
Urban Religion through the Lens of Urban Archaeology

Rubina Raja^{*1,2} and Jörg Rüpke^{*3}

¹Aarhus University – Denmark

²Centre for Urban Network Evolutions – Denmark

³Universität Erfurt – Allemagne

Résumé

Cities are among the most intensely studied topics in the classical world. Systemic studies of Greek and Roman urbanism explore the quick proliferation of urban settlements, their characteristics, connectivity and, last but not least, the establishment of and competition about single cities' places in regional or imperial hierarchies of primary and secondary centres and finally rural settlements, not excluding the precariousness and frequent fall of cities. More rarely, such cities are studied as lived spaces, rendered urban by the very practices, discourses, and materializations thematizing and expressing its very urbaneness.

One of the perspectives to study them as lived space has been through the concept of "lived ancient religion" (Raja, Rüpke, Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World, 2015). Religion is not to be reconstructed as a rule-based system arranging and manipulating objects with precise (even if not always reconstructable) meanings. 'Religion' is, first of all, a perspective used and a quality ascribed in the very act of performing or planning and performing communication with those super-human and special addressees. Of course, to make such communication more successful, to prepare it and commemorate it, temporary use and ascription are easily turned into permanent elaboration, giving new forms and meanings to objects and developing new forms of vessels, instruments, architectural settings, and speeches and performances. On the level of the academic observers, this analytical perspective is not served neither by quick classifications nor by rejecting any possibility of talking about standards and generalisations. Such reflections are not restricted to questions of urban religion, but they neatly tie in with methodological preferences of an urban archaeology.

When reflecting on urban religion, we are well aware that urbanity is not simply a question of complexity. It is much more than that. The urban seems to be characterised by ambivalences in several dimensions, typically advocating unity and diversity at the same time in terms of people reckoned as belonging to the place, the far-reaching connectivity and the closeness of the town's or city's gates, the temporal coordination of activities in centralized practices or the co-existence of very different time-schedules and temporalities inhabited by the city-dwellers.

Lived religion is dis-embedded or re-embedded into such tensions. Its very difference to other cultural practices and their (implicit) knowledge is its very *raison d'être*, rendering its use so precarious – the relevance of religious communication, of involving gods into urban procedures, can be denied or forcefully excluded (for instance by disregarding omens)

*Intervenant

– and powerful at the same time, when situationally super-human support of a human actor is accepted. Yet, such practices marked off as religious can also be made to overlap with and blend into other social strategies; it can be made to coincide with economic or political hierarchies, to mark out urban publics, to go along with the temporalities of family lives from birth through marriages to death and surviving individual death as a collective.

Such an approach has more recently further specified into "urban religion". It starts from the hypothesis of a mutual formation of religion and urbaneness as a globally applicable tool (Christ et al., ARG 25, 2023), taking into account local change as much as the formation of and interaction in networks.

For the ancient world, archaeology is the most relevant discipline and its most important "lens" for any such study. In this panel we wish to explore methodology and concepts that allow to produce better accounts of comparability and change when combining local case studies with an interest in transregional entanglement and comparability beyond the limits of *Eigenterminologie* and concepts that seem to arise out of historical cultures self-descriptions. The contributors to this panel will use a wide arrange of urban tensions to propose and discuss concepts like ephemerality, anomaly, high definition or ambivalence. On that basis, the specific perspective of an archaeology of urban religion for the study of lived space is developed.

Mots-Clés: urban religion, lived experience, lived ancient religion, archaeology, archaeology of urban religion