Urban Religion and Urban Landscapes in the First Millennium CE

13–14 May 2019
UrbNet / Moesgaard Museum, Højbjerg, Denmark

Organised by Rubina Raja

UrbNet
CENTRE FOR URBAN NETWORK EVOLUTIONS
The Danish National Research Foundation

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Rome, Mithraeum of Santa Prisca (Copyright: Michael Blömer).

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4 URBAN RELIGION AND URBAN LANDSCAPES IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM CE

Outline

Within the framework of the Nordic-funded research collaboration *Globalization, Urbanization and Urban Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Roman and Early Islamic Periods* headed by Raimo Hakola, Simon Malmberg, Rubina Raja and Eivind Seland, a series of workshop are organised over a period of two years at the various participating institutions. In May 2019, the workshop is organised and hosted by Rubina Raja, Classical Studies and *Centre for Urban Network Evolutions*, Aarhus University. The workshop will focus on the theme *Urban Religion and Urban Landscapes in the First Millennium*. The aim will be, through a set of invited papers, to explore the relationship between religion and the urban across the Mediterranean in the first one thousand years CE.

Religion, religious practices, rituals and sacred spaces were intrinsic parts of the ancient city. Religion was an integrated part of everyday life in antiquity, and urban landscapes would have borne imprints of religion and its material expressions, be it in the public or the private spheres. This workshop will focus on urban religion in the ancient city in the first millennium CE in the broader Mediterranean region. It aims to examine how the continuities and changes may or may not be traced in the built environments and material cultures of these cities, which made up the core of the spaces for interaction between individuals and groups over the centuries in question, and further examine which role in specific the urban environment played in catalysing religion.

The first millennium CE in the Mediterranean region offers ample evidence for comparison as well as for continuity and changes. While a variety of what may be termed as artificially constructed periods have been examined within their own rights (i.e. Early Roman, Roman, Late Roman, Late Antique, Byzantine and Early Islamic), comparisons or enquiries of continuities and changes have seldom been undertaken across larger parts of this long millennium. The first millennium CE saw, arguably, the most profound religious development of the Eurasian world, which had an impact on history to an extent not comparable to any other period in this part of the world. The coming of Christianity and Islam had an extensive impact on not only the religious structures of these parts of the world, but also on the way in which political life became structured and how elites and societies interacted

and developed. In turn, these changes had an impact on the urban spaces of the region, which went beyond the religious spaces themselves. Whereas monumental sanctuaries in the Roman period had dominated the cityscapes, churches from the 4th century CE took the role as monuments of euergetism, financed by the urban elites. Later in the 8th century, mosques were introduced and the early ones of the kind remain understudied as expressions of urban societal phenomena and the changes in societal structures which they might imply in comparison with earlier pagan religious spaces and Christian monuments.

Economic and social developments led to the so-called 'urban revolution' and subsequent interpretations of urban situations within a cultural framework have always included religious ones, even on a global scale. Religion and religious practices offered a framework for the individual and for groups and the interrelations and dynamics were ever-changing and complex. Although religion is not tied to the urban or the urban specifically to the religious, the urban has been imprinted by spaces for religious practices created by individuals and groups. This also goes for periods in which religious practices and religions developed and changed. Religious practices and ideas would have influenced urban spaces and the other way around – the process was dynamic and not a one-way process.

In this workshop ,examples as well as theoretical considerations on religious developments in urban contexts will be considered. Through an interdisciplinary approach achieved by a mixture of participants coming from the disciplines of archaeology, ancient history, history of religion and theology, the aim is to consider a wide range of empirical material ranging from archaeological evidence over epigraphic material and literary and biblical sources as ways of enquiring into the questions about whether we can begin to pin down specific traits of religious expressions and development across time in urban situations. Papers focus on specific case studies, cities, societies and regions, and include views of longue durée developments or what has been termed cultural amnesia – the, to us, seemingly abrupt puncture of any connection to past traditions.

Programme

DAY 1: Monday 13 May 2019 UrbNet, Moesgaard Allé 20, 8270 Højbjerg, 4230-232	
9:30–9:45	**Introduction** Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)
9:45–10:45	**Cities and their images of sacred space on coins as reflections of urban religion** Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)
10:45–11:45	**Pomerium, postmoerium and postliminium: Thinking about walls and borderlines in ancient Rome** Jörg Rüpke (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
11:45–12:45	**The dialectic entanglement of deity and city history: The religious cityscape of Mater Magna in Rome** Asuman Lätzer-Laser (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
12:45–13:45	Lunch
13:45–14:45	**New cults for the city: Three case studies on visual communication strategies at Rome during the Imperial period** Marlis Arnhold (Universität Bonn)
14:45–15:45	**Religion on the agoras of Greece and Asia Minor under the early Empire: Processions, sacrifices and the rhythms of daily life** Christopher Dickenson (Aarhus University)
15:45–16:15	Break
16:15–17:00	General discussion
17:30	Buffet dinner at UrbNet

DAY 2: Tuesday 14 May 2019 Moesgaard Museum, Moesgaard Allé 15, 8270 Højbjerg, 4240-302	
9:00–10:00	**The worship of Dionysos in urban settlements in Attica in the beginning of the common era** Elina Lapinoja-Pitkänen (University of Helsinki)
10:00–11:00	**Aspects of urban religion in Roman Anatolia. The case of Caesarea in Cappadocia** Michael Blömer (Aarhus University)
11:00–12:00	**Trade, traders and religion in gateway-cities of the Roman world** Eivind H. Seland (University of Bergen)
12:00–14:00	Lunch + visit to Moesgaard Museum
14:00–15:00	**A neglected dimension of the Christianisation of urban space: Recovering the religious sensescape of the late antique city** Jan Stenger (University of Glasgow)
15:00–16:00	**In search of conceptual framework for a *longue durée* analysis of Petra's sacred places** Laurent Tholbecq (Université Libre de Bruxelles)
16:00–17:00	**Early Muslims as urban settlers** Ilkka Lindstedt (University of Helsinki)
17:00–17:45	General discussion and closing
18:30	Speakers' dinner Langhoff & Juul, Guldsmedegade 30, 8000 Aarhus C

Commodus, Caesarea in Cappadocia, Bronze, 28 mm, 192 n. Chr., American Numismatic Society, Inv. 1944.100.62570 (Copyright: American Numismatic Society).

Abstracts

Cities and their images of sacred space on coins as reflections of urban religion

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In the Roman period, coins were the most widely circulated media in, between and outside urban societies. Apart from the Roman Imperial coinage controlled by Rome itself, numerous cities also began to mint their own coinage. This so-called civic coinage would have been used within the cities themselves but would also circulate at least regionally to a certain extent (although perhaps not as widely as often assumed). Since coinage circulated, it was an ideal medium on which messages of diverse nature could be placed and seen by numerous individuals belonging to different strata of society. Deities and sanctuaries, or parts of sanctuaries, were themes often found on the coinage struck by cities, and we may assume that these images were consciously chosen, since they were important for the city's identity – both internally and externally.

This paper reconsiders selected coinage from the so-called Decapolis region in the Near East (modern-day Jordan and Israel). The region was heavily urbanised, and urbanisation intensified in the Roman period, in particular from the late first century CE onwards. The cities of the Decapolis were overall middle-sized provincial cities, and they all held sanctuaries – some of which we still have archaeological remains from or written evidence for. Some of the deities worshipped in these cities and the sanctuaries that hosted them were depicted on the coins of the respective cities. Here, a selection of these coins will be examined and held up against the physical spatial reality within these cities in order to discuss whether spatial reality and coin images corresponded, or whether the coin images were rather used to convey a different (and perhaps manipulated) image of urbanity and the urban reality, underlining the importance of religion in the urban setting or perhaps magnifying the importance of the urban cults. The images on the coins are discussed in order to penetrate potential ideas about ideal city-scapes in the Roman period as being shaped by sanctuaries and therefore by religion – locating religion at the very heart of being urban in antiquity.

Pomerium, postmoerium and postliminium: Thinking about walls and borderlines in ancient Rome

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In Roman public and private law, borderlines were of heightened importance. My contribution explores the contribution of such concepts for ideas of 'urbanity', of the qualities of living in a city, and citizenship and the latter's possible relationship to the city. The concept of the strip of land behind the wall – and here the direction of the gaze is already important – offers a starting point. Its etymological interpretation as "behind the wall" (Varro, *de lingua Latina* 5.143), even if linguistically doubtful, points to associations in systematic reflection about space. How are such lines used in legal arguments? How are they ritually performed? Which original cases are remembered respectively narrated? How could such lines be temporarily opened or overcome? The analysis is above all a textual one, but takes archaeological findings into account. It is informed by the research programme of the Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe *Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formation*.

The dialectic entanglement of deity and city history: The religious cityscape of Mater Magna in Rome

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Ancient literary sources provide the narrative that due to an oracle saying the Magna Mater statue was brought from Asia Minor to Rome, presumably in the year 204 BCE, and that the deity – in a highly political act to ensure the well-being of the Roman people – was immediately placed in the mythological core centre of Rome, on the Palatine Hill. Not relying on traditional continuities, rather forcing religious change through the acts of denomination, of the installment of annual festivals or the invention of new religious practices, the Romans transformed the veneration practices for this female deity tremendously and according to their understanding or translation of the 'cultural backpack', which the religion brought with it from Asia Minor and Greece.

The aim of this paper is firstly to sketch a picture of the diverse and very different places for venerating the goddess inside the city, namely the temple on the Palatine Hill, a second sanctuary at the Mons Vaticanus and the house of the association on the Caelian Hill. And secondly, elucidating on the dialectical negotiation processes that arose when creating and establishing an urban religious cityscape.

New cults for the city: Three case studies on visual communication strategies at Rome during the Imperial period

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Studies on religion in the city of Rome are often marked by a tendency to focus on a selection of specific cults (i.e. the cult of Mithras) or architectural forms (i.e. Roman podium temples). Given the sheer size of the city during the Imperial period, this is hardly surprising and, depending on the aim of the respective studies, often even necessary. The selective perspective, however, also bears the risk of neglecting the many interrelations of these cults and the material expressions of their veneration. The focus on the human agents behind the cults and their various communication strategies allows us to overcome these partial pictures.

Rather than only asking who makes the decision to establish a sanctuary, who conceptualises monuments of various kinds, and who executes these, respectively (cfr. de Polignac 2017), this contribution puts emphasis on the role of the visual within the communication processes. The appropriation of a visual cue from a public building, for instance, articulates both claims and aspirations of the agents who did so. All the same, the embeddedness of the various cults in the same material culture and the complex mechanisms of interdependencies become apparent. This topic will be approached by three case studies: the newly established temples of the emperors, the cults at a quarter of the city like Transtiberim, as well as the images of the bull-slaying Mithras and their relation to Rome and Central Italy.

Religion on the agoras of Greece and Asia Minor under the early Empire: Processions, sacrifices and the rhythms of daily life

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It is well accepted that there was no strict separation between sacred and profane in Greek and Roman cities either in terms of time or space. There were clearly degrees of sacredness; not every temple was equally important, and within sanctuaries, areas to which different people had access was graded. But the gods were everywhere – in their temples, sanctuaries and statues that were strewn across the urban landscape. The calendar was punctuated with public festivals – moments at which connections between the mortal and the divine were intensified – but religious practices in the form of small-scale sacrifices and other acts of devotion must have been common everyday sights in public spaces. Yet, while acknowledging the ubiquity and continual and constant presence of the sacred, scholars have still tended to separate Roman urban religion from daily life and to discuss it as a separate sphere of activity.

This paper will explore some of the ways in which urban religion was woven into the day-to-day experience of the cities of the Greek part of the Empire by examining the presence of religion on their most important public spaces – spaces where commerce, politics, socialising and religion were all intertwined: their agoras. Focusing on three main case studies from Greece and Asia Minor, Athens, Ephesos and Magnesia on the Maeander, the paper will explore how our understanding of both religion and other spheres of public activity can be enriched by thinking of them taking place in the same setting and potentially at the same time.

The worship of Dionysos in urban settlements in Attica in the beginning of the common era

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This paper discusses the voluntary Greco-Roman associations devoted to Dionysos/Bacchus in urban settlements in Ancient Attica during the first two hundred years of the Common Era. The focus will mostly be on Athens, from which we have most surviving evidence, but we will also make a small detour to Piraeus and Megara. In this paper, I will go through both: archaeological evidence of a sanctuary devoted to worship of Dionysos (Baccheion), and inscriptional materials – for example, the well-known inscription IG II 2 1368 The Rule of the Iobakchoi found from Baccheion. What can we learn about the cult of Dionysos and voluntary associations devoted through inscriptional materials?

Already the fact that we have surviving material evidence proves that worshipping Dionysos had been a part of Athenian public life, like The Theatre of Dionysus, but also part of the private life for centuries, like the voluntary associations.

With this paper, I will focus on the voluntary associations mentioned in inscriptional material asking what we can learn about the worship of Dionysos in more private settings of voluntary associations. For instance: How were these voluntary associations organised; what were their main functions; or how was the mythology connected to Dionysos present in the language used in the associations?

Aspects of urban religion in Roman Anatolia: The case of Caesarea in Cappadocia

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The cities of Roman Anatolia have frequently been described as distant from the sophisticated urban civilisations of the Mediterranean world. In accord with this, the religious life of these cities often seems to deviate from what we see in the cities of the Aegean coast. Caesarea in Cappadocia, modern Kayseri, is a case in point. Caesarea was the capital of the Hellenistic kingdom of Cappadocia and later became the metropolis of the homonymous Roman province. It is located at the foothills of the Erciyes Dağı, ancient Argaios, which is the highest mountain of central Anatolia. In antiquity, this mountain was venerated as a deity and became the main god of Caesarea.

In my talk, I will explore how this seemingly very ancient divine mountain was fashioned into a major urban cult. As no systematic archaeological investigations have been conducted in Caesarea, my analysis will focus on representations of the mountain in the civic and provincial coinage and in other media. A close iconographical examination can show how the urban elites resolved the dichotomy of extra-urban and urban.

Furthermore, I will address the question of the cults' antiquity. The focus of previous research has been on the identification of Bronze-age predecessors to emphasise the resilience of Hittite religious ideas in Anatolia. There is little evidence, however, for a direct link, and we may assume that the Argaios cult of Caesarea was styled according to contemporary models and religious concepts in the late Hellenistic and Roman period. Consequently, we must entertain the idea that the veneration of Argaios in Caesarea was not an archaism but reflected a trend towards localised cults and cult practices visible in many cities of Roman Anatolia.

Trade, traders and religion in gateway-cities of the Roman world

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Long-distance merchants occupied liminal positions in premodern societies, operating across in-groups that were mostly defined by birth, such as tribes, *ethnê*, and *dêmoi*. This created the double need for social cohesion within the merchant collective and attachment to host societies. In a number of publications based primarily on literary and epigraphic evidence, I have argued that religion was of prime importance in creating the social infrastructure necessary for this.

In this paper, I examine cases from the well-documented cities of Palmyra and Berenikê, and from other gateway-cities of the Roman world, with the aim of applying this insight on archaeological settings: How is the religion of traders and other mobile and socially liminal groups potentially visible in the material record and the urban landscape?

A neglected dimension of the Christianisation of urban space: Recovering the religious sensescape of the late antique city

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Research on the Christianisation of Graeco-Roman cities in late antiquity so far has focused on the physical transformation of the material cityscape through religious expressions. Scholars have looked at, among other things, the erection of church buildings, martyr shrines, cemeteries and statuary, further at performances such as processions to examine the ways in which Christianity transformed life in the classical polis. In this context, textual sources mostly have been studied as historical documents of these processes. However, it is important to be aware that the impact of Christian religion on urban space had further crucial dimensions, namely perceptual and spiritual ones.

In my paper, I propose the discursive construction of sense perception as an avenue for research and suggest a theoretical approach that can illuminate a neglected layer of the transformation of urban space in late antiquity. Drawing on recent research in cultural studies and the anthropology of the senses, I will analyse John Chrysostom's ethical preaching as a case study. His homilies frequently discuss the effects that the perception of behaviour and interaction in the city has on the perceiving person, thereby conceptualising urban space as a sensescape that acts on humans. In the preacher's eyes, these effects are more often than not harmful and render the city an environment hostile to the true Christian life. I will argue that Chrysostom aims at a re-education of his congregants' sensory habits that is intended to create a distinctively Christian sensescape.

In search of conceptual framework for a *longue durée* analysis of Petra's sacred places

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Petra's over-millenial existence (from the late 4th c. BCE until the mid-8th c. CE) provides a noteworthy case study of urban evolution meaningfully interacting with sacred places during the Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine periods and within the framework of three different religious systems. The spatial distribution of private and public religious spaces during the Nabataean period reflects the segmentary characteristic of Petraean society (heterotopia). The AD 106 annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom and its reformulation as a Roman province was apparently associated with the abandonment of some indigenious religious places (e.g. Obodas Chapel). Archaeology helps to understand the process of local adaptation to the introduced Roman religious superstructure. This is exemplified by the reorganisation of the civic participation in the imperial cult and the construction of indigenious architectural religious markers (Kh. edh-Dharih and Kh. at-Tannur) at the limits of the newly defined political entity (*Petra Metropolis*). The third radical urban and religious change seems to occur in the aftermath of the earthquakes which affected Petra in AD 363 and 419. These destructions resulted in considerable quantities of available *spolia* which were then reused, between late 5th and the 6th centuries, in the construction of at least three Christian edifices *intra muros*, in an otherwise seemingly impoverished city. Finally, the architectural remains on the Jabal Haroun mountain attest to a continuous use of the place by various religious communities (polytheist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim). Current work carried out on the top of Jabal Khubthah (high place) is intended to establish if a continuous use of the summits could constitute a shared pattern in Petra.

Early Muslims as urban settlers

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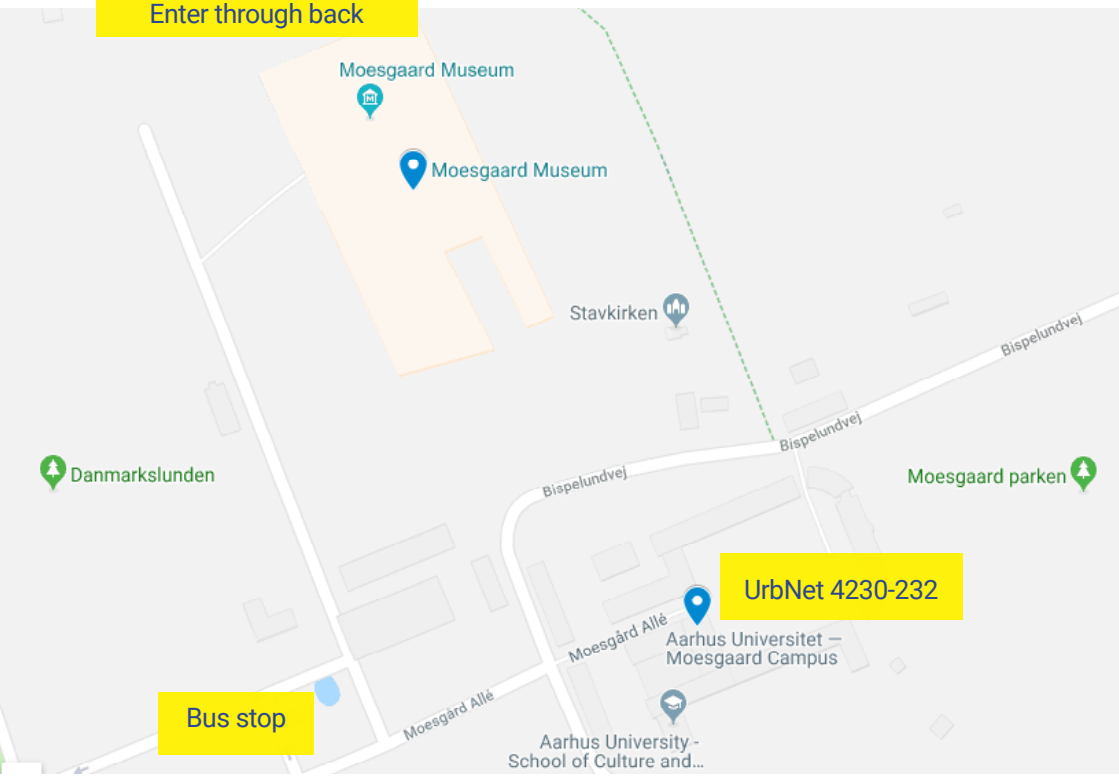
In Orientalist scholarship, early Islam (the seventh–eighth centuries CE) was and sometimes is described as something to do with nomadism and Arab nativism. However, the opposite seems to be true: Nomads are often harshly criticised in the Quran and early Arabic literature and, moreover, Arab ethnogenesis was still underway. The nomads are portrayed as stereotypical laggards and disbelievers. For instance, Quran 9:97 states: "The nomads are the most stubborn of all peoples in their disbelief and hypocrisy. They are the least likely to recognise the limits that God has sent down to His Messenger. God is all knowing and all wise."

Rather than nomadism, it appears that one of the significant components of the emerging Islamic identity was urbanism. To affiliate with the group of the believers, one had to move to a city or town (often meaning a garrison town). Being a believer meant being an urban settler (*muhājir*). Reverting to nomadism (*ta'arrub*) was tantamount to leaving the community of the believers.

My paper builds on earlier research (especially by Patricia Crone) on the subject, but interprets the evidence in the light of the social identity approach (initiated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner) and identity signaling theory (Martin Ehala). My study looks at group boundaries and the components of the burgeoning Islamic identity.

Venues

Scan QR code for link to Google Maps.



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Website and travel reimbursement

http://urbnet.au.dk/news/events/2019/urbanreligion/

After the workshop, please contact Professor Raimo Hakola (raimo.hakola@helsinki.fi) who will instruct you as to how to claim back travel expenses. Please keep all of your receipts, as these need to be submitted as documentation.

GDPR

Note: We will take photographs during the conference, which we store and use for e.g. reporting purposes. If you do not want us to use photos in which you are depicted, please contact Christina Levisen: levisen@cas.au.dk.

Notes

Aerial view of Dura Europos (Copyright: Yale University Art Gallery).

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Venue: UrbNet / Moesgaard Museum, Højbjerg, Denmark
Organiser: Rubina Raja, Aarhus University

Book of Abstracts, published April 2019
Editors: Christina A. Levisen and Rubina Raja

Front cover: Rome, Forum Romanum (Copyright: Michael Blömer)
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Printed in Aarhus, Denmark (AU Tryk, Aarhus University)