegia compitalicia* were abolished in 64 BCE, only to be re-established by Clodius six years later (Cic. *Pis.* 8), then seemingly abolished again, by Caesar, though he gave the *ludi*, while Augustus revived the institution with a new focus. The Compitalia was also a rural festival, marking the end of the agricultural year. See Scullard 1981: 58–69; Lott 2004 33, 35–7, 45–60, 114–15.

[37] Cicero chose not to arrive to visit Pompey at his villa on Compitalia so as not to disturb his slaves' festivities: Cic. *Att.* 7.7.3 (it was an occasion for a companionable walk on another occasion: *Att.* 2.3.4).

[38] References here are legion but see, most influentially, Bakhtin 1968 and Stallybrass and White 1986. I shall return to the relationship between the Kalends, Saturnalia and Carnival later.

[39] A rare exception: Tert. *De idol.* 14; see too Max. Tur. *Serm* 98 *extr.* 1, referring scornfully to *ebrietatem . . . saturnaliam . . . lasciviam kalendarum.* The two festivals are also discussed together, perhaps in confusion, by the *Acts of Dasius*, discussed later.

[40] The Jewish festival of Purim provides an interesting late antique comparison. Purim was the subject of prohibitive imperial legislation in 408: *CTh* 16.8.18. This festival, like the Kalends and Saturnalia, involved jests and mockery, but it was the specific mockery of the Christian faith and its rituals that seemed to concern the authorities, as well as its potential to stir inter-communal tensions: see here Sivan 2008: 144–68.

[41] Glossed by Festus as follows: *Strenam vocamus, quae datur die religioso ominis boni gratia* (410, 21ff.); on the etymology, John Lydus, *De Mensibus* 4.4. Suetonius tells us that Tiberius forbade their exchange (*Tib.* 34.2), during a discussion of the emperor's various frugality measures, designed to characterize him as stingy and joyless; see further Baudy 1987 and Meslin 1970: 39–46.

[42] See here Versnel 1994: 148–9; gifts were also exchanged at other festivals, such as Matronalia: see Scullard 1981: 87; Tert. *De idol.* 14.7.

mentioned by Ovid,[43] fruit was decorated with tinsel according to Asterius of Amaseia[44] and a tasty-sounding honey cake was described by John Lydus.[45] Although less prominent in our sources, lamps could also be exchanged as gifts at New Year: small clay examples survive from Apulia,[46] and Tertullian refers with disapproval to the hanging of lamps at this time.[47] The coins offered ranged greatly in value, from small bronze *asses* to silver *denarii*, and indeed gold *solidi*,[48] and, as we shall see, the exchange of gifts of significant monetary value was a popular subject of attack from Christian critics of the Kalends, who wished the monetary gifts involved to be redirected into Christian almsgiving.

As well as, or instead of, giving presents, the exchange of New Year greetings (known as *vota*) was another crucial feature. There is a delightful illustration of this on the mosaic calendar from Thysdrus in North Africa (Figure 6.1): two male figures, smartly dressed (in their festive best no doubt), greet each other in a New Year's embrace.[49] Asterius of Amaseia makes a close connection between the New Year gift and the New Year kiss – which he sees, in characteristically jaundiced tones, as purely venal in character.[50] These greetings were often as part of door-to-door visits, which formed a prominent part of the celebrations – and a target for much of the clerical disapproval, as we shall see later. Houses were often decorated for the festival. The decoration of doors with (evergreen) laurel garlands is widely mentioned in our texts,[51] and the Thysdrus mosaic depicts a table bearing branches of greenery. Lamps were also hung as part of the festival decorations – even in daylight, as Tertullian complained.[52] A number of other Kalends practices, clearly apotropaic or prognostic in design, will be discussed further later.

Many of the activities described in relation to the Kalends are familiar from festive behaviour in antiquity in general (and indeed from the earlier chapters of this book). It is unsurprising, for instance, to read of (excessive) drinking, as well as of feasting.[53] Tertullian echoed familiar complaints

[43] Ov. *Fast.* 1.187–8. [44] Ast. *Hom.* 4.6.
[45] Lydus, *Mens.* 4.4: Lydus says that these honey cakes replaced the figs of earlier, more frugal times.
[46] See Meslin 1970: 44; Baudy 1987: 27. [47] For example, Tert. *Apol.* 35.
[48] See Meslin 1970: 43–4; claims that *solidii* were exchanged: Max. Tur. 98 *extr.* 2.
[49] See Stern 1981: pl. vi.11.
[50] Ast. *Hom.* 4.3; Max. Tur. *Serm* 98 *extr.* 2 also stresses the venality of the kiss.
[51] For example, Tert. *Apol.* 35; Libanius, *Descr.* 5.7; John Chrys. *In Kalend.* 3; Mart. Brag. *De Corr. rust.* 16; Second Council of Braga 572 can. 73. See further Meslin 1970: 41–2, 73–4.
[52] For example, Tert. *Apol.* 35; he crossly compared the festive decoration of laurels and lamps to rigging one's house up like 'some new brothel' (*habitum alicuius novi lupanaris*)!
[53] For Libanius, excessive eating and drinking are part and parcel of the festival: Lib. *Or.* 9.7; *Descr.* 5.12. John Chrys. *In Kalend.* 2 was less indulgent, complaining about the consumption of unmixed wine all day and night; Caesarius criticizes excessive drinking and wishes his congregation would fast instead: *Serm.* 193.3. Filotas 2005: 162–4 notes that early medieval texts pay less attention to drinking

Figure 6.1 Depiction of January on the mosaic calendar from El Djem, now at the Musée archéologique de Sousse. Photograph: Alamy.

about popular culture when he complained that Kalends revellers turned the whole city into 'nothing but a tavern'.[54] For moralizing preachers, as we have already seen, drinking was invariably associated with general dissipation, with lust, with 'bawdy' singing and with immodest dancing.[55] Opportunities for licence, and role reversal for slaves specifically, so characteristic of the Saturnalia, are less prominent in accounts of the Kalends.[56] However, laughter, jesting and general licence do seem to have been characteristic of the Kalends, and we shall explore this further in what follows.[57] Dice playing, a key feature of Saturnalia,[58] is less prominent in

and suggests it might have become more acceptable: the sermon embedded in the *V. Elig.* 2.16 is a rare exception.

[54] *civitatem tabernae habitu abolefacere*, Tert. *Apol.* 35.

[55] For example, Max. Tur. *Serm.* 63.1; Augustine, *Serm*. Dolbeau 26.8; Caes. *Serm*. 193.1.

[56] Accounts of the Saturnalia frequently recount that masters waited on their slaves (or at least allowed them licence and relaxation), for example Plin. *Ep*. 2.17.24 and Cato, *Agr.* 57; see here especially Dolanksy 2011. However, only Libanius specifically mentions licence for slaves during the Kalends: *Or.* 9.11 and *Descr*. 5.12, including a description of slaves and masters playing dice together: *Descr*. 5.11: Libanius' accounts arguably have a rather artificial flavour, however.

[57] As particularly focused on by Gleason 1986 and Hawkins 2012.

[58] Saturnalia was famous for gambling with both dice and knucklebones, being the one time of year when it was not officially illegal. Dice are depicted in the image for December in the Calendar of 354: see here Salzman 1990: 74–6. See further on dice in the Kronia/Saturnalia Versnel 1994: 211; Versnel sees dice as thematically central to Saturnalia because of the element of dangerous unpredictability whereby chance can reverse roles.

accounts of the Kalends,[59] though gaming and gambling are attacked by preachers in general.[60]

Who took part in the festival? It is clear that under the Roman and then the Byzantine empire involvement was spread across society, from the bottom right up to the very top, with generous provision of Kalends gifts and entertainment being expected of the political elite, who provided the civic side of the festivities. The participation of soldiers and their activities at the festival will be discussed further later. While the major festivities took place in urban centres, the Kalends would of course have brought rural populations into the town for both the official and unofficial aspects of the celebration.[61] Libanius' account in *Or.* 9, which we should probably read as part of an ongoing debate with rival Christian orators,[62] makes an effort to stress the universality of the celebration. He claims that it was celebrated by both rich and poor,[63] including slaves and prisoners,[64] with gifts being given from the emperor downwards, including the consuls.[65] He emphasizes the festival's theme of equality[66] and its ability to bring unity to society.[67]

In what sense was the Kalends of January a specifically 'popular' festival? To a certain extent, its depiction as 'popular' stems from the rhetorical strategies of hostile polemic. Asterius refers to Kalends celebrants as the 'rabble outside'.[68] In a familiar tactic, Caesarius makes an association of the festival with the lower orders, with *inperiti homines et rustici*;[69] however, he also describes Kalends customs as being practised by *plures in populo christiano* and speaks of his desire to drive the custom of dressing as stags (to be discussed later) from the city of Arles itself (*de hac civitate*), suggesting that Kalends practices were in fact far from being restricted to *rustici*.[70] Writing on the Byzantine Kalends, Antony Kaldellis argues that the festival continued to be celebrated across the whole of society as late as 1200, and

[59] Although Augustine mentions it: *lusurus alea cum pagano*, *Serm*. Dolbeau 26/Mainz 62.2. Gaming in taverns is mentioned by Chrysostom: *In Kalend.* 2; Libanius says that slaves were allowed to play dice: Lib. *Descr.* 5. 11; *Or.* 9.11.

[60] For example, Caes. *Serm.* 61.3, 207.3.

[61] As explicitly discussed by both Asterius (*Hom.* 4.6) and Libanius (*Or.* 9.8).

[62] Graf 2012 argues that Libanius is responding to sermons such as John Chrysostom's.

[63] Lib. *Or.* 9.6. [64] *Or.* 9.11, 9. 12. [65] *Or.* 9.15, 9.18. [66] *Descr.* 5.12. [67] *Or.* 9.14.

[68] Ast. *Hom.* 4.1: τοῦ ἔξωθεν συρφετοῦ.

[69] Caes. *Serm.* 192.1; this has left a legacy in the account of the festival in the Golden Legend from 1260, which is largely based on Caesarius (although Augustine gets the credit!) and talks about the persistence of the custom: Graesse 1846: 86. The practice of laying out tables is specifically ascribed to *rustici* by Caes. *Serm.* 192.3, as discussed further later.

[70] *Serm*. 192.3. As we have seen, Caesarius' orbit took in both the city of Arles and the *vici* and *pagi* of the outlying districts: it is generally impossible to know which audiences he is addressing in his sermons, even assuming the published sermons give us access to identifiable historical audiences, as discussed in Chapter 4.

further that attacks on the festival as 'popular' were polemical and designed to discredit it; indeed, what we have here is a very familiar strategy in terms of ecclesiastical responses to popular culture.[71] In the analysis that follows, wherever possible I shall draw more granular pictures of participation.

It is now time to home in more closely on the celebration of the Kalends of January in late antique southern Gaul. As we saw, the special status of the festival as a legal holiday was expressed for the first time only in 389.[72] As Fritz Graf has recently and convincingly argued, the Kalends was seen by the Roman imperial authorities (and later, in the east, by the Byzantine empire) as a festival of significant ideological import, and thus worth promoting as well as preserving.[73] Arles was of course a site of major political importance for much of late antiquity and seems a likely venue for official Kalends celebrations: the city served at different points as an imperial residence and as seat of the Prefecture of the Gauls, and possessed an impressive circus arena in which games could take place. Fifth-century testimonies from other, comparable, major cities describe a variety of official activities. Augustine speaks of games taking place in Carthage, which had brought a large number of people into the city.[74] Processions are described a little earlier in Antioch (by John Chrysostom),[75] but also some years later in Ravenna (by Peter Chrysologus).[76] The fact remains, however, that we have no specific evidence for official, civic or imperial, Kalends celebrations in late Roman Gaul, as our first witness is Caesarius.

As for the region under post-Roman rule: there is significant *negative* evidence as regards the official celebration under Visigothic rule. The Visigothic *interpretatio* of excerpts of the *Codex Theodosianus*, produced as part of the *Breviarium* of Alaric II, promulgated in February 506, actually *omitted* the Kalends of January from the list of official celebrations, while adding Christmas and Epiphany to the list.[77] This compendium was

[71] Kaldellis 2012: 200–3.

[72] *CTh* 2.8.19; Graf 2015: 113, 122; this law omitted the great 'pagan festivals', while singling out the Kalends. The law also asserted that Sundays were holidays, and specified a full two weeks around Easter; Christmas, however, is not mentioned.

[73] Graf 2015, *passim*.

[74] Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26/Mainz 62.1, .3. .9 though his critique of the spectacles here is so generic that Scheid 1988 is right to be sceptical as to whether the Kalends games are really current; nonetheless, circus races are also mentioned by Libanius: *Descr.* 5.13.

[75] John Chrys. *In Kalend.* 1: on *daimones* (clearly, people in masks or costumes) processing (πομπεύσατων) in the *agora* in Antioch.

[76] What looks like a similar procession featuring the traditional deities is described by Pet. Chrys. *Serm* 155 *bis*; compare *Serm.* 155.

[77] Graf 2015: 124–5: *CTh* 2.8.19 *interpretatio*; the festival was also omitted from the later (c. 654) Visigothic compilation, the *Liber Ludicorum*. This is in marked contrast to the situation in the east:

produced with the input of Gallic bishops (though without the help of Caesarius) and suggests that the influence of the ecclesiastical anti-Kalends polemic had been successful (as it would *not* be in the Byzantine East). However, Visigothic rule in Arles would be short-lived: in 507, war broke out in southern Gaul, which would lead to the long siege of Arles in 508 and then to the end of Visigothic rule over its territory. The victorious Ostrogoths re-established a new 'praetorian prefecture of the Gauls' and established Arles again as the seat of the prefecture and also of the vicariate, and proclaimed the area as part of a newly restored 'Roman empire'. The legal framework of this restored empire was frequently and proudly expressed as Roman, especially in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus. These included two letters from Theoderic to the provincials of Gaul, telling them to behave in accordance with Roman law and civilian rule.[78] There is, of course, a substantial propaganda aspect at work here, and we simply do not know enough to be able to say whether Ostrogothic law regarded the Kalends as an official holiday or not, although it would seem likely.[79]

The earliest literary testimony regarding the celebration of the Kalends of January in southern Gaul comes from Caesarius himself. This account, the key points of which we will consider in some detail, does not particularly suggest any official events put on by the civil authorities in Arles.[80] In large part, the bishop appears to be describing informal activities put on by the local inhabitants of both city and countryside for themselves and for their friends.[81] However, there is an important exception in the activities of one specific group mentioned by Caesarius: his account of the festivities enjoyed by soldiers. The New Year celebrations of the Roman state had always included a military counterpart: as well as the donative to the troops, the soldiers themselves renewed their vows to their emperor at this time.[82] However, it seems as if the New Year festivities could also include something like a military carnival, where soldiers dressed up and performed satirical and racy skits – if we can believe our Christian

the Kalends was maintained as a legal holiday by both the *Codex Justinianus* (*CJ* 3.12.7) and the later *Basilika* (7.17.23).

[78] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.17, 3.43.

[79] On Roman law under Theoderic in general, see Lafferty 2013.

[80] Scheid 1988: 363 suggests the same applies to Augustine's considerably earlier account of the Kalends celebrations in Carthage (in *Serm.* Dolbeau 26).

[81] Explicit mention of Kalends practices as an *urban* practice comes when Caesarius speak of wishing to drive the practice of stag dressing up *de hac civitate*: *Serm*. 192.3, as described earlier; the same activity is attacked in *Serm*. 13.5, which later became associated with rural congregations, for example it is entitled *Sermo in parocchiis necessarius* in the ninth-century Zweifalt collection (the preface of which Morin plundered for his *Serm.* 2).

[82] See here Meslin 1970: 29.

sources.[83] The lengthiest description comes from Asterius of Amaseia, who describes soldiers performing skits mocking the imperial authorities before going on to attack their practice of cross-dressing as part of the same festivities.[84] Caesarius, too, attacks soldiers cross-dressing at the Kalends[85] – in fact, the similarity of these two descriptions is striking and indeed surprising. Does Caesarius' account provide evidence of continuity of Roman military practice among barbarian soldiers (a military subculture, we might call it) in a barbarian army?[86] Or should we suspect Caesarius of employing a literary motif rather than referring to the actual activities of actual troops stationed at Arles (as some have suspected)?[87] We cannot, alas, be sure. I shall return to the broader cultural and social significance of the military carnival in due course.

The range of communal practices Caesarius describes as taking place in Arles and in the surrounding countryside therefore seem broadly consistent with activities elsewhere. In the analysis that follows, I shall consider the key themes of the Kalends activities in terms of popular culture, firstly from the perspective of the church.

The View 'from the Pulpit' Once More: The Kalends of January As a 'Pagan' Festival

Late antique preachers stressed to their congregations that the Kalends activities represented not harmless merriment but superstitious pagan behaviour. Let's return to Augustine, an important influence, as so often. What is in fact his longest surviving sermon was delivered in Carthage on New Year's Day, January 404, and likely lasted a full two and a half hours.[88] A deliberate filibuster, as Augustine's translator Edmund Hill puts it, this sermon was designed to keep his Carthage congregation from the Kalends

[83] The intriguing *Acts of Dasius* depicts a scandalous military carnival: although the anonymous author links the festivities with Kronia/Saturnalia, it is clear that the Kalends of January is in fact the occasion at hand: see the *Acts of Dasius* in Musurillo 1972: 272–9; and see further Cumont 1897, Weinstock 1964 and Pillinger 1988. While the narrative of the *Acts*, a tale of ritual human sacrifice transformed by the brave martyr solider Dasius, is obviously fictional, the text is designed to prevent Christians from taking part in 'pagan' New Year ceremonies.

[84] Ast. *Hom.* 4.7. [85] Caes. *Serm.* 192.2, discussed further later.

[86] Theoderic called himself *imperator* and clearly there was a degree of ideological continuity in the post-Roman armies, which had of course been manned with 'barbarian' troops for many generations. See further Vallet and Kazanski 1993.

[87] As suggested by Arbesmann 1979: 115; Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 34 are also unsure about the reliability of Caesarius' claims.

[88] *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.

celebrations for as long as possible.[89] Early on in the mammoth homily, after complaining about the noise made outside by revellers, including 'silly and disgraceful songs',[90] the bishop asks his congregation: 'Are you going to join in today in the celebration of good luck presents [*strenae*] with a pagan [*cum pagano*], going to play at dice with a pagan, going to get drunk with a pagan?'[91] Clearly there is nothing especially *pagan* about any of these activities, but these questions are indicative of Augustine's strategy throughout: he constructs a binary rhetoric of separation, demarcating the church, the saved, from the nations (his biblical text for the day is Ps. 106.47), who he describes as suffused with worldly loves and destructive pleasures.[92] This binary distinction would turn out to be highly influential in ecclesiastical attacks on the Kalends, as well as those on popular culture more generally.[93] As we have already seen elsewhere, a whole range of activities could be powerfully stigmatized as 'pagan' by preachers and church councils.

The claim that celebrating the Kalends was 'pagan' was most simply demonstrated by a common argument that the origins of the festival lay in the worship of the two-faced god Janus.[94] Caesarius employs the usual Christian polemic against the pagan gods; he asserts simultaneously both their monstrous, demonic nature and their human origins.[95] The focus on Janus, it should be stressed, is for rhetorical and polemical purposes: despite the original association with the god, it is abundantly clear that actual worship of Janus was *not* a feature of the late antique festival.[96]

[89] Hill 1997: 229 n.1; see Chadwick 1996: 71, noting that Augustine himself commented on how he liked to prolong his sermons on days of big pagan festivals to try to deter his flock from getting involved: *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 7.24. The very length of the Kalends sermon is seemingly what put off generations of later copyists as it was generally only known in shortened and fragmentary versions (*Serm.* 197, 198 and 198A). Peter Brown writes that Bede tried to read it but 'his eyes soon glazed over': Brown 2000: 444; see too Dolbeau 1996; see Scheid 1988 for a useful discussion of this sermon as a source for the late antique Kalends.

[90] *strepitu vanissimarum turpissimarumque cantionum*, Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.1.

[91] *Acturus es hodie celebrationem strenarum cum pagano, lusurus alea cum pagano, inebriaturus es te cum pagano?*, Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.2. Gambling and gaming are also mentioned at *Serm* 196.4. and *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.8.

[92] Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.8.

[93] For example, *qui vult regnare cum Christo non possit gaudere cum saeculo*, Max. Tur. *Serm.* 63.1.

[94] Briefly, Max. Tur. *Serm.* 63.2; at greater length, Caes. *Serm.* 192.1.

[95] Janus is described as *dux quondam et princeps hominum paganorum*, worshipped 'like a god' by the foolish but in reality a demon; his two-faced appearance rendered him particularly monstrous: *monstrum esse fecerunt*, Caes. *Serm.* 192.1. Compare the prohibition against the Kalends in Conc. Tur. a.567: can. 23: *Enimvero quoniam cognovimus nonnullos inveniri sequipedes erroris antiqui, qui Kalendas Ianuarii colunt, cum Ianus homo gentilis fuerit, rex quidam, sed esse Deus non potuit*.

[96] The association with Janus is nonetheless a feature in calendrical poems, such as those of Ausonius: *Primus Romanas ordiris, Iane, kalendas*, *Monosticha de Mensibus* 1; *Iane bifrons, spectas tempora bina simul*, *Disticha de mensibus* 2. However, Libanius does not identify Janus in his account of the festival

Sacrifice obviously played no role in the public festivities in late antiquity.[97] Moreover, the likelihood that the late antique congregations so warned had much of a notion of the god Janus at all is slim indeed.

There was more mileage for preachers in attacking the festival as pagan by focusing on the 'superstitious' practices that were distinctively attached to the Kalends in its capacity as a New Year festival. Here again, many of the practices mentioned by Caesarius chime in with those mentioned elsewhere. Kalends rituals included activities that seem to have been both apotropaic and prognostic in character. Martin of Braga has the longest list of these (including such seemingly bizarre omens as putting cloth and bread in a box for mice and moths) but they turn up in other texts as well.[98] I have already discussed the widespread use of greenery as Kalends decorations. In northern Italy Maximus of Turin describes the practice of going outside the city in order to gather 'auspices', referring to 'little branches' (*ramasculi*), and Martin of Braga also mentions the long-standing custom of placing laurels at the door, although Caesarius, it is true, makes no mention of greenery.[99] A variety of rituals related to fire are described from Antioch to Portugal.[100] Another widespread custom involved laying tables abundantly with food and drink on New Year's Eve in order to ensure a bounty for the year to come.[101]

My aim in critiquing the characterization of the Kalends of January as a 'pagan' festival is not to deny that there was a 'religious' dimension to Kalends practices. We can and should indeed understand Kalends practices as part of people's lived religion, as embedded in popular culture, as discussed in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, I shall here argue that the problem with the Kalends, even for the church, was not really 'paganism' – despite the varied collections of Kalends 'superstitions' collected by preachers and, later on, in penitential manuals. Ordinary church-goers were already aware

(it is, of course, unlikely that he would name a Roman deity) but refers to the festival as being in honour of a 'mighty daimon': *Or.* 9.1; Graf suggests, persuasively, that this is most likely the emperor: Graf 2012: 178.

[97] Libanius laments the fact that sacrifices no longer form part of the festival's rituals: *Or.* 9.18. The original consular sacrifices would have been to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and, later, the imperial cult.

[98] *De corr. rust.* 11; for detailed discussion, see Filotas 2005: 165–72.

[99] Max. Tur. *Serm.* 98 *extr.* 3; Mart. Brag. *De corr. rust.* 16.

[100] Libation of food and wine on the fire: Martin Brag. *De corr. rust.* 16; refusal to share fire: Caes. *Serm.* 192.3, 193.3; lighting fires in the forum: John. Chrys. *In Kalend.* 2.

[101] For example, Caes. *Serm.* 192.3; Martin Brag. *De corr. rust.* 16. This was practised in Rome as late as the eighth century, to the horror of Boniface: *Ep.* 50 (*MGH Ep.* 3: 301), and then proscribed: Conc. romanum a.743 can. 9 (*MGH Conc.* 2.1: 15–16); see Meslin 1970: 71–2 for discussion and interpretation.

of this, as Peter Chrysologus recounted in a Kalends sermon from Ravenna: 'But one of you says: This isn't the deliberate pursuit of sacrilege, these good luck visits are just for fun; this is a celebration of the new, not an error from the past; this is just New Year, not the offence of paganism.'[102]

I am not the first to argue that the Kalends was not really a 'pagan' festival. Robert Markus made this point some years ago, arguing specifically that the Kalends represented a rival to Christian ideas of time and renewal, as represented liturgically by Christmas and its related calendar, and that the church would simply brook no rival.[103] Furthermore, William Klingshirn has argued that the Kalends should be understood more as a *secular* festival that offended the church with its worldly emphases than a religious phenomenon, pointing out rightly that Caesarius' objections to the festival were largely moral.[104] Building on Klingshirn's analysis, I shall argue that these 'moral' objections focus more particularly on the Kalends as an example of popular culture, against which, as this book shows, the church waged a forceful war in late antiquity. In what follows, therefore, I shall examine the major features of the festival with popular culture in mind, beginning with the key theme of Carnival.

Kalends As Carnival: The Significance of Festive Licence

The late antique church linked Kalends activities with the activities of the lower classes in order to discredit them. However, clerics were hostile to the festival precisely *because* it in fact contained a number of elements associated with popular culture. For the historian of this popular culture, the temptation to make a connection with theories of carnival at this point is almost impossible to resist.[105] The early modern festival of Carnival, as

[102] *Sed dicit aliquis: non sunt haec sacrilegiorum studia, vota sunt haec iocorum; et hoc esse novitatis laetitiam, non vetustatis errorem; esse hoc anni principium, non gentilitatis offensam*. The preacher gave this imagined reply pretty short shrift, continuing: *Erras, homo! Non sunt, non sunt haec ludicra, sunt crimina* (O man, you are wrong: these are not, these are not jokes; these are sins'), Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155.5.

[103] Markus 1990: 103–6; see also on the church's desire to privilege a Christian concept of time Meslin 1970: 109–12.

[104] Klingshirn 1994: 216–18. MacMullen 1997: 36–8 is an exception among modern scholars in seeing the Kalends as representing 'paganism'. See too Harl 1981 on eastern Christian denunciations of 'profane' festivals.

[105] The lure of Carnival has been enthusiastically embraced by classicists in the discussion of the better-known Saturnalia, for example Jerry Toner on the Saturnalia: 'The Saturnalia were more than a mere holiday; they were an alternative world sanctioned by the authorities. Everything that was culturally dominant was overturned . . .. A new world order was established in direct opposition to the serious high culture', Toner 2009: 93; Mary Beard gives a nicely sceptical critique of carnivalesque accounts of Saturnalia in Beard 2014: 62–5. The title of the final chapter of James C. Scott's

studied by Mikhail Bakhtin in his hugely influential book *Rabelais and His World*, has come to be understood as symbolically central to popular culture itself and indeed, we might say, to stand by means of synecdoche for popular culture *tout court*.[106] Bakhtin's carnival is a space where inversion is the norm, where the high becomes low, where comedy rules and the grotesque (the 'lower bodily stratum') reigns supreme. Moreover, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have stressed, Bakhtin's carnival, and the 'carnivalesque', go some way beyond the festival itself as 'a potent, populist, crucial inversion of *all* official words and hierarchies'.[107] For Bakhtin himself, carnival is 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less'.[108] It is the place where uninhibited, unofficial discourse could be uttered: 'carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter'.[109] It is a place where hierarchical society could, temporarily at least, be infused with its opposite; it is a site of liberation and renewal.[110] Bakhtin's carnival is therefore inherently radical – at least potentially – offering a site for the expression and construction of an alternative society. The idea of carnival as providing a vital site for opposition and rebellion in 'pre-political' societies is what has made Bakhtin's work so stimulating for scholars of pre-modern history.[111] For example, Sara Forsdyke has used Bakhtin to help her interpret seemingly obscure episodes in archaic Greek history, such as the ancient accounts of the seemingly bizarre reforms of the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon and riots in sixth-century BCE Megara.[112]

But can we really assign an oppositional meaning, or even potential, to carnival, let alone popular culture, *in toto*? The apparently 'licensed licence' of carnival (and allied festivals) has also been seen as providing a 'safety valve', allowing the *temporary* release of tensions, while in fact permitting the maintenance of the status quo.[113] (As the political anthropologist Georges Balandier once neatly formulated: 'The supreme ruse of power is to allow itself to be contested *ritually* in order to consolidate itself

highly influential *Domination and the Art of Resistance* is 'A Saturnalia of Power: The First Public Declaration of the Hidden Transcript': Scott 1990: 202–28.

[106] Tardily translated into English as Bakhtin 1968. [107] Stallybrass and White 1986: 7.

[108] Bakhtin 1968: 6. [109] Bakhtin 1968: 8.

[110] Bakhtin 1968: especially 10: 'The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance . . . all were considered equal during carnival time . . .. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations.'

[111] See, for instance, Le Roy Ladurie 1979, Davis 1975: especially 103 and Scott 1990: especially 172–82.

[112] Forsdyke 2012: 90–113, 117–43, especially 134–7.

[113] For example, Eagleton 1981: 148: 'Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair, in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art.'

more effectively.')[114] But is that a realistic alternative? James C. Scott is surely correct when he comments that 'safety valve' interpretations tend to confuse 'the intentions of elites with the results they are able to achieve'.[115] In the end, this interpretation just gives us another excessively essentializing interpretation of carnival,[116] whether applied to a supra-historical 'carnival' or to individual examples. Henk Versnel's nuanced interpretation of the festival of Kronia seems to offer a more convincing model, where he argues that we need to see both aspects of such festivals operating together: the 'rebellious' and the 'cohesive'.[117]

The idea that these festivals provided an opportunity for 'licence' is central to the theme of carnival. While Saturnalia is the ancient festival most famously associated with this idea, we can also see important aspects in the case of the Kalends. One of the most obviously 'carnivalistic' elements of the Kalends celebrations is its traditional association with popular mockery, notably political mockery, and satire. John Lydus represents this as a venerable tradition of the Roman past: 'And the common people [το πλήθος] would jeer at the magistrates without fear – not [only] in words, but also in gestures that strove to be amusing. They would do this in honour of freedom, and the magistrates would allow it, yielding to custom as though to law.'[118] Here we have a clear example of customary *licentia.* The most famous example of this association continuing into late antiquity comes from the New Year of 363, when the emperor Julian was ridiculed by the people in the *agora* of Antioch – and then attempted to satirize himself 'back' in his *Misopogon*.[119]

The episode at Antioch is worth considering in more detail as it brings nicely to the fore the issue of carnivalistic licence. It was clearly with gritted teeth that the emperor responded to the Antiochenes: Ammianus tells us 'although he was indignant for these and similar reasons, he held his peace, kept control of his feelings, and continued to celebrate the festivals [*sollemnia celebrabat*]'.[120] Julian did not like the jibes from the people, but custom compelled him to accept them: the licence permitted to the people at the Kalends represented an important and broader Roman imperial tradition whereby *licentia* was *permitted* at a certain range of occasions and

[114] Balandier 1972: 41; note too here the classic work of Gluckman 1954. [115] Scott 1990: 178.
[116] See Stallybrass and White 1986: 13: 'It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression.'
[117] Versnel 1994: 115–21. [118] Lydus, *Mens.* 4.4, trans. Hooker.
[119] See here Gleason 1986 and Hawkins 2012; van Hoof and van Nuffelen 2011 seek to broaden the context beyond New Year, but the connection remains significant.
[120] Amm. Marc. 22.14.3, trans. Rolfe.

activities, especially at the games.[121] And yet, taken together, the writings of Ammianus, Libanius and indeed the emperor Julian himself are revealing as to (late) ancient elite expectations about the proper *limits* of festive *licentia*.

Despite the studied attempt at good-humoured satire in the *Misopogon*, Julian *was* angry with the people of Antioch: he threatened never to visit the city again (which represented a considerable detriment to its status and economy)[122] and left the famously harsh Alexander of Heliopolis in charge as governor.[123] The severity of the threat posed was such that Libanius wrote two orations in response to the quarrel between the emperor and the Antiochenes: *Or.* 15 aimed at the emperor and *Or.* 16 aimed at the city.[124] These texts show clear limits being placed on the boundaries of licence by elite authority. They also are a good starting point from which to explore how far we can consider this kind of *licentia* as specifically popular – and, indeed, how far the social status of its practitioners was significant in imperial and elite responses. Libanius seeks, as is well known, to plead for the city, but he does so in part by disassociating the urban elite from the behaviour of those he depicts as a lower class. When addressing both the city and the emperor he pointedly blames the most offensive activity on outsiders and those of despised professions. For instance, in his oration supposedly targeted at Julian, Libanius focuses on the role of 'some people', 'redolent of forge or tannery' – that is, associated with two particularly despised professions.[125] Indeed, he seems to be responding to a defence on these lines from the city's elite themselves.[126] While seeking to speak up for Antioch, Libanius still makes clear his own disdain for popular ἀσελγέια: impudence or insubordination.[127] He specifically questions who has a right to ridicule whom in a telling passage:

> I agree that some ridicule is part of some holidays, but it is light-hearted, easily borne and not uttered from unbridled mouths, for it is not directed against their equals, and so it soothes its bitterness. But if my slaves were allowed to scrape together all the insults men can lay their tongue to and abuse me without restraint, using the holiday as their excuse, I would never have acknowledged the gods who enjoy such attentions.[128]

[121] See Hawkins 2017: 177–8. [122] See Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2011: 172.
[123] Amm. Marc. 23.2.3.
[124] *Or.* 15 was not in fact delivered in front of the emperor, and was probably finalized after his death: van Hoof and van Nuffelen 2011: 180.
[125] Lib. *Or.* 15.77 and 16.28.
[126] Lib. *Or.* 16.31–4: Libanius retorts that this behaviour should have been controlled, nonetheless. See further Ventura da Silva 2018.
[127] Lib. *Or.* 16.29. [128] Lib. *Or.* 16.36, trans. Norman.

Antiochene impudence took expression in various forms, including insulting shouts or jests (*skommata*), songs (*asmata*) and satirical *anapests*. It would be perverse not to associate these *anapests* with an elite literary culture, and thereby conclude that the Antiochene elites were themselves involved, at least in some part.[129] (However, as in so many periods, the bad behaviour of upper-class youths is generally regarded with far more indulgence by ruling elites than bad behaviour by social inferiors.) The behaviour in Antioch that upset Julian is obviously familiar from the broader context of a lively urban popular culture and indeed was not just limited to the few days of the Kalends celebrations alone.[130] This behaviour, as is well known, could become especially rambunctious at times of economic difficulty and it is indeed significant that Julian's stay in Antioch coincided with an (allegedly ill-handled) food shortage.[131] Later on in this chapter I shall indeed return to other instances when Kalends behaviour intersected with prevailing economic and social conditions. But first it is time to analyse the social and cultural meanings involved in the most 'carnivalesque' but also the most distinctive and probably most-discussed ritual element of all those associated with the Kalends of January: the masquerades.

The Kalends Masquerades: Performance As Subversion?

The Kalends masquerades constituted a crucial target of criticism in the Latin west in the aftermath of the complaints of Caesarius. They have fascinated generations of scholars and represent a tantalizing glimpse of a particularly suggestive aspect of popular culture. These masquerades came in various forms: dressing up in costume, including masks, and travelling in public procession, sometimes on floats (in major urban settings), or going door to door (in both urban and rural settings), most commonly at night. In Ravenna, Peter Chrysologus seems to describe both sorts of masquerade and his most developed description of the first type is worth quoting at length. This masquerade is in fact a public procession, part of the official Kalends festivities:

> The days are now coming, the days that mark the Kalends are coming, and the demons arrive with all their pomp [*tota daemonum pompa procedit*], a fully-fledged workshop of idols [*idolorum . . . officina*] is set up. And the

[129] Ballabriga 2009.
[130] On an extended period of insults, see Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2011: 174; on Antiochene urban sociability and festive behaviour, see Soler 1997.
[131] On the role of the food shortage in the upset at Antioch (minimizing its importance), see Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2011: 172–4; on food riots in the Roman world in general: Erdkamp 2002.

> New Year is consecrated with age-old sacrilege. They fashion Saturn, they make Jupiter, they form Hercules, they exhibit Diana with her young servants, they lead Vulcan around, roaring out tales of his obscenities, and there are even more, whose names must be left unmentioned, since they are hideous monsters [*portenta*].[132]

A few years earlier John Chrysostom had complained about *daimones* processing in the *agora* in Antioch, which probably likewise refers to a public spectacle, as in Ravenna, likewise involving masks/costumes of the gods.[133]

However, in his sermon Peter Chrysologus also had *unofficial*, door-to-door visits in mind: 'And this is what Christians gaze at, what Christians look forward to, what they allow into their homes, what Christians welcome in their homes.'[134] These visits, whether costumed or not, clearly constituted an important feature of the Kalends, involving songs and jests, as well as the exchange (or extortion!) of gifts, as we will see later. The costuming might well have been of the improvised kind, perhaps involving the use of charcoal (for face blackening), straw, rags, even dung, according to Peter Chrysologus.[135] For Caesarius, it is definitely the dressing up that constitutes the most reprehensible aspect of the Kalends of January: 'For in these days miserable men and, what is worse, even some who are baptized, assume false forms and monstrous appearances, and certain features in them are especially worthy of laughter or rather of sorrow.'[136] This stress on the unnatural, the monstrous, is consistent, even when we are far from clear as to what exactly is being described.

The first kind of dressing up attacked by Caesarius involved animal costume:

> For what wise person can believe that such are found to be of sound mind, if they are willing to make themselves a small stag [*cervulum facientes*] or to be changed into the condition of wild beasts? Some are clothed in the skins of

[132] Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155 *bis* 1, trans. Palardy (lightly altered). Compare the very similar passage in *Serm.* 155.1: *Hinc est, fratres, hinc est quod hodie gentiles deos suos, foeditatibus exquisitis, excogitato dedecore, et ipsa turpitudine turpiores – deos suos videndos trahunt, distrahunt, pertrahunt, quos faciunt non videndos*.

[133] John Chrys. *In Kalend.* 1.

[134] *Et hoc christiani vident, christiani expectant, admittunt in domus suas, in domibus suis recipiunt christiani*, Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155 *bis* 2.

[135] *Namque talium deorum facies ut pernigrari possint, carbo deficit; et ut eorum habitus pleno cumuletur horrore, paleae, pelles, panni, stercora toto saeculo perquiruntur, et quicquid est confusionis humanae in eorum facie collocatur*, Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155 *bis* 2. The mention of dung is likely a deliberate exaggeration designed to ridicule and denigrate.

[136] *In istis enim diebus miseri homines et, quod peius et, etiam aliqui baptizati sumunt formas adulteras, species monstruosas, in quibus quidem quae primum ridenda aut potius dolenda sint nescio*, *Serm.* 192.2.

> sheep, and others take the heads of wild beasts, rejoicing and exulting if they have transformed themselves into the appearance of animals, in such a way that they do not seem to be men.[137]

The practice of dressing up as animals appears in Kalends texts from France, Germany, Italy and Spain.[138] The first disguise mentioned, the *cervulus*, appears in our sources as early as the 380s in the writings of Ambrose of Milan;[139] shortly afterwards Pacianus, bishop of Barcelona, wrote a work entitled *Cervulus* criticizing the practice.[140] As Caesarius noted, the *cervulus* was generally joined by a supporting cast of other animals, both wild and agricultural. One lively account comes from the *Vita* of Hilary of Mende (in Languedoc, c. 160 km from Arles); Hilary was a monk-bishop contemporary of Caesarius, although the *Vita* itself is probably seventh century. We are told that one January Hilary went to meet a group of villagers, who he found ready to go out masquerading, all decked out with antlers on their heads in order to look like wild beasts (*praefixo . . . cervi capite ad imitandum ferae formam*), but he successfully persuaded them to abandon the practice.[141]

The popularity of the stag as a common feature in the literary sources is striking, but it can also be traced to a very different type of evidence. A number of depictions of the *cervulus* can in fact be found on the indigenous pottery of southern and western Gaul in late antiquity, the so-called 'dérivées des sigillés paléochrétiennes' (DSP) that we came across earlier in the book (Figures 6.2 and 6.3).[142] The deer is a very popular motif on this pottery, especially as a motif on the centre of plates, where it appears in combination with diverse symbols: trees, humans and other animals,

[137] *Quis enim sapiens credere poterit, inveniri aliquos sanae mentis, qui cervulum facientes in ferarum se velint habitus commutare? Alii vestiuntur pellibus pecudum; alii adsumunt capita bestiarum, gaudentes et exultantes, si taliter se in ferinas species transformaverint, ut homines non esse videantur*, *Serm.* 192.2.

[138] Compare *vestiuntur homines in pecudes*, Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155 *bis* 1. There are almost thirty references to animal costumes counted by Filotas 2005: 161, all from the Latin west.

[139] Amb. *De interpellatione Iob et David* 2(4)1. (*PL* 14.813D).

[140] Pacianus later worried that he might have, in fact, *taught* people the practice: *Puto nescierant cervulum facere, nisi illis reprehendendo monstrassem*, *Paranesis* (*PL* 13.1081D). Jerome (Jer. *De vir. ill.* 106) thought the title of the work was *Cervus*, but was obviously mistaken.

[141] *Cum more solito mense, quem gentiles a Jano rege januarium vocitavere, vulgus ignobile ludis, cantibus exerceretur vel epulis, antiquus ille serpens per speciem laetitiae mortis venena diffudit; ludum simulat ut sacrilegio corda subvertat. Praefixo quidem cervi capite, ad imitandum ferae formam conditionem humanam persuasionis diabolicae scelus inclinat. Mala haec geri haud procul a monasterio suo pater agnovit: et duobus adscitis fratribus, infelicem plebem sanctaque correcturus exortatione progressus est*, *Vita B. Hilari episcopi*, in *Acta SS* Oct. 11: 638–9 (638).

[142] See p. 48.

Figure 6.2 Drawing of a 'dérivées des sigillés paléochrétiennes' (DSP) plate featuring a stag. Drawn by Clem Hayes after Rigoir, Rigoir and Meffre 1973: 207–63, at 255, no. 901.

Figure 6.3 Drawing of a 'dérivées des sigillés paléochrétiennes' (DSP) plate featuring stags and a human figure. Drawn by Clem Hayes after Rigoir, Rigoir and Meffre 1973: 207–63, at 254, no. 898.

including dogs, as well as crosses.[143] While earlier scholars identified a biblical theme, making a connection with the deer panting for water in Psalm 42, this interpretation does seem tenuous.[144] Could not the popularity of the stag on late antique Gallic ceramics instead have more to do with the stag being the most popular and recognizable emblem of the Kalends celebrations? While this obviously cannot be proven, it remains a tantalizing possibility. The fact that the stag imagery arises in the Gallic pottery itself, rather than being a motif imitative of North African imports, adds strength to such a connection.

The question 'why the stag?' remains. For some, the significance of the *cervulus* lies in its connection to the Celtic deity Cernunnos.[145] This horned god, generally associated in scholarship with the renewal of nature, sexual power, abundance and riches, has been identified in over forty different iconographical depictions from antiquity across a wide geographical area.[146] His most common attributes are deer's antlers, torc(s) and a container of coins/grains, which he holds in his lap while he sits cross-legged. Although covering a strikingly wide chronological and geographical reach, depictions of Cernunnos mostly hail from eastern Gaul from the first century CE onwards. However, the case of Cernunnos is rather more problematic than many scholars would have us believe. There is in fact a single labelled image of the deity, on the so-called Pillar of the Boatman, a stone bas-relief from a temple in Lutetia (Paris), which is dated by its inscription to the reign of Tiberius and now in the Musée de Cluny in Paris (Figure 6.4). Cernunnos appears on this monument as one of a group made up of both Roman and Gallic deities.[147] While scholars have been keen to identify Cernunnos very widely, we might prefer to see the deity as essentially a scholarly construction, pieced together from various types of Celtic horned god by scholars overly eager to build a homogeneous, even timeless, pan-Celtic religious tradition.[148] In any case, in the absence of any

[143] See, for many examples, Rigoir, Rigoir and Meffre 1973.

[144] For example, Béraud-Sudreau 1938–40: 536, 540–1; see too Girault 1876. There is little back-up for such an interpretation: the iconography does not feature water; most importantly, there is no other comparable biblical iconography in the DSP.

[145] For example, Arbesmann 1979: 117–19; Meslin 1970: 88–9, but going back to Arnold 1894: 174 and Nilsson 1916–19. See too the connection made between the deer as Christ and the deer as Cernunnos in the late antique ceramics: Béraud-Sudreau 1938–40: 540–1.

[146] For a brief summary: Maier 1997: 69–70; Bober 1951 gives a comprehensive survey with catalogue; Fickett-Wilbar 2003 argues that Cernunnos' iconography is deliberately ambiguous as he was an intentionally ambiguous deity.

[147] *CIL* 13.3026a; Espérandieu 1911: nos. 3132–5.

[148] See Fitzpatrick 1991.

Figure 6.4 Cernunnos as depicted on the 'Pilier des Nautes': Musée de Cluny – Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris. Inv. Cl. 18604. Photograph: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée de Cluny – Musée National du Moyen Âge)/Jean-Gilles Berizzi/ Gérard Blot.

corroborating evidence, it is difficult to interpret stag costuming in the Kalends as representing 'continuity' of pre-Christian Celtic religion.[149]

The stag is certainly not the only animal costume worn by Kalends revellers, in any case; Caesarius, as we saw, mentions sheepskins and 'wild beast' heads. In the long and complex textual record, different versions of clerical prohibitions against beast mumming feature a bewildering number of terminological variants referring to what is most probably a young cow: the *vitulus* or *vitula*.[150] These prohibitions extend some way into the medieval period and are deadening in their volume and monotony. As E. K. Chambers (who bravely collected all the evidence) put it: '[h]omily followed homily, canon followed canon, capitulary followed capitulary, penitential followed penitential, for half a thousand years. But the Kalends died hard'.[151] The canons of Gallic councils and Frankish penitentials are a fertile source for Kalends prohibitions right up to the tenth century, but references go as late and as far north as the indefatigable Burchard of Worms, writing in the eleventh century (his *Decretorum* is a famously ragbag text).[152] The most immediately tempting conclusion to draw from this textual morass is indeed that of Arbesmann, over forty years ago: that the later tradition of the Kalends animal dressing up is 'purely literary'; that

[149] Rudoph Arbesmann nonetheless saw the practice as representing a sort of 'folk memory': 'Like the other forms of pagan worship, his cult could be destroyed, but not the customs and jollifications which had been connected with it since time immemorial. Though their initial significance had long been forgotten, they lived on: in the countryside, where the peasants practised them in the form of simple, old-fashioned fertility magic, and in the cities and towns, where the masquerade had to all appearances taken on the features of pure carnival-sport.' Arbesmann 1979: 119.

[150] Including *cervula*, *annicula*, *vecola*, *vetola*, *vecola*, *vaecola*, *vitula*; see here Arbesmann 1979.

[151] Chambers 1903: 246.

[152] Burchard, *Decretorum* 10.39 (col. 839B). See here Filotas 2005: 61, 181.

is, it represents a clear case of 'cutting and pasting' in the textual tradition and only refers to what was in fact a moribund practice.[153] Such a critique brings us back to the methodological problems posed by the repetitive nature of early medieval ecclesiastical accounts of 'popular religion' and indeed popular culture: how far can we take the constant reiteration of stereotypes to represent anything other than lazy plagiarism?[154] How far can we imagine real people actually dressing up like this?

The evidence in fact offers tantalizing suggestions that animal mumming *did* enjoy real continuity in Gaul well beyond the early medieval period.[155] Two late medieval manuscripts clearly depict this activity. A French manuscript of the *Histoire du Graal* preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris depicts what looks like a hollow tree trunk with a stag's head on top, but we can see human feet beneath the bottom of the costume and a human face emerging out of a hole about halfway up; this costumed man is dancing to a musician playing the bagpipes.[156] In the famous illuminated manuscript of the *Roman d'Alexandre* from Tournai, now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, we find two more relevant illustrations (Figures 6.5 and 6.6).[157] One depicts a man in a highly impressive stag costume, dancing along to a musician; his costume is so impressive he has managed to frighten away a woman and two children.[158] In the other we see three men dressed as animals: a stag, a hare and an ass/boar, accompanied by female dancers (or men dressed as women?). A tonsured cleric, armed with a threatening club, towers over the group; in an added twist, under his tunic he has the legs of an animal.[159]

So why, then, did people dress up in animal costumes at the Kalends? A wide variety of explanations have been proffered, neither comprehensive nor necessarily mutually exclusive: as part of an inversion of dominant

[153] Arbesmann 1979: especially 104. Sometimes the confusion in the early medieval texts is palpable; for example, *Si quis, quod kalendas ianuarii vel alias kalendas colunt . . . et cerenus, quod dicitur circerlus, aut in vecula vadunt* ('If anyone honours the Kalends of January or any other Kalends, and goes about as a *cerenus*, as the *circulus* is called or in/as? a *vecula*'): *Poen. Oxoniense* 29 (*CCSL* 156: 91) (first half of the eighth century); see Filotas 2005: 161. It is obvious that the scribe here had no idea what exactly he was prohibiting. See again Harmening 1979: 121–45 for a sceptical account of the 'langwierig' early medieval textual tradition.

[154] As discussed at pp. 29–31. Compare the cautionary case of the fictive festival of the 'Spurcalia', a medieval clerical construction further reified by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholarship: see Ristuccia 2013.

[155] See Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 14–100 and Camille 1998: 232–75.

[156] Robert de Boron, *Histoire de Graal* BNF, MS fonds français 95 fol. 273r. For a reproduction, see Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 32.

[157] *Roman d'Alexandre*, illustrated by Jehan de Grise, produced in Tournai in 1344. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264.

[158] MS Bodley 264 fol. 70r. [159] MS Bodley 264 fol. 21v.

Figure 6.5 Man dressed as a stag from the *Roman d'Alexandre*. MS Bodley 264, fol. 70r. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

Figure 6.6 Animal mummers and dancers from the *Roman d'Alexandre*. MS Bodley 264, fol. 21v. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

categories, as apotropaic or as intended to promote fertility.[160] Taking a more 'common-sense' view, Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter point out that animal skins were easily available and hence convenient items for use in dressing up. Animal dressing up is part of a broader range of carnivalistic behaviour, where costuming enables an escape from the harshness of mid-winter: 'escape from the old into the new, escape from normal routine into riotous play, escape from duty into temporary irresponsibility and escape from oneself into another identity'.[161] In this case, participants could escape their normal human identity, exchanging it temporarily for that of an animal. Caesarius of Arles, as we saw, worried

[160] Meslin 1970: 80–5 provides a useful discussion of the different costumes and interpretations; see further Testa 2013.

[161] Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 19–20, 28–31, 38.

that Kalends dressing up revealed the deep-seated human desire to embrace the bestial within, to transform oneself into a wild beast.[162]

Dressing up as beasts was attacked by clerics as unnatural, indeed monstrous, as a perversion of God's creation, as apostasy, as the opposite of what is Christian, indeed as *pagan*. Some of the costumes chosen do seem to have deliberately represented the monstrous – something that was no ordinary mortal, human or animal. As we have already seen, John Chrysostom and Peter Chrysologus described processions of 'demons', with the latter also claiming that a special workshop was set up (*idolorum . . . officina*) to fashion images of the gods. Chrysologus puts stress on the monstrous: he describes hideous *portenta* and highlights the unnaturalness of the costumes.[163] As we saw earlier, Peter also imagined ordinary people making use of improvised materials to disguise themselves and fashion their own monstrous costumes.[164] Caesarius himself also seems to allude to monstrous costumes: 'whatever other kind of omen' (*alia quaelibet portenta*).[165] Taking to the *longue durée* once more, a lively account from the Swiss protestant polemicist Rudolf Hospianian attacks the combination of monstrous dressing up and cross-dressing that occurred as part of carnival celebrations in sixteenth-century Zurich:

> Men are often in women's clothes, and also women in men's clothes, as if to belie their fair and virtuous sex. Some, besides, are so deformed that you would say they had put off all human appearance, for with horns, beaks, boar's teeth, flaming eyes, breathing smoke and sparks, curved talons, tails, shaggy hair, they aim to seem, and to terrify, like monstrous and terrible demons.[166]

If dressing up as animals and monstrous creatures can represent both reversal of categories and a crossing of boundaries, the same can clearly

[162] *Alii vestiuntur pellibus pecudum; alii adsumunt capita bestiarum, gaudentes et exultantes, si taliter se in ferinas species transformaverint, ut homines non esse videantur*, Caes. *Serm*. 192.2.

[163] *Figurant saturnum, faciunt Iovem, formant Herculem, exponunt cum vernantibus suis Dianam, circumducunt Vulcanum uerbis anhelantem turpitudines suas, et plura, quorum, quia portenta sunt, nomina sunt tacenda; quorum deformitates, quia natura non habet, creatura nescit, fingere ars laborat*, Pet. Chrys. *Serm*. 155 *bis* 1. Compare *Hinc est, fratres, hinc est quod hodie gentiles deos suos, foeditatibus exquisitis, excogitato dedecore, et ipsa turpitudine turpiores – deos suos videndos trahunt, distrahunt, pertrahunt, quos faciunt non videndos*, *Serm*. 155.

[164] Pet. Chrys. *Serm*. 155 *bis* 2.

[165] Caes. *Serm*. 193.2.

[166] *frequenter veste foeminea, interdum etiam foeminae veste virili, tanquam si pulchrum aut honestum foret sexum mentiri. Nonnunquam insuper quidam sic deformati, ut figuram omnem humanam prorsus exuisse diceres: nam cornuti, rostrati, dentibus aprinis, flammantibus oculis, fumum et scintillas ex ore exhalantes, curvis unguibus, caudati hirsute, denique & monstrosi terribilesque cacodaemonas videri atque timeri affectant* (Rodolphus Hospinianus, *Festa christianorum: hoc est de origine, progressu, ceremoniis et ritibus festorum dierum christianorum* (Zurich, 1593): 37–8), trans. Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 72.

be said for the type of dressing up that is in fact the most prominent across the whole geographical spread of Kalends activity: festive cross-dressing.

Cross-dressing is a practice common to carnivalistic celebrations across space and time. References to cross-dressing recur in a number of sources relating to the Kalends, from both east and west. Although the sources normally specify men dressing up as women, others suggest that women could also practise cross-dressing.[167] Our ecclesiastical authors are deeply troubled by the transgression of gender boundaries and, no doubt, the potential connection with sexual misconduct often associated with cross-dressing in hostile sources.[168] Caesarius considered cross-dressing as perhaps the most shameful Kalends practice of all:

> Moreover how shameful and how disgraceful it is when those who were born as men are clothed in the tunics of women. By a most unseemly change they make their manly strength womanish by means of girlish fashions, not blushing to put the arms of a soldier into the tunics of women. They show bearded faces, but want to appear like women.[169]

And again: 'For what is so absurd as by shameful dress to change the sex of a man into the form of a woman? What is so foolish as to disfigure one's face, to assume an appearance, which even the demons themselves greatly fear?'[170] As we have already seen, the mention of *soldiers* raises questions for late antique Arles but also has a parallel in Asterius' earlier account of military revels in Amaseia.[171]

[167] While Isidore of Seville is an apparent source for cross-dressing (or at least female pantomiming) in the west, his dependence on Caesarius is very clear: *etiam fideles, sumentes species monstruosas, in ferarum habitu transformantur: alii, femineo gestu demutati, virile vultum effeminant*, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.41.2. From another highly derivative source: *Viri vestes femineas, femine vestes virilis in ipsis Kalandas* [sic] *vel in alia lusa quam plurima nolite vestire*, Pirminius, *Scarapsus* c. 22 (*PL* 89.1041c). Peter Chrysologus is a more reliably independent (and earlier) source for cross-dressing: *in feminas viros vertunt*, *Serm.* 155 *bis* 1. In the east the Council in Trullo in 692 ruled against cross-dressing as part of its Kalends prohibitions: can. 62 Mansi xi 971: *ut nullus vir deinceps muliebri veste induatur, vel mulier veste viro conveniente*.

[168] See, for an interesting comparison, Bennett and McSheffrey 2014.

[169] *Iam vero illut quale vel quam turpe est, quod viri nati tunicis muliebris vestiuntur, et turpissima demutatione puellaribus figuris virile robur effeminant, non erubescentes tunicis muliebribus inserere militares lacertos: barbatas facies praeferunt, et videri se feminas volunt*, *Serm*. 192.2.

[170] *Quid enim est tam demens, quam virilem sexum in formam mulieris turpi habitu commutare? Quid tam demens, quam deformare faciem, et vultus induere, quos ipsi etiam daemones expavescunt?*, *Serm.* 193.1.

[171] 'But their other doings, how can one mention them? Does not the champion, the lion-hearted man, the man who when armed is the admiration of his friends and the terror of his foes, loose his tunic to his ankles, twine a girdle about his breast, use a woman's sandal, put a roll of hair on his head in feminine fashion, and ply the distaff full of wool, and with that right hand which once bore the trophy, draw out the thread, and changing the tone of his voice utter his words in the sharper feminine treble?', Ast. *Hom.* 4.7.

Again we might ask what deeper meanings we should ascribe to such practices. Taking the 'common-sense' line, Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey remark that '[s]ome cross-dressing was (and is) simply ludic: playful parody, associated once with Christmas, Shrovetide and May Day, and more recently with Halloween and Gay Pride'.[172] Nonetheless, the meaning of cross-dressing in ritual and in popular festivity has received a good deal of attention from anthropologists and historians alike. Anthropological interpretations of cross-dressing have tended to cluster around a number of predictable themes: seeing it as apotropaic, as an example of fertility ritual, as a ritual of status reversal, as part of a rite of passage or as a form of category definition.[173] In the ancient world cross-dressing was associated with several Greek festivals and rituals, most strikingly perhaps the 'Festival of Insolence', an Argive festival, where men and women swopped clothes and fought,[174] as well as being associated with rite-of-passage rituals, including wedding rites.[175] Cross-dressing was less common in the ritual sphere in the Roman world; for instance, at Saturnalia (male) citizens reputedly took off their togas and donned freedmen's caps, hence performing using costume inversion to play not with gender but rather with socio-legal status.[176] However, Kalends dressing up certainly involved cross-dressing and thus it is worth exploring this theme further.

Cross-dressing clearly offers liberating possibilities. Michel Meslin suggested that each individual dressing up was able to benefit 'from the other powers of the other, and to find a positive and beneficial value in these masquerades'.[177] Putting on the costume of the opposite sex certainly offered an opportunity to behave differently, outside the usual bounds of convention: here the theme of *licence* comes into play once again. Natalie Zemon Davis influentially argued that male cross-dressing enabled men to play productively on the idea of the 'unruly woman', giving them new opportunities for normally *unlicensed* behaviour in that 'the female persona authorized resistance', helping to remove responsibility for male actions.[178] Caesarius and Asterius, as we saw, made rhetorical play on the shocking contrast *between* and inversion *of* martial hyper-masculinity and femininity at the Kalends. Caesarius, in line with a long tradition of Roman gender

[172] Bennett and McSheffrey 2014: 7. [173] Usefully summarized by Davis 1975: 130.
[174] See Forsdyke 2012: 130; Tommasi 2017: especially 121–4.
[175] Useful discussion in Carlà-Uhink 2017. [176] See Versnel 1994: 147.
[177] 'des pouvoirs de l'autre et de trouver dans de telles mascarades une valeur positive et bénéfique', Meslin 1970: 84.
[178] Davis 1975: especially 149.

ideology, considered the masculinity and strength of the soldiers to be put at risk in this way: 'Those who change into the dress of women fittingly no longer possess manly strength [*virile . . . fortitudinem*], for it must be believed to be happening by God's just judgement that they should lose the strength of a soldier [*militarem virtutem*] when they deform themselves with the appearance of women.'[179] We can only assume that in general the soldiers involved were aware of, and positively enjoyed, just such a 'risk'.

Cross-dressing also includes the idea of disguise, as seen in such famous cases as the Rebecca Riots of mid-nineteenth-century Wales and the Porteous Riots of mid-seventeenth-century Edinburgh.[180] Peter Chrysologus mentioned the use of charcoal by Kalends revellers;[181] face-blacking in fact turns up frequently as a feature of costumes for popular festivities, often in combination with cross-dressing. In an example from early modern Elgin (in north-east Scotland), we have a confession from a penitent brought before the kirk session, for 'dansyng and guysing'; he admits to the court that 'he haid his sisters coat upon him and the rest that were with him haid claythis dammaskit about thame and thair faces blaikit [blacked] . . . Archie Hay haid a faise [face = mask] about his loynes and ane kerche [woman's kerchief] about his face'.[182] Here we have both cross-dressing and face-blacking. Dressing up in 'monstrous' forms, as well as in the clothes of the opposite sex, continued to form an important part of popular festivities and therefore of popular culture. Again, while we can point to the practicality of face-blacking as a readily available and effective disguise, we should probably push the interpretation further. Blackness in late antiquity, as in later periods, clearly had connotations of race as well as (and related to) associations with the demonic and the underworld.[183] In her discussion of the use of cross-dressing and 'blackface' in medieval popular festivity, Claire Sponsler persuasively argues that we need to take *both* these disguises seriously, to situate them in 'the realm of social and cultural struggle' and appreciate their 'dangerousness', rather than seeing

[179] Caes. *Serm*. 192.2; compare Ast. *Hom*. 4.7, as discussed earlier. [180] Davis 1975: 149.

[181] *Namque talium deorum facies ut pernigrari possint, carbo deficit*, Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155 *bis* 2.

[182] 1598 Elgin Rec. II. 69, cited in Twycross and Carpenter 2002: 81; we can also compare a stern account from Aberdeen, just a few years later in 1605, of carousing by a group of young men and women who were celebrating a wedding, involving cross-dressing, mask wearing and dancing: *Selections from the Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, ed. John Stuart (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1846), p. 47.

[183] We might think here of the vision of Perpetua, where she wrestles with a 'foul' Egyptian, clearly meant to embody the demonic: *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 10.1; see Heffernan 2012: 261–2.

them as 'customary and inconsequential'.[184] We can certainly see Kalends dressing up as offering an opportunity for different groups and individuals to express diverse sentiments. Women and men alike could have welcomed the opportunity to break out of their customary roles through cross-dressing. Social subordinates might have enjoyed the opportunities disguise afforded them when paying their noisy visits to their social superiors. However, it is hard to push anthropologically tinged interpretations much further without straying too far into the hypothetical.

So far we have seen that in accounts of the Kalends satire and role reversal – clichés, almost, of the carnivalesque – abound. But as I have hinted, there is a danger that 'carnivalistic' interpretations can descend into vague and unhelpful, and indeed unhistoricized, cliché.[185] Ultimately I want to demonstrate the complexities and ambiguities, indeed the polyvalence, of the festival of the Kalends. There is clearly a wide range of anthropological frameworks or interpretations available for the interpretation of festivals and festive behaviour.[186] For instance, with Geertz's 'thick description' in mind we can understand ritual behaviour as a means of describing and performing the social order in question.[187] We might well also think of Victor Turner's highly influential (and again somewhat idealized) interpretation of social rituals as fostering *communitas*.[188] More generally, the role of ritual in establishing bonds of reciprocity and social relations, as studied by anthropologists and sociologists, comes to the fore in discussion of gift exchange, a prominent aspect of the Kalends, as I shall discuss next.

The Politics of Gift Exchange at the Kalends

The exchange of *strenae* at the Kalends is a conspicuous feature in late antique accounts of the festival, as an element that was prominent in both official and informal rituals and celebrations. Kalends gift-giving was modelled at the very highest level, with gifts being made both to the people and to the army by the emperor himself. Officials in the cities of the empire also made donations: Libanius refers both to the payment of gold and the

[184] Sponsler 1997: 322.
[185] See Rogers 1998: 15 on how some interpretations tend to signal 'a cosmic populism, an exaltation of irreverent counter-cultures whose historical significance is ultimately elusive, paradoxical, and indeterminate'. I owe this reference to Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira.
[186] Note the brief comments of Graf 2012: 2–4.
[187] Geertz 1973: 412–53 ('Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight').
[188] Most canonically in Turner 1969: 94–140; cited in connection with the Kalends by Gleason 1986: 112.

throwing of coins into the crowd by these officials.[189] In the later Roman empire, the Kalends was clearly an important occasion for politicians and political authorities to demonstrate their largesse. It was also important in the private sphere: we have already seen how gifts were also exchanged among 'private' individuals as part of the Kalends greeting rituals.[190] This process occurred horizontally, between friends, but also again vertically, between patrons and clients of various sorts (including, presumably, employees). Gift exchange at the Kalends served to both create and retain social and communal bonds through reciprocity.[191]

The importance of gift exchange in pre-modern societies has been much discussed, ever since Marcel Mauss wrote his 'Essai sur le don', almost a hundred years ago now.[192] As explained by Michael Satlow, 'All gifts are embedded in a set of social relationships and obligations . . .. The purpose of the gift is thus to create group cohesion by establishing an ongoing cycle of gift-exchange.'[193] In a pithy if idealistic formulation, Marshall Sahlins comments, '[i]f friends make gifts, gifts make friends'.[194] However, as many have noted, while symmetrical giving among equals might produce what Mauss and others saw as the 'pure' gift, more generally gifts 'play an important and highly calibrated role in creating and reinforcing social hierarchies within each community'.[195] In particular, in the case of asymmetrical reciprocal relations, such as those found in ancient patronage relationships, gifts are usually given *downwards* in order to cement loyalty and dependency. Neil Coffee argues that gift-giving was unusually significant in Roman culture, even in comparison with other ancient societies: indeed, Roman literature has much to say about the 'power dynamics' of giving.[196] For instance, Seneca wrote a treatise on gift-giving, *De Beneficiis*, which argued for giving without hope of return; Martial presents a much less idealized and of course satirical view which I shall examine further later. It is helpful now to look more closely at how gift-giving was generally seen in Roman discourse in order to provide something of an ideological background for the late antique *strenae*.

Saturnalia provides the canonical setting for gift exchange in Martial's epigrams; indeed, the two final books (XIII and XIV) are presented as poems

[189] Libanius *Descr*. 5.7–8.
[190] Meslin notes how the sources mention that *strenae* were exchanged directly following the Kalends greetings, which for him highlights their links with reciprocity: Meslin 1970: 39.
[191] Graf 1998: 207–9, 214, stressing the importance of Kalends gifts in the symbolic construction of status.
[192] Mauss 1923–4; translated into English as Mauss 1990. [193] Satlow 2013a: 5.
[194] Sahlins 1972: 186, cited by Crook 2013: 62. [195] Satlow 2013a: 8.
[196] Coffee 2017: 9, 11; see further on classical gift-giving Carlà and Gori 2014.

to accompany gifts. The social world conjured by Martial is certainly not one of the 'pure' gift: gift-giving here is always vertical, with some clear end in view, and not all gifts are equal. Martial does not subscribe at all to Seneca's idealistic view that it is the *intention* behind the gift, not its value, that matters.[197] Not all gifts, he says, are equally desirable: in the gift poems in Book 14, the *Apophoreta*,[198] desirable 'rich' and undesirable 'poor' presents alternate. In other books too Martial sneers at the inelegant gifts his lawyer friend Umber has received from his clients, gifts that Umber has offloaded onto him in turn: the poet says he would rather have had the money![199] Gifts are traps to lure advantage, says Martial. This epigram is worth quoting at length; here the poet defends himself against the claim that he is mean for sending only his own works as presents: 'I hate the wily, wicked tricks of presents [*odi dolosas munerum et malas artes*]. Gifts are like hooks: for who does not know that the greedy wrasse is taken in by the fly he has devoured. Whenever he gives nothing to a rich friend, Quintianus, a poor man is generous.'[200] Martial's point is that the gifts of a *pauper* (such as himself!) are not gifts as they work merely to ensnare richer friends in costly bonds of dependence.[201] He depicts an intensely structured world of gift-giving where inferiors seek to bind their superiors with gifts, and where giving the wrong gift could cause real offence.

Turning to our late antique clerical critiques of Kalends giving, we find accounts that are equally satirical in tone but with very different kinds of complaint about vertical giving. Bishops allege that Kalends gifts move inexorably *up* the social scale, with drastic effects on those at the bottom of the pile, who find themselves utterly impoverished. The ideological and discursive context of this argument is of course important: these accounts are shaped by ecclesiastical discourse around what constituted appropriate giving. Late antique churchmen repeatedly argued for a new, ecclesiastically supervised form of giving in place of the traditional classical model of euergetism, and other forms of conspicuous consumption.[202] Ecclesiastical attacks persisted against those who continued to support traditional civic events and entertainments, just like those associated with the Kalends. Bishops argued that those who were well-off should give generously to the

[197] See Coffee 2017: 161–4.
[198] The name is derived from the gifts 'carried away' by guests at Saturnalia.
[199] Martial 7.53; also sneering at the gifts received by another lawyer friend, Sabellus: 4.46.
[200] Martial 5.18, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Loeb). Compare also 4.56.
[201] See further Verboven 2014.
[202] The bibliography here is large. The work of Peter Brown has been particularly influential; see Brown 1992: especially 71–117; Brown 2002; Brown 2012.

church so that the bishop himself might correctly supervise the disbursement of funds to the poor.[203] It is Augustine who most directly and pithily opposed the giving of *strenae* to the giving of alms, as part of the binary scheme that lies at the heart of his critique of the Kalends: '*They* [the pagans] give *strenae*; *you* give alms' (my emphasis).[204] A little later in the same sermon, in one of the mock dialogues he favoured as a homiletic technique, he imagines his congregation wrestling with their consciences over the issues of *strenae*. 'But you say to me, "When I give *strenae*, I too receive them".' Augustine's response is familiar: he argues that giving to the poor will receive its own reward (while failure to give to the poor will lead to divine punishment!).[205] The satirically tinged accounts of Kalends gift exchange given by our preachers clearly display their shared agenda: to promote ecclesiastically sanctioned alms donation in place of profane practices of giving.

The concept behind the exchange of *strenae* at the Kalends (as at other times) was clearly to do with reciprocity, part of the building of *communitas* at festivals.[206] Gifts were exchanged as part of larger patterns of Kalends rituals of greeting and hospitality. This gift exchange indeed forms part of Libanius' account, fleshing out his picture of the festival as something that fostered reciprocity, social unity and equality. Kalends gift-giving, according to Libanius in his *Or.* 9, teaches generosity, encouraging everyone (from the emperor downwards) not to 'cling excessively to their gold, but rather to give it up and put it into the hands of others'; it is 'an education concerning possessions'.[207] In his *Description* Libanius explicitly discusses the ways in which Kalends giving is reciprocal and symmetrical: 'So, on the day before the festival, gifts are carried through the city, as many as would make a table splendid, some from the powerful honouring each other, others from the lower ranks to them and from them to the lower ranks, the latter attending to the former's power, the former sharing their luxury with their attendants.'[208] This passage in fact strongly indicates that the equalizing claims he has made for Kalends hospitality and gift-giving elsewhere are indeed unreliable, as Libanius recognizes here that gift-giving in fact cements

[203] As Brown 1992 demonstrated, bishops in particular preferred to maintain stewardship over the funds for charitable giving. More freelance almsgiving sometimes led to suspicion, as with the infamous story told by Jerome of the noblewoman who ostentatiously distributed alms to beggars in her own right outside St Peter's in Rome, but punched an old woman who had the temerity to come back for a second coin: Jer. *Ep.* 22.32; see further Grig 2006.

[204] *Dant ergo illi strenas, vos date eleemosynas*, Aug. *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.2.

[205] Augustine, *Serm.* Dolbeau 26.4.

[206] See further Baudy 1987.

[207] Lib. *Or.* 9.15, 9.17; as a teacher he appreciates that this is the day when teachers are paid: 9.16.

[208] Lib. *Descr.* 5.5, trans. Gibson.

and highlights *relative* status rather than obliterating status distinction (something which comes as no surprise to the critical reader). Nonetheless, the depiction of reciprocity in gift-giving fits his highly idealized picture of the festival as something that is enjoyed by everyone in society: he makes a point of saying that even the poor eat better than usual, and even slaves and prisoners enjoy some respite from their usual lot.[209]

In Arles, Caesarius has little specific to say about *strenae*: he makes it clear that he objects to both the giving and receiving, and terms them *diabolica*, presumably with reference to their function as good luck presents – and as part of his broader aim to present the festival as 'pagan'.[210] It is from the more extended critiques of other preachers that we are able to construct a thicker description of both the practices and ideological debates involved. Maximus of Turin sets the scene nicely: his revellers get up early and go out to greet people; they exchange *strenae* and kisses with their friends. This kiss, says the bishop of Turin, is venal, to do with avarice rather than *affectum*: it is a kiss with gain in view. However, as he goes on to argue, only the well-off will in fact benefit from the exchange of *strenae*. According to Maximus, inferiors are expected to give to their superiors, even though some will need to borrow in order to be able to do so. He even imagines, with satirical exaggeration, a man having to sell his son into slavery so that he might fulfil his gift obligations. Horizontal giving does exist, at the level of gift exchange between rich men, but here Maximus comments with disapproval that the rich will give each other *solidi* while denying a beggar a *denarius*.[211]

Asterius presents a very similar picture: he describes the Kalends kiss as motivated by covetousness and again paints a picture of giving and receiving in which very few people achieve satisfaction, as the money moves ever upwards: 'Oh, the absurdity of it! All stalk about open-mouthed, hoping to receive something from one another. Those who have given are dejected; those who have received a gift do not retain it, for the present is handed on from one to another, and he who received it from an inferior gives it to a superior.'[212] He claims that *strenae* lead to debt and usury, depicting an honest man abused and forced to give away more than he can afford, with the result that his own family go hungry on the feast day.[213] It is Asterius

[209] Lib. *Or*. 9.6, 9.11–12.

[210] *diabolicas etiam strenas et ab aliis accipiunt, et ipsi aliis tradunt*: *Serm*. 192.3; he mentions the practice without further comment in *Serm.* 193.3: *multi praeterea strenas et ipsi offerre, et ab aliis accipere solent*. The influential canon 1 from the Synod of Auxerre also refers to *streneas* [sic] *diabolicas*, Synod. Dioces. Autiss a. 561–605 can. 1.

[211] Max. Tur. *Serm.* 98 *extr.* 2; discussion in Grey 2011: 106–7.

[212] Ast. *Hom.* 4.4; translations of Asterius throughout are by Anderson and Goodspeed.

[213] Ast. *Hom.* 4.5.

who gives us by far the most detailed depiction and critique of Kalends giving.[214] He seeks to argue that it does not even succeed within traditional criteria: 'One cannot call what takes place exchange [συνάλλαγμα], for the multitude exchange nothing with one another. But to call it a free gift [δωρεά] is still more inappropriate, since the giving is by necessity [ἀνάγκη].'[215] Kalends gift exchange is immoral, according to Asterius, because the givers are compelled to give and the recipients are, in various ways, unworthy. It is worth considering now what his description, together with the others we have, can tell us about the specifically 'popular' aspects of the *strenae*.

Even allowing for the deeply partial viewpoints of our episcopal critics, the picture they give of the existing system of gift-giving, as one that favours the rich and powerful over their inferiors, is largely convincing. Rituals of gift-giving generally sought to *reinforce*, not to undo, existing patterns of economic distribution and social hierarchies. However, the limits of early Christian radicalism on this topic are also well known: patristic texts tend to propose an orderly, episcopally supervised distribution of superfluities to a carefully designated group of the deserving 'poor'.[216] Indeed, this is precisely Asterius' theme: in his account the unworthy recipients of Kalends gifts include not just the rich at one end of the scale but also a variety of social undesirables at the other. His picture of the Kalends as a 'feast of annoyance' includes the depiction of a very motley and disreputable crew, seeking unmerited material gain: 'For the common vagrants and the jugglers of the stage, dividing themselves into squads and hordes, hang about every house.'[217] Asterius' mission is to persuade his audience to give alms, not monetary gifts, to the unworthy, so he provides a series of antitheses:

> Give to the crippled beggar, and not to the dissolute musician. Give to the widow instead of the harlot; instead of to the woman of the street, to her who is piously secluded. Lavish your gifts upon the holy virgins singing psalms unto God, and hold the shameless psaltery in abhorrence, which by its music catches the licentious before it is seen.[218]

Once again, several of the most familiar negative topoi of popular culture are emphasized in order to be castigated: singing, dancing and performance are highlighted as especially contemptible activities and performers as a particularly unworthy category. We might also notice the gender dimensions that emerge at this point. While in general the discourse surrounding

[214] Lisa Driver rightly comments that for Asterius Kalends gift exchange puts real strain on 'the ideal of civic unity': Driver 1996: 176.
[215] Ast. *Hom.* 4.3. [216] See, for example, Grig 2006. [217] Ast. *Hom* 4.4. [218] Ast. *Hom.* 4.8.

gift exchange (academic as well as ancient and late ancient) seems to assume gift exchange among *men* and as to do with relative *male* status, here we find female recipients under explicit discussion. And again, it is the specifically *sexual* status of women that is raised: (deserving) widows and virgins are contrasted with (undeserving) prostitutes and licentious performers, who, as so often, are seen as basically equivalent.[219] At the same time, as is typical, the audience of the discourse is constructed as male.

Asterius seeks to denigrate the Kalends as a festival celebrated by a lower-class rabble as part of his rhetorical strategy and his ideological agenda. However, and finally, it is worth returning to our sources once more to see if the festive practices of the Kalends could nonetheless have provided an opportunity for the under-privileged to seek material improvement in one way or another. I shall now look in detail at what we have already identified as one of the most important aspects of the interpretation of carnivalesque festivals: the association of the festival with riot, rebellion and indeed revolution, and in this way focus on one of the biggest questions as regards the nature of popular culture.

Socio-economic Relations at the Kalends: Crisis or Resolution?

Let's start by going back in time to the sixth century BCE, to an intriguing episode we find in Plutarch:[220]

> When the Megarians had expelled Theagenes, their despot, for a short time they were sober and sensible in their government. But later when the popular elders poured a full and heady draught of freedom for them, as Plato says, they were completely corrupted and, among their shocking acts of misconduct towards the wealthy, the poor would enter their homes and insist upon being entertained and banqueted sumptuously. But if they did not receive what they demanded, they would treat all the household with violence and insult.[221]

According to Plutarch's much later account, the poor invaded the houses of the rich and demanded to be feasted.[222] Sara Forsdyke contextualizes the incident at Megara within a broader pattern of popular festive revelry, linked to contemporary socio-economic concerns. Traditions of more or

[219] See p. 136. [220] I owe my discussion to Forsdyke 2012: 117–43.

[221] Plutarch, *Mor.* 295d (*Quaest. Graec.* 18), trans. F. C. Babbitt (Loeb); later Plutarch discusses the sacrilegious violence also allegedly committed by the Megarians: *Mor.* 304f (*Quaest. Graec.* 59).

[222] Forsdyke convincingly places the origin of Plutarch's account in the context of anti-democratic discourse, which sought to link democracy with disorder: Forsdyke 2012: 119–24; Plutarch himself links the feasting behaviour with the campaign for debt relief for the poor.

less extortionary door-to-door visits in ancient Greece are evidenced in a number of surviving songs, such as the Swallow Song and the Crow Song, which were seemingly sung by groups of young men who travelled door to door, asking for hospitality from householders.[223] For instance, in the Crow Song: 'But, good sirs, offer me some of the wealth your house has deep within. Give me something, lord! And you too, young lady! The law requires that you give a handful to a crow when she asks. That's the end of my song. Give something: it will be enough.'[224] In a fascinating instance of apparent continuity, the twelfth-century Byzantine author Ioannes Tzetzes wrote about begging monks who went door to door at Christmas, the Kalandai and Epiphany, either singing or reciting encomia and asking for a reward in return.[225] There are no specific Kalends songs mentioned in our Gallic texts – but as we have seen, song is one of the most frequently cited elements of popular culture and we can certainly imagine them being sung as part of Kalends visits and general revelry.

Songs were indeed part of the riotous and abusive behaviour that so upset the emperor Julian at Antioch in 362/3, behaviour which, as we saw, took place at a time when tensions were inflamed by an apparently ill-handled food shortage.[226] And we hear that in 384 the Antioch New Year festivities got (even more) out of hand; Libanius on this occasion associated the upheaval with the festival of Poseidon, which included circus races, which famously were occasions with potential for volatility. According to Libanius, it was after the races that a mob attacked an unpopular official, the former supervisor of bakers, Candidus, whom they blamed for earlier food shortages:[227]

> he, ever the sot, was ousted from his position of authority and sat at home with covered face, and when the horse race had been run in honour of Poseidon, he was all fear and trembling for his own home, such a torrent of lads bored down upon it, torch in hand, calling upon him to disgorge all that he had unjustly consumed. His former associates in arrogance were but broken reeds, and he, thoroughly undeceived, tore his hair in mortification.[228]

The threatening behaviour depicted here lies on the borderline between symbolic and actual violence. Libanius here describes what sounds like a classic case of carnivalistic violence or charivari, as Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira has pointed out. He suggests that here we have

[223] Forsdyke 2012: 126–228. [224] Ath. 360a, trans. S. Douglas Olson (Loeb).
[225] ἐπῳδῶν ἢ λόγοις ἐγκωμίων, Ioannes Tzetzes, *Histories* 13.475.244 = Leone 1986: 523, cited in Graf 2015: 220.
[226] Discussed by Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2011: 172–4. [227] See Brown 1992: 88.
[228] Lib. *Or.* 1.228, trans. Norman.

popular justice as street theatre, a recognizable aspect of late antique urban culture, characteristic of the new flavour of expression of social conflict in this period.[229]

The Kalends celebrations could undoubtedly be boisterous. In North Africa Augustine, in one of his bouts of homiletic ventriloquism, imagines 1 January revellers saying, 'Let's create some chaos!' (*alogiemus*); Brent Shaw comments, 'As 1 January approaches, Christian bishops knew that there was potential for trouble.'[230] We should not forget, however, that most of the time even uproarious urban festivities, as well as food shortages and political crises, did *not* actually lead to violence. The closest our Kalends material takes us to violence comes with behaviour reported by Asterius. Libanius, meanwhile, as we saw, depicts the festival as an opportunity for joyous interaction between different classes and groups, leading to renewed social unity and equality, indeed the very model of *communitas*. It is in polar opposition to this picture that Asterius instead paints the Kalends as an occasion for social strife and conflict. In his account outsiders are not only mocked but also beaten, in an outburst of drunken violence. The first victims named are farmers who have come into the city for the festivities:[231] 'the sturdy and honest farmers [*georgoi*] . . . such as are found within . . . [the city] are flogged, treated with drunken violence, what they have in their hands is snatched from them; they are warred upon in a time of peace, are jeered at, and mocked with words and deeds'.[232] Food producers, or those involved in fixing food prices, are regular targets of group violence, especially at times of food shortages – just as we saw with Candidus in Antioch in 384. However, it seems most likely that the *georgoi* who were abused in Amaseia were attacked rather as socially insignificant country bumpkins and innocents abroad (indeed as an 'outgroup') rather than in a context of conflict over food production and prices, where it was usually rich landowners and officials who were targeted.[233]

[229] Magalhães de Oliveira 2014 and 2020. Although there was no actual bloodshed in Antioch in 384, this was not always the case: there are certainly other accounts of very real popular violence, including that which resulted in the death of the governor Theophilus in 354: *Or.* 1.103. There is a highly coloured tenor to the autobiographical oration as a whole, with violence, or threatened violence, often prominent, including claims of plots on Libanius' own life: *Or.* 1.136–7.

[230] Aug. *In Evang. Iohann.* 5.17, discussed by Shaw 2011: 220 n.88, who comments, '"Alogiemus" was a shout with Greek roots, that was an encitement to disorderly conduct, literally "let's get things out of order" or "let's create some chaos"'; he also points out, however, that there is 'little evidence' of 'conflict and hostilities'.

[231] Asterius begins a sermon which takes place on a martyr's feast day with a special welcome to rural Christians who have come into the city for the celebrations: *Hom.* 3.1.

[232] Ast. *Hom.* 4.6.

[233] Bell 2013: 65 describes the *georgos* as 'someone who *works* the land – whether as tenant, labourer, or freeholder' and compares the term with the Latin *colonus*.

Asterius claims clerics as another category of victims harassed by Kalends revellers in Amaseia: 'Even our most excellent and guileless prophets, the unmistakeable representatives of God, who when unhindered in their work are our faithful ministers, are treated with insolence.'[234] Asterius goes into no more detail and his terminology is sufficiently vague that we do not know which types of clergy are concerned. We might indeed suspect that this vagueness is deliberate on Asterius' part: that he knows of no actual insults or attacks on specific clergy members but is trying to stir his apathetic audience to moral outrage against the Kalends celebrations. On the other hand, it seems quite plausible that on an occasion of lively carnivalistic celebrations clergy, presumably distinguishable by their clothing and grooming, could have made obvious targets for insults. We can compare the riots that took place in 408 in Calama, North Africa, during celebrations of the Kalends of June: these began with a riotous dancing procession that went past the town's Catholic church but escalated when clerics tried to stop the celebrations.[235] In Arles itself we can recall nothing so dramatic outside times of more widespread conflict, but we can recall the incident reported in the *Vita* of Hilary, whereby a stirred-up crowd came and insulted the bishop and were duly punished by a divinely sent fire.[236]

Even without violence, some of the festive practices associated with the Kalends clearly caused unease among members of the elite, especially when these practices and behaviours made noisily visible real-life fissures of social and economic inequality, just as in the case of the enforced hospitality in archaic Megara. Asterius' account, as hostile as it is, presents the Kalends as an opportunity for 'commoners and beggars' (δημόται γάρ ἀγύρται)[237] to receive hospitality from high-ranking members of the civic community:

> For the common vagrants and wonderworkers of the stage, dividing themselves into squads and hordes, hang about every house. The gates of public officials they besiege with especial persistence, actually shouting and clapping their hands until he that is beleaguered within, exhausted, throws out to them whatever money he has and even what is not his own. And these mendicants going from door to door follow one after another, and, until late

[234] Ast. *Hom.* 4.6.

[235] Later, when the clergy reported the illicit celebrations to the authorities, riots ensued, resulting first in the stoning and then the setting on fire of church buildings; a cleric was murdered and the bishop put under siege: this event is recounted by Augustine, *Ep.* 91.8–9 and 104.3.9 and discussed by Magalhães de Oliveira 2012: 253–65; I am grateful to the author for drawing my attention to the episode.

[236] *V. Hil.* 18; see pp. 36–7, 63–4. [237] Ast. *Hom.* 4.4.

> in the evening, there is no relief from this nuisance. For crowd succeeds crowd, and shout, shout, and loss, loss.[238]

Here we can see how the Kalends could provide a ritualized opportunity for marginal members of the urban community to seek redress and sustenance from its civic leaders. Bishops, meanwhile, supposedly the champions of the poor, did not look upon such behaviour with favour but tended to subscribe to traditional elite critiques of the behaviour of the lower classes instead.

We have already seen our preachers contrast the gifts of the Kalends with the supervised charitable giving they wished to see in its place. It is Asterius, once more, who provides the most developed and hostile account of the social effects of the exchange of *strenae*. All our preachers exhort their congregations to give alms to the poor in their Kalends sermons but Asterius draws a contrast between the worthy and unworthy poor. For all his claims that Kalends revellers are giving handouts to 'harlots' and stage performers, he also clearly describes the role of the urban poor in the form of unwelcome beggars: δημόται γάρ ἀγύρται. He does not see these people as worthy recipients of charity, especially when gathered in groups. He claims that real *penetes* are themselves victims of the anti-social behaviour of the Kalends revellers, as discussed earlier.[239] Asterius has his own vision of legitimate poverty and of the expected behaviour of the poor. He expected the poor of Amaseia to await episcopally organized charity humbly – not to demand it noisily on the doorstep. The Kalends beggars are deliberately constructed by Asterius as outcasts, outsiders, as outside the accepted chains of household and church patronage.

Asterius' sermon is one of many texts that express various levels of unease at the potentially socially disruptive presence of mendicants of different kinds in late antiquity. In another sermon, on the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, Asterius himself attempted to distinguish between the more and less deserving poor.[240] Bishops and clerical writers consistently professed a preference for the high-born who had suffered reversals of fortune to the permanently poor and for the voluntary religious poor against the merely indigent – while at the same time showing anxiety about some supposed monks who lived from mendicancy.[241] As we saw, there was a long-standing tradition as regards who should be entitled to the support of the church.[242]

[238] Ast. *Hom.* 4.4.
[239] Ast. *Hom.* 4.6. The choice of *penetes* is in itself interesting, as generally patristic Greek texts preferred to use *ptochoi* for the destitute.
[240] Ast. *Hom.* 10.1–3.
[241] See Caner 2022 on such preferences and Caner 2002 on 'wandering, begging monks'.
[242] See pp. 45–6.

Our late antique sources – ecclesiastical and legal alike – show persistent concern about dubious beggars of various kinds. John Chrysostom berated his congregations for refusing to give alms to supposed 'fake' beggars,[243] but also mentioned the practice of deliberately blinding children to increase their value.[244] Asterius described criminal beggars of various kinds.[245] In the late antique city of Rome a much-discussed rescript of Gratian's indicates wider elite concerns about dubious beggars in the city.[246] While we do not have such concerns expressed explicitly in texts from southern Gaul, it seems likely that we can extrapolate from elsewhere in such a case.

In Amaseia Asterius sees the door-to-door visits at the Kalends as extortion: he claims that the money handed out by householders is only handed out in response to coercion. It is not difficult, however, to imagine a different interpretation, whereby the householders involved mostly took the 'festival of annoyance', to use Asterius' words, in good (enough) part. For urban public officeholders, at least, it was part of the deal at such occasions – even if, at times, this must have felt like an uncomfortable one. As the festival of the Kalends traditionally included both official and informal aspects, public officials, from the emperor downwards, were likely to be prominent in celebrations – something that worked largely to their advantage, as well as occasionally to their disadvantage. This was part of the traditional licence of festivals, and perhaps especially of the Kalends, as we have already seen. In the case of late antique Gaul, it is not possible to identify any official *civic* aspect to the festivities in the cities in our surviving evidence, but we can think about how relations between landowners and their social inferiors of various sorts might have been performed, negotiated or indeed challenged in the Kalends rituals.

Caesarius claims, in a pattern familiar from previous chapters, that 'superstitious' Kalends practices were engaged in not by his primary intended audience of landowners but rather by *rustici*, by their social inferiors, and subordinates, including those within their own households: *vicini*, *famuli* and *familiae*.[247] The scenario envisaged in the sermons is one where landowners provide hospitality to their social inferiors and subordinates, presumably including tenants, *coloni* and indeed poorer neighbours, who make their New Year's visits to their houses. Caesarius firmly warns landowners not to show sympathy

[243] John Chrys. *Homilies on Matthew* 35.3 (*PG* 47.409), *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 21.8 (*PG* 61.177).
[244] John Chrys. *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 21.5 (*PG* 61.177). [245] Ast. *Hom.* 1.10.1–3.
[246] *CTh* 14.18.1; see Grey and Parkin 2003 and Machado 2022. [247] Caes. *Serm.* 193.2.

(*humanitas*) towards the revellers, and certainly not to let them into their homes (*ante domos vestras venire non permittatis*).[248] Indeed, rather than offering hospitality, this is one of the misdemeanours for which the bishop counsels especially severe punishment: 'But rather rebuke and correct and, if you can, even punish with severity [*sed castigate potius atque corripite et, si potestis, etiam cum severitate distringite*].'[249] Correction by punishment and example alike should be the proper response of the social superior, the bishop enjoins, explaining that this combination will help ensure both a heavenly reward for the landowner and mercy for the rustic alike.[250]

It is apparent, however, that the expectations of Caesarius' congregations seem to have been rather different: they were obviously minded to be tolerant of – or even find enjoyment in – the revels:

> Anyone who shows a kindly feeling to the foolish men who indulge in wanton amusement on these Kalends should not doubt that he is a participant in their sins. The man who thinks about the salvation of his soul ought to grieve or weep over them rather than to open his soul to miserable laughter with them or over them.[251]

Note how the bishop feels the need to insist that Kalends practices are contaminating even when merely *looked* at,[252] let alone laughed at (whether, he says, you are laughing *with* them or *at* them). Gift exchange surely played a role in these visits, even if Caesarius is not explicit on this point beyond issuing a general prohibition of *strenae*. We must assume, even if Caesarius does not go into detail, that social superiors were expected to provide gifts, not least in the form of hospitality. Ultimately, these 'exchanges' were indeed one of the customary practices or rituals whereby the fundamentally unequal and yet relatively stable social and economic relations of the late antique Provençal countryside were maintained – alongside more obviously coercive and extractive

[248] *aliquam humanitatem inpenderit*, Caes. *Serm*. 192.4; *aliquam humanitatem dederint*, *Serm*. 193.2.

[249] Caes. *Serm*. 193.2.

[250] *si in peccatis eorum participes esse non vultis, cervulum, sive anniculam, aut alia quaelibet portenta ante domos vestras venire non permittatis, sed castigate potius atque corripite et, si potestis, etiam cum severitate distringite*, Caes. *Serm*. 193.2: although he later also counsels correction *cum caritate et mansuetudine*, *Serm*. 193.3.

[251] *Qui enim in istis kalendis stultis hominibus luxuriose ludentibus aliquam humanitatem inpenderit, peccatis eorum participem se esse non dubitet: nam qui de salute animae suae fideliter cogitat, magis de illis dolere debet vel flere, quam cum illis vel de illis ad infelicem risum suum animum relaxare*, Caes. *Serm*. 192.4.

[252] See further: *non oportet ut oculi vestri, qui asidue in ecclesia vigilantes ad deum sanctificantur, videndo luxuriam stultorum hominum polluantur*, Caes. *Serm.* 192.4.

means. Indeed, Cam Grey comments of Kalends gift exchange that it 'was effective for both rich and poor'. While the well-off cemented their influence, the poor 'could legitimately except to receive more than they gave while also behaving in ways that accorded with accepted norms of communal behavior'.[253]

Finally, further 'superstitious' practices of the *rustici* are also worth considering in terms of their economic and social symbolism. Caesarius accuses *rustici* of one of the most widely attested Kalends practices, one already mentioned earlier:

> On the very eve of this feast there are also some rustics who set their little tables full of many things which are necessary to eat and they want to keep them arranged this way throughout the night, believing that in this way the Kalends of January can benefit them, so that throughout the year their banquets will continue with such plenty.[254]

This is an act which Caesarius wants his householder audience to 'command to be removed' from their households.[255] It is not hard to see how a practice designed to ensure plenty throughout the year would have resonance for those whose diets were indeed not always assured of *abundantia*. And although Caesarius attributed this practice to *rustici*, it is attested in various locations, as we have seen, including the city of Rome. Food shortages were of course an ever-present threat in the pre-modern world, whether caused by price-fixing, corruption, poor weather or demonic interference, and the poor were, as ever, the most vulnerable. We can easily understand the persistence of this ritual, then, despite the clerical naysaying.

The Kalends of January proved impressively resistant to the consistent disapproval of the church. And yet, the study of this festival also neatly demonstrates broader problems in the study of pre-modern popular culture *tout court*: notably, the difficulty of analysing the practices of the Kalends from within when forced to use elite and ecclesiastical literary sources. Nonetheless, a whole range of themes pertinent to the study of the history of popular culture, and to this book, converge in the case of the Kalends of January. The festival has worked nicely as an example of our model: its celebration contained clearly oppositional elements while incorporating 'top-down' as well as 'bottom-up' aspects.

[253] Grey 2011: 107. [254] Caes. *Serm*. 192.3.
[255] *a vestris ordinate familiis removeri*, Caes. *Serm*. 192.3.

Conclusions

Let's try to return to the point of the view of the Kalends revellers themselves: what might *they* have said to describe or interpret their activities? Earlier in the chapter we came across the ecclesiastical records from early modern Elgin, which preserved some of the testimony of the accused winter revellers, but we never got to hear what Archie Hay and his friends might have said to defend themselves. In late antique Ravenna, however, Peter Chrysologus, as we saw, at least pretended to give us a glimpse of the 'other side' of the struggle as he ventriloquizes his congregation's side of the story: 'But one of you says: This isn't the deliberate pursuit of sacrilege, these good luck visits are just for fun; this is a celebration of a new beginning, not a superstition from the past; this is just New Year, not the threat of paganism.'[256] Meanwhile, a text from early medieval Gaul, the much-discussed *Vita Eligii*, provides a spirited defence of traditional culture in the form of a fictionalized speech from the pagan opponents of its titular hero. We have already seen how St Hilary of Mende was able to persuade a band of Kalends revellers to hang up their antler horns. Eligius reputedly met a group of peasants from a vicus outside Noyon that were made of stronger stuff: 'No matter how often you talk, Roman, you will never be able to uproot our customs, but we will continue always and forever to carry on our feasts as we have hitherto. No man will ever be able to forbid us the ancient entertainments that are so dear to us.'[257] Ramsay MacMullen has very aptly compared this speech to 'the passionate speeches invented by Tacitus for oppressed barbarians'.[258] Kalends practices do seem to provide us with an illuminating snapshot of what we can consider a continuing 'culture war' – even if we need to read this through the distorting lens of ecclesiastical discourse.

So what of the purported retort of Peter Chrysologus' congregation: that their Kalends activities were simply *ioci*, jokes? This is, I suggest, only part of the story: the activities *did* provide fun during the traditional festive season, but we can and should identify several aspects of deeper significance. What was the festival of the Kalends 'about'? It was, in the final

[256] Pet. Chrys. *Serm.* 155.5.

[257] *Numquam tu, Romane, quamvis haec frequenter taxes, consuetudines nostras evellere poteris, sed sollemnia nostra sicut hactenus fecimus, perpetuo semperque frequentabimus, nec ullus hominum erit, qui priscos atque gratissimos possit nobis umquam prohibere ludos*, *V. Elig.* 2.20; see Banniard 1992. While admittedly the customs in questions here are not specifically those of the Kalends, Kalends practices *are* criticized elsewhere in the *Vita*. The sermon gives a very standard denunciation: *V. Elig.* 2.16: *nullus in Kalendas Ianuarii nefanda et ridiculosa, vetulas aut cervulos vel iotticos faciat neque mensas super noctem conponat neque strenas aut bibitiones superfluas exerceat*.

[258] MacMullen 1997: 18.

analysis, about many things – or, to put it in the terms of an anthropologist, it was polyvalent. The Kalends celebrated new beginnings and renewal and hence constituted one of the most important festivals of the calendrical cycle. It also provided an important opportunity for mid-winter revelry and an occasion to enjoy plenty, where at all possible. It also had a vital social aspect: the festival provided an annual opportunity for the renewal or development of relations with both social equals and social superiors, including an important occasion on which to receive gifts or patronage of other kinds. That is not to say that we need accept a Durkheimian-style interpretation whereby the festival inevitably renewed the status quo through practices of social and ritual *communitas*. Indeed, at times the Kalends undoubtedly also provided an opportunity for the enacting and inflaming of tensions of various kinds: social and economic but also, perhaps, in terms of gender.

During late antiquity the festival of the Kalends of January became increasingly popular (as well as increasingly *visible*). The late Roman state had specifically enshrined the status of the holiday, seeing it as offering an important opportunity to show generosity and foster unity, while local civic elites had sponsored (perhaps sometimes through gritted teeth?) the often uproarious celebrations. While the end of traditional forms of imperial and civic euergetism brought an end to official, publicly funded celebrations, 'bottom-up' celebrations certainly more than filled the space left behind. One might point out that the Kalends did not offer any real threat to the status quo: indeed, the evidence from Gaul suggests that landowners were happy to sponsor the revelry through hospitality to their subordinates. The opposition to the festival, as we have seen, came largely from the church. The dynamics of this triangular relationship (to put it baldly) between popular culture, the church and secular interests and power will come more clearly to the fore in the final, concluding chapter.