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Resonant Self–World Relations  
in Ancient and Modern  
Socio-Religious Practices



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“Resonant Self–World Relations in Socio-Religious Practices in Antiquity and Modernity”  
in collaboration with University of Liverpool and UrbNet, University of Aarhus

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**Measuring the World against the Body:  
Materialities and Meanings of Magnification and Miniaturisation in  
Religious Communication in Antiquity and Modernity**

**Report**

“Measuring the World against the Body: Materialities and Meanings of Magnification and Miniaturization in Religious Communication in Antiquity and Modernity”, the annual spring conference of the International Graduate School "Resonant Self–World Relation in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices" (IGDK 2283\_W1265) took place this year in a smaller and virtual format. Due to the pandemic, earlier plans to convene at Haus Hainstein, Eisenach, had to be abandoned and the format changed to a speakers’ conference with pre-circulated papers.

The conference was a cooperation with the University of Liverpool and the UrbNet project at Aarhus University on both the organizational and speakers’ level. The conference brought experts from a wide field of disciplines into conversation, among them Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Archaeology, Classics, History, Philology, Prehistory, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Theology. The many and various examples showed difficulties and similarities in referring to size and scale, assigning importance or meaning to objects based on size, and speaking about materiality and immateriality of experience and practice in different religious contexts.

With eighteen papers overall, it covered a wide range of topics, several focused on Mediterranean antiquity and architecture, pottery or statuary, with glimpses beyond this area and period by papers from Religious Studies of the Ancient Near East (on Hittite treaties), contemporary times (on



religious artefacts in the trucking milieu) or Palaeolithic images and our approach to them. Taken together the methodological focus profited from confrontation with a broad range of sources from different historical periods, enabling advances in interpretation as theoretical modeling.

The conference opened with a block on architectural material and the relation of agents, objects and buildings to space and size with papers by Diana Pavel (“Scaling Etruscan Tomb Altars”), Rubina Raja (“Abstraction of Religious Symbols and Objects in Sacred Architecture in the Roman Near East: The Role of Miniaturization”), Jörg Rüpke (“Urban Monumentality”), and D. Malka Wijeratne (“Perceptions of Changing Religious Landscapes in Augustan Rome”). The discussion focused on questions of densities and hierarchies as characteristics of cities – of either the living or the dead. Looking at the various forms and dimensions of altars in Etruscan necropoleis no pattern in the relation of size, shape and location (inside a burial chamber, on top of a tumulus) can be traced. According to Pavel no hierarchy is at work, but rather an intended difference of practical (ritual and bodily) interaction of human agents with the altars. An either internalized or an externalized bodily engagement with the differently dimensioned objects in Etruscan necropoleis set up for a communication with the divine or the ancestors addressed the vertical and horizontal axes (H. Rosa). The question of why some of the altars are so monumental cannot be answered. However, one could look into the relations to theatricality and the interaction with the landscape around. Issues of monumentality were central to Rüpke’s paper where he asked about why religious places in cities often become monumental and what this tells us about the relation of human agents to their gods – it might be an aspect of control of otherwise unattainable deities. The magnification of houses (of ancestors) to large-scale temple buildings as well as the construction of visibly including and/or excluding city walls leads Rüpke to a view of the city as monument. In the discussion, aspects of hierarchies were tackled, for example that not only density and largeness create monumentality, but also the lack of it, such as empty spaces (plazas, roads): How can we conceptualise monumentality when facing “low density urbanism” (R. Fletcher) and how are control and urban diversity related to each other?

A topic that occurred already in the first session was the interplay between size and number: With the renovation of more than 80 temples that Augustus mentions in the *Res Gestae*, it is not about the individual work and temple but about the sheer number as such as Wijeratne pointed out. Monumentality comes into existence by an amassment and means then more than its individual parts. Also, larger audiences that are embraced in monumental events, spaces, and by objects and architecture play a role in magnification in general. The definition of what is small, or what is “not to scale” and how changes in dimensions trigger meaning and reaction was exemplified by Raja, presenting niches and altars that change size and location in architectural or ‘objectal’ contexts of the Graeco-Roman Near East. Comparable to the non-patterns of altars in Etruscan necropoleis, it is the contexts that establish the relations to other parts of the complexes. Motifs change size and place, where new or shifted meanings can be ascribed. Potential – and varying – meanings are offered due to the abstraction and formal reduction of the altars and niches, whereas in case of

small-scale imagery only the size, but not the details are reduced. Abstraction is not at work, rather the reduction of size goes hand in hand with an increase of elaboration, details and artistic finesse – this was exemplified by statuettes of *Jupiter Heliopolitanus* – having one of the most monumental sanctuaries of the ancient Mediterranean – and re-occurs in the Late Republican and Early imperial statuettes of the *Lares*. The way of abstraction and reduction was traced all the way to the tiny Palmyrenean tesserae on which signs – as for example of the god Bel (Kaizer / Raja) in a total reduction still mean and refer to the gods.

This session was followed by papers inquiring into “narratives of personified states or deities” and papers by Elisabeth Begemann (“The Dancing Deity. Diminishing the Goddess Libertas on the Palatine”), Georgia Petridou (“The Eyes Have It: Magnification and Miniaturization in Modern Greek eye-shaped *tamata* and Ancient Greek *anathemata*”) and Alexei Zadorozhny (“The global micronarrative: dynamics of exemplarity and the embodiment of Roman values in Valerius Maximus”). Aspects of “‘miniaturized gods’ in statuettes and drawings” were discussed by Olympia Bobou (“Stars and signs in Palmyra: Astrological Symbols in Religious Architecture and *tesserae*”), Christopher Hallett (“Miniature cult images: ‘Corinthian bronzes’, hand-held processional statuettes, and early imperial representations of the Roman *Lares*”) and Peter Scherrer (“*Di Penates* – From Small Objects to Anthropomorphic Gods”). Begemann and Zadorozhny from different angles showed how Roman authors play with seeming or real diminution (*exempla* in Valerius Maximus) or smaller and larger images of deities that are intended to function through contrasts. While he works in his highly political speech *de domo sua* with associations of moral categories (good / bad) and sizes (large / small), Cicero ascribes these categories depending on content (Lar / Libertas) building his argument on associative allusions, whereas Valerius Maximus’ brief *exempla* reveal the grand narratives (“Romanness”) only by the agglomeration of micro-narratives. Shortness of text relates to abstraction of moral concepts (and personifications of abstract notions) on the one hand, which refers to the abstraction of niches and altars used as applications in architecture and focus meanings. On the other hand, the concept of Libertas, the goddess of freedom, venerated on the Palatine and good as such, is pejoratively moved towards a meaning of *licentia* and equated with a foreign meretrix and with a small image, whereas the (Cicero’s) *Lares* attain even if small as objects, a huge significance in the Roman context.

In his paper, Hallett traced the exquisiteness of the statuettes of *Lares* back to the predilection of Roman Republican elites for ‘Corinthian Bronzes’, applying an art historical approach. He argues for an art-market driven phenomenon that gave rise to the production of these statuettes (and finally also the Augustan *Lares* in the *vici* of Rome) rather than religious motivation. Issues of the collectors as beholders of these elaborate tiny products might have played a bigger role than the need for statuettes in household shrines. Paintings, as he stressed, of the *Lares* were known and in use and show the deities at a larger size than the Late Republican Bronze statuettes. What small size (and elaborateness) means in terms of handiness and bodily engagement he transcribed with closeness, movability and controllability. A discussion about anthropomorphic representations of a

rather under-defined group of deities – the *Lares* and *Penates* – started with the interpretation of vessels with heads found in provincial household contexts by Scherrer: The so-called ‘Gesichtsgefäße’, often combined with findings of miniature receptacles or food shares, may represent the *Di Penates*, called upon for stocks and wellbeing of the household (apart from *the Di Penates Publici* called upon as oath gods). The individual *Di Penates* were important for all Romans. With reference to Cicero’s description of how the *Di Penates* get normally received their shares of food in small receptacles to discredit Verres’ behaviour, Scherrer explains the need for provincial inhabitants to make these *Di penates* graspable with the invention of *Gesichtgefäße*. An anthropomorphisation helped to construct an addressable object. Again, the portability of the pots on which the faces of the deities were applied is crucial for this choice and product. A common strand in the papers on *Lares* and *Di penates* that re-occurred in later papers (Jacobs, Rieger, Sojc), were the contestations of forms and artistic production and the religious aspects revolving around provisioning, stockage and reproduction – a in-family, cross-generational and individual need.

The contribution by Olympia Boubou dealt with the paradox of the stars as one of the largest and farthest phenomena mankind is exposed to that are translated into tiny symbols, for examples in zodiacs occurring in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD in the Mediterranean. The signs that represent stars as well as the human or theriomorphic shapes applied to them go into the direction of anthropomorphisation and miniaturisation, but first of all entail a reduction of a celestial body (at least with regard to the gigantic visible shapes of the moon or sun close to the horizon); in the most extreme case reduced to a dot. The significance of contexts for such reductions or miniaturizations is important to note: At least in the Palmyrene material the symbols of the stars do not appear in the visually rich funerary art, but only in the sphere of sacred places. If we look for the meaning of such symbols – from tesserae to ceiling reliefs - we need to take this strictly into account.

With cross-temporal comparisons and modern milieus the religious aspects of magnification and miniaturization, of big and small, came to the fore with the papers by Georgia Petridou (“The Eyes Have It: Magnification and Miniaturisation in Modern Greek Eye-shaped *tamata* and Ancient Greek *anathemata*”) and Manuel Moser (“Saint Mary and the Motors! Religious Artefacts in the Trucking Milieu”). The Greek orthodox *tamata* to S. Paraskevi were compared to ancient plaquettes of the eyes (*anathemata*) given to Demeter. Both represent small version of body parts, i.e., they are miniaturisations of internal and external parts of the human body. Moreover, the hands-on effect the small version allow for, overturns the body perception of an individual handling them. Miniaturisation is an irritation in comparison to humans’ bodies scale and their modes of perception. Especially against the background of illness that was in antiquity conceived of as instability or fluidity of the body, these paradoxical changes of body relations in order to regain stability (= health) these small objects are full of potential. Manuel Moser presented material of a socio-religious study in the (East-) German trucker milieu inquiring into the employment of religious objects establishing potential relations in various directions: to the trucks, to the drivers, to those people close to them, as well as to a transcendental other. With the notion of “assemblage” he set

those agents into relations, with which he raised a discussion of object agency (power, 'Wirkmacht') - a topic that returned in papers on late antique statuettes and pottery. Object agency happens here on different physical scales - from the small-scale imagery or objects to the truck as the ultimate assemblage. The issue of power came into the discussion, since the flattened and rather broad understanding of religion and the involved agents leads also to a flattened understanding of power, which omits the impact on politics on the companies and individuals in the trucker milieu.

Anthony Sinclair ("From Awe to Shock: the impact of downsizing on interpretive scale in the study of Paleolithic Art") shed light on the history of science: How technical developments entail examinations of the detail (the individual brush stroke in a painting) but misses drawing the larger picture: What did it mean to people? Here, the interplay of scrutiny into the detail by academics and the grand narratives and big questions (why? who?) becomes an academic and societal challenge.

On the final day of the conference, an archaeological block on "miniaturized objects in deposits" opened the discussion (papers by Ine Jacobs & Hugh Jeffrey: "Pagan statuettes in a 7th-century mansion at Aphrodisias"; Anna-Katharina Rieger: "Miniature Pottery from Pompeii: What do tiny objects want?"; and Natascha Sojc: "The material record of micro-shares. An archaeological case study on sanctuary transactions in ancient Sicily"). The phenomenon of smaller than life-size statues and statuettes in late antique and byzantine times (4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE) are often looked at as remnant of a polytheistic revival or as an elite décor showing the interests of the owners in classical *paideia*. However, in the contexts of Aphrodisias and other late antique houses and sanctuaries, Jacobs and Jeffrey pushed this view further. The deliberate exhibition and re-production of the statuettes of deities demonstrates an ongoing re-negotiating of imagery that proved to be 'functional' and powerful ("efficacious endurance") - regarding the communication with the divine over generations. This captures the situation in late antiquity better than the often quoted 'falling back to 'pagan beliefs' or the 'resistance towards new beliefs'. Stressing the prospective rather than the retrospective aspects that such imagery entailed, the authors went beyond a black and white image of late antique religion.

Issues of a less clear-cut ascription of meanings, fuzziness of functions and over-determined archaeological labels turned up also in the contribution by Katharina Rieger on miniaturized pottery as employed in various contexts in Pompeii (houses, shared sacred places, street shrines). Size is not the only criterion for determining if something is miniaturized or magnified; accumulations as well as specific aggregation of ceramic products widen the spectrum of interpretations. Ludic aspects of tiny vessels - usage by children - might sometimes be an explanation, however the delicacy, the change of bodily perception, the relation of container to content - making them appear more valuable or as only a part of something - are all aspects that play into the meaning of miniature vessels. Natascha Sojc inquired into the religious and socio-economic implications that we can read out of archaeological material. With the example of deposits in the Sanctuary of Santa Anna at Agrigent, she distinguished different ways of sharing with the gods: tiny, manufactured

things, fragments, parts of sets or tiny natural objects. Drawing on analogies of Indian temples, she interpreted the contexts as remains of a redistributive system that in a century-long frequency established a community, subtly organized through the various options of micro-shares. Explanations as *pars pro toto* or reciprocity of resource distribution fall short in the view of the deposits and their 'objectal' range; rather choices and selections in "gift-transactions" dominate the scene and point to a close and deliberate cooperation between the worshippers. With a reference to the monumental appearance of buildings (Rüpke), the existence of such places – close to monumental "polis"-temples of Agrigent – their societal purpose becomes clear.

In the final round, "narratives of magnification processes" became central (papers by Irmtraud Fischer: "Magnification as Post-traumatic Mechanism Reflected in Biblical Texts"; Elena Malagoli, "The King and the Population as Protagonists of the Oath: Pars pro toto Semantics in Ancient Near Eastern Treaties", and Katharina Waldner: "The Materiality of Martyrdom"). These papers showed convincingly how textual strategies, metaphorical language and associations and hints to physical figures, spaces, cities and monuments influence the imagination, imagined dimensions, meanings, and the reception and effect, texts had or have on people. Applying trauma and postcolonial hermeneutics, Irmtraud Fischer analysed the story of Jonah, and passages from prophetic texts against the background of the interplay of different sizes. In the account of Jonah for instance the magnification of the awful and threatening (Ninive, the whale, etc.) is explicitly or implicitly pointed to, whereas the protagonist is diminished. The figure of Jonah can better cope with the trauma he (or the people of Israel) suffered. The question if such behaviour is rather typical for heterarchical or hierarchical society was discussed controversially. Also, the question of the relation between a cultural trauma and an individual trauma was raised. The fragmented body (and soul) as image and perception of trauma referred back to the *tamata* and the body as measure and locus of perception. Elena Malagoli inquired into the position of the Hittite king and explained him as a *pars pro toto* of his people, starting from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> mill. BCE, but the phenomenon to conceptualise a leader as a multiple body can be traced through time (for example Medieval Europe). The term was seen as not fully suitable, however the role in the treatise as active and acting for his people (and not as heroized, distant figure) came to the fore. With the narratives of martyrdom (Ignatius, Polycarp and Eusebius), we find that whereas Ignatius never mentions any of the places of martyria (amphitheater or arena) and makes them so present by this strategy, Eusebius makes the monuments of the city cry. Hence, two very different takes of the spatial setting and the compassion/alienation of monuments occur. In the martyr story of Polycarp the fire that kills the saint, is given the form of a grave monument (a vaulted chamber). So, the texts play with explicit or implicit mention of monuments, the agency of the monuments and their materiality in relation to the materiality of tortured or dying body.

Important results were the fruitfulness of strengthening the relational perspective. The body is not only canon (measure) for objects, but itself fragmented and fluid and in need of stabilization by magnified or miniaturized object. As a measurement of scale, human differences, not least between

children and adults, but also between the powerful and the subaltern textually and visually often translated into differences of size, and are to be taken into account. Sizes, shapes, and scales as well as speaking about sizes and applying different scales turns out to a strategy that is applied in texts, objects, and architecture (and the spaces left between lines, buildings, or things). Even if the agency of objects was controversially discussed, the importance of an environment for human action that is characterized by meanings and effects attributed to the objects which are constituting this environment was stressed. The different – not only physical but perceptual – position of the human body to large or small objects, things or structures changes the relation to them and as such the agency as a result of relations. The additional focus on religion made clear that the relation is not just a ‘horizontal’ one between human agents and smaller or larger objects made special by variation of scale. The ‘vertical’ reference to and construction of agents beyond the horizontal relation enlarge the analytical grid to a triangle with very different relational properties.

The proceedings of the conference will be published in the series “Contextualizing the Sacred” (Turnhout: Brepols). The next conference of the IGS will take place October 27-29 in Graz on the topic of “Text, Music and Image-object as counterparts in Resonant Relationships”.

### **Organizers**

Elisabeth Begemann, Diana Pavel, Georgia Petridou, Rubina Raja, Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke

### **Participating Institutions**

University of Aarhus, Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet)

Max Weber Centre of Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt, IGS “Resonant Self–World Relations in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices”

University of Graz, IGS “Resonant Self–World Relations in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices”

Universities of Liverpool, Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology