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Book Review

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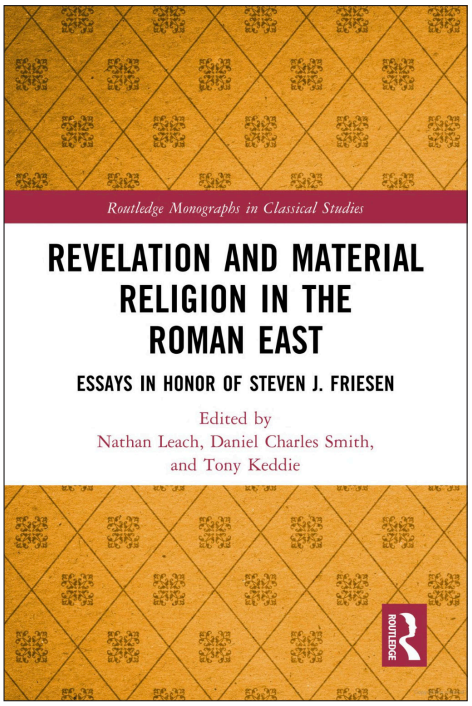

The Festschrift for Steven J. Friesen, edited by a group of his former mentees, assembles a broad variety of essays based in textual as well as material studies on ancient religions. The book is structured in three parts, namely I: Materializing Revelation, II: Spatializing Religion and Power, and III: Politicizing Memory, which mirror the research interests and scholarly publications of the honouree (see p. 1–4 emphasizing scholarly achievements and p. 9–13 for a list of selected publications). The contributions mainly focus on Asia Minor and the Near East, and range from the Classical to the Roman Imperial period, with the majority focussing on the latter. I refrain from discussing each paper individually, since the introduction provided by the editors already contains a brief summary of each contribution (p. 4–8). Instead, I would like to offer some more general observations informed by a materially focused archaeological perspective, as befits TRAJ.

Material is mainly approached from the textual perspective to elucidate the setting of the Book of Revelation and the New Testament in general; all contributions aim for

an inter-textual/historical analysis of written testimonies of religion to contextualize the object of analysis. Some authors do offer an in-depth archaeological analysis, such as Schowalter (Ch 11) on the site of Omrit, Northern Israel where he aims at developing a sequence of its intricate building history and related depositions in order to retrace potential motivation for large-scale ritual acts. Thomas (Ch 10) likewise applies a distribution analysis of religiously connotated objects in the Terrace Houses at Ephesos in order to identify fixed zones of religious practice, e.g. for ancestral worship; she contrasts this archaeological investigation of pagan cult activity, which was also practiced outside the houses, with the earliest Christian worship which was exclusively limited to the house space since no communal institutionalized buildings existed besides Jerusalem. For his study on the Neokorate of Laodikeia, Cadwallader (Ch 14) combines literary sources, epigraphy and numismatics in order to understand the dynamics of securing this desire for Neokorate status first attested under Hadrianic rule, through imperial support. Keddie's (Ch 6) contribution on blood sacrifice also draws upon comparisons from various archaeological contexts for understanding the sensory repertoire of this practice in its contemporaneous context, to which almost every person was familiar, and contrasting it to modern perceptions based on the inaccessible industrialized meat industry. However, archaeological testimonies are not always exploited to their fullest. Significant methodological potential remains untapped in the analysis of material finds and images or current trends in spatial analysis. With an eye to the latter, it is surprising that most of the texts do not even feature a map of the respective site (exceptions are Schowalter with Ch 11 and Økland in Ch 13), not to mention other visualizations of space (see below), although some papers in part II and III focus on case studies of specific ancient sites.

With regard to pictorial testimonies, I would like to point out the difficulties of interpretation posed by a multicultural and multi-media ancient lived world: the Book of Revelation and the New Testament are Early Christian texts with a heavy Jewish imprint, which need to be read against the background of an actually lived world with heavy Greek/Hellenized heritage, Roman rule and culture and many other influences. This entanglement demands a careful use of comparisons regarding chronology and regional setting. Kurek-Chomycz's (Ch 7) contribution, for example, attempts to explain the use of the Greek term *phiale* for the incense sacrifice alluded to in Rev. 5:8. She correctly points out that in a Classical Greek context, the term *phiale* is used for a vessel without handles and an *omphalos* at the bottom and that the material gold is not suitable for high temperatures. From an archaeological perspective, I would like to make an observation: regarding the material properties of gold, realia of gilded/golden-coloured utensils for fumigation prove that the impression of wealth was most

important, and material could be adapted to fulfil the needs, e.g. by use of alloys (cf. Simon and Sarian 2004). The author's comparisons for *phialai* from the fifth century BC (based on Gaifman 2018), however, are tricky. In examples from Roman material culture — more synchronous to the Book of Revelation — these vessels are denominated in Latin as *patera* (see Scheibler 2006 and Bendlin 2006) and bowls from different materials were actually used as 'Räucherschalen' (cf. Kurek-Chomycz's statement on p. 118 'untypical function of incense containers'). Moreover, residue analyses prove that vessel shapes were not dogmatically limited to one specific use, but functionally adaptable in different cultural settings (see Stockhammer 2012, who coined the term 'entangled pottery'). With this, the idea of a *phiale* containing coal for incense burning — which Rev. 5:8 does not describe — poses a problem only due to the contribution's one-sided textual approach that seeks to connect Rev. 5:8 with Rev. 8:5. Thus, also the author's metatextual approach to a non-existent 'subversive rituality' (p. 121) in the lived world could benefit from some reconsideration.

Visualized spatial analysis would have benefitted many of the contributions (even a map would have been helpful!), but especially Harrington's (Ch 12) chapter on altars from Priene and also Thomas's (Ch 10) analysis of the Ephesian Terrace houses and the movable ritual objects found within. Harrington's contribution illustrates a biblical scholar's view of a pre-New Testament site. She establishes the category of 'untempled' altars — in her study, exclusively built structures — and seeks to avoid the binary categories 'sacred' vs. 'profane' space, which she rightly identifies as modern categories, by using 'ritualized' space instead. As pointed out in the introduction, in Friesen's work 'space [is considered] as dynamic, polyvalent, and multifunctional' (p. 6). In the context of ancient *lived* religion, 'untempled' altars are problematic, since a ritual required neither a temple nor an altar (cf. acts of libation). The very fact of a religiously connotated act taking place within a certain space would render it at least temporally sacred for the duration of the ritual. Moreover, given the fact that every iterative action could be considered a ritual, a category such as ritualized space would need further elaboration to be of value. Regarding the discrepancies between ancient and modern perceptions of space (nicely illustrated by Økland on p. 225), Harrington's contribution would have profited from including the temporal dimension of ancient religious spaces (cf. concepts of temporality, co-temporality and co-spatiality). Harrington's plea that archaeologists should place altars at their place of discovery (p. 217), speaks to a textual scholar approaching the field of material studies from the outside. Even though I am not familiar with the find spots of all of her chosen objects, I am quite certain that the majority was found in secondary contexts. Presenting the altars at their place of discovery would hence not add to Harrington's study at all, but

would instead illustrate the pragmatics of (ancient) recycling processes. Moreover, exhibition/site management bears the burden of preserving a site as much as possible for future generations and making a site safely accessible to a vast audience, including non-specialists. Educational concerns can render pieces almost irrelevant, especially at a site like Priene with so much knowledge to impart. The complexity of an archaeological site with several phases of use presents itself as an (ever) evolving spatial palimpsest, shaped in part by measures of preservation and presentation.

With regard to space in the context of religions, it is also surprising that a more theory-based approach is applied only in Ip's (Ch 8) analysis of the Athenian Agora, which employs a New Institutional Economics framework to understand the imaginary/imaginations/allusions of agora in the New Testament. Other chapters would also have benefitted, given that mental capacities of space (social order, imagination, commemoration) are shaped by different actors and their respective agency (cf. Löw 2001).

As already highlighted, time as a structuring factor when thinking through and analysing ancient testimonies is crucial for many of the chapters. Yet, when it comes to the chosen textual attestation for practiced religion and the actual religious practice, the chronology of the attestation is sometimes hardly set into relation with the subject described in the text (cf. Classical Greek objects vs. the Book of Revelation in Kurek-Chomycz). Økland's reading of the Roman Imperial periegete Pausanias and other authors on Hera's epithets in the Peloponnese as indicators for cultural memory rightly combines time and the mental aspects of religion, or mnemonic capacities. She draws upon Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti (2022); yet for this study Pirenne-Delforge's (2008) monumental work on Pausanias's narrative focus on Classical Antiquity should also have been taken into account. In contrast to Økland's contribution, Pirenne-Delforge embeds chronological classification involving material testimonies. Økland's assumption that 'without material anchoring points, memories are likely to disappear' (p. 229) is actually focussing on the sensory aspects of religion, making memory last through practices with tangible/haptic experiences. In this direction, the vague attestation of cultural memory extracted from mentioned epithets in Pausanias could have been made more concrete and eventually nuanced by involving the material remains from the analysed sites.

A different mental capacity is touched upon in the contribution by Crews (Ch 16), namely the ambiguity of memory or memory making. She draws upon the wishful thinking, or scholarly over-enthusiasm, for tangible proof for Montanist sites in Phrygia to provide some critical insight into recent scholarly discussions on Montanism fuelled by scholarly imagination. This vast field of research on the sensory and emotional capacity of religion(s) is present in some of the contributions, such as the chapter

on the perception of textual performance by Smith (Ch 3), Keddie's work on blood as *pars pro toto* for animal slaughter and connected multisensory experiences (Ch 6), and Ibita's contribution on coping and post-traumatic growth (Ch 17). Yet, it only plays a minor role and remains extremely vague within the contributions (with the notable exception of Keddie's, which deeply engages with the practical aspect of blood sacrifice at sanctuaries and material properties of the built structures), and is never illustrated in a viewshed, soundscape or smellscape analysis.

Given the fact that most of the contributors are anglophone, the concentration on English scholarly literature is not surprising. Yet, in certain cases it seems astounding that much recent French, Italian and German literature is missing. Various large-scale digital research projects on ancient religion, which certainly would have benefitted some of the contributions, also remain unconsidered. Notable omissions include the ERC-funded MAP database on the onomastics of ancient deities,[1] the ERC-funded Lived Ancient Religion project (Gasparini et al. 2020), the DFG-funded Religion & Urbanity Online,[2] or the projects under the umbrella of the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion.[3]

In summary, the volume contains contributions on the textual world of the New Testament, which enhance research on specific topics on Early Christianity and Roman religion and provide interesting and creative thought experiments illustrating the scholarly legacy of Steven Friesen and his school. For the overarching concept of understanding religion(s), the volume would have profited from an introduction to the concept of religion chosen for this specific volume. Certainly, Friesen`s fundamental and multifaceted work helps to better understand the essays of his mentees, yet for an outsider, the references to Friesen's work are not immediately comprehensible, and even if they are, his approaches could have been contrasted to other scholarship on ancient religion. Despite the textual focus, many chapters would have profited from broader interdisciplinary engagement, for instance by analysing archaeological testimonies with the full potential of archaeological methodologies or by taking note of transatlantic research approaches/current developments in European research on ancient religions.

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Notes

[1] https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/ [Last accessed 5 December 2024].
[2] https://www.degruyter.com/database/urbrel/ [Last accessed 5 December 2024].
[3] https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/projects [Last accessed 5 December 2024].

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