

Initial program – Call for short papers

Lived Religion in Metropoleis: A comparative view

21 (noon)-23 June (evening) 2016, Erfurt, Germany
(Augustinerkloster)

The Lived Religion approach to ancient religion, as developed at the Max Weber Center has highlighted the importance of local spatial and social contexts, of materiality and communication as much as of social imaginaries and knowledge. One of these most important contexts is the urban, and this in two senses. First, the urban can be seen as the product of a specific economic development in the aftermath of the Neolithic revolution, embedded in cultural schemes of interpretation and Lived Religion. Secondly the urban is also a specific constellation of materiality and communication that finds its expression most of all in the emergence of public spaces. This constellation is of key importance for the specific reproduction of cultural schemes interpretation and Lived Religion.

So far, we have concentrated on domestic, secondary groupings' and public space. The collaboration with the new Center for Urban Network Evolutions at Aarhus University and specialists in social geography allows to add a further field, urban space, and to explore the mutual constitution of religious and urban space in both directions. As a starting point, this raises the question of religion in the city and in particular in ancient metropoleis of more than 100,000 inhabitants, characterized by a density of exchange and speed of interaction, a plurality of religious practices and religious groups, by a violence of critique and boundary drawing, by economic opportunities and medical dangers unknown to rural spaces. The degree of reading competences and the presence of texts in public spaces were certainly elevated there as well. At the same time, the sheer size would have offered the possibility of segmentation, of hiding or simply refraining from claiming public space. Spatial distance might have lowered frequency of specific religious interactions and hence degrees of institutionalisation, the diversity of public spaces could have ensured a large number of shared practices and reduced the salience of discrepant religious identities.

Of course, these metropoleis were intensively connected to the larger world, by economic, cultural and religious exchange, by traders and immigrants, by exploitation of distant areas or patronage. These metropoleis were present as imaginaries and penetrated as places of attraction even into the most distant places and they grew imaginaries of rural life and solitude at the same time. Once urbanity had gained foothold there was nowhere which was not somehow effected by having "become urban", being somehow in touch with or affected by the "urban". How did these facts translate into religious agency, communication and identities within the mega-cities?

Certainly, many of the large urban formations were a result of the formation of empires, but within the framework of "lived religion", the conference is not interested in empire but in scale as a factor for history of religion. From a history of religion point of view, the very few ancient mega-cities – Rome above all, but also Alexandria, Antioch and Byzantium – also appear as places of important changes, of innovation and conflict, of intensified literary production, of mutual influence, imitation, and frequent, if not aggressive distinction, boundary drawing and processes of marginalisation. The role of Hellenistic and imperial Alexandria for Judaism and Late Antiquity's Christianities is a case in point, the role of Rome for the proliferation of diverse symbols (emperor,

“Egyptian gods”, bull-sacrifice) and theological and Christ-related texts another. What would ancient religion had looked like without the specific contribution of these centres to the shaping of religion and religious traditions? Are we able to specify such factors? To narrate religious change in a way that pays sufficient attention to it and might we be able to pin it down?

Given the growing percentage of urban population, already forming the majority, in today's world, and the role of mega-cities in contemporary life, has become a thriving field of research. However, even here the role of religion in such environments is under-researched. Thus, looking onto ancient metropoleis might also contribute to a pressing field of research that so far has been dominated by a concentration on public spaces and dissolution of tradition social forms of bondage and their consequences to religion. This invites to attempt a comparative approach focusing on the interaction of scale and lived religion. This demands to employ comparison (with smaller cities or rural conditions) and larger diachronic views (assessing rates and the importance of changes). It is also inviting studies focusing on the interaction of different media, groups, and imaginaries in a metropolitan environment.

We are inviting young and senior scholars to join the discussion and to contribute short papers on the mutual constitution or the interaction of urban and religious developments past and present as outlined above (15 minutes).

Please, send a substantial abstract, including two or three bibliographical references, until **11 March 2016** to emiliano.urcioli@uni-erfurt.de

We offer free accommodation to accepted speakers and can offer travel subsidies on a limited scale.

Invited speakers:

Nicole Belayche, Paris: "Mithraism in a megalopolis' context (Rome and Ostia)? An impact? Which impact?"

Esther Eidinow, Nottingham/Erfurt: Scaling Up: Networks, Narratives and Religion

Paul Lichterman, Los Angeles: Style and inter-religious spaces

Lisa J. Lucero, Urbana-Champaign: Low density Maya urbanism

Teresa Morgan, Oxford: Rome, Alexandria and Antioch and key developments in early Christianity.

Rubina Raja, Aarhus: Networks in Metropoleis in the Eastern Mediterranean

Jörg Rüpke, Erfurt: Metropoleis and religion: An uneasy companionship

Michael Stausberg, Bergen/Erfurt: What is urban religion?

Anna Sun, Gabor/Ohio: The Social Life of Prayer in Contemporary Shanghai

Miguel John Versluys, Leiden: Unpacking the cosmopolitan node: Alexandria, *Alexandrianism* and religious innovation

Markus Vinzent, London/Erfurt: Jewish-Christian uprootings at Rome

Annette Weissenrieder, Berkeley: Alexandria

Benno Werlen, Jena: Schemes of Interpretation and the Constitution of Urbanity: Lived Religion and Metropoleis in comparative perspective

Greg Woolf, London: Scale and structure: Religious action in metropoleis of the Roman Empire

Rubina Raja
Center for Urban Network Evolutions
Aarhus University

Jörg Rüpke
Lived Ancient Religion – Ordering Dynamics
Max Weber Center Erfurt

Benno Werlen
International Year of Global Understanding
Universität Jena

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