

Cities, Resources and Religion – Economic Implications of Religion in Graeco-Roman Urban Environments. An Introduction

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In memoriam Johanna Stöger
a grievous loss

The idea to organise a panel on economy and religion in cities of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean at the AIAC 2018 grew from the shared interest of the organisers in Roman Ostia, in Roman religion and lived ancient religion as well as in, more broadly, the interrelations and entanglements of spatial and social organisation in Graeco-Roman cities and landscapes.¹ Against a background of the archaeology and history of the trade-oriented harbour of Rome and our research on resources, resilience and religion, it was an obvious step to inquire into the under-researched interferences of economy, religion and urban spaces and the involved agents, and to ask about how and where religion or religiously driven phenomena permeate economically driven actions and economic processes in cities of the Mediterranean antiquity.

Accordingly, the case studies and analyses collected in this volume aim at exploring on the one hand aspects of sacred spaces, religious architecture and institutions as well as religious references in objects, images and texts that relate to economic interests or entanglements of cities and their inhabitants. This perspective entails exploring material evidence with religious connotations and meaning, mainly in cities of Asia Minor and Italy, through the lens of the economic dynamics. On the other hand, the contributors attempt to explore the religious dimensions of socio-economic activities and their agents, such as the organisation of resource availability, investments and re-distribution. These issues are reflected in households and their material environment, in temple buildings, *macella* and *horrea* in Graeco-Roman cities; they become manifest in objects and epigraphy; they include *collegia*, religious experts, villa owners as well as public officials and embrace the well-known variety of divine agents of the Graeco-Roman world, representing the regional differences of the Mediterranean regions and societies.² Hence, approached and analysed under the perspective of religion and economy, the material evidence provides insights into strategies of coping with varying resource availability, of controlling financial means or land property, of gaining social capital, i.e. prestige, that is often intrinsically tied to religious actions, most efficiently to religious offices and power.

Cities, especially in Roman imperial times, were densely inhabited places characterised by the plurality of religious groups and practices, all negotiating, squatting, appropriating and re-purposing urban space.³ Cities as descriptive term for such places with specific but varying socio-spatial and socio-economic parameters, can be understood

as a heterogenous and highly dynamic constellation of people including their interrelations to the inner and outer environment: a city is a network in itself as well as a part of networks. Urban communities are related to other communities or groups; they have connections to various areas of cultural production, or to virtually and materially circulating objects and ideas; in their inner organisation the different social, political or religious groups are interrelated on various levels, such as personal relations, administrative contacts or (temporarily) shared activities or spaces as for examples streets.

When asking about the interrelations of religion and urbanity,⁴ one could even claim that many processes of diversification of religion took place especially in cities from classical times to late antiquity as for example the creation of new gods in the 4th century BC and the 2nd century AD, small group religions such as Orphism or Mithraism, adaptations of Roman deities to indigenous ones, deified emperors and Messianic religions. These changes entailed the entire spectrum of practitioners of religion (the *poleis* or *civitates*, the elites, small groups, households, individuals) and institutions. But even more – the diversification and changes (trans-)formed cities to various extents and made them microcosms of local socio-economic and socio-religious interactions with links to wider or even global developments. These transformations influenced existing bonds of solidarity or reinforced social and economic differences within a city, led to new connections or broke up others. Whatever happened in the religious field, it also modified the socio-economic organisation and vice-versa.

In both, archaeological research and religious studies, cities were and are “en vogue”, since they not only materially but also socially represent points of highest concentration of human expressions – from symbiosis to conflicts, from slow changes to revolutions, from administrative acts to cultural processes.⁵ A focus on cities in Roman times through the lens of economy and religion allows for inquiring into claims on spaces and resources for religious activities, either financial or natural, or workload for religious affairs as well as organisation of religious institutions. They offer evidence of the symbolic aspirations that buildings, (elite) families or memorial places gain, but also provide a diachronic view on religious institutions, groups, and experts who were matter of diversifying or even conflicting strands.

The religious infrastructure of a city was constantly in dialogue with the built urban infrastructure. The plurality of religious voices, spaces and events was influenced above all by economic forces, developments, and necessities. Archaeological research can set in at points of intersection between the urban infrastructure, the city’s economic life, and religious agents and establishments (e.g. small groups/*collegia*, individual dedicators, temples or sacred areas, and temporarily dedicated spaces): Architecture that structures space and vision as well as temporal practices appropriate public or private spaces in the cities as for example the temple of Fortuna Augusta in Pompeii or the procession to the *lavatio* of Magna Mater in the Almo outside of Rome, whereas burial places that are located in the *suburbium* integrate the economic functions of suburban rural villas and religious retreats.⁶

The dynamics of a city influence how religious activities can be spelled and lived out, whereas economic potentials or limitations in the densely inhabited space of a city also have an impact on spatial, social or economic capacities used for religious investments. Additionally, a city's space regulates the interactions between residents, religious bodies and civic governance, either conflicting or reconciling in their negotiations, and had an impact on what religious activity could take place in what manner.⁷

Economic considerations ranging from resource availability to property rights and financial support come into play, when for example people or the council of a city establish a cult, when they build or re-build a temple, when a *collegium* acts in a religious festival, or sacrificial meat is sold in the *macella*. They continue, when communities or individuals are entrusted with the maintenance and the financing of cultic activities or spatial requirements, in the dynamics of an environment with ever changing conditions. Complexity of social relations and necessities of sustainable redistribution of resources that must be or often are framed by religious practices are the other side of the coin.⁸

The theoretical basis of this approach to the city, economy and religion draws on the "social production of space" (Lefebvre 1974), developed from a Marxist viewpoint against the backdrop of cities of the first half of the 20th century, and broadened to a sociology of urban spaces that are also applied in studies of ancient cities;⁹ however, a deeper interest in religion is missing. In turn, studies of religion for ancient societies focus on the significance of spatial and material practices when "doing religion" in Graeco-Roman antiquity.¹⁰ Yet, the economic aspects of religion are with some exceptions underrated.¹¹ They can only be studied on the basis of individual cases, whereas a macro-economic level is far from easy to be reached,¹² since the Mediterranean world in its complexity and diversity in regards of religion and societies did not function along modern (socio-) economic criteria such as rational choice or new institutional economics as well as approaches of political economy.¹³ Moreover, the perspective on economic conditions of religion does not stop at the question of financing religious infrastructure or claiming urban spaces for a temple building or a ceremony, but concerns the conceptualisation of resources as part of a human-divine interaction and identificatory power as is it is investigated in the following contributions.

Under these presuppositions, the contributors to this panel focused on i) the pluralities of spaces, societal groups as well as ideas and concepts of the divine and pertaining religious practices; ii) the material presence of religion and the production of religious spaces in the city, and how this presence was negotiated, contested, or lead to changes in use, character, availability or accessibility of urban spaces; iii) the role of cities as dense, multifunctional, materially and socially heterogenous, economically central places of concentrated political and economic power fostering dynamic religious changes. To bring this down to the archaeological material the set of some more general and some detailed questions about the city, economy and religion entail in a broader and a more concrete sense:

- What are the resources – in a material and social sense – of a city?
- What role does religion play in providing, shaping and using such resources?
- How does religion impact the (economically) competitive environment of a city?
- In what way became economic and religious institutions and infrastructures manifest in urban spaces?
- Were spaces and their utilisation contested?
- In how far did particular urban conditions affect religious change and how were economic developments involved?

Even though the topic of economy, religion and cities is complex and diverse, the contributions to this panel were an attempt of opening up different approaches by classical archaeology.

In her paper on “Appropriating Space in Urbs and Suburbium” (extended abstract), Kristine Iara examines the various spatial ranges of deities and their cults in late antique Rome. Processions between the centre and the *suburbium* f.e. of Magna Mater or Dea Dia, the variable route of the Salii at the Lupercalia through the city or the appropriation of the *suburbium* by Christian (Constantinian) church buildings demonstrate the different strategies of marking spaces, either temporarily or permanently, by the different agents and officials of the cults.

Charlotte Potts deciphers “Urban Sanctuaries: Continuities in Form and Function” (extended abstract) and the longevity of the combination of open spaces for assemblies and gatherings and religious buildings in Italy and Rome. Her point of departure is an understanding of *fora* and *templa* rather as social institutions than architectural forms, thus pushing the idea of the social production of space even further. Fora were the first places of economic and cultic activities in the cities (e.g. Satricum) where human and divine agents interacted. Temples are rather a means of displaying the wealth (of families or the community). Fora and temples as cultic and socio-political spaces are the “physical expression of a conceptual connection” (p. 22).

Anne Kleineberg draws in her paper on “The Forum Boarium and Holitorium in Rome – their Religious, Social and Economic Significance Until the Early Imperial Time” (extended abstract) on the complicated evidence of the fora close to the Tiber in Rome. She re-reads the history of the sacred places for Hercules from Republican to early Imperial times and the close interrelation of religion and economy at this market and harbour place. Merchants and the military personnel made offerings in a range of financial investments (*decuma* to the dedication of buildings), while later the fora were changed to a façade and stage for the *triumphatores* on their route to the Capitolium. Thus, they lost their economic importance, visible also in architectural changes.

In the second set of papers moves away from Rome and shifts the focus to cities in Italy and Asia Minor, where the contributions inquiry into the strategies of constructing and maintaining religious spaces as well as narrating about offices and duties. Ostia in the long durée is looked at by Maura Medri in her contribution on “The Long Life of an Extra-Urban Sanctuary: the Bona Dea Sanctuary in Ostia (Regio V, X, 2)”. The sanctu-

ary's history can now be traced over nine phases from Republican to late antique times. Women of Ostia's elite took over the responsibility of financing the renovations, even though it became spatially restricted in a city of decreasing availability of space and increasing prices in the 2nd century AD. However, the sanctuary did not lose its religious attractiveness, since investments continued and the social capital the dedicators could gain was still paid off the financial investment.

By presenting another case from Ostia, Iskander Sonnemans asks about the strategies, how Mithraic associations occupied spaces for worshipping and feasting in Roman Ostia. In his paper on "The Mithras-Scape: a Case-Study from Ostia Antica" he studies how Mithraea were inserted in the urban space of Ostia. A high degree of privacy is always characteristic. Since the individual groups of adherents were small and their locales inwardly oriented, tight-knit social ties could be established. Considering the concurrence of social, economic and religious demands in a city like Ostia in the 2nd century AD, they represent socio-religious phenomena as well as private enterprises comparable to *collegia*.¹⁴

With his contribution "Zur Deutung und Finanzierung der 'Roten Halle' in Pergamon", Winfried Held offers an analysis of the Red Hall at Pergamon, considering the relation of its religious intention and the construction work. The brick building in the lower city of Pergamon is too big and luxurious to have been paid for by the citizens of Pergamon alone. The city alone could not afford the deities that should be venerated here – no less than the emperor as divinised human being. Nevertheless, the interaction of urban elites and the (*officiae* of the) emperor Hadrian resulted in the realisation of this enormous religious building full of allusions to the empire and its power. The comparisons with the monumental temple for the emperor's cult at Tarsus as well as with the layout of the temple of Zeus at Olympia show it was intended to represent – again – nothing less than the *kosmos*. Meaning and intention are here closely related to an extreme effort of costs, logistics and manpower.

Aynur-Michèle-Sara Karatas uses epigraphical evidence from cities of Asia Minor in archaic and classical times to examine the engagement of local families in the financing of cultic activities. With her paper "Cults, Money, and Prestige: Cultic Offices as Means of Prestige for Leading Families in Asia Minor", she demonstrates the strong interest of cult officials in displaying their offices, the ones of family members and their financial input to festivals, buildings and cultic activities in inscriptions of honorific statues from the 3rd and 2nd century BC. Wealth, financial power, and their socio-political influence in a changed political setting in Asia Minor were the main motivations of the families and donators of the statues, on which they eloquently told their co-citizens about their investments.

Two more contributions, by Marlis Arnhold and Asuman Lätzer-Lasar are not published in this volume. However, they added to a core area of city, religion and economy with cases from the city of Rome. Marlis Arnhold reflected on the "Religion in the Urbs: Defining the Special Case of Imperial Rome beyond the Political Centre" with a

focus on the complexity of the social and religious web of the urbs.¹⁵ She analysed how the double temple of San Omobono was inserted into the urban network in reference to the changing functions of the Forum Boarium, the Capitolium and the connecting routes. With this analysis she showed the diminishing significance of the sacred area and the agents that were active with dedications or building measures. Compared to the later cults of Dolichenus or Mithras, which appropriated urban spaces in a limited extent and had smaller groups of worshippers, she concluded that not economic reasons but the changed socio-political organisation in the city are the reason for the changed appearance of the area sacra.

In her paper “Your City – Your Arena. Religious Practices as Marketing Strategies for Claiming Urban Space”, Asuman Lätzer-Lasar compared the claims of urban spaces by the cults of Isis and Magna Mater. While Magna Mater marks larger areas and has more religious buildings, Isis is detectable rather punctually in the city of Rome in Imperial times. Both contributions considered aspects of visibility, of the marking or claiming of spaces in practicing religion in the city of Rome.

Three areas of research in ancient studies were combined in this panel and represented by the contributions – economy, city and religion. Each of them is as complex and debated as it is fundamental for the functioning of the entire (not only urban) societies. For today’s globalised and urbanised world which is economically highly entangled and where religion is often instrumentalised for reasons of power a view back into cities of the Mediterranean history allows for a better understanding of the dynamics urban centres were able to provide, channel or govern. However, it has only started to be tapped analytically, how religion is impacted by such urban dynamics and how it is, at the same time, a social, spatial and economic factor and resource in itself.¹⁶ To account for the complex phenomena of religion, economy and urbanity in our research questions and designs we have to be as creative as cities and their economic behaviour, the inventions to enhance in resource availability or the religious strategies to cope with stress and uncertainties appear to have been in antiquity.

Notes

¹ See representatively Albrecht et al. 2018; Rieger 2004; Rieger 2011; Rieger 2017; Rieger 2020; Stöger 2010; Stöger 2011a and b; Stöger – Bintliff 2009.

² Exemplary studies asking about interrelations of religious practices and economic interest in urban spaces are for example De Ruyt 2008 and Van Andringa 2008 on *macella*; Van Oyen 2020 on storage; Laforge 2009 on household religion; on *collegia* and their economic and religious purposes see Liu 2008; Terpstra 2013 and Stöger 2009 a and b; on religious experts see the contributions in Gordon et al. 2018; on economy and the city see representatively Flohr – Wilson 2016; for religious meanings of objects see Raja – Weiss 2015, esp. 137–141.

³ On recent conceptualisation of the interdependencies of urban environment and religion see Urciuoli – Rüpke 2018; Rüpke 2020; for an archaeological view on urban history see Flohr 2021; on the approach of lived ancient religion see Rüpke 2011; Raja – Rüpke 2015; Albrecht et al. 2018.

⁴ These relations are at the core of a Kollegforschergruppe “Religion and Urbanity” at Max Weber Centre of the University of Erfurt, lead by J. Rüpke and S. Rau; see Rüpke 2020, esp. 48–61; Rüpke – Rau 2020.

⁵ Cf. research conducted in the Center of Excellence “Urban Network Evolutions” at the University of Aarhus or the Graduate School “Metropolität in der Vormoderne” at the University of Regensburg.

⁶ As references to the examples see Borg 2019; Iara 2015 and this volume; van Andringa 2015.

⁷ As a recent example for an archaeologically researched city Ephesos see Schowalter et al.

⁸ Even though cities are not at the heart of this study Rieger 2018 is an example for the religiously framed redistribution of the resource water. See also the redistribution of the *stipes* collected from the citizens in Augustan Rome with statue donations by the emperor at the compital shrines see Suet., Aug. 57.1.

⁹ For (German) approaches to a sociology of space and urban spaces in particular see Löw 2008 and Ößbrügge – Verpohl 2014. For ancient cities see Stöger 2009 and 2011a; Flohr 2020, esp. 5–7.

¹⁰ e.g. Rieger 2020; Moser – Knust 2017.

¹¹ An exception is Collar – Kristensen 2020. Relevant for sanctuaries as economic centres in the Greek world are Dignas 2002, Sassu 2014 and the volume of Topoi. Orient – Occident 12–13, 2005 with contributions by V. Chankowski-Sablé, A. Malrieu and J. Maucourant. The introduction to the recent issue of the journal Religion in the Roman Empire on “Transformations of Values: Lived Religion and the Economy” by C. Moser and Ch. Smith with the same title (3–22) argues against the accounts of “marketplace of religion” and rational choice (6–7). However, the author are not clear about what values they speak of. Also, the central notion of “transformations” seems to focus rather on transformative agency of ritual able to ascribe (symbolic) value to objects. Earlier attempts for Greek cults resp. Rome see Linders – Alroth 1992; Rüpke 1995.

¹² For recent approaches to economy and religion see Gordon et al. forthcoming; Spickermann forthcoming and Jongmann 2014; for individual cases studies see e.g. DeLaine 2002; Granino Cecere 2009; Stöger 2011b; Rieger – Möller 2020.

¹³ See for studies discussing (modern) economic theories Maucourant 2004; Verboeven 2015; Ruffing 2016; Marzano 2017; Davies 2018.

¹⁴ Rieger 2004, 252–257.

¹⁵ see Arnhold 2020.

¹⁶ Albrecht et al. 2018.

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