

ALEXANDRA W. BUSCH / ALFRED SCHÄFER (eds), *Römische Weihealtäre im Kontext. Internationale Tagung in Köln vom 3. bis zum 5. Dezember 2009 "Weihealtäre in Tempeln und Heiligtümern"*. Likias Verlag, Friedberg 2014. € 54,-. ISBN 978-3-9817006-2-6. 454 pages with 254 images.

As Alexandra Busch and Alfred Schäfer write in their introduction (pp. 13–25), the volume under review aims to elucidate the contexts that prompted the dedication of altars and study the patterns of communication that underlay their erection in sanctuaries during the Roman period (pp. 13–14). In fact, if one common thread emerges, it is the prominence accorded to “context” and (religious) “communication”. I will return to these two concepts below.

Apart from the focus on altars (of any kind, as we shall see), coherence proves elusive. This is owed in part to the material’s geographical and contextual disparity, but neither can the volume, the proceedings of a conference organised by the Römisch-Germanisches Museum Köln and the Abteilung Rom of the German Archaeological Institute, hide its genesis. Three introductory chapters relate only intermittently to the two groups of papers that follow. The latter seem to have been arranged roughly so as to focus on civilian society (fifteen chapters) and the military (six contributions). Although the two editors highlight the most pertinent results (pp. 14–18), it might have been beneficial to commission a concluding chapter to reassess the volume’s manifold trajectories. Many readers, of course, will peruse the volume selectively and in search for individual case studies. Such readers should appreciate the wealth of evidentiary detail, but even they will bemoan the absence of any kind of index.

The editors note the “mass” occurrence of “dedicatory altars” particularly during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. In purely quantitative terms, this may be correct, an unsurprising epiphenomenon of the so-called epigraphic habit. This peculiar chronological pattern is reinforced in part by the editors’ decision to put the focus squarely on the Roman Northwest and West, and in particular on Roman Germany. This is to the detriment of the Roman Greek East, which is represented by two chapters only, and the Hellenistic world, which is entirely absent. If there really was a discernible “medialer Wandel” (p. 17) in dedicatory practices during the imperial period, its contours are thus left vague. William Van Andringa (whose chapter is otherwise concerned with sacrificial altars from Pompeii; pp. 107–120), identifies only two Campanian votive altars from the 1st century: “la pratique d’offrir un autel en acquittement d’un vœu était exceptionnelle” (p. 115). True, but we need a wider diachronic perspective to place such observations in their proper historical context. A comparative perspective is also required to assess the geographical distribution of altar dedications across the Roman world. One such view is offered in Rudolf Haensch’s chapter about altar dedications by the Roman military in *Asia Minor*. R. Haensch notes a rough parity between Eastern and Western provinces as concerns the number of altar dedications by entire units, but he observes significant differences between the two halves of the Empire (and within the Greek East) regarding the dedicatory practices of officers and *beneficarii* (pp. 369–379).

No in-depth discussion of terminology or the categories of classification is proffered in this volume. Nor is there any detailed engagement with the semantic field (*arae*, *altaria*, and so forth) that denoted, and differentiated among, the objects we describe with the second-order word “altar”; in that respect, John Scheid’s chapter (pp. 27–35; see below) proves an exception. Some authors conceive of the volume’s subject matter narrowly, taking it to pertain to votive altars erected in fulfilment of a vow (*votum*). The chapter by Markus Scholz, by contrast, discusses the locally varied functions of funerary altars from the northern frontier provinces (pp. 79–105): as altars for sacrifice, containers of the ashes of the deceased, or monumental funerary markers. Others adopt a still broader approach: Thierry Luginbühl distinguishes between votive altars, funerary altars, and

those altars erected “pour d’autres raisons” (p. 185), only to discuss altars of any kind in the territory of the *Civitas Helvetiorum* (pp. 179–198). The web is cast just as wide in surveys from Cologne (Friederike Naumann-Streckner, pp. 137–153) and Bonn (Gerhard Bauchhenß, pp. 155–178). Both contributions catalogue not only local votive altars (identified by epigraphic formulas like “*votum solvit*”), but they also comprise altars erected in gratitude for divine intervention, after discharge from military service or on the occasion of some office; altars set up by individuals whose *raison d’être* is now unclear are also included.

Some terminological and taxonomical consistency is needed, however, before one can contextualise the disparate material at hand. “Weihe(alt)ar”, it must be realised, is an etic term of classification which, although attested only since the early 19th century, seems all too established in German – much more so, in fact, than the “dedicatory altar” is in English or “l’autel dédié” is in French. This modern notion, however, appears to lack an exact semantic correlation in Roman antiquity. Likewise, *ara votiva* (thus only Année Epigr. 1985, 633) denotes an altar set up in fulfilment of a *votum* (cf. the analogous case of *ludi votivi*). As such, the phrase merely varies formulas like “*aram (ex) voto posuit*”, but it fails to provide an emic analogue to our taxonomical “votive altar”. More generally, attempts to differentiate between the sacrificial altar on the one hand and the votive or dedicatory altar on the other, as happens throughout this volume, build upon problematic classificatory grids and use incongruous language of comparison. With the phrase “sacrificial altar”, we merely stress one functional criterion, namely the altar’s use for sacrifice. “Votive altar”, by contrast, denotes primarily, if not exclusively, a causal distinction, signifying the monument’s origin in a previous vow. The *dedicatio*, on the other hand, is a ritual technique and formal process, by way of which different social actors make a dedication to one or several deities, regardless of the classification of the object of their dedication as sacrificial, votive, or otherwise.

The terminological confusion of “dedicatory” and votive altars has a long history in Religious Studies, which some papers in this volume inadvertently perpetuate. Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser argues that Ovid selected the votive altars to Janus, Hercules, Concordia, and Pax Augusta for inclusion in book 1 of his *Fasti* with the aim of constructing a set of Augustan *lieux de mémoire* (pp. 37–54); cultural memory, it seems, continues to constitute a popular research trajectory. The author defines the votive altar as a permanently installed “Erinnerungsort” (pp. 40–41), but functional attributions of this kind can be applied to a wide variety of material objects. Besides, it is improbable that the *Ara Pacis Augustae* was a votive altar in the narrow sense (thus pp. 42–43), despite its frequent misattribution as such. Nor does the identification (p. 46) of the altar dedication to Jupiter Pistor (Ov. *Fast.* 6.349–394) as a votive altar convince: rather than evoking a *votum*, the Ovidian text suggests that this altar was dedicated to the god in gratitude for his directive for action, which led to the expulsion of the Gallic enemy from Rome. Ovid, in other words, appropriates for his *aition* the formal type of *Ex imperio-* or *Ex visu-*dedication.

John Scheid (pp. 27–35) characterises the dedicated altar as the sign of a past “exchange” between a deity and a human being (p. 33), which introduces a necessary rather than a sufficient criterion for definition: exchange (of whatever kind) underlies the alienation and dedication of all material objects. J. Scheid insists that sacrificial altars were consecrated by the political community and became the deity’s property (as a *res sacra*), whereas votive altars, being private dedications, were neither *sacrae* nor inalienable and hence could be removed from sanctuaries at any time. But Scheid draws attention to only one formal distinction and one specific Roman legal discourse about the scope of *sacrum* (for which see F. G. CAVALLERO, *Arae sacrae. Tipi, nomi, atti, funzioni e rappresentazioni degli altari romani*. Bull. Comm. Arch. Roma, Suppl. 25 [Rome 2018]). This distinction largely shuns the question of pragmatics and context. It has been noted before, for instance, that dedicators appropriated the category of *sacrum* for their own, “private” dedications

(cf. J. P. BODEL, ‘Sacred dedications’: A problem of definitions. In: J. P. Bodel / M. Kajava [eds], *Dedicatio sacra nel mondo greco-romano. Diffusione, funzioni, tipologie*. Acta Inst. Romani Finlandiae 35 [Rome 2009] 17–30). And when dedicators of every stripe call their dedicated monument *ara* and the dedicatory inscription uses the formula “*sacrum*” (with the deity in the dative), then the material object advertises its own “sacredness”. Modern typologising cannot do justice to the self-referential process in which sacrality is construed by the material object, nor can it convey the social actor’s perception of the altar as sacred, regardless of whatever “proper status” others may attribute to it.

The monument’s inherent sacrality is touched upon by Ute Verstegen, albeit from the perspective of its later reception: she investigates the extent to which the late antique reuse of “pagan” dedications at St. Gereon in Cologne was guided by religious or ideological considerations, in addition to the “Ressourceneffizienz” which often characterised late antique construction work (pp. 433–454). Basing her discussion on the material from Cologne, the author concludes her inquiry into this question with a cautious *non licet* (for the problem, albeit without reference to Cologne, see also L. LAVAN / M. MULRYAN [eds], *The Archaeology of Late Antique ‘Paganism’*. Late Ant. Arch. 7 [Leiden, Boston 2011]).

Religious pragmatics comes to the fore with the question of whether sacrifice was performed on altars dedicated by private individuals. In his chapter on the relevant evidence from the *Conventus Tarraconensis* (pp. 67–78), Christof Berns points out that the erection of any altar of a certain size and form implied the potentiality of its ritual use, whatever its primary purpose may have been. Some of the altars from *Alburnus maior* collected by Carmen Ciongradi (pp. 269–280) appear to show traces of burning (p. 275). Th. Luginbühl distinguishes smaller altars, “peut-être plus commémoratifs que réellement fonctionnels”, from large ones, “les autels principaux d’un lieu du culte” (p. 185), but size or original function cannot be the only decisive variables. Dirk Schmitz notes that no sanctuaries dedicated solely to the Quadviviae and related divinities are attested in Roman Germany. Their altars became attached to civilian or military settlements or were integrated in the sanctuaries of other divinities. When altars to these goddesses were set up at cross-roads or along arteries, this was because of their special association with a specific “street situation” (pp. 281–302). With regard to this latter context in particular, their function cannot have been dedicatory alone. Ritual use is also apparent in Günther Schörner’s successful investigation of the later employment of votive altars in the sanctuary of Asclepius at *Epidaurus* (pp. 55–66): in the 4th century CE, they were marked with numbers and *circuli*, the latter to denote individual gods. G. Schörner relates this local system of internal reference to a concrete ritual performance, in the course of which the respective altars, as if in procession, were accessed sequentially for the purpose of sacrifice.

Therefore, when the editors suggest (e. g. p. 16) that we distinguish between the sacrificial altar, which was officially established to serve the purpose of animal sacrifice, and the “Weihealtar”, which was largely a private initiative and on which only incense was burned on the occasion of its dedication, their taxonomy fails to convince on a variety of grounds, terminological, taxonomical (see above), and evidentiary. Quite rightly, Jörg Rüpke draws attention to the analogous case of divine images: recent scholarship rejects the previous distinction between the actual cult image and other images, which were merely dedicatory objects (p. 23).

The identity and social status of dedicators proves a useful field of investigation. Bernd Steidl shows that the altar was the preferred choice of *beneficarii* in Obernburg / Main, which resulted over time in a large number of dedicated monuments in the sanctuary. Noting the differences in size and execution, B. Steidl suggests that there existed competition among individual *beneficarii* (pp. 413–432). In his reassessment of the altars from Maryport on England’s northwestern coast (pp. 381–396), Jonathan Coulston identifies high-ranking military personnel as dedicators.

Dedications to Jupiter Optimus Maximus dominate here, but J. Coulston rightly cautions against the view that they were merely expressions of ritual uniformity or indicators of ideological control (see already W. ECK, *Religion und Religiosität in der soziopolitischen Führungsschicht der Hohen Kaiserzeit*. In: Id. [ed.], *Religion und Gesellschaft in der römischen Kaiserzeit*. Kolloquium zu Ehren von Friedrich Vittinghoff. Kölner Hist. Abhandl. 35 [Cologne, Vienna 1989] 15–51 at 43). J. Coulston's thesis that these dedications exemplified "elite euergetism in ritual and in communication with the gods" (p. 393), for which he adduces research on the religious behaviour of urban elites in the Greek East, seems less immediately convincing.

Richard Neudecker discusses the self-representation of *Augustales* in *Misenum* and *Herculaneum* more generally (pp. 303–316), but he also notes that their dedications – by which we must understand altars or statues with their bases – were found only in public spaces. The possible reasons for this particular choice are left unspecified. Nor is it apparent whether all *arae* dedicated by local *Augustales* should be defined as "Weihealtäre"; surely, on occasion sacrificial altars *stricto sensu* (as in the case of CIL III 8675) occur. R. Neudecker rightly observes that the dedicatory practices of local *Augustales* laid "eine epigraphische Spur ihrer Gruppe durch die Stadt" (p. 312; see in more detail M. L. LAIRD, *Civic Monuments and the Augustales in Roman Italy* [Cambridge 2015] 215–34), but one could object that public dedications were frequently performed by "individual" *Augustales* (e. g. *ex voto*: CIL IX 2835) rather than by "their group".

A very different clientele of dedicators emerges from the sanctuary of Deus Lar Berobreus on Monte de Facho (Galicia). Thomas Schattner, José Suárez Otero, and Michael Koch plausibly conclude from the altars' relative levels of uniformity, as well as from the lack of personal information on them, that homogenous groups, possibly from within family networks, dedicated these monuments (pp. 249–268). In the *Conventus Tarraconensis*, by contrast, slaves, gladiators, and common soldiers prominently appear as dedicators of altars while civic officials are underrepresented. According to Christoph Berns, this pattern is explicable by the fact that altar dedications here often expressed personal concerns, but they were not motivated by a political occasion or public event (pp. 67–78). Ton Derks discusses the altar dedications in sanctuaries of the goddess Nehalennia and related rural shrines in Lower Germany (pp. 199–219), where the altar emerges as the preferred form of dedication in fulfilment of vows among merchants and shipowners but also, if less prominently, among the military. T. Derks explains the popularity of the aedicula-type in sanctuaries of Nehalennia as local imitations of the conditions then prevailing in Cologne, where the type is attested since the mid-2nd century, for instance in altar dedications to the *Matronae Aufaniae*. The individual elaboration of such altars points to competition for social capital among the dedicators.

The theme of personal motivation is pursued perhaps most thoroughly by Alexandra Busch, who discusses the dedications of the *equites singulares Augusti* from the Via Tasso and the altars dedicated in the *castra peregrina* on *Mons Caelius* (pp. 317–334). A. Busch establishes six different frames of analysis, which she calls contexts: situational, normative-social, historical, religious, and formal/iconographic. These – largely formal – grids of categorisation are related to Ian Hodder's model of "contextual archeology" (p. 13), even if Hodder's post-processual approach (summarised in I. HODDER / S. HUTSON, *Reading the Past. Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*³ [Cambridge 2003] esp. 170–211) conceptualises "context" more variably. Be that as it may, Busch's analysis shows that the *equites singulares* prominently dedicated altars in commemoration of their discharge whereas, according to the author, the dedication of a relief communicated "individual decisions". One might demur that the *equites singulares* also dedicated altars in fulfilment of a vow, which arguably was quite an individual affair. Besides, when Busch interprets the small, rather variable (and hence "individual") altars in the *castra peregrina* as expressions of "private

religiosity and piety”, it does not necessarily follow that the more standardised altars from the Via Tasso embody an official layer of “religiosity and lived piety”, different from that in the *castra peregrina* (p. 330). When *arae* represent more than 50 percent of the extant evidence (cf. p. 323), the choice of dedicatory object alone seems an unreliable variable to measure levels of piety.

The underlying dichotomy – that of personal versus communal expressions of religiosity – continues an earlier theme: in their introduction, A. Busch and A. Schäfer insist that we situate the dedication of an altar between the two poles of personal statement and societal conformity (p. 14). Of course, the material object fails to indicate where exactly between these poles it must be located. Indeed, one is left wondering whether these ideal types of social behaviour constitute suitable tools for the description of social practice. Busch’s own investigation has the advantage of pinpointing the social actors’ agency, something that strictly typological studies cannot establish. Necessarily formal criteria, however, can only go so far toward the elucidation of the dedicator’s motivations. Nor can they conclusively identify her or his religiosity.

Here and elsewhere, “context” is intimately connected with “communication”: it is through contextual analysis, the editors argue, that a better understanding of the altar’s medial quality, its function as carrier of communication (“Kommunikationsträger”, p. 17), may be obtained. Against this background, J. Rüpke proposes that we investigate the functional advantage of the “Weihealtar” (pp. 19–25), whose rather instrumental character and non-figurative appearance allowed for a simplified communicative process: unlike a statue dedication, a simple altar facilitated communication about, or with, iconographically problematic local and new divinities or when a combination of different deities was concerned (p. 24). This suggestion, however, while it may elucidate some particular contexts, must disregard the many instances where the altar included a figurative depiction or an epigraphic commemoration of the divine addressee, whether Roman or local: dedicators seem to have had very clear ideas as to how they envisaged their divine addressees. Nor does Rüpke’s suggestion full justice to the large quantity of cases where the deity in question was neither iconographically precarious nor local or new.

In her contribution on the altar dedications in the sanctuary of Silvanus and the Quadriviae in *Carnuntum* (pp. 121–136), Gabrielle Kremer defines the aim of communication as a two-fold process: altars served to communicate both with the gods and with the dedicators’ social environment, and they established a permanent representation of dedicators in their social environment (she follows W. Eck, *Öffentlichkeit, Monument und Inschrift*. In: XI Congresso Internazionale di Epigrafia Greca e Latina. Roma, 18–24 settembre 1997. Atti 2 [Rome 1999] 55–75). Based on this model, G. Kremer reconstructs for the sanctuary a local community to which a collective, only “semi-public” frame of religious practice applied: since information about the dedicators is largely absent, their communicative focus was on the gods rather than on their social peers. In her study of the sanctuary on Yalak Başı in rural *Lycia* (pp. 221–248), Barbara Stark adopts a similar communication model: the larger and more elaborated altars at the site’s centre are interpreted as expressions of communication through which the affluent and socially superior members of the community competed with one another; smaller and more homogenous altars, the author argues, expressed the belonging to a certain group. Yet, neither a more elaborate and detailed monument nor a more sophisticated architectural design are unambivalent indicators of a higher level of “personal religiosity”. Likewise, the dedication of an inconspicuous altar may be owed to the contingencies of production (as Th. Schattner, J. Suárez Otero and M. Koch point out; pp. 258–263), but the monument’s lack of individuality may but mask concrete personal concerns.

In his analysis of military dedications at the Upper German-Raetian Limes, with particular emphasis given to dedications to the Genius, Minerva, and Fortuna, Oliver Stoll adopts a different view (pp. 335–367). With reference to the sociology of religion, he concludes from the material’s

uniformity that the dedicated objects communicated and created group solidarity (p. 358). In response, it can be argued that O. Stoll's reading of the evidence is owed primarily to his choice of (Neo-Durkheimian) functionalist theory. Also, as Stoll realises, there is simply too little historical depth for a closer analysis. Similar objections may be raised concerning Alfred Schäfer's chapter, which discusses the dedication of altars in various gubernatorial seats (with a cursory glance toward the altars set up by *beneficarii* in Osterburken; pp. 397–411). As the dedications originate predominantly from high-ranking military office-holders, A. Schäfer correlates the dedicatory practices of this relatively homogenous group with the architectural homogeneity of their sanctuaries, from which he infers group solidarity, either conscious or unconscious, among them (pp. 408–409). The functionalist emphasises on group solidarity matches Schäfer's interpretative decision to characterise the dedications themselves – which address Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the Capitoline triad, or are for the well-being of the imperial family – as “staatstragend” and “offiziös”. One wonders, however, whether the dichotomous vocabulary adopted – of individual and communal, of personal / private and official – is sufficiently suited to describing social practice, and whether the neat juxtaposing of official and personal religiosity (p. 409) properly characterises the historical actors' behaviour and cognition.

Recently, “religious communication” has become a catchphrase in scholarship on ancient religion. All too often, however, scholars employ a rather colloquial understanding of communication, which they envisage to consist in the interplay of sender (the dedicator or a group of dedicators) and recipient (or receiver: the deity or social group). Semiotic theory, by contrast, postulates a three-stage model: (religious) communication occurs through a process of information, utterance, and understanding (cf. V. KRECH, *Religion als Kommunikation*. In: M. Stausberg [ed.], *Religionswissenschaft* [Berlin, Boston 2012] 49–64), which allows for a methodologically more stringent investigation of the communication process. If, in a semiotic perspective, the contextual analysis of altar dedications may not be the same as the analysis of religious communication, the contributions in this volume have laid the groundwork for that latter endeavour.

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JOHN CREIGHTON, Silchester: Changing Visions of a Roman Town. Integrating Geophysics and Archaeology: The Results of the Silchester Mapping Project 2005–10. Unter Mitarbeit von Robert Fry. *Britannia Monograph Series Band 28*. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London 2016. £ 55,-. ISBN 978-0-9077-6442-7. XVIII + 486 Seiten mit über 200 meist farbigen Abbildungen und Faltpänen.

Das hier besprochene Buch verbirgt hinter der im Untertitel angekündigten „Integration von Geophysik und Archäologie“ nicht weniger als eine komplette Zusammenstellung der Forschungsgeschichte sowie aller bisherigen Ausgrabungs- und Prospektionsergebnisse des Fundplatzes *Calleva Atrebatum*-Silchester. Dabei beschränkt es sich nicht, wie im Titel angedeutet, auf die römische Stadt, sondern behandelt im gleichen Maße auch die vorangehenden späteisenzeitlichen Phasen der Siedlung. Die Ergebnisse aller Einzelstudien werden zu einem interpretativen Gesamtbild der Entwicklung des Fundplatzes von einer eisenzeitlichen Streusiedlung bis hin zu einer ummauerten, in Stein ausgebauten römischen Stadt zusammengeführt. Die Ansichten bezüglich der Bedeutung und Entwicklung des Fundplatzes haben sich im Laufe der Forschungsgeschichte stetig gewandelt, was einen weiteren sehr interessanten Aspekt des Buches ausmacht.