

Call for Papers

Conference organized by the

Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies

Religion of Quarters
Practicing Religion on a Neighbourhood Scale in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods

Eisenach, 4-6 July 2018

We invite abstracts for a conference on ‘**Religion of Quarters: Practicing Religion on a Neighbourhood Scale in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods**’. Below you find a detailed description of the conference.

The abstract may have max. 300 words. The deadline for submitting an abstract is **21 February 2018**. The conference papers should be pre-circulated two weeks in advance (that is, by 20 June 2018). During the conference they should be only summarized in a few minutes to allow for intensive discussion. We hope that the publication of the papers after the conference will be cornerstones in the new emerging field of Urban Religion.

Conference room and accommodation will be provided in the Hotel ‘Haus Hainstein’ – a particularly charming venue for conferences which is situated in a park-like area nearby the centre of Eisenach. Travel expenses will be refunded according to the Thüringer Reisekostengesetz.

Abstracts have to be submitted to this email address: emiliano.urciuoli@uni-erfurt.de

General queries can be directed to the same address

Kind regards,

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Religion of Quarters: Practicing Religion on a Neighbourhood Scale in the Hellenistic and Imperial periods (Eisenach, 4-6 July 2018)

The conference seeks to bring together scholars from different fields, such as archaeology, classics, ancient philology, religious history and ancient history, in order to discuss how material urban space and culture affected the shape of non-elite religious representations, conducts, and experiences during the Hellenistic and Roman Period ('Urban Religion'). For the study of ancient Mediterranean religions, basic units of dwelling, working, and gathering in densely-populated and socially heterogeneous quarters of the larger cities of the empire form a privileged focus of investigation. Often devoid of monumental complexes of 'built religion', they are to be investigated alongside family traditions and networks, street- and neighbourhood-based linkages, as well as occupational and commercial ties and the local web of various religious 'small groups' (including Jews and Jesus followers). The kind of religion taking place on this scale of the urban fabric and life is traditionally grouped under the questionable rubric of 'private' or 'domestic religion'.

Contextualization : The 'Urban Religion' Framework

A fresh program of research, the 'Urban Religion' approach delves into the long-term mutual constitution of religion and urbanity. It explores the dialectic between religious innovations and changes and the socio-spatial form of city life. Without claiming either that religion is specifically urban or city is eminently religious, or assuming a stark city/country divide, the Urban Religion line of investigation brings questions of 'spatiality' (i.e., the social production of space and the spatial organization of society) to bear on the analysis of the reciprocal modelling of urban as well as religious imageries and practices. Its agenda presupposes that 'space matters' to the life of embodied individuals, that there is 'no unspatialized social reality' (Soja 1996), and that city-space constitutes a specific spatial form of sociation indexed by a cross-culturally combination of organizational principles and structural features (size, density, heterogeneity, overlapping of different spatial areas, accumulative division of labour, heterarchical arrangements and rankings of powers; etc). These basic assumptions are likely to produce proximate consequences on the way religious phenomena in urban environments could and should be investigated.

The focus of the conference

Zooming in on socio-spatial settings smaller than temples, less cramped than circuses and amphitheatres, and less conspicuous than the stages and itineraries of centralized city festivals, the topic of the conference comprises a rich variety of urban settlements which were contiguous, often indiscriminately mixed, and even directly adjoining to each other. The list includes: (a) multi-storey crowded tenements with several rental apartments functioning as space for a variety of religious practices; (b) grand houses frequently 'inhabited by a houseful rather than a household' (Wallace-Hadrill 2003) and organized into portions whose physical setting could occasionally accommodate non-resident and extra-familial worshippers and be eventually adapted for collective ritual purposes; (c) different non-residential locales (shops, commercial premises, halls, clubhouses; etc.) belonging to the same city block and run by family members, leased to private individuals, and/or used as meeting places for the plethora of Greco-Roman associations, including those of a religious type; (d) privately owned but publicly used facilities (neighbourhood bathing establishment, cookshops, and bars) functioning as neighbourhood highlights and landmark, tending to be 'nodes of social

interaction' (Snyder 2007), and forming the focus of the local communal life; (e) side-streets and crossroads with their relatively small-scaled religious material environments.

Inspired by an Urban Religion approach, the research builds upon such questions as: how and to what extent did the varying spatial features of domestic units, housing stocks, and street networks affect the imagination and practice of religion? How did the landscape and the soundscape of crowded living quarters shape their 'religious-scape'? Which was the interplay between urban layout and planning, locational aspect and occupancy patterns of buildings, and the construction of neighbourhood-based religious networks (see Flower 2017)? What forms of inter- and intra-religious rivalry among 'self-authorized religious experts' (Wendt 2016) and their more or less irregular followers did such locations prompt? What codes of religious and ethical conduct became necessary and persuasive in such settings?

Archaeological and inscriptional findings need to be reviewed with the perspective of Urban Religion. This may provide supplementary insights into: (a) the physical space of meeting places; (b) the effects that a neighbourhood-based economy comprising patronage, rental market, trade, and small industries produced on the strategies of recruitment, the social complexion, and the instructional level of the groups, (c) the role of offering and withholding hospitality in different settings; etc. Against the background of the accessible media of visual culture, the workings of the urban spatial language and metaphors (housing, citizenship or its lack, trans-ethnic unity of humankind, militiae, trades routes, city versus rural, but also urban gardens and fields) need to be thoroughly scrutinized.