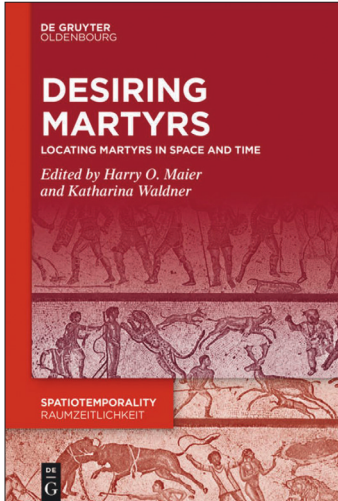


DESIRING MARTYRS



MAIER, HARRY O. & WALDNER, KATHARINA (eds.) (2021). *Desiring Martyrs. Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Berlin: De Gruyter, xviii + 236 pp., 59,95 € [ISBN: 978-3-1106-8248-9].

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IN THE COLLECTIVE VOLUME *DESIRING MARTYRS. LOCATING MARTYRS IN SPACE AND TIME*, the editors Harry O. Maier and Katharina Waldner published the proceedings of an international workshop, “Martyrs in Space and Time”, organized at the University of Erfurt in 2017. The *Desiring Martyrs* is dedicated to the spatial and temporal considerations of the literature that emerged in the early Christian period (p. 1). The volume addresses the assortment of sources and does not necessarily focus solely on martyrdom narratives. Other genres, such as letters, apocalypses, Apocrypha, and biblical books, are likewise examined. With that said, martyrs and martyrdom are treated in all articles. The volume *Desiring Martyrs* has contributed to the study of

early Christian martyrdom literature and literature discussing martyrdom through the spatiotemporal approach.

Spatiotemporality presents an innovative framework in the study of this literature. The volume appears a year after Paul Middleton's *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* (2020),¹ which came in after some years of silence ever since the cutting-edge scholarship of Candida Moss (2010-2013).² Although it may seem challenging to delve into the subject where the leading scholars just had their say, the editors rightly note that the discussion of spatiotemporal questions presents a novel and unexplored way of studying early Christian literature.

The martyrdom and martyrdom literature studies have not been traditionally bound to a specific branch of knowledge. Their examination is at the crossroads of religious studies, theology, early Christian studies, Biblical studies, Jewish studies, the studies of Christian sanctity, and hagiography. Their reception may emerge in the research outcome of any period, from medieval (Western Latin, Byzantine, Oriental) to contemporary. Consequently, various analyses of martyrdom inevitably link to the specific area under whose umbrella they appeared. Besides, the investigations of martyrdom literature have not been caught thus far by the "spatial turn", which gained ground in Biblical studies and the studies of the Old Testament.³ According to the editors, the spatiotemporal considerations have been barely touched upon in the scholarship of martyrdom literature, for example in the writings of Judith Perkins, Elisabeth Castelli, and Candida Moss.⁴

The book is published in the series "Spatiotemporality" of Walter de Gruyter, which, although relatively new, presents a good platform with a solid variety of books for the study of practices and concepts in the two-fold perspective of space and time, which strives for interdisciplinarity and covers both historical and contemporary contexts, informed by current theoretical approaches. The editors' aim in this volume is to encourage other scholars to "continue the spatiotemporal investigations" (p. 11).

In the "Introduction", the editors devote space to defining of the term "martyr", providing a literature overview in German and English. Such a trend has been set in the previous scholarship on martyrdom: many scholars, such as Brox, van Henten, Avemarie, Rajak, Boyarin, Middleton, and Moss, discussed the concept previously

1. Middleton, 2020.

2. Moss, 2010; 2012; 2013.

3. Stewart, 2012, pp. 139-150; Schreiner, 2016, pp. 340-371.

4. Perkins, 2001; 2002; 2008; Castelli, 2004; Moss, 2012.

(p. 3). The editors further stress that this volume presents a ground-breaking study that addresses how texts from early Christianity “represent and produce configurations of time and space” (p. 1). The volume focuses on the “narrative and rhetorical dimensions” of the martyrdom narratives and literature mentioning martyrdom (p. 4). The editors explain the volume’s title as two-fold: in one way, it refers to the characters in stories (martyrs). It also seeks to answer questions related to the implied author, audience, and communal self-understanding. The editors stress that they “move outward from definitions to considerations of where, when, amongst and for whom accounts unfold and how narratives create and reflect spatiotemporal worlds” (pp. 5-6).

The following essay of the volume, “Sacral Meals and Post-Traumatic Places. Revision and Coherence in the Epistle to the Hebrews”, is Michael Thate’s discussion of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* investigated through the viewpoint of trauma studies. The *Epistle* is a venue for reconsiderating the past from the traumatic event of Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ violent death was a traumatic, shameful event (p. 18). The author aims to track the themes such as “the narrative assemblage of trauma, place, and therapies of desire” (p. 18). The *Epistle* is, in his view, “an important witness to the complex transgenerational phenomena of post-traumatic place-making in early Christianity” (p. 19). The story, initially uncomplicated, is revised by the community of believers: it alters the trauma of crucifixion into a place of repair, desire, communal belonging, and solidarity. The death of Jesus is reconsidered through the coherence of priestly sacrifice and the sharing of the priestly meal.

The author contributed to the argument of reading early Christian texts as complex post-traumatic phenomena in his other works.⁵ His statement contrasts some previous publications discussing martyrdom narratives, such as Candida Moss’ *The Myth of Persecution*.⁶ The textual analysis includes a close reading of the text, analyzed by the combination of philological methods and theological interpretations, at times becoming admirably specialized (p. 23). The article is written for experts familiar with this text and the Bible. Those unfamiliar with ancient languages, such as Greek and Hebrew, may find navigating difficult (although the author provides translations). The article does not extensively engage the theoretical literature on spatiotemporality. Its central theme, overall, answers the primary pursuits of the volume.

5. Thate, 2019.

6. Moss, 2013.

In the following article, ‘Who are These Clothed in White Robes and Whence Have They Come? The Book of Revelation and the Spatiotemporal Creation of Trauma’, Harry O. Maier discusses the *Book of Revelation* in connection to the desire for the imitation of Christ and martyrdom from the perspective of the absence of trauma. The author engages extensively with the literature on early Christianity. Besides, drawing from the writings of Lefebvre, Soja, and Bakhtin, he proposes that John wrote the *Book of Revelation* to inspire the imitation of Christ through a set of contrasting spatiotemporal depictions (pp. 7 and 50). Based on Soja’s book, *Third-place*, the author elaborates on the trialectical spatial consideration of *Revelation* (p. 51). Bakhtin’s conceptual tools complement Soja and Lefebvre in analyzing how *Revelation*’s characters inhabit differing spatiotemporal realities (p. 52). To produce an experience of trauma, according to Maier, John creates in his *Revelation* what he calls two “chronotropes” (Bakhtin’s concept): one produced by the martyrs who suffer for their faith, and another, produced at various locations where “idolaters curse the God and worship the beast” (p. 53). “The narrator constructs two sites of trauma to compel his listeners to choose one spatiotemporality or chronotrope over the other” (p. 53). In *Revelation*, there is a desire for the martyrs’ biographies to unfold in the future. For this, John creates the sites of trauma where he invites his audience.

In his contribution, “Murder at the Temple. Space, Time and Concealment in the *Proto-gospel of James*”, Christopher Frilingos analyzes the *Proto-gospel of James*, a 2nd-cent. infancy narrative that refers to the death of Zecharias and the flight of Elizabeth during Herod’s massacre of the infants (as in Mt. 2:16). Relying on Boyarin’s comparison of Jewish and Christian martyrs, Frilingos attempts to answer whether Zecharias’ death is martyrdom by applying a variety of spacetime configurations. Frilingos states that, beyond martyrdom, “a new understanding can be found in an array of spatial and temporal features in the account” (p. 65). His focus is the “cycles of liturgical time, correspondences between the secret depths of physical spaces, and the complexity of familial bonds” (p. 66). Zacharias does not die for faith and God; he dies for his family (p. 66). In his view, this apocryphal gospel does not display a desire for martyrdom. It is instead a love story of a husband towards his wife. A minor drawback in this otherwise elaborate article is that some subtitles are written with fonts smaller than others, which may give a false impression of a hierarchy among them.

In his article “Roman Judge vs. Christian Bishop. The Trial of Phileas During the Great Persecution”, Jan Bremmer examines the historicity of early Christian martyrdom narratives in response to Candida Moss’ study of their fictionality. Bremmer criticizes such an approach in recent scholarship where a tendency exists to minimize the number of victims of Christian persecutions (p. 89); this inclination is the most

vivid in Moss' book, *The Myth of Persecution*. He focuses on the manuscript tradition of the *Acta Phileae*, opening the article with the Bollandist approach, where he discusses the source, versions, and the old and vexing problem of authenticity (pp. 81-87). The discussions of the authenticity of hagiography and martyrdom literature have dominated the field for at least the first half of the twentieth century. Bremmer, however, adds to it a fresh approach, multi-lingual and all-encompassing, where he engages the entirety of the known literary sources on saint Phileas in many languages. Media studies additionally help his analysis. Bremmer safely bases the study of this martyrdom narrative on papyri, among other sources, which has not been widely utilized in earlier scholarship. However, it presents an excellent way to safely date texts, considering that papyri usually have stable early dating. Bremmer moves further from mere questions of facts and fiction and discusses the appropriation and readership. A better question is how these historical records were adapted and used to promote a certain kind of memory and to which end. His article may not directly contribute to spatiotemporality, but it is a fine addition to the study of authenticity and reception of martyrdom narratives.

In his article about Ignatius' letter to Romans, entitled "Pure Bread of Christ. Imperial Necropolitics and the Eucharistic Martyrdom of Ignatius", Eric C. Smith applies postcolonial theory and the concept of necropolitics to explore the postcolonial mechanism of imperial subversion (p. 8). The article of Smith rightly starts by explaining the postcolonial concept of necropolitics and Foucault's concept of biopower (pp. 120-122). When he turns to the source, Smith does not neglect further solid use of theory; he elaborately intertwines it into the principal analysis. In the view of postcolonial theory, "Ignatius' rhetoric of martyrdom and his performance of subjection and captivity emerge as expressions of agency by a colonized and subjugated person" (p. 120). Smith concludes that by dying for God and imitating Jesus, Ignatius reclaims agency over death and reveals the limits of Roman power. "Ignatius' death and his letters are a necropolitical protest and a denial to Empire of the thing it prized most: control over life and death" (p. 134).

Further, in her article, "From Prison to Palace. The *Carcer* as Heterotopia in North African Martyr Accounts", L. Stephanie Cobb offers a subterranean view of martyrs in prison. It is another site of necropolitics where imperial power was inscribed on bodies through humiliation and suffering (p. 9). She focuses on martyrdom literature to explore the experience of prison and "the subterranean world of darkness, stench, chains, and torture" (pp. 138-139). She uses Foucault's concept of heterotopia (p. 139) to define prisons as "counter-sites" (p. 146), places with new meaning where martyrs produced an alternative spatiotemporality (p. 9). She argues that prisons turn from heterotopic places to places of refreshment and neatness,

experienced as palaces (p. 139). “The prison is constructed as a sacred site for Christians even as it retains its horror” (p. 146). One drawback of this article is that it is the only article that misses the abstract in the opening.

Nicole Hartmann next studies the afterlife of the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch from Irenaeus to the other late antique and Byzantine *Acts of Ignatius*. Her article is entitled “Bones Ground by Wild Beast’s Teeth. Late Ancient Imaginations of the Death of Ignatius of Antioch”. The martyrdom of Ignatius story was exposed to acceptance, affirmation, circulation, and extensive rewritings and adaptations in several genres (p. 156). Hartmann’s analysis also pertains to studying the saint’s posthumous cult. Hartmann concludes that the different martyr traditions regarding Ignatius of Antioch are highly diverse and, more importantly, disconnected (p. 172). Ignatius took “many journeys through space and time as communities refashioned his travels to conform to their liturgical needs and theological expectations” (p. 9). In this way, both Bremmer and Hartmann conclude that “the past is appropriated for new goals and public desires” (p. 9). Hartmann’s article likewise may not be a straightforward contribution to the study of spatiotemporality, but it presents an innovative examination of the variety and reception of martyrdom literature.

In the penultimate contribution of the volume, entitled “When the City Cries: The Spacetime of Persecution in Eusebius’ *Martyrs of Palestine*”, Katharina Waldner analyzes the *Martyrs of Palestine* in two versions, from Eusebius and a Syriac translation with Greek fragments. She employs Soja’s concept of thirdspace. By first writing down the extended version of the *Martyrs of Palestine*, and abbreviating and inserting it into his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius “transformed these individual experiences of violence into a ‘cultural trauma,’ that is, ‘a catastrophe that continues to be recalled in cultural memory in such a way that its wounds are revealed and not healed in time’” (p. 183). Eusebius uses space and time to construct a Christian identity that refers explicitly to the province of Palestine (p. 183). The places of martyrdom turn into the memory spaces of cultural trauma of martyrdom (p. 186), which form the new identity of the Palestinian Christians.

The final essay by Jennifer Otto, “Making Martyrs Mennonite”, is displaced from the early Christian period and studies a 17th-cent. *Martyrs Mirror*, composed by Thieleman van Braght, a work that preserves an Anabaptist historical memory for the Mennonite community (p. 10). The author incorporates the martyrs of the early church into this anthology, by which he expands the chronological and territorial boundaries of previous Mennonite martyrologies. Otto discusses the “way a diversity of accounts could be shaped and serviced to create a uniform spatial, temporally oriented desire” (p. 11). By layering narratives from different times and places, the

author invites readers to reflect on their own lives on this example of faithfulness at any cost, repeatedly told (p. 208).

While applying spatiotemporal considerations is praiseworthy in some articles, one may not find their discussion equally consistent in all the individual pieces of the volume. The editors may have left it to individual authors to choose the direction to take within the study of spatiotemporality. Thus, the approaches in the individual articles embark on diverse aspects of spacetime studies, while some articles may not necessarily insist on the study of spatiotemporality. Although volumes of this kind, being the work of many authors, tend to over-promise a debate on a specific subject, the aimed direction to take in the study of martyrdom literature and literature mentioning martyrdom is commendable as it may inspire new contributions.

This volume reveals is a necessity for communication and consultation of the various mentioned disciplines and fields of study regarding martyrdom and martyrdom literature, starting from the use of the same terminology. One reference to this point is that the authors mainly use “martyrology” to designate martyrdom texts or narratives. This term could be misleading. For the scholars of Latin medieval sanctity, martyrologies were collections containing saints’ names and their feast days, aligned by calendars. Such collections of martyrologies were widespread in the Middle Ages.

Besides, while some concepts in the volume are over-explained, such as the term “martyr”, the other concepts, including the novel and uncommon ones, such as “spacetime”, could have benefited from a more elaborate explanation, mainly as they are central to the volume’s theme (p. 2). The book also has a few typos and added words that were not sifted through the proofreading process.

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