OxREP Conference 2016: The Economics of Roman Religion
Abstracts

Thursday, 22nd September: Religious Institutions and the Impact of the Roman Empire. Session 1

Investing in Religion: Religion and the economy in pre-Roman central Italy

Charlotte Potts, University of Oxford

This paper will suggest that the economic role of religion in the republican and imperial periods was shaped by developments prior to the fifth century BC. After a brief review of the ways in which anthropologists recognise religion as a regulator of market systems in pre-industrial societies, the paper will focus on the growth of Etrusco-Italic sanctuaries as centres of consumption, exchange, and production. It will consider what conditions may have prompted the emergence of divinely-protected marketplaces and parallel developments elsewhere around the Mediterranean during the Archaic period. It will finish by suggesting that Rome's precocious investment in these practices laid the foundation for its subsequent success in using religion to facilitate commerce.

Cult Economy in the Eastern Provinces

Marietta Horster, University of Mainz

Roman colonists and Roman legionaries took an active part in the spread of Roman cult outside Italy. Both intermediaries did not play a major role in Imperial Greece and Asia Minor. Rather, Greek cities and eastern provinces invested into the new cults of Roma and the senate, of Roma and Augustus and later the Imperial cult. It is often presumed that these new cults rivalled the traditional (civic) cults and that by consequence these politically motivated choices created a redirection of resources spend for cult and ritual in Greek cities.

The presentation investigates the impact of Roman rule on cult economy in the Eastern provinces in the imperial period. Two aspects of cult economy will be looked at: firstly, the economic conditions and basis of the various cults in a city (the income of leases of landed or other property of the deities, fees of worshippers, priestly obligations and benefactions, other civic funds); and secondly, the quality (wealth) and quantity of the demographic basis of those attested as having invested in and contributed to a cult.

Both aspects will be addressed with a focus on well documented cities like Athens, Miletus, Ephesus and few other cities in Greece and Asia Minor.

Session 2

TBC

Tony King, University of Winchester

Measuring Divine Devotion: Comparing the Size and Scale of Animal Offerings in the Pre-Roman and Roman Provinces

Rachel Hesse, University of Oxford

Animal bones – arguably the most archaeologically accessible evidence for food and of particular import for their role in religious offerings – provide invaluable insight into both economic and religious life in the ancient world, allowing us to study the physical remains of ancient rituals within secure archaeological contexts. This paper examines the zooarchaeological evidence for ritual slaughter in Judea and the Northwest Provinces before and after Roman conquest, the results of which demonstrate two discernible economic patterns. First, ritual offerings in the Iron Age Northwest Provinces, Jewish rituals in Judea, and rites in Roman period Eastern cults were often carried out on a far more economically extravagant and 'wasteful' scale than those found in 'traditional' Roman offerings. Evidence for more economically-conscious public offerings in the Roman period can be identified through an apparent decline in the burial and/or burning of animals without removing meat for human consumption, and less conspicuous expenditure in a single rite. Second, in keeping with the historical evidence, the zooarchaeological remains deriving from Roman offerings include species, mortality profiles, and a presence of butchery and consumption waste which indicate a demonstrable link between 'traditional' Roman religious offerings and human consumption. Considered together, these patterns raise a not unfamiliar question: Was the motivation behind less extravagant and dining-oriented religious offerings in the Roman period driven by ideology, frugality, or an effort to feed, please, or appease a population through an increasing emphasis on dining in Roman religious rites?

Impact of the Roman conquest on temple economies in Egypt

Marie-Pierre Chaufray, CNRS, Bordeaux

If the Roman reforms of traditional temples in Egypt are no longer seen as being responsible for the decline of Egyptian religion, they did nevertheless have an impact on the internal organization of the priesthood and the management of temple goods. This did not prevent temples from remaining active economic centres in the first two centuries of Roman rule. The bilingual administrative archives of the Egyptian temple of Soknopaios in the village of Dime in the Fayyum give a good idea of the role of the temple in the local economy after the Roman reforms. My paper aims to present this rich documentation, part of which is still unpublished,

and to compare it with the evidence for other temples in Egypt in order to get a precise idea of the impact of the Roman conquest on temple economies.

Friday, 23rd September: Costs and Financing.
Session 3

Cost differences in temple architecture between Rome and the provinces

Javier Á. Domingo Magaña, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

Some of the largest architectural projects in Roman towns and cities were religious buildings. We only need to think of the large temples in Rome and its main provincial cities. They were often dedicated to the imperial cult, built within huge porticoed squares and lavishly decorated with large amounts of imported marble.

They were, therefore, projects that required a considerable financial investment about which we rarely have any details. However, we can attempt to glean information by applying the building cost calculation methodology that has been developed over the last few years.

We will see how the application of this calculation methodology also provides us with other data of great interest. For example, based on the study of temples in North Africa, we can see that the amount recorded in the epigraphy of some of these buildings is not always the true cost of their construction. We also see that the different values we have to assign to certain variables, depending on the geographical zone in which they were applied, led to notable differences in cost between the complexes built in Rome and their provincial imitations.

In this respect, we take as examples two buildings from the Flavian period that are very similar in size, structure and building materials: the *Forum Pacis* of Rome, financed by the imperial household, and the Provincial Forum of Tarragona, financed by the municipal and provincial elites. This study will also allow us to estimate the financial investment in one of the most important imperial cult complexes built in a provincial city –Tarraco– at a particularly outstanding moment of its history.

Animals in Roman Religion: The Economics behind the Rituals

Michael MacKinnon, University of Winnipeg

Much has been written about the role of animals in Greco-Roman religion. Arguments surrounding the symbolism inherent in animal sacrifice and the social and political functions these actions served, as well as debates about the secular/sacred nature of meat consumption

in antiquity dominate the bulk of this scholarship. Less attention, however, has been placed upon the seemingly practical and economic side to animal sacrifice and ritual. What types of animals were used, and how did this vary among public and private ritual ventures? What costs were involved in maintaining, selecting, acquiring, transporting, processing and ultimately sacrificing animal victims? Who bore these expenses, and how might these be negotiated among different individuals or networks? How did such costs balance, or otherwise compare, with the 'benefits' (be these, tangible/intangible; social/spiritual) that accrued from animal sacrifice? This paper explores these components through an integrated assessment of ancient textual, iconographical, and zooarchaeological evidence for animal sacrifice in Roman antiquity, with particular focus upon the Mediterranean context. Data reveal relatively cost-effective decisions often underscored the choice of animal sacrificed or dictated the actions involved in feasting upon the victim (in sacrifices involving feasting), or in interring the victim (in some burial and funerary contexts). Pigs and domestic fowl often were central among familial-sponsored rituals, even in areas where cattle or ovicaprids might be more plentiful or important as regards greater husbandry and dietary aspects. Larger livestock were typically selected at public events. Finally, the seemingly unremunerative nature of animal burial, notably in the case of whole livestock or cuts of meat that might otherwise be consumed, need not be labeled as such when a broader spectrum of practical and economic factors is considered.

Moneychangers in the Temple? Coins, ritual and religion in the Roman world.

David Wigg-Wolf, Römisch-Germanische Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts

The inherent connection between money and religion in the ancient world is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in the story of Jesus overturning the moneychangers' tables in the Temple. One might also note the derivation of the words money / monnaie / Münze etc. from Iuno Moneta, whose temple was originally the site of the Roman mint. From the outset, coinage and religion were close companions.

This contribution will consider a number of aspects of this intricate relationship, and how they developed and changed from the Republic until the Late Empire, in particular:

- The role of religious content in the coinage and its iconography. Above all the means by and the extent to which it was instrumentalised by issuing authorities;
- The evolution of the role of coins in ritual practices. Were they employed as objects in their own right, or as monetary substitutes? What was the role of temples and treasuries in such practices, and what did deposition at a religious site involve and imply? Were deposits eternally sacrosanct? What relevance does this have for the role of temples as banks, or at least as accessible stores of wealth?

While the focus will be on the Roman world, new work on Late Iron Age and Early Migration Northwest Europe that is blurring the lines between the concepts of permanence and temporality of ritual deposits will also be presented, and implications for the Roman period discussed.

Session 4

Sacred Gifts, Profane Uses? The Limits of Roman Donations in the Religious Sphere

Marta García Morcillo, University of Roehampton

According to Roman law, gifts were voluntary transfers of properties between a donor and a donee that could involve various types of goods and benefits but needed always to be measurable in money. The monetary value of gifts was essential for their regulation and for the resolution of legal conflicts around the right of possession of the thing given. It further enabled its transformation into a commodity, into something that could enrich and impoverish. Even if donations were considered pure acts of *liberalitas*, legal restrictions and conditions set upon them tried to prevent circumstances that could potentially put the giver's patrimony in danger, but also that could turn these acts of altruism into a *negotium*. Among the gifts positively viewed in Roman society were those motivated by religious and sacred aims, such as donations and endowments made for funerary *loca* and rituals (e.g. banquets for the *dies natalis* of the deceased) to individuals, *collegia* or public institutions, votive gifts and donations of objects and money to temples and sanctuaries and on occasion of public festivals. This was for instance one of the exceptions included in the very restrictive regulations of *donationes inter virum et uxorem*, which assumed that no economic benefit should be involved in those practices. My paper will examine in depth this phenomenon and attempt to challenge these assumptions by looking in the first place at the spirit (*animus*) and the will (*voluntas*) of the giver in both self-directed and altruistic donations that used religion and the sacred sphere not only as platforms of spiritual and social reaffirmation, and investment in their own afterlife, but also of direct or indirect economic investment. In the second place, I will scrutinise the limitations imposed on such practices, their consequences and exceptions, from the 3rd century BC (*leges de cereis* (209 BCE) and *Cincia de donis et muneribus* (204 BCE)) to the Justinian compilations and their interconnections with earlier literary and epigraphic evidence. A further point of analysis will be the frequent practice of redirecting private donations which, after becoming the property of a temple or sacred place, could eventually be sold and/or exchanged as marketable commodities, as is attested in the famous *Lex Furfonensis* (58 BC). To what extent did public authorities prevent private donations becoming more or less regular sources of economic profit beyond the primary purpose of the gift and the intention of the donor?

Guilds in a World Full of Gods

Koenraad Verbovven, Ghent University

Scholars have often stressed—and rightly so—that all Greco-Roman voluntary associations, including the so-called 'professional' ones, were religious. But this can be said of every social group in the ancient world. It doesn't tell us much about the role of religion to associations formed on the basis of common occupations and expressing their identity through occupational markers.

Nilson (1957: 64) famously argued that for ancient private associations religion was merely a pretext for throwing a party. MacMullen joined him in this idea: 'if piety counted for much, conviviality counted for more' (MacMullen 1974a: 71-87, esp. 77, 80). Harlan (2013: 45), on the other hand, strongly emphasized 'the importance of honoring gods and goddesses within associations of all types'. In his view 'all types of associations served a variety of interdependent social, cultic, and funerary functions for their members. … (that) helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and identity.

While no one doubts the importance of sociability and 'convivialité' for ancient private associations, or the strength of their members religious convictions and feelings of awe towards the gods and divine powers, scholars since the 1990s have also stressed the utilitarian aspects of occupation based associations in the Roman World from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity. Guild members had material interests to defend and their associations served that purpose. Conversely, public authorities (imperial and local), used guilds to facilitate tax levying, and public contracts. Occupational associations connected middling groups to urban institutions and thereby integrated non-elite citizens in urban society. That raises the question of how useful religion was for collegia and in what ways. In this paper I will first study religious practices by professional collegia as integrative strategies to express and claim a place in public society. Secondly, I will study religious practices as exclusive strategies to strengthen bonds between members and distinguish them from outsiders. The study is based on material collected in the 'Ghent Database of Roman Guilds and Occupation-Based Communities'.