Making Boundaries

Performing Religion and Urbanity

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TITLES AND ABSTRACTS

Richard Lim, Smith-College, Northampton, MA

The Expulsion of Foreigners from Rome in Times of Crisis: Negotiating Social, Moral and Spatial Boundaries in Late Antiquity

Ancient Rome was not only a city of immigrants but was known for its periodic expulsion of *peregrini,* foreigners, from its physical boundary. As expulsions mainly occurred at times of crisis such as a food shortage or riots, they may appear as measures that address mundane problems and yet they also involved the mobilisation and adaptation of social, moral and religious boundaries between in- and out-groups within the city.

My paper addresses the topic of ancient population expulsion (*xenelasia*) and focuses on related social processes in late fourth-century Rome. In what manner and in which socio-spatial contexts was the identity of a citizen and urban resident performed or challenged? How did it come to pass that even a Roman citizen might be adjudged a 'foreigner' liable to expulsion from the boundaries of fourth-century Rome? I will draw on the historical evidence from contemporaries Symmachus the Elder and Ammianus Marcellinus to investigate these questions. I plan to give consideration to the perspectives and agency of different urban actors as they sought to carry out 'boundary work' that maintained and modified the social, moral-religious and spatial boundaries of a Late Roman city during a time of urban crises and pagan-Christian religious conflicts.

Annette Haug, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

Topos and heterotopos. Boundary operations and structures of order in the Late Republican and Early Imperial city

The starting point for the reflection on boundaries in this contribution will be Foucault's concept of heterotopies. Spaces, according to Foucault, are not neutral, but structured, divided, folded spaces. As Foucault suggests concrete divisions of urban spaces, the paper will provide a detailed critique of the concept. We propose here a praxeological perspective on *heterotopoi*: They are, just like *topoi*, produced by forms of thinking and acting. Strategies of place-making (and boundary making) thus produce both *topoi* and *heterotopoi*.

These general considerations will be applied to a concrete example: religious places in the Roman house. On a general level, one can question if 'religious spaces' are topoi or heterotopoi. But the critique goes further: We suggest that there is no strict division between sacred and profane. Instead, we suggest that all divine images of a Roman houses have a ritual potential, i.e. a ritual affordance, which can be activated by ritual acts – be it a sacrifice, a prayer or any other form of interaction. In relation to spatial structures (or [*hetero]topoi)*, it is the singularity or repetition of ritual actions that lend spaces the notion to be more or less ritually charged. This praxeological perspective allows to focus on the temporality, fluidity and permeability of (hetero)topoi.

Epsita Halder, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

Reclaiming Karbala – Nation, Islam and Literature of the Bengali Muslim (Book presentation)

Analysing an extensive range of texts and publications across multiple genres, formats and literary lineages, *Reclaiming Karbala* studies the emergence and formation of a viable Muslim identity in Bengal over the late-19th century through the 1940s. Beginning with an explanation of the tenets of the battle of Karbala, this multi-layered study explores what it means to be Muslim, as well as the nuanced relationship between religion, linguistic identity and literary modernity that marks both Bengaliness and Muslimness in the region.This book is an intervention into the literature on regional Islam in Bengal, offering a complex perspective on the polemic on religion and language in the formation of a *jatiya* Bengali Muslim identity in a multilingual context. This book, by placing this

polemic in the context of intra-Islamic reformist conflict, shows how all these rival reformist groups unanimously negated the Karbala-centric commemorative ritual of Muharram and Shīī intercessory piety to secure a pro-Caliphate sensibility as the core value of the Bengali Muslim public sphere.

Simone Wagner, Universität Potsdam

Between urbanity and wilderness? Blurred boundaries in Lothringian hagiography of the tenth century

Lothringian monasteries of the tenth century have long been studied through the lense of monastic reform. While early medievalists have critized the concept in the last years it remains unclear what monastic hagiography of the tenth century was about. Rather than returning to an instrumentalistic view of hagiography it must be taken seriously as a source of contemporary discourses. The vita of Johannes of Gorze primarily is a discussion of the different possibilities to lead a religious life like being a hermit, a canon, an anchorite/anchoret or a monk and nun. These religious lifestyles are spatially located: the hermit in the mountains, the canons and anchorets in the city, the monasteries in the city and the countryside. However, by foregrounding mobility the vita also blurrs spatial boundaries. Johannes is depicted as constantly travelling to and from cities, the countryside and undeveloped land. Citizens visit the hermit in the mountains whose lifestyle is dependent on urbanity. Cells and monasteries in the city are places where the transcendence of earthliness is possible. The paper analyses how urbanity, wilderness and the countryside are (spatially) constructed and to what extent these constructions rely on boundaries and their blurring.

Harry O. Maier, Vancouver School of Theology

The Urban Marking and Crossing of Permeable Boundaries in Second Century Christ Religion through Ritual

As Christ religion took various forms in the second and third centuries some saw an increasing need to mark and defend lines separating groups in various ways. There were a variety of means of doing this: the fabrication of lists of successive leaders representing authentic lines of teaching stretching back to the apostles and Jesus; ritual practices distinguishing one set of observances over against another; promoting one kind of gathering place over against another; and so on.

Boundary demarcations created spaces to populate with differing kinds of heroic and nefarious actors with their respective genealogies. But while there was considerable effort at demarcating boundaries, the very need to do so alerts us to the permeability of boundaries and evidence that even as boundaries were drawn, they were being constantly crossed and blurred. While one person drew a boundary another ignored it; while one person was pilloried for being outside a boundary, another saw no boundary at all. This paper will offer a number of case studies of instances where practitioners of Christ religion drew attention to ritual action as means of creating and maintaining boundaries. This is especially the case where we see teachers drawing attention to ritual to erect and maintain boundaries which was simultaneously a means of clarifying them. Irenaeus for example opposes a Valentinian teacher Marcus by calling out his ritual actions in introducing innovations to established worship patterns, a representation that begs the question as to how normative one set of practices was compared to others. Similarly, letters are attributed to Ignatius of Antioch as a traveling martyr who states that only assemblies convened by bishops are legitimate, a clear sign of competing meetings under different kinds of leaders and sets of teachings. Perhaps, the most dramatic instance comes from the Didache where the author pillories those who fast on Mondays and Thursdays as hypocrites as opposed to do so on Wednesdays and Fridays, a magnification of other boundary strategies demarcated by charges of hypocrisy of those who engage in certain practices. Amongst other things, these demarcations were associated with travelling Christ teachers and emissaries whose presence revealed ambiguous boundaries and called for their clarification. Boundaries and their permeability reflect urban spatial realities of co-existing and overlapping forms of lived Christ religion. They show how boundaries – crossing them and marking them – were produced by urban realities even as they helped to create different forms of urbanity spatialized through religious imagination.

Elisabeth Gruber, Universität Salzburg

Between City and Hospital: Negotiating Spatial and Social Boundaries in Medieval and Early Modern Salzburg

My starting point is the observation that the hospital, as a welfare and religious institution, was perceived both as part of the city and as a separate entity. This is only possible by drawing and formulating boundaries, but also by transgressing and permeating them. In particular, the interplay between secular and religious

interests in terms of jurisdiction and control led to regular processes of negotiation that have found their way into the written record.

Using the example of the Bürgerspital in Salzburg during the medieval and early modern periods, the paper examines how boundaries were constructed within the hospital and in relation to the urban space. The architectural form and its associated usage scenarios of the Bürgerspital provide a clear case study for understanding these processes. Initially, the primary boundary within the hospital was gender segregation, reflecting the social norms of the time. Over time, however, this focus shifted, and the separation of spaces began to reflect a growing awareness of the transmission of infectious diseases. As a result, the hospital's physical layout adapted to include distinct areas based on the severity of illnesses, marking a significant shift in boundary-making practices.

This paper will further investigate how these physical boundaries were not only visible but also embedded in the hospital's organizational and social structures. By focusing on processes of boundary-making, including the creation of visible and invisible separations, and considering the physical symbols of boundaries, this study aims to shed light on the evolving relationship between health, space, and society. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of both physical and conceptual boundaries in the historical development of healthcare institutions.

Peter Gottschalk, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Processes of Maintaining Boundaries around Ground Zero: Contestations of Revered Ground and Religious Plurality among New Yorkers, Muslims, and Other Americans

The twin assaults on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and American responses led to geo-political consequences across the globe. Much more locally, the devastation that had been wrought led to massive physical changes to the immediate neighborhood of devastation in lower Manhattan. Rebuilding would not attempt a repetition of the preexisting architecture but create a reimagined place of sadness, hope, and determination for what had popularly become known as "Ground Zero." This place was both old and new: on a decades-old landfill serving commercial purposes and now also a site of New Yorker and national mourning. As such, it was defined in great part by affect.

Inadvertently, when Manhattan residents Feisal Abdul Rauf and Sharif El-Gamal sought in 2011 to create an Islamic prayer and community center at what they dubbed "Park51" three blocks away from Ground Zero, the resulting storm of controversy demonstrated that they inadvertently had transgressed a previously invisible boundary that triggered negative emotions toward them, other Muslims, and Islamic traditions in general. While on the one hand, the proponents of the project viewed themselves as maintaining preexisting boundaries of the city's vaunted religious inclusivity by replacing the lost, Islamic prayer space in one of the Twin Towers (i.e., replacing one local prayer space with another), the antagonists viewed themselves as necessarily maintaining an "appropriate" boundary that had not existed before 11 September 2001 but which that event had essentially established by transforming the footprint of the World Trade Centers into a "sacred space." Specifically, they held that Muslims should respect the tragedy inflicted there by other Muslims. Meanwhile, there were non-Muslims who supported the Park51 project because they sought to maintain an inclusive model of belonging among Manhattan residents, demonstrating that this tension was not simply a "Muslim vs non-Muslim" issue but rather a contest over the boundaries of inclusivity that American and other Muslims are allowed in lower Manhattan, and in the United States in general.

Ultimately, three sets of boundary-maintaining efforts overlapped and affectively conflicted in the three-block radius beyond Ground Zero demonstrating a local urban landscape partly defined by emotion and affect, which served some parties as a metonym of "appropriate" boundaries that define the nation.

Irene Becci, Université de Lausanne

The practice of Christmas in European prisons

Starting from studies carried out on religious diversity in some Western prisons over the last twenty years, this contribution proposes to approach Christmas in confinement as a hybrid practice with continuously intertwining spatio-temporal dimensions, locating it 'in between' usually separated categories. The analysis proceeds by showing the co-habitations of the material value of gifts and their symbolic meanings, of a secular occasion for a get-together and a specific Christian celebration, and the circulation of people and symbols from inside and outside prison. In the conclusion it suggests that beyond the observed hybridity a notion of otherness persists.

Carolin Kosuch, Georg-August Universität Göttingen

Uncovering the Invisible: Transcending Boundaries between the Living and the Dead in the Neapolitan Underworld and in late 19th-century Italian Spiritism

This contribution will question the apparent solidity of boundaries defining (or cutting through) urban space. I will take a look at Naples and one of its particular death cultures (which still exists today), taking place in the catacombs beneath Neapolitan churches and carried out by laypeople, as Ulrich van Loyen has analyzed in his ethnographic study on the subject. The activities of these laypeople transcend many boundaries - by no means only those that divide the city into an upper and an underground area. From this contemporary setting, I will try to cross temporal boundaries and go back to the late 19th century, where such visible but (even more) less tangible barriers were shattered by the famous spiritualist medium Eusapia Palladino, who traveled the world and was studied by renowned scientists, Cesare Lombroso among them. She lived and practiced in Naples, but her work transgressed the boundaries set by her time, structuring the city and life within it: those between North and South, those of her gender, those of her background and those between the living and the dead. The dead, it seems, ultimately do not rest, but demand presence in the city - a shared space in which boundaries appear permeable in an intersectional way, without, of course, disappearing.

Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler, Philipps-Universität Marburg

– Emphasizing social order's boundaries. Some episodes of (religious) unrest in medieval Cairo

For centuries, larger cities under Islamic rule were also inhabited by religious minorities. Coexistence was guaranteed by laws of the *ḏimma* as part of the Sharia. Nevertheless, there are dramatic examples of temporary exceptions to the rule: in the year 1321, a building project by the Mamluk Sultan Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341) led to the destruction of a church in Cairo. Although existing religious buildings were generally protected by Sharia law, tensions between the religious communities in the city escalated; Muslims tore down churches and enriched themselves with the church treasures, Christians set fire to Islamic buildings, and many people died on both sides.

The historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) describes these events in detail and shows a variety of actors, interests and mechanisms of religious-political decision-making to restore order. The temporary state of emergency can be seen as a reversal of the usual religious and social boundaries in the city, which remained in place even in a state of social chaos. Relevant aspects of religious and social distinction in the historian's description can be perceived as: social stratification, political hierarchies and networks, property issues, markers like alcohol consumption, etc. The example of a dramatic, temporary change generally illustrates the factor of time in the interplay of religions in urban contexts: interestingly, the religious boundaries seemed not only to be preserved but even strengthened when their material representations such as sacred buildings were destroyed.

Nora Lafi, Universität Bayreuth

The nature of urban boundaries revisited: longue-durée reflections on Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Aleppo

In contrast with static visions of urban boundaries, limits and frontiers, research has, in the last two decades, insisted on dynamic interpretations in which the relationship between confessional identities, administrative limits, practices of separation or segregation and the urban space is the object of non-dichotomic attentions. Notions like crossings, interstices, ambiguities, ductility or differentiated temporalities have been used in order to describe more precisely such interactions. The object of this paper is to examine such issues through the study of a set of neighbourhoods of the city of Aleppo. Among the questions under examination are:

- The confessional nature of neighbourhoods and its impact on spatialities, both administrative and daily. An attention to confessional mixity is also proposed, as well as to the circulation of individuals.

- Temporalities: the nature of limits changes according to time, seasons, contexts.

- Chronology: under examination is the evolution of practices and implementations of limits between the Ottoman period, the modernizing late-Ottoman era (including urban planned extensions) and French colonial occupation after WWI.

Notions like ghost frontiers and invisible frontiers are used in order to nuance visions of limits that are based upon official delimitations only and to understand

how past configurations participate in the definition of the nature of limits in other times. Sources for this study are urban chronicles of Ottoman times and archives, mostly petitions, from the National archives of Syria, the French army (Vincennes), British colonial administration (London Kew Gardens), Geneva (League of Nations) and Istanbul (BOA).

The aim is both to illustrate new ways of interpreting boundaries and to contribute to theoretical and methodological debates through a micro-history of urban space and a historical anthropology of identities and their complex relationship with the urban space.

Given the project's preoccupation with religion and urbanity, and specifically the making of difference and hierarchy, here is an excellent example for discerning a shift in attitude. It is also a occasion to reflect on the role of the visual in our research.

Helen Bönnighausen, Universität Erfurt

The Constitution and Crossing of everyday Boundaries between different Fields of Meaning in Contemporary Societies

Contemporary societies are considered to be functionally differentiated and pluralistically structured. This means that they are organized into a multitude of subsystems or fields of action, each pursuing different goals and operating according to distinct functions, values, and practices. Consequently, subjects must navigate through various self-referential and sometimes contradictory segments of meaning. These circumstances are intensifying in urban environments, forcing urban residents to constantly shift between these various social fields of action and segments of meaning.

In this presentation, these shifts or transitions are discussed as a specific type of boundary-crossing — as a boundary of meaning that is invisible and hidden, yet often symbolically structured by specific spatial patterns. Drawing upon an empirical study conducted in 2024 in several larger German cities, this presentation aims to explore the constitution and process of crossing boundaries of meaning in urban contexts: Guided by the approach of actor-network theory (ANT) and drawing on spatial sociology, an attempt was made to capture this phenomenon through ethnographic fieldwork at urban building entrances (e.g., shopping centers, offices, or public libraries). It is assumed that when looking at

entrances as the (symbolic) infrastructure for crossing the threshold between different social fields, actions and rituals associated with the process of meaning transitions become visible and can be examined.

Presenting and discussing the results should contribute to a deeper understanding of how subjects navigate moments of crossing boundaries and offer insights into the conditions of urban life in contemporary societies.

Constanze Schaller, Universität Erfurt

The report of [fe]male benefactors'? – Crossing Boundaries in Early Modern Erfurt through Donations in a Protestant Library

Early modern Erfurt was characterized by many boundaries, which can be observed in various sources. As an example, Erfurt's status as a biconfessional city marked confessional boundaries as well as their permeability. This is also particularly evident in the sources of the Library of the Protestant Ministry, which reveal the crossing of boundaries through donations from different contexts. Those include, for example, donations that crossed city and/or confessional boundaries.

The donations are recorded in the *Liber Fundationis* under the title 'Erzehlung aller derer Herren Benefactorum und Wohlthäter'. Within the context of this gender-specific demarcation on the title page, the six women named in the Book of Donations alongside the ‚Herren Benefactorum' are of particular interest.

Through the reconstruction of the biographies of the woman and the donation processes, different boundaries that influenced diverse aspects of their lives and frequently intersected with each other become clear.

By working with the source material and the available information, the case studies will describe those different levels of boundaries. Therefore the focus will be especially on the boundaries for Protestant women from different social backgrounds in early modern Erfurt, as well as the boundaries of the source material itself.