

**Measuring the World against the Body:  
Materialities and Meanings of  
Magnification and Miniaturization in  
Religious Communication in Antiquity and  
Modernity**

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The spring conference of the International Graduate School „Resonant Self–World Relation in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices“ (Universities of Erfurt and Graz) was dedicated to issues of materiality and scales. It took place in a virtual format with pre-circulated papers in cooperation with the University of Liverpool and the UrbNet project at Aarhus University. The conference brought experts from various disciplines into conversation, among them Archaeology, Classics, History, Philology, Prehistory, Religious Studies, and Theology. The speakers focused on Mediterranean antiquity with glimpses beyond this area and period from Religious Studies of the Ancient Near East and of contemporary Europe to Palaeolithic images and our approach to them. The methodological scope profited from confrontation of a broad range of sources enabling advances in interpretation and theoretical modeling. The various examples showed difficulties and similarities in referring to size and scale, assigning importance or meaning to objects based on size, and speaking about materiality and immateriality of experience and practice in different religious contexts.

The conference opened with papers on the relation of agents, objects and buildings to space and size. The discussion focused on densities and hierarchies as characteristics of cities of the living and of the dead. According to DIANA PAVEL (Erfurt), no pattern in the relation of size, shape and location of the various forms and dimensions of altars in Etr-

uscan necropoleis (inside a burial chamber, on top of a tumulus) is recognizable. Instead of a hierarchy, a difference of ritual and bodily interaction of human agents with the altars is at work. An internalized or an externalized bodily engagement with the differently dimensioned altars for a communication with the divine or the ancestors addressed the vertical and horizontal axes of resonance (H. Rosa).

Issues of monumentality were central to JÖRG RÜPKE (Erfurt) who asked why religious places in cities often become monumental and what this tells about the relation of human agents to their gods (control of unattainable deities?). The magnification of houses (of ancestors) to large-scale temple buildings as well as the construction of visibly including and/or excluding city walls leads Rüpke to a view of the city as a monument. In the discussion, aspects of hierarchies were tackled, for example, that not only density and largeness create monumentality, but also the lack of it (empty spaces, plazas, roads).

Another topic was the interplay between size and number: With the renovation of more than 80 temples that Augustus mentions in the *Res Gestae*, it is not about the individual temple but about the sheer number, as D. MALKA WIJERATNE (Erfurt) pointed out. Monumentality comes into existence by an amassment and means more than its individual parts. Larger audiences that are embraced in monumental events, spaces, and architecture play a role in magnification in general.

The definition of what is small and „not to scale“ and how changes in dimensions trigger reaction was exemplified by RUBINA RAJA (Aarhus), who presented niches and altars in different sizes and locations in architectural contexts of the Graeco-Roman Near East. Comparable to the non-patterns of altars in Etruscan necropoleis, the relations of the reduced motifs to other parts of the complexes are the key for potential – and varying – meanings. In the case of small-scale imagery, only the size is reduced, but not the details. Reduction of size goes hand in hand with an increase of elaboration, details, and artistic finesse, as for example in the statuettes of Jupiter Heliopolitanus, who had one of the most monumental sanctuaries of the ancient Mediterranean. The abstraction was traced

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all the way down to the tiny Palmyrenean *tesserae* on which an abstract sign still represents the god Bel.

The following papers inquired into narratives of personifications and deities. ELISABETH BEGEMANN (Erfurt) and ALEXEI ZADOROZHNY (Liverpool) showed from different angles how Roman authors played with seeming or real diminution or smaller and larger images that are intended to function through contrasts. While Cicero, in his highly political speech *De domo sua*, uses associations of moral categories (good/bad) and sizes (large/small), he ascribes these categories depending on content (*Lar/Libertas*), building his argument on allusions, whereas Valerius Maximus' brief *exempla* reveal the grand narratives („Romanness“) only by the agglomeration of micro-narratives. Shortness of text relates to abstraction of moral concepts and personifications on the one hand (cf. abstraction of objects applied in architecture, Raja). On the other hand, the concept of *Libertas*, the goddess of freedom, venerated on the Palatine and good as such, is pejoratively moved towards a meaning of *licentia* and equated with a small statue of a foreign *meretrix*, whereas the (Cicero's) *Lares* attain even if small as objects, a huge significance.

Aspects of miniaturized gods and phenomena were then discussed. CHRISTOPHER HALLETT (Berkeley/Aarhus) traced the exquisiteness of the statuettes of *Lares* back to the predilection of Roman Republican elites for Corinthian Bronzes, applying an art historical approach. He argued for an art-market driven phenomenon that gave rise to the production of these statuettes rather than religious motivation. The collectors as beholders of these elaborate tiny products might have played a bigger role than the need for statuettes in household shrines. Hallett transcribed with closeness, movability, and controllability what small size (and elaborateness, cf. Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Raja) means in terms of handiness and bodily engagement.

A discussion about anthropomorphic representations of a rather under-defined group of deities – the *Lares* and *Penates* – started with the interpretation of vessels with heads found in provincial household contexts by PETER SCHERRER (Graz). The „Gesichts-

gefäße“, often found with miniature receptacles or food shares, may represent the *Di Penates*, called upon for the wellbeing of the household. With reference to descriptions of how the *Di Penates* normally received their shares in small receptacles to miscredit Verres' behaviour, Scherrer explained the need for provincial inhabitants to make these Roman gods graspable with the invention of „Gesichtsgefäße“. An anthropomorphization helped construct an addressable object. A common strand in the papers on *Lares* and *Di penates* were the contestations of forms, artistic production, and the religious aspects revolving around stockage and reproduction as family, cross-generational and individual needs.

OLYMPIA BOBOU (Aarhus) dealt with the paradox of the stars as one of the largest phenomena that are translated into tiny symbols, for example in zodiacs occurring in the 1st century AD in the Mediterranean. The signs that represent stars as well as the human or theriomorphic shapes applied to them go into the direction of anthropomorphization and miniaturization, but basically entail a reduction of a celestial body (cf. gigantic shapes of the moon or sun close to the horizon), in the extreme case reduced to a dot. The significance of contexts for such miniaturizations is important to note: In the Palmyrene material the symbols of the stars do not appear in the funerary art, but only in the sphere of sacred places – from *tesserae* to ceiling reliefs.

With cross-temporal comparisons and modern milieus the religious aspects of „big“ and „small“ then came to the fore. GEORGIA PETRIDOU (Liverpool) compared the Greek orthodox *tamata* to S. Paraskevi with ancient plaquettes of eyes (*anathemata*) given to Demeter. Both represent small version of body parts; they are miniaturizations of internal and external parts of the human body. Moreover, the small version allows for a hands-on effect and overturns the body perception of an individual handling them. Miniaturization is an irritation in comparison to body scale and modes of perception. These paradoxical changes of body relations in order to regain stability (health) by these small objects are full of potential, especially against the background of illness that was in

Antiquity conceived of as instability of the body.

MANUEL MOSER (Erfurt) presented material of a socio-religious study in the (East-) German trucker milieu inquiring into the employment of religious objects establishing potential relations in various directions: to the trucks, to the drivers, to people close to them, as well as to a transcendental other. With the notion of „assemblage“ he set the agents into relations, with which he raised a discussion of object agency – a topic that returned in papers on late antique statuettes and pottery. Object agency happens here on different physical scales – from the small-scale (image-)objects to the truck as the ultimate assemblage.

ANTHONY SINCLAIR (Liverpool) shed light on the history of science and asked how technical developments entail examinations of the detail (the individual brush stroke in a painting) but misses drawing the larger picture. What did it mean to people? Here, the interplay of scrutiny by academics and the grand narratives and questions becomes an academic and societal challenge.

An archaeological block on miniaturized objects in deposits followed. INE JACOBS and HUGH JEFFREY (Oxford) examined the phenomenon of smaller than life-size statues in late antique and Byzantine times that are often looked at as remnant of a polytheistic revival or an elite décor demonstrating classical *paideia*. However, in the contexts of Aphrodisias and other late antique houses, the exhibition and re-production of the statuettes of deities demonstrates an ongoing renegotiating of imagery that proved to be powerful („efficacious endurance“) in the communication with the divine over generations. This captures the situation in Late Antiquity better than notions of „revival of pagan beliefs“ or „resistance towards new beliefs“. Stressing the prospective aspects of such imagery, the authors went beyond a black/white image of late antique religion.

Issues of a less clear-cut ascription of meanings and functions and over-determined archaeological labels also turned up in the contribution by ANNA-KATHARINA RIEGER (Graz) on miniaturized pottery as employed in various contexts in Pompeii (houses, shared sacred places, street shrines). Size is

not the only criterion for determining if something is miniaturized or magnified; accumulations of ceramic products widen the spectrum of interpretations. Apart from ludic aspects that tiny receptacles might have, the delicacy, the change of bodily perception, the relation of container to content play into the meaning of miniature vessels.

NATASCHA SOJC (Augsburg) inquired into the religious and socio-economic implications of archaeological material. With the example of deposits in the sanctuary of Santa Anna at Agrigent, she distinguished different ways of sharing with the gods: tiny, manufactured things, fragments, parts of sets or tiny natural objects. Drawing on analogies of Indian temples, she interpreted the contexts as remains of a redistributive system that in a century-long frequency established a community organized through the options of micro-shares. Explanations as *pars pro toto* or reciprocity of resource distribution fall short for these deposits and their objectal range; rather choices in „gift-transactions“ dominate the scene and point to a close cooperation between the worshippers. The existence of such places – close to monumental *polis*-temples of Agrigent – makes their societal purpose clear.

In the final round, narratives of magnification processes became central. The papers showed convincingly how textual strategies, metaphorical language and associations with human agents, cities, and monuments influence the imagined dimensions, meanings, and the effect that texts had on people. Applying trauma and postcolonial hermeneutics, IRMTRAUD FISCHER (Graz) analyzed the story of Jonah and passages from prophetic texts against the background of the interplay of different sizes. In the account of Jonah, the magnification of that which threatens (Ninive, the whale, etc.) is explicitly or implicitly pointed to, whereas the protagonist is diminished. Therefore, the figure of Jonah can better cope with the trauma he (or the Israelites) suffered. The question of the relation between a cultural trauma and an individual trauma was raised. The fragmented body (and soul) as image and perception of trauma referred to the *tamata* (cf. Petridou) and the body as measure and locus of perception.

ELENA MALAGOLI (Erfurt) examined the

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position of the Hittite king and explained him as a *pars pro toto* of his people, starting from the mid-2nd mill. BCE, but the phenomenon to conceptualize a leader as a multiple body can be traced through time (cf. medieval Europe). The term seemed not fully suitable; however, his role in the treatise as active and acting for his people (and not as heroized, distant figure) came to the fore.

KATHARINA WALDNER (Erfurt) analyzed how the narratives of three martyrs play with explicit or implicit mention of monuments, the agency of the monuments and their materiality in relation to the materiality of tortured or dying body: Eusebius makes the monuments of the city cry, whereas Ignatius never mentions any of the places of martyria (amphitheater or arena). Both strategies make the monuments present. Two very different takes of the spatial setting and the compassion/alienation of monuments occur. In the martyr story of Polycarp the fire that kills the saint is given the form of a grave monument.

An important result was the strengthening of the relational perspective. The body is not only canon (measure) for objects, but itself fragmented and fluid and in need of stabilization by a magnified or miniaturized object. As a measurement of scale, differences, not least between children and adults, but also between the powerful and the subaltern, textually and visually often translated into differences of size, must be taken into account. Shapes as well as speaking about sizes and applying different scales turns out to be a strategy that is applied in texts, objects, and architecture (and the spaces between lines, buildings, or things). Even if the agency of objects was controversially discussed, the importance of an environment for human action that is characterized by meanings and effects attributed to the objects which are constituting this environment was stressed. The different – physical and perceptual – position of the human body to large or small objects, things or structures changes the relation to them and as such the agency resulting from relations. The additional focus on religion made clear that the relation is not just a horizontal one between human agents and smaller or larger objects made special by variation of scale. The vertical reference to and

construction of agents beyond the horizontal relation enlarge the analytical grid to a triangle with different relational properties.

The proceedings of the conference will be published in the series „Contextualizing the Sacred“ (Brepols).

#### Conference overview:

Diana Pavel (Erfurt): Scaling Etruscan Tomb Altars

Rubina Raja (Aarhus): Abstraction of Religious Symbols and Objects in Sacred Architecture in the Roman Near East. The Role of Miniaturization

Jörg Rüpke (Erfurt): Urban Monumentality

D. Malka Wijeratne (Erfurt): Perceptions of Changing Religious Landscapes in Augustan Rome

Elisabeth Begemann (Erfurt): The Dancing Deity. Diminishing the Goddess *Libertas* on the Palatine

Alexei Zadorozhny (Liverpool): The Global Micronarrative. Dynamics of Exemplarity and the Embodiment of Roman Values in Valerius Maximus

Olympia Bobou (Aarhus): Stars and Signs in Palmyra. Astrological Symbols in Religious Architecture and *tesserae*

Christopher Hallett (Berkeley/Aarhus): Miniature Cult Images: „Corinthian Bronzes“, Hand-held Processional Statuettes, and Early Imperial from Representations of the Roman *Lares*

Peter Scherrer (Graz): *Di Penates* – from Small Objects to Anthropomorphic Gods

Georgia Petridou (Liverpool): The Eyes Have It. Magnification and Miniaturization in Modern Greek Eye-shaped *tamata* and Ancient Greek *anathemata*

Manuel Moser (Erfurt): Saint Mary and the Motors! Religious Artefacts in the Trucking Milieu

Anthony Sinclair (Liverpool): Awe to Shock. The Impact of Downsizing on Interpretive Scale in the Study of Paleolithic Art

Ine Jacobs / Hugh Jeffrey (Oxford): Pagan

Statuettes in a 7th-century Mansion at Aphrodisias

Anna-Katharina Rieger (Graz): Miniature Pottery from Pompeii. What do Tiny Objects Want?

Natascha Sojc (Augsburg): The Material Record of Micro-shares. An Archaeological Case Study on Sanctuary Transactions in Ancient Sicily

Irmtraud Fischer (Graz): Magnification as Post-traumatic Mechanism Reflected in Biblical Texts

Elena Malagoli (Erfurt): The King and the Population as Protagonists of the Oath: *Pars pro toto* Semantics in Ancient Near Eastern Treaties

Katharina Waldner (Erfurt): The Materiality of Martyrdom. Narratives and Monuments

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