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Ritual and the Emergence of Early Christian Religion (REECR)

A Socio-Cognitive Analysis: An Overview

2013-17

Project presentation, Neutestamentliche Sozietät, Heidelberg 16.5.2014

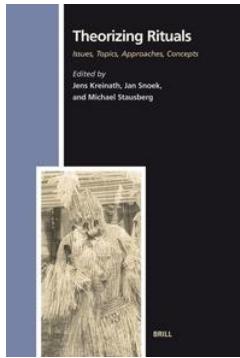


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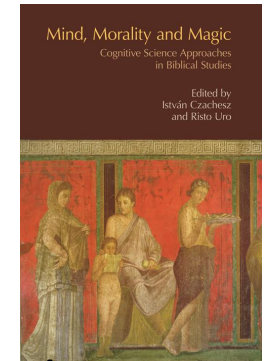


About the kind of questions we are asking

- The project seeks to bring ritual as an analytical and explanatory tool to the study of Christian beginnings with special emphasis on cognitive science approaches:
 - What was the **role of ritual practices** in the emergence, social organization and stabilization of Christianity?
 - How do ritual **innovations** emerge? How did ritual innovations and modifications of earlier practices motivate and mobilize (new) members of the movement?
 - How did **practices and beliefs** interact in the spread of the early Christian movement?



Combining two methodological currents



- **Ritual Studies** has established itself as an independent and multidisciplinary field during the last few decades (e.g. Grimes 1995, 2013; Bell 1997; Kreinath et al. 2008b)
 - Ritual Studies as a new approach in Biblical Studies (Gorman 1995; Gruenwald 2004; DeMaris)
- **The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR)** has developed new theories of rituals which can be tested against historical evidence
 - Biblical scholars have begun to employ cognitive approaches in their work (Czachesz & Uro 2013)
 - CSR promotes “explanatory pluralism,” which enables to combine multiple levels of explanation, for example, social and psychological/cognitive levels (McCauley 2013)
 - socio-cognitive approach

Research team



Risto Uro, Helsinki, Project Director, works on a monograph *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford University Press)



Anne Katrine Gudme, Copenhagen, investigates funerary culture and the commemoration of the dead in the world early Judaism and Early Christianity.



Rikard Roitto, Stockholm, focuses on rituals of forgiveness and conflict resolution in early Christianity



Vojtěch Kaše, Helsinki, works on a doctoral thesis “Ritualization of Early Christian meal practices”

Ritual and Christian Beginnings (Uro)

- A "theory-first" approach
- Theoretical pluralism
 - No grand theory, but several middle-range theories of ritual (Kreinath et al. 2008a; Hedström & Ylikoski 2010)
 - Explanatory pluralism (cf. above)
- Three-dimensional model of ritual drawing on socio-cognitive theories of ritual:
 - Rituals as actions bringing about changes in the religious world (cf. McCauley & Lawson 2002)
 - Rituals as signals of cooperation (Sosis, Bulbulia)
 - Rituals as means of generating and accommodating religious knowledge (Whitehouse, embodied/extended cognition)

Dimensions of ritual in Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (forthcoming)

Dimension	Questions	Classical issues	Cognitive theorists	Examples from EC
Rituals as actions bringing about changes	What kind of rituals are sensed as powerful? How rituals invigorate movements?	- Theories of magic - Ritual efficacy	- Lawson & McCauley - Czachesz	- John the Baptist - Jesus' healings
Rituals as cooperative cues	How rituals foster cooperation in small-scale and large-scale societies?	Social group reaffirms itself by means of rituals (Durkheim)	- Irons - Sosis - Bulbulia	Rituals in Pauline communities
Ritual and religious knowledge	How rituals generate and accommodate religious knowledge?	- Myth and ritual - Ritual symbolism and semiotics	- Whitehouse - Embodied and situated cognition	Ritual knowledge transmitted in and through baptismal practices

Cooperation

- External advisors
 - Joseph Bulbulia, Wellington, NZ
 - István Czachesz, **Heidelberg**
 - Armin Geertz, Aarhus
 - Douglas Davies, Durham
- [“The Evolution of Religion and Morality”](#), Edward Slingerland, University of British Columbia
- [Mind, Society and Religion in the Biblical World](#) (SBL program unit)
- Ritual in the Biblical World (SBL program unit)
- [Finnish Center of Excellence in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences](#) directed by Uskali Mäki (Deputy-Director Petri Ylikoski)
- Appr. 10 collaborators supporting the research of the REECR project

Outcomes

- Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming)
- Journal articles on individual research topics (e.g. forgiveness rituals and commemorative practices)
- Doctoral dissertation on early Christian meal practices
- *The Handbook of Early Christian Rituals* (a proposal submitted to OUP)

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