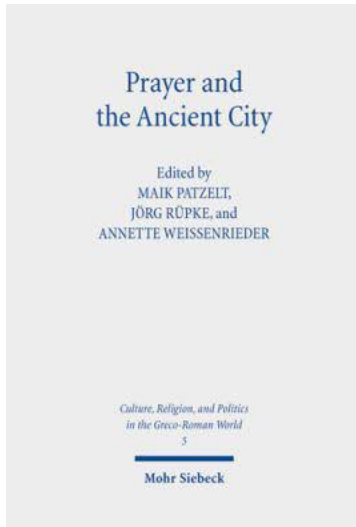


## PRAYER AND THE ANCIENT CITY




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PATZELT, MAIK, RÜPKE, JÖRG & WEISSENRIEDER, ANNETTE (EDS.) (2021). *Prayer and the Ancient City. Influences of Urban Space*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 384 pp., 144,00 € [ISBN 978-3-16-160740-0].

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This collection of articles follows a workshop held at the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in January 2019 (V). It consists of a *Preface* (pp. V-VI), *Table of Contents* (pp. VII-IX), Introduction (pp. 1-22), 17 articles (pp. 25-367), a *List of Contributors* (pp. 369-371), and an *Index*, compiled by Maria Pätzold (pp. 373-384). The 17 articles are divided into four parts.

In the Introduction, *Prayer and the Ancient City. Influences of Urban Space* (pp. 1-22), the three editors discuss definitions of prayer, taking into account scholarship on Judaism, Christianity, Greco-Roman-religion, Hinduism and Islam (pp. 2-5). The

editors argue that prayer should be studied as part of *lived* religion, taking into account embodiment, performance, emotions and agency (pp. 6-8); they invoke the so-called *spatial turn* in scholarship and explore how urban space interacted with ancient prayer (p. 8). Finally, the editors highlight aspects from the seventeen articles in the volume – they do not provide a summary of the content of the articles (pp. 8-15).

The definitions of prayer discussed in the introduction rightly emphasise human-divine communication and human-divine relationship (pp. 2-4). Given the book's approach and its focus on prayer in public or communal urban spaces (see below), it is surprising that the editors fail to draw supplementary attention to human-to-human communication in prayer. While the “addressee” of public or communal prayers were generally divine beings, the (intended) “audiences” of these prayers included humans – cf. Rouwhorst's reflections on the “didactic or catechetical purpose” of aspects of Christian prayer, i.e. their reference to details from (salvation) history and precise formulations of theological doctrines (pp. 87-89, cf. also Stenger, pp. 195-196).

**PART I. URBAN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CONSISTING OF ONE ARTICLE (PP. 25-40).**

Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli and Jörg Rüpke's, *Religion and the Urban. Historical Developments* is a revised version of an article from 2018. It sets a theoretical frame for studying ancient religion and urbanity in general (p. 25, n. 1), with little special reference to prayer, which is only rarely mentioned (p. 35). Urciuoli and Rüpke are inspired by sociological studies of modern cities, which incidentally are only recently beginning to rediscover the role of religion. Urciuoli and Rüpke contend that previous historical research has perceived religion to be causing major changes in cities but has failed to take into account how cities change religion. Such a generalisation is difficult to “prove”, and it seems to ignore the flurry of scholarship that followed Wayne Meek's seminal classic, *The First Urban Christians*, Yale University Press 1983 (for its influence on subsequent scholarship see for example Steve Walton, Paul Trebilco and David W. J. Gill, eds., *The Urban World and the First Christians*, Eerdmans 2017). Following and contributing to the spatial turn, Urciuoli and Rüpke present the “key thesis” for future research “that city-space engineered the major changes that revolutionized Mediterranean religions” (pp. 25-26). In their model, the city is ascribed agency, and the two authors theorise that “city-spaces themselves engineered the major changes that revolutionized ancient Mediterranean religions” (p. 35). Urciuoli and Rüpke rehearse the idea of *lived ancient religion*, taking into account diverse practices and ideas ranging from domestic religion to civic cult and seeing

these as in constant fluctuation. They argue that the relationship between religion and (especially urban) space has been “under-theorised and under-researched” and propose to remedy this (pp. 26-28). From there, they introduce the idea of *urban religion*, a kind of function of *lived ancient religion* and *civic religion*, and argue that religion and the urban should be studied and perceived as in continual, reciprocal interaction (pp. 28-30). Thus, they tacitly and wisely soften their stated thesis, where the urban was seen as the active subject and the religious as the passive object. The article then discusses definitions of key concepts such as *City, Religion, Agency and Aspiration, Spatial Imagination* and *Appropriation* (pp. 30-35).

**PART II. THE INTRINSIC LOGIC OF THE CITY. THE MUTUALITY OF URBAN SPACE AND PRAYER CONSISTS OF SIX ARTICLES (PP. 43-159).**

Yair Lipshitz, “Ancient legacies, modern reactivations: Urban space and the praying body in artistic performance in Jerusalem” (pp. 43-61) discusses two modern performance pieces that draw on late antique rabbinic prayer. Lipshitz uses the pieces to examine the use of ancient traditions in contemporary culture and to generate fresh questions that may lead to a better understanding of ancient urban prayer practices.

In “Catering to the diaspora within: Caesarea Maritima, Greek prayer, and rabbinic Judaism”, Catherine Hezser analyses attitudes to the reading of the Scripture and praying in Greek with a focus on rabbis in Caesarea (pp. 63-76). She asks the question, “Whether and to what extent this multicultural Mediterranean city’s urban environment would have influenced their halakhic decision-making” (p. 63). Her well-argued article shows that Caesarean rabbis were willing to recognise prayers and the reading of the Torah in Greek and argues plausibly that the urbanisation of the rabbis prompted this willingness.

The article “The formation of Christian liturgical prayer tradition in the fourth and fifth centuries in a predominantly urban environment” is by Gerard Rouwhorst. He analyses and shows how (urban) communal prayer practices in the basilicas in the presence of the bishop and (rural) prayer practices of, for example, cemeteries and monastic settings mutually influenced each other. The article could serve as a model for conducting the research envisaged and framed by the volume editors and in *Part I*. Firstly, in order to understand what is particularly urban, one needs to compare and contrast with something else, the rural. Secondly, while some inhabitants of modern major cities might be so estranged from rural life as to delude themselves into thinking that they are but little influenced by rural developments, the interaction between city and country was intense and vibrant in antiquity – for that reason alone any study of urban religion must take into account such interaction. Thirdly, while

Rouwhorst's article brings lucid and remarkable results, he consistently reflects on the character and limits of his sources and on which crucial questions he is unable to answer, i.e. very few sources on prayer in houses, in private, on the streets, on travel etc.

In the article "The creative potential of urban space: An urban approach to the prayers of the marginalised urban dwellers of Rome", one of the volume's editors, Maik Patzelt, discusses non-elite personal pagan prayer in the city of Rome from an "urban approach" (pp. 95-114). The sources analysed are of course written predominantly by the elite so that we get an elite perspective of non-elite religious practice. Patzelt's approach is fruitful and allows him to glean both practices and what I would term *embedded theology* in these practices (p. 108).

"Toward a topography of the sacred in urban space: Places of religious performance at Ephesos" by Alexander Sokolicek examines pagan religiosity in Ephesos, focusing on processions (pp. 115-131). The article touches on the consequences of the Artemision becoming an "extra-urban" sanctuary (p. 116), on the eleven prayers, four pagan and seven Christian, recorded in the "Inschriften von Ephesos" (pp. 119-120), and the gods worshipped in Ephesos (pp. 120-126). The article includes three valuable maps, two made by Sokolicek himself. However, the publisher, Mohr Siebeck, reproduced the most informative map in a quality that is simply unacceptable; some information is difficult to read, and some impossible. This would be detrimental in any book, not to say in a book as exorbitantly expensive as this (144 €).

Valentino Gasparini's article (pp. 133-159), "Urban religion and risk management at Simitthus (Chemtou, Tunisia)", concludes in a splendid way the first part by asking and discussing the question, "Could religion be invoked in order to try to ensure the greatest benefits and the least possible risk" (p. 134). His case study is the inscriptions from the imperial quarries at *Simitthus*, including stamps. Gasparini rightly highlights how this material is well-suited to test the *lived ancient religion* theory (p. 134). The article provides: Firstly, a history of *Simitthus*, an overview of how the site has been explored, and of its religious landscape (pp. 135-138). Secondly, an analysis where Gasparini argues convincingly that the quarries and the Roman colony as very different entities also had different religious fabrics (pp. 138-142). Thirdly, a section and a conclusion where Gasparini shows that gods were indeed solicited in the quarries to manage and reduce risk and alleviate stress (pp. 143-149).

**PART III. THE POWER OF IMAGINED SPACES. CHALLENGING AND PRODUCING SPATIAL ROUTINES OF PRAYER CONSISTS OF SIX ARTICLES (PP. 163-288).**

In “The urban life of South Indian gods”, Ute Hüsken combines the results of anthropological fieldwork and a reading of texts from the Brahim tradition to discuss the urban religious world of the Indian pilgrimage city Kanchipuram (pp. 163-180).

Jan R. Stenger’s “Re-educating spatial habits: John Chrysostom on the production and transformation of urban space” discusses a number of Chrysostom’s homilies (pp. 181-201). Stenger argues that Chrysostom (incidentally in line with the theoretical framing of this volume) perceived urban space and religious practices as reciprocally interacting (p. 198) and that he aimed for a reorientation of the city for the benefit of the lower strata (p. 194). In the city described by Chrysostom, the rich dominate space and oppress the passive poor. Religion, however, has the power to transform and, through prayer, obedience to God, and (perception of) dignity as God’s children, the humble and poor become active agents who “participate in the production and use of space” (p. 199). The article is characterised by very long quotations in original Greek and English translations. These quotations are, however, accompanied by lucid analysis in dialogue with earlier scholarship and convincing argumentation (e.g., pp. 181-182, 186-188, 192-193 and 196-197).

Chrysostom, this time with his contemporary citizen of Antioch, Libanius, is again in focus in Florian Wöller’s “The city as ‘Colonnades’ and ‘Monastery’: Libanius and John Chrysostom on Antiochene street processions” (pp. 203-220). Wöller lucidly and perceptively compares and contrasts Libanius’ and Chrysostom’s descriptions of two “processions” going in or out of the city. Both presented an Antioch in crisis, both described an appropriation and manipulation of space through the movements of the “processions”, and both drew on a glorious past that the present should connect to – the pasts that the two orators pointed to were, however, different, as were their vision of the ideal Antioch.

A long prayer from *1 Clement* 59.3-61.3 is analysed and discussed by Harry O. Maier in “The prayer of 1 Clement, mutual urban formations, and the urban aspirations of Roman Christ believers” (pp. 221-238). Maier “offers a new urban spatial reading of the prayer. It aims to show that this prayer helps to place Clement and his audience in a shared urban space that idealizes civic order and seeks through language drawn from political discourse to persuade it to conceive of itself as living in a civic space of harmony and concord” (p. 222). In the analysis and discussion Maier demonstrates, along with his expertise on the letter and history of scholarship, that it is fruitful to do a “spatial reading” of the prayer and of *1 Clement* in general. Surprisingly however, given that the letter is written by one urban community to another,

Maier's analyses do not really seem to support his thesis or conclusion in regard to the letter inviting its readers to occupy, particularly "urban-imagined spaces" (p. 225, further pp. 231-233). No urban spaces are emphasised in the prayer. Maier is fruitfully able to show how the author presents (imaginary and historic) spaces for his readers. Maier also shows how the author employed visualisations of space for his purposes. However, only a minority of these spaces are urban (rural spaces, e.g. 16:3, 20:4, 20:11.23:4, 24:4-5), and even in these cases, the author is not highlighting the urban character of these spaces (references to cities, most of them from Jewish scriptures, but without any urban emphasis are found in 6:4, 7:7, 11:1, 12:1). Maier also discusses the social fabric of the Roman and Corinthian congregations and describes them as relatively homogeneously composed of people from the lower strata of society. It is commendable that the text is analysed in dialogue with reflections on the author's and intended readers' social world, even if both congregations were more diversely socially stratified than he assumes (pp. 225 and 235).

Hekmat Dirbas' article, "Communal prayer in an early Muslim city: Medina during the prophet's time", discusses the role of prayer in the early Muslim construction of the past, in identity formation and the interaction between Medina and prayer (pp. 239-262).

The third part is concluded with an article by Annette Weissenrieder, one of the volume's editors, "*Pater sancte*: The father appellation and the imaginaires of Jerusalem in the *Vetus Latina* Luke 11:2" (pp. 263-288). In this article, Weissenrieder analyses fascinating variations in how the addressee of the Lord's Prayer is addressed in the *Vetus Latina* traditions of the Gospel of Luke. Weissenrieder is particularly interested in the *Pater sancte* appellation. The article thoroughly discusses possible inspiration for this variation (pp. 274-281). To the credit of Weissenrieder discusses not only her own favoured theory, namely prayers of the Caesars, where she has found an example, where Valerius Flaccus addresses Vespasian in like manner, but also the possibility of Scriptural inspiration, and both subjects with equal diligence (pp. 278 and 284). This discussion is followed by a discussion of Jerusalem, the temple and prayers in Luke with special references to the *Vetus Latina* (pp. 271 and 281-284).

#### **PART IV. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY IN THE DISCOURSES ABOUT PRAYER CONSISTS OF FOUR ARTICLES (PP. 291-367)**

In "Urban spaces and prayer in the Book of Judith", Barbara Schmitz provides a lively and perceptive narratological reading of the spatial construction in this novel with a special focus on the cities of Jerusalem and Bethulia (pp. 291-309). Schmitz employs the concept of *storyworld* for her analysis and reflects on the difference for both

author and reader (ancient and modern) between presenting a fictional city in the storyworld and a city that is known to both author and reader.

Nadine Ueberschaer's "The transcending of the Temple City to the Kingdom of God and its consequences for the practice of prayer" (pp. 311-327) analyses the intersection between prayer and Jerusalem and the temple in the Gospel of John. Ueberschaer observes that Jerusalem and the temple have a more prominent role in the Gospel of John compared to the synoptic gospels and that "all of John's statements on prayer appear in connection with Jerusalem" (p. 311). She argues, however, that "Although the farewell discourses are located in Jerusalem, the place does not play any role for the content" (pp. 314 and 325). There are several perceptive observations in this article, e.g. that the personal relationship between Jesus (or God) and the worshippers is presented by John as the core of praying (pp. 313 and 325) and that the manifestation of divine presence and that forgiveness of sin is transferred from the temple to Jesus (p. 315).

Stefan Schorch's "Praying in the countryside: Samaritanism as an anti-urban religion" discusses how the Samaritan holy place is conceived (literary, ideologically and in ancient and medieval depictions) as a landscape and not a city (pp. 329-344). Schorch points out that the mountain was urbanised to some degree; the conception and presentation of the mountain as a landscape, therefore, represent the construction of an "anti-urban space" (p. 335, see also p. 339). The article provides the most lucid reproduction of figures and images in the volume, the quality is excellent. This shows that it would have been possible to reproduce all the other figures and images in good quality.

The final article of the volume is Cornelia B. Horn's "Prayer at the threshold of the city in the Lives of Rabbula and Barsauma: Placing a late antique bishop and a monk in spiritual and spatial perspectives" (pp. 345-367). The article is methodological reflective (pp. 346-347) and its analysis and conclusions draw into question some of the assumptions of the volume and its theoretical frame (pp. 1-40). Horn concludes that "Private prayer and prayer as an act of concentrated spirituality outside of a set liturgical space does not seem to have needed or desired the city as a public space" (p. 363).

In conclusion, this volume contributes to an understanding of some of the many different connections and interactions between prayer and ancient cities. It shows that it is productive to study ancient urban prayer practices from a lived ancient religion perspective and take into account the spatial turn. However, to understand the (ancient) city, its interaction with the rural world must be considered. Only through a reflection on the interaction and interdependence of city and countryside do we understand the (ancient) city. We will never understand it by studying urbanity in

splendid isolation. Further specifically, urban prayer practices or urbanely spatially informed prayer discourses can only be discerned if we make an effort to compare them with rural prayer practices (however meagre the source material may be). In this volume, there are articles that highlight and integrate such perspectives (e.g. the articles by Gasparini, Wöller and Rouwhorst).