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Rüpke, Jörg: Urban religion. A historical approach to urban growth and religious change. – Berlin: De Gruyter 2020. (ix) 239 S., pb. € 24,95 ISBN: 978-3-11-062868-5

The book consists of an introduction (1–15), nine chap.s (16–189), a conclusion (190–194), a bibliography (195–232), and an index (233–239).

The “Introduction” describes the book’s purpose and ordering. Jörg Rüpke argues that modern studies of the metropolis have failed to pay attention to religion and how it shape cities, but that these studies have nevertheless generated insight, that can inform the study of lived religion as urban phenomena. The book studies religion in the ancient city and advances the theory that religious change and urban development is interconnected and can be studied under the designation *urban religion* – an urban context transforms religion, while urban religion becomes a marker of urbanity and contribute to urbanization.

Chap. 1, “Looking at religion in the city”, emphasizes urban religion as shaped by and shaping its context in a continual process. R. understands religion as “communication with special agents”, but adds what he terms “an audience to the communication”, e. g. attendants at sacrifices and communal meals (18–19). The book and especially chap. 8–9 emphasize individual and collective agency and choice of urban people in the forming of urban religious identity and community. It would have fitted the argument better if R. had defined attendants as ‘participants’ rather than ‘audiences’ and had placed inter-human interaction more centrally in his definition of religion.

In chap. 2, “Before urban religion”, R. discusses the concept of *civic religion*. He contends that this concept, though useful, has been deficiently employed with an overemphasis on top down elite agency and religious-political links. On this background, R. promotes the idea and terminology of *urban religion*, which he, bluntly stated, sees as the subset of *civic religion*, *lived religion* and *religion of space*.

The heading of chap. 3, “Urbanising and urbanised religion”, encapsulates the book’s theory. The chap. reflects on religion and spatial practice and argue that sacred spaces in a city-scape are much more than just ‘settings’; and he propose that religion and urbanization interact so that religion is urbanized and contribute to urbanization. Historical, diachronic, studies of urban religion furthers the study of such processes.

Chap. 4, “Presupposing the City: Philosophical piety as urbanised religion”, analyzes Cicero, *De natura deorum* and argue that the dialogue both in its content and as an intellectual endeavor presupposes and reveals an urban, Rome-centered, setting and outlook. For R. this confirm the notion of urban religion. Would it however, have been possible to also analyze the dialogue for rural setting and imagery, and would we then have to speak of *rustic religion*?

In chap. 5, “Crafting complex place: Religion and urban development”, R. observes that cities are relatively new phenomena and asks, what role religion played in urbanization and urban development. Drawing on Varro and Vitruvius, R. ascribes a significant role to religion and argues for example that religion helped people to appropriate and disrupt space in urban settings.

Chap. 6, “Materiality of religion in urban space: Neighbourhoods of a metropolis”, discusses Rome’s neighbourhoods and their development of religious shrines, festivals and offices. R. argues for example, that these blurs the dichotomy between public and private, because shrines and celebrations appropriated public space while honoring deities often associated with the household.

In chap. 7, “Urban resilience and religion”, R. defines Rome as resilient and discuss how religion has reflected and promoted this urban resilience, for example in the interpretation of disasters as signs of divine wrath, which could be propitiated by rituals. The Roman calendar’s varied forms is the main test case. R. commands the material, and his reading, through the lens of urban resilience, is fruitful. He makes claims however, that the analysis cannot support. He interprets for example Fulvius’ version of the calendar as highlighting past victories and writes, “Fulvius’ ensemble was clearly an attempt at constructing a history of continuity and self-identity despite the intermittent disasters.” (126) If R.s own analysis is correct, then it is victories that are commemorated, not disasters.

Chap. 8, “Urban Selves: Individualisation in urban space”, discusses the agents of urban religion and how urban religion shaped and was shaped by individualization. R. discusses the concept of self and ancient philosophical positions on the self. Following this, R. champions a perspective on the historical construction of the self, founded in sociology, history and the study of urbanity. With a marketplace metaphor, R. then discusses how ancient cities produced and offered religious choices through which these urban selves could shape their identities. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is analyzed as a case study.

R. argues convincingly that the urban individualization discussed in chap. 8 should be seen as related to processes of urban grouping, which he discusses in chap. 9, “Urbanity and multiple religious identities”. Some of the sources in this chap. overlap with chap. 8; others are new (mishnah). Apart from indirectly, through analysis of *Hermas* and *Hebrews*, the book is not engaging with the most important religious change in antiquity, Christianization.

There are many generalizations in the book, some very sweeping. R. claims for example: “In the Jewish Bible and in its Christian interpretation, the urban is a suspicious place, a place of sin and godlessness” (190, in reality the view on the city is ambivalent, cf. for example the works on Jerusalem referenced p. 160 footnote 62). Another example is R.s claim that: “The most consequential identity for an individual was that of civitas, ‘citizenship’” (176). How about family identity? Other generalizations are more concrete. On modern scholarship on pilgrimage R. writes: “Semiotics and stable systems of meaning, rather than qualities of space, have been at the centre of this type of research and it has, thus, not yet been informed by the challenges posed by new approaches to spatiality” (95). R. further claims that pilgrimage studies have not yet taken into account that studies of “spatiality have rejected the Cartesian notion of homogeneous space and a historicist fixation of time, which have, taken together, long upheld the dominance of a physicalist view of space as objectically real and mappable” (95). There are no references to show a theoretical deficit in newer studies of pilgrimage. Further, modern scholarship on ancient pilgrimage has advanced two steps compared to R.s description of the state of the art. Not only have scholars embraced the so-called spatial turn, recent scholarship has even bridged the gap between traditional and new understandings

of space as real/physical and imagined/experienced (e. g. *Excavating Pilgrimage*, ed. by T.M. KRISTENSEN / W. FRIESE. Aarhus 2017).

On the book's back G. Woolf characterizes the book as a "series of reflections". Many subjects are "hinted at" (145) and sections of the book offer a series of definitions, e. g. what is *urban religion*, leads to definition of *urban* and *religion*, to definitions of *sacralisation* and the *sacred*, to discussion of *agency* etc. (20–22). However, the overarching theory that cities and religion interact does connect this series of reflections and is captured by the concept of *urban religion*. One might criticize, that such a theory is self-evident – who would propose that religion is not transformed by urban settings? I will respond however, that R.s explicit formulation of the theory and the terminology will likely prove useful for future scholars – "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" (cf. Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory is Social Science. Selected theoretical Papers*. New York 1951, 169.).

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