

An Urban Archaeology of Ancient Religion

23–26 June 2019
Schæffergården, Gentofte
Organised by Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke



Outline

In 2015 a Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World, edited by the organisers, formed the basis for a new research paradigm of *Lived ancient religion* by focusing on the archaeology of religious experience, as we labelled the new emphasis. We would now like to shift the focus to urban religion. The interest here is not on religion in the city, but the mutual shaping of urban space and urban ways of life, on the one hand, and religious practices and ideas, on the other. The focus is on change, on factoring in religion for urbanism and urbanism for religious transformations. We envisage a long-term cooperation between archaeologists and historians of ancient cities and historians of religion, but would like to start with looking at material culture and its possibilities to trace such changes.

We invite you to come together to review existing and explore future lines of research that address top-down centralised activities by powerholders as well as bottom-up trajectories of competing groups or individuals, immigrants as well as ephemeral visitors or stakeholders from the region, processes of homogenisation as well as differentiation and even the intervention of specifically religious claim-makers or the establishment of religious institutions and authorities. We think of periods of the founding of cities and urban growth as much as urban decline.

As a result of the conference, we envisage a joint publication – not of a handbook but of an ‘invitation to the archaeology of urban religion’, suggesting and exemplifying, but also critically discussing potentially fruitful methods or broader approaches.

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Programme

23 June 2019	
19:00	Welcome dinner
24 June 2019	
9:00–9:30	Introduction Rubina Raja (Aarhus University) and Jörg Rüpke (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
9:30–10:00	Urban resilience and religion: Attaching time to place Jörg Rüpke (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
10:00–10:45	Discussion
10:45–11:15	Spatial archaeologies of ancient religion at Pompeii Miko Flohr (Universiteit Leiden)
11:15–12:00	Discussion
12:00–12:45	Lunch
12:45–13:30	Walk and talk
13:30–14:00	Urbanism versus the gods: Exploring the role of religion in shaping the towns of Roman Britain Christopher Dickenson (Aarhus University)
14:00–14:45	Discussion
14:45–15:15	Cities and their images of sacred spaces on coins: reflections of urban religion? Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)
15:15–16:00	Discussion

16:00–16:30	Small shrines and their shaping of urban space: A case study of Athens and Priene Anja Klöckner (Goethe Universität)
16:30–17:15	Discussion
17:15–17:45	Trade, traders and religion in gateway-cities of the Roman world Eivind H. Seland (University of Bergen)
17:45–18:30	Discussion
18:30–19:30	General discussion
19:30–20:30	Dinner

25 June 2019	
9:00–9:30	The wood comes to the city: Ancient trees, sacred groves, and the ‘greening’ of Early Augustan Rome Christopher Hallett (University of California, Berkeley)
9:30–10:15	Discussion
10:15–10:45	Two case studies in defixiones: Religion and ethics in Corinth and Antioch Laura Nasrallah (Harvard University)
10:45–11:30	Discussion
11:30–12:00	An urban religious identity: Deities at Roman Pompeii Anna-Katharina Rieger (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
12:00–12:45	Discussion
12:45–13:30	Lunch
13:30–14:15	Walk and talk
14:15–14:45	Urban religion beyond the city limits: Extra-urban sanctuaries in the Roman East Michael Blömer (Aarhus University)
14:45–15:30	Discussion
15:30–16:00	Religious placemaking in urban contexts Asuman Lätzer-Lasar (Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt)
16:00–16:45	Discussion
16:45–18:15	General discussion
18:15–19:00	Walk and walk
19:00–20:00	Dinner

26 June 2019	
	Breakfast
	Departure



Rome, Forum Romanum (Copyright: Michael Blömer)

Abstracts

Urban resilience and religion: Attaching time to place

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This paper focuses on the relation of resilience and religion, using resilience as a lens for the analysis of religion and vice versa. By focusing on religious practices that might be reasonably seen as fostering resilience, I assume that religious change in ancient Roman religion is related to a constellation of material and social action that could be termed urban resilience. Among the very few historical data that allow relating specific religious practices to the ups and downs of urban history, an important source is preserved in the material and frequently even monumental form of calendars (*fasti*).

I will argue that the development of some features of this cross-culturally exceptional material presence and graphic representation of a solar year and its rituals (even if it seems ‘natural’ to heirs of this specific form) offer a glimpse into different forms of practices that might have reflected and helped foster urban resilience. In the material form of the *fasti* and related media, memories of disasters (defeats, i.e. a massive loss of men, also outside Rome; pestilences; floods) and memories of overcoming disasters, that is, resilience, are fixed with regard to annual dates and thus communicated. This is not an inherent feature of any calendar, but a characteristic of the republican Roman development of the calendar and its medial representation. The city is stressed in its structural and historical continuity despite disasters. As a second aspect, I will demonstrate that the actual copies of the Roman calendar from the early imperial period – the only period that allows us to trace the material distribution due to the fashion of inscribing calendars on stone – indicate a bottom-up interest in the very places that made up the city of Rome. Whether such an interest and practices actually contributed to resilience cannot be proven. However, looking into these religious practices can bring to light some of the peculiar ways of how Romans dealt with the fear of and with actual disaster. *Vice versa*, looking for resilience can help historicise religious practices at Rome that can be better understood within the framework of such memories and fears and with a changing urban and imperial constellations in mind.

Spatial archaeologies of ancient religion at Pompeii

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This paper explores the intersecting archaeologies of religion in the material remains of Pompeii, and the ways in which developments in Pompeian archaeology of the last decades have transformed our understanding of the social and cultural embedding of religion in the city. Drawing from insights developed in response to the 'spatial turn' in Roman archaeology, this paper will assess the archaeology of urban religious landscapes at four distinct spatial levels.

The paper will first look at the level of the house, where ample evidence for religious activities has been found, both within the domestic core of the building and in its broader context. Then it will assess the level of the neighbourhood – assessing the semi-public altars and paintings on façades and street corners. Subsequently, it will discuss the spatiality of religion at the level of the urban area as a whole and, finally, put that into a broader context, integrating what is known of the sub-urban sanctuaries of Pompeii.

Following this approach, it becomes possible to discuss the spatiality of urban religion in Pompeii in a more integrated manner, and to connect the various categories of archaeological evidence into a broader analysis of the place of religion in the urban landscape.

Urbanism versus the gods: Exploring the role of religion in shaping the towns of Roman Britain

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For Roman Britain there has been much discussion of both urbanism and religion but surprisingly little consideration of religion as an urban phenomenon. A certain tension arguably exists between the ways that the two subjects have been approached. On the one hand, towns – if no longer interpreted as straightforward instruments of Romanisation – have typically been seen as the most pronounced expressions of a move toward a more Roman way of life in the province. On the other hand, religion – as characterised by the scarcity of Roman-style temple architecture, the ubiquity of so-called Romano-Celtic temples and the large number of local deities worshipped in the province – is seen as the area of culture where local traditions remained strongest. This paper will address this tension by exploring the role played by religion in creating a form of urban life unique to the province and by asking what, if anything, was distinctly urban about the religious activity that took place within the towns as opposed to that seen in the countryside.

Cities and their images of sacred spaces on coins: reflections of urban religion

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Coins were the most widely circulated media in, between and outside urban societies in the Roman period. They were, so to say, the most efficient “social media” of their day and age, reaching a large audience. Apart from the Roman Imperial coinage controlled by Rome itself, numerous cities also minted their own coinage. This so-called civic coinage was used within the cities themselves but would also have circulated at least regionally to a certain extent. 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 Roman Syria and the Near East. 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 region were of differing sizes, and they all held sanctuaries – some of which we still have archaeological remains from or written evidence for and some of which we only know from the coins.

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.

**Small shrines and their shaping of urban space:
A case study of Athens and Priene**

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The visual appearance of Greek cities was heavily shaped by the large polis sanctuaries. Religious practices were embedded into a topographic frame of reference. Processions crossing the cities followed strict rules; streets thereby used formed 'sacral axes' (Hölscher). However, what was the significance of the streets themselves in this context? Numerous small cult sites were situated at or on streets, particularly in liminal spaces such as entrances, passageways or crossings.

This paper will focus on how such sacredly charged road spaces formed and characterised the urbanistic structure, and on how sacred and profane areas were delineated from each other. In addition, it will consider the question of which protagonists were involved with which practices, and how the designing of these shrines can be located within the area of tension between homogenisation and individualisation. The investigation's emphasis will be put on Athens in Classical and Hellenistic times. A prospect of the settings in Priene will complete the analysis.

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?

The wood comes to the city: Ancient trees, sacred groves and the ‘greening’ of Early Augustan Rome

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Marcus Agrippa’s ambitious program of urban renewal, begun in 33 BC, dramatically expanded Rome’s water supply. One aspect of Agrippa’s transformation of the city that has received much less attention, however, is the simultaneous planting of a huge number of trees: in porticoes, in sanctuaries, beside temples and laid out in large groves and wooded walks in the Campus Martius – especially around ‘the tumulus of the Julii’, Augustus’ gigantic Mausoleum, itself topped with a stand of trees.

This ‘greening’ of Rome, I shall argue, was an important part of Augustus’ ostentatious revival of Archaic Roman religion, prompted by the writings and ideas of the antiquarians of the previous generation. All these trees may be understood as an explicit part of the Augustan programme of religious renewal. Our best evidence for this comes from the poetry of Vergil, and from the genre of ‘sacro-idyllic’ painting – invented at Rome in these very years.

Two case studies in defixiones: Religion and ethics in Corinth and Antioch

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This paper focuses on two case studies to investigate religious practices at the edge of the markets and *temenoi* of cities. It studies two *defixiones*, one from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on the Acrocorinth, dating to the second century CE, and one from the House of the Calendar in the environs of Antioch, dating to the third or fourth century CE. These case studies of *defixiones* allow an investigation of 1) lower-status roles (the person condemned in one case is a garland-weaver, in the other a green-grocer; 2) the deities called upon (including the “fates that exact justice” and the “avenging gods and goddesses,” in the case of Corinth); 3) ethical implications of the condemnations and *historiolae* found in the *defixiones* and employed by religious expert and frustrated petitioner. The aim will be to develop a greater understanding of theological-philosophical ideas and their manifestation in physical objects, ritual and social life in Roman Corinth and late antique Antioch.

An urban religious identity: Deities at Roman Pompeii

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Even though there is a general agreement of what a city in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean is, each city is characterised by its particular socio-political, socio-economic as well as spatial situation. Accordingly, the religious expressions such as the deities present in the city, the forms of venerating them, and the spatial practices around religion vary considerably.

This paper focuses on the Campanian city of Pompeii, mainly in its phase of the 1st century CE, and asks about the character of the city, the character of its societal groups, and the religious meshwork they form or are embedded in. What is the difference between Pompeii and other Italian cities, and what did the city's inhabitants need from one or the other god? Is there a 'Pompeian way' to communicate with them? Taking image-objects as 'Leitfossil', this paper searches into the local shapes of religion, what the people at Pompeii practiced, and looks for the possible synergies of deities who had a place there.

The approach entails the contextualisation of image-objects, the analysis of visual and habitual triggers, and the spatial relations and virtual links between different categories of objects and human agents. The claim is that these analytical steps applied to ancient material do not necessarily follow a linear way of sense-making, but that arbitrary behaviour of agents as well as temporarily adaptations of spaces and image-objects have to be considered, too.

Recent research on the cults relating to ancient Egypt (Barrett 2019; Mol 2015), to the deities worshipped since archaic times (d'Alessio 2009; Bielfeldt 2007; Carroll 2010), the comprehensive account of Van Andringa (2009) or research on household and neighbourhood religion (Anniboletti 2010, Charles-Laforge 2009) offers a rich basis to the focus of the paper. In combination with the intense research on the urbanistic and economic history of Pompeii, the paper can contribute to the question of an 'urban archaeology of religion'.

Urban religion beyond the city limits: Extra-urban sanctuaries in the Roman East

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In ancient cities, space, social organisation and religion were closely intertwined. Religion shaped space, and space shaped religion. Density, concentration and rapid exchange were key factors in this process and distinguished the urban environment from the non-urban. Yet, we must cater to the fact that in many cities, major sanctuaries were located outside the perimeter of the city walls. They were extra-urban. Examples are legion. Among the most prominent are the Artemision of Ephesus, the Apollo sanctuary of Didyma, the sanctuary of Zeus Stratios in Amasya, the Zeus sanctuary of Antioch on the Orontes or the sanctuary of Labraunda. The distance between a city and its main sanctuary could be substantial, thereby preventing frequent or spontaneous visits. Consequently, the sanctuary was an intrinsic part of the city's religious life and crucial for the forging of urban identity, but the dynamics of communication between urban dwellers and sacred space differed from the dynamics we see in intra-urban sanctuaries. Thus, the study of urban religion needs to include extra-urban sanctuaries and consider the distinctive ways in which they interacted with the (distant) urban space.

Religious Placemaking in Urban Contexts

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This paper aims to introduce as well as discuss the term *placemaking*, which derives from the disciplines of urban planning and geography, in order to elucidate advantages and disadvantages for the new emerging research field ‘urban archaeology of ancient religion’. In the Roman empire, the choice of location of a sanctuary might have been dependent, for instance, on an augurium; however, in dense and crowded places such as a city, there were also different needs and requirements that had to be respected, for instance urban topography, infrastructure and accessibility, as well as policy, economy, local legislation, or even traditions. Establishing a place for religious communication, be it a sanctuary, a grave or the erection of a dedication for a deity therefore had to be some kind of negotiation between the religious communicator and the physical and non-physical pre-existing environment. In antiquity, this negotiation was not necessarily as inclusive as the urban activist from the 1960s in New York demanded when arguing that institutional (meso-level) and individual (micro-level) actors had to be integrated into the decision-making processes when planning public places in the city in order to not only concentrate on the needs of investors, but rather take the daily necessities of all the city inhabitants into consideration (Jacobs 1961).

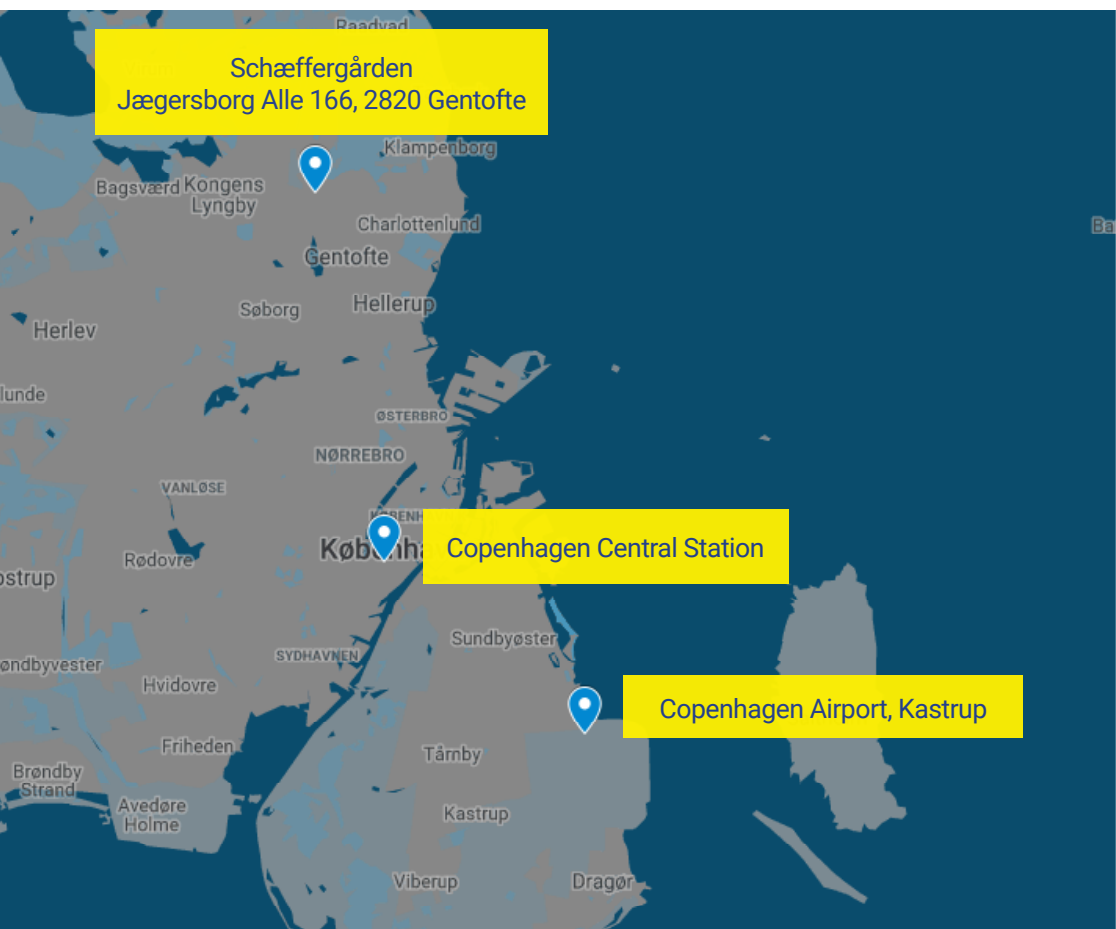
However, even in antiquity the establishment of places of religious communication in dense and diversely crowded cities cannot have been taken place as mere top-down processes restricted to and decided upon only by elite, ruling actors without taking any significant and urban-related factors into account. I argue that the decision-making process when creating a place for religious communication is an interplay of spaces, objects, actors, practices and aspirative semantics that lead involuntarily to reciprocal formations. The interplay in cities is most probably more intense and complex in the urban context than on the rural countryside.

As case study, I will review on the backdrop of historical developments, political shifts, changing social and ethnic populations as well as religious traditions the contextual setting of the multiple establishments of the ancient city of Emporion: Palaeiopolis – Neapolis – Municipium Emporiae.



Venues

Scan QR code for link to Google Maps.



Organisers



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Website and travel reimbursement

<http://urbnet.au.dk/news/events/2019/ancientreligion/>

After the workshop, please fill out a reimbursement form (can be downloaded from <http://urbnet.au.dk/visitors/visitors/travel-reimbursement/>). Disregard the bottom part – it is for internal use) and return to Christina Levisen (levisen@cas.au.dk) as an excel file (no need to sign), along with scanned copies of your travel receipts.

GDPR

Note: We will take photographs during the workshop, 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



An Urban Archaeology of Ancient Religion, 23–26 June 2019

Venue: Schæffergården, Jægersborg Allé 166, 2820 Gentofte, Denmark

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