

Call for Applications

SPRING SCHOOL “URBAN RELIGION” (Rome, 12th – 16th March 2018)

The Danish Institute in Rome, the Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (Urbnet) at Aarhus University and the Max-Weber-Kolleg at the University of Erfurt cordially invite PhD students and early postdoc researchers to the Spring School on “Urban Religion” in Rome (12th – 16th March 2018).

Description

It has become obvious that more attention must be paid to the complex interplay between the city and religion. Cities are not static, but highly complex organisms which are in constant motion; they never reach equilibrium and continuously assume new shapes. These processes had a deep effect on religious sites and religion within cities of ancient Mediterranean world too. Urban growth and urban transformation, intensification of building activities, access to new materials, resources and techniques constantly altered the religious landscape and affected religious imagination. Access to sanctuaries, along with their connectivity and location in the urban fabric, changed over time. Peripheral zones turned into central places, while well connected places became marginal. Sanctuaries struggled with the accumulation of debris and waste in cities which led to a constant rise of the ground level. The city swallowed ancient places and forced people to adapt the religious landscape to the new realities. Limitations of space urged newcomers to be content with small plots of land available for religious activities and potentially fostered the development of new and innovative solutions. City as a “perpetual oeuvre” (Lefebvre) demands religion to keep pace with it.

On the other side, religion had a strong impact on cityspaces and cityscapes and on urban life in general. The enlargement as well as the decline or transformation of sanctuaries affected urban flows and settlement patterns. Large-scale building projects initiated by the elites or emperors forced large numbers of people to resettle; small-scale and less conspicuous interventions modified the way city dwellers practised and lived the city “down below”, below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (de Certeau). Religion, moreover, displayed the human diversity sustained by cities and could escalate tensions up to conflicts changing their topographies and demographic complexions. Finally, ‘Christianization’ ushered in a radical change of the cityscape in general and redefined urbanity as a whole.

The focus of the course is on the comprehensive and contextual approach (both spatially and chronologically) to places imbued with religious significance and their urbanistic setting. Instead of addressing single religious sites and their features, the aim is to widen the approach and re-integrate religious sites in the urban environment. How did the surrounding areas look like, who lived next to a sanctuary, how did the neighborhoods change over time? How integrated and visible were the sites in the cities? How accessible were they, how big was their capacity, and how large was the potential



audience? How can we establish who actually visited a place, and how much efforts were necessary to get there? What qualified as a place of religious importance within the city? Which requirements had to be met? How and how far did these venues operate as laboratories for new spatial practices and imaginations? To what extent were they productive sites of religious knowledge, where typifications of meanings and functions on the part of political elites and religious leaders could be negotiated and contested?

Conveyed by the “Urban Religion” formula, the aim of the course is to integrate archeology and history of religion in order to envision and track down the ongoing co-constitution of religion and the urban in the city of Rome from the Late Republic to the 4th century CE. Archaeological observations are the key to recognize and interpret many of these phenomena, changes of spatial arrangements, architecture and decoration being indicators of profound changes which require explanation. Historical-religious insights permit to address urban religious regularities and changes in comparative perspective. Spatial analysis not only provides a better understanding of visibility, accessibility, and frequentation of a place, but highlights the causal and material effectivity of cityspaces hitherto preferably interpreted as neutral and inert backdrops of religious practices.

The participants of the course will be trained to develop new strategies of interpreting the archaeological context of urban religious sites in a comprehensive way and beyond the comfort zone marked by disciplinary boundaries. They will be requested to pay attention to the architectural and urbanistic environment of the places (carving out/squeezing in, accruing space, limiting entrance, enhancing or reducing visibility, relationship to major routes, walls etc.) and to develop close-up insights into the history of architectural modifications, changes in use, lighting, etc. To go into the matter, the core of the course will be on-site discussions. Each participant of the spring school is required to give a presentation related to a specific place or monument. Ideally the presentations are based on the individual research projects of the applicants.

Participants

The Spring School is open to 15 junior researchers at the PhD and early postdoc stage.

The academic staff involved comes from the Universities of Aarhus (UrbNet), Erfurt (Max-Weber-Kolleg), Göttingen and Graz.

Application deadline: 1st December

The PDF application should include:

- a CV
- a letter of motivation indicating interest in the Spring School’s topic (max. 300 words).



The letter of motivation should briefly outline the disciplinary background, the academic experience, and the ongoing research of the applicant. It should also mention two or three topic preferences for the onsite presentation.

Working language

The Spring School will be held in English.

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