Prof. Dr. Jörg Rüpke

Is the city wall the end of the world? Rituals thematising, neglecting or appropriating a physical boundary

Problems and research questions: Massive and extended walls were the defining element of many urban settlements, that is, rendered larger, a 'city'. This holds true for the urban networks of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean world, but likewise for many, but not all urban cultures from Bronze Age China through the Indus civilisation (e.g. Harappa) to Mesopotamia and the Western most provinces of the Roman Empire. Typically, such walls were the largest investment in terms of material and labour of these cities and seen as the most powerful visual dimension of the respective urban society. At the same time, the ritual thematisation seems to be very uneven; religious practices frequently stress the permeability or even appropriated the materiality of the wall for illegitimate ritual usage. Against this background a doctoral project might ask: How was the physical and often legal boundary of urban society inculcated in religious and non-religious ritual practices – and which was the relationship of the two? How did religious rituals translate the physical barrier into transcendent or social self–world relations, including relations of gender and power? Who were the agents of such practices?

Two **hypotheses** inform this research: a) City-wall related religious rituals were a field of contestation between singularising and pluralising agents. b) The materiality of the wall is ritually related to the monumentality of religious architecture within and beyond the city.

How could the topic be **approached**? The topic needs the integration of archaeological data, including graffiti and individual modifications in the form of burials, shrines or paintings attached to walls or gates, with literary and iconographical representations of city-walls. The focus needs to be on the reconstruction of ritual practices and, as far as possible through the tools of lived-religion methodology, experiences of such practices by different agents.

In the analysis of such archaeological and literary evidence the performance and habitualisation of mute or resonant relationships needs to be seen through ways of dealing with the materiality, the orientation of the space used, and the imagery and metaphorical use of wall images. Particular attention is to be paid to spatial metaphors of high and low, inside and outside, beyond and behind, as well as metaphors of movement of through, underneath or over the wall.

References

Boivin, Nicole 2009. 'Grasping the Elusive and Unknowabel: Material Culture in Ritual Practice', in: *Material Religion* 5. 266-87.

Burchardt, Marian 2016, 'Infrastrutture del religioso: materialità e disposizioni d'ordine urbano', in: *Historia Religionum 8*. 67-77.

Bynum, Caroline Walker 2011. *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York.

Droogan, Julian 2013. *Religion, Material Culture and Archaeology*. Bloomsbury Advances in Religious Studies. London/New York.

Garbin, David (ed.) 2012. *Believing in theCcity: Urban Cultures, Religion and (Im)materialitay*. Culture and Religion. Abingdon.

Insoll, Thomas 2009. 'Materiality, Belief, Ritual-Archaeology and Material Religion: An Introduction', in: *Material Religion* 5. 260-4.

Knott, Kim; Krech, Volkhard; Meyer, Birgit 2016. 'Iconic Religion in Urban Space', in: *Material Religion* 12.2. 123-36. doi: 10.1080/17432200.2016.1172759.

Morgan, David (ed.) 2010. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. London.

Morgan, David 2015. 'Religion and Embodiment in the Study of Material Culture', in: *Oxford Research Enxclopedias: Religion* 1. 1-20. doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.32.

Raja, Rubina; Rüpke, Jörg 2015. 'Archaeology of Religion, Material Religion, and the Ancient World', in: Raja, Rubina; Rüpke, Jörg (eds.), *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*. Malden. 1-25.

Rüpke, Jörg 2015. 'Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication: Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion', in: *Religion* 45.3. 344-66. doi: DOI:10.1080/0048721X.2015.1024040.

Rüpke, Jörg 2018. 'Religious Agency, Sacralisation, and Tradition in the Ancient City', *Istrazivanya* 29.1. 22-38. doi: 10.19090/i.2018.29.22-38.

Rüpke, Jörg 2020. 'Ritual Objects and Strategies of Sacralization within Religious Communication', in: Bergmann, Claudia; Stürzebecher, Maria (eds.), *Ritual Objects in Ritual Contexts*. Erfurter Schriften zur Jüdischen Geschichte Band 6. Erfurt. Im Druck.

Watson, Sophie; Zanetti, Oliver 2016, 'Religion as Practices of Attachment and Materiality: The Making of Buddhism in Contemporary London', in: *Culture and Religion* 17.3. 257-78. doi: 10.1080/14755610.2016.1211544.

Wilburn, Drew 2015. 'Inscribed Ostrich Eggs at Berenike and Materiality in Ritual Performance', in: *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1.2. 263-85.

#