

Harry O. Maier

Practising the City: Spatial Imagination, Imperial Location, and Reciprocal Processes of Urban Transformation in Second Century Christianity

This project seeks to contribute to a social geographic consideration of emergent Christianity in different spatial contexts and moments of engagement with its larger Roman imperial urban contexts. The spatial turn taken in a variety of disciplines has so far rarely been taken in the study of either New Testament or extra-canonical Christian texts and combining spatial study with consideration of emergent urban Christian religion awaits sustained application.¹ And additional unique feature of the study will be a cross-disciplinary application of urban studies in consideration of emergent Christianity. The project's chief purpose is to offer a kind of "archaeological" study of particular sites of ancient "Christian" urban imagination and practice, and to compare emergent Christian notions of space and practice with similar phenomena in Greek and Roman urban settings. By archaeological, I do not mean consideration of material culture alone, but material culture as it is practised under local conditions and positioned within certain ways of imagining physical space, self, and others. As such it will offer a unique vantage point from which to interpret the growth and development of a new imperial religion. The main title "practising the city" seeks to capture the urban dynamics at play in emergent Christianity. It is meant in a twofold sense. First, it refers to the kinds of actions and rituals (daily, religious, social, and so on) that were typical in various Roman cities. Second, it refers to the cultivation of varying ways of living in the city as a means of cultivation of urban life with the help of a religious imagination of physical space. Early Christians were thus practising urban life as city dwellers as well as practising at living various expressions of urbanity. The two understandings taken together express the mutual transformation of city and religious practice in emergent Christianity.

¹ To date one finds only a few examples of the interdisciplinary application of social geography to the study of extra-canonical Christianity. These include: Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 2008); "Social Geography in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," in Michael Paschalis and Stavros A. Frangoulidis (eds.), *Space in the Ancient Novel*. Narrative Supplementum 1 (Groningen: Barkuis, 2002), 118-131; "Space, Place, Voice in the Acts of the Martyrs and the Greek Romance," in Dennis R. MacDonald (ed.), *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 117-137; Laura S. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010); Eric C. Smith, *Foucault's Heterotopia in Christian Catacombs: Constructing Spaces and Symbols in Ancient Rome*. Religion and Spatial Studies (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) – where the application is remote despite the title of the book; also, Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), who takes up a comparative spatial account of Roman and Greek conceptualizations of household space with Christian accounts, but without an interdisciplinary social geographical theorization.

The study will apply the theoretical spatial study developed by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Michel de Certeau.² These authors offer excellent tools for the kind of analysis this book will furnish. Foucault's notion of heterotopia, Lefebvre's triad of conceived, perceived, and lived space, Soja's concept of thirdspace, and de Certeau's analysis of practice as tactic offer four complementary concepts for this study. Foucault proposed the term heterotopia to describe spaces that exist in societies that mirror real places, but invert or contest them through imagination and new practices. Foucault is famously fuzzy about what he means by heterotopia.³ The version of heterotopia I will follow is described in his 1984 (ET 1986) essay, "Different Spaces." There he defines heterotopia as "real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, [the] sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable."⁴ Lefebvre's spatial triad and Soja's conceptualization of thirdspace describes processes of living and imagining empirical spaces that organize the social world. De Certeau takes up the study of the practice of everyday life by showing how the local practices of time and space can sometimes take prescribed time-space-practice configurations and result in dramatic improvisations. Societies may organize spaces in which behavior unfolds, but each individual performs space in idiosyncratic ways. He distinguishes between strategies and tactics. Strategies describe ideological blueprints for daily conduct and uses of space; tactics are the practices that insert themselves within strategies that result in a contest for cultural meaning and definition.⁵

This theoretical apparatus is excellently suited to a study of emergent Christianity as a lived urban construct performed and imagined in cities of the Roman Empire. It turns away from earlier essentializing accounts of ancient Christianity as orthodox, or heretical, or more recently, "proto-orthodox." Rather it seeks to study the mutually transformative influences of belief, practice, and urban space wherein all three are in continual processes of negotiation.

The project will focus on a series of sites for a kind of "archaeological" investigation of these processes of negotiation: Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus, and Carthage. The project will build on work under taken in the last years at Erfurt and

² Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New York Press, 1998), 176-186; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

³ For the history of publication and its influence, P. Johnson, "History of the Concept of Heterotopia," *Heterotopian Studies* (2012), 1-14, www.heterotopiastudies.com, cited 17 July 2015.

⁴ Foucault, "Spaces," 178-79

⁵De Certeau, *Practice*, 32-37.

elsewhere. The mutual transformations of emergent Roman urban Christianity will attend to the dense urban quarters of neighbourhoods to consider *1 Clement* (also with reference to Corinth), the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* to consider emergent belief in what Peter Lampe calls the fractionated church dispersed in tenements throughout the imperial capital. In the case of Alexandria, the focus will be on Clement's *Paedagogus* as the cultivation of an emergent Christian urbanity, with reference also to patterns of hospitality, instruction, and patronage of differing Jesus groups in the city and their religio-social legitimation. Here research will focus also on the physical organization of Alexandria, its neighbourhoods, and reciprocal influences of space, practice and belief we may detect as indicating mutual urban formation. The (middle) Ignatian corpus of letters (which should now be understood as largely pseudonymous), together with late New Testament writings (the Pastoral Epistles, in my opinion Hadrianic), as well as second century apocryphal Acts will take up the creation and imagination of networked cities and specifically Ephesus and the practices of granting and withholding hospitality in domestic spaces, as well as the definition of belief as a means of marking urban spaces as legitimate or illegitimate places for gathering. The *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* as well as writings by Tertullian will consider Carthage as a site of spatial practice and control. Here the interest will be on the civic imaginaries the martyrdom and Tertullian's writings promote, with particular attention given to inversions and reconfigurations of urban spaces. The final part of the project will consider Eusebius of Caesarea as creator of early Christian space in a historical form for the purposes of a larger imperial agenda promoted by Constantine. This will look at the way Eusebius created a kind of second century urban Christianity and reified what were in de Certeau's sense "tactics" into strategies for the practice of an empire-wide Christianity endorsed by the emperor. One of the chief interests here will be to compare Eusebius's construction of an urban-networked church with that of pagan contemporaries and the practices they endorse and reject. I seek to explore mutual Christian and urban transformation imagined on a large scale through Eusebius's development of a pioneering historiography and creation of a linear past.

The modules of the project will become a five-chapter book, with an additional introduction and conclusion.