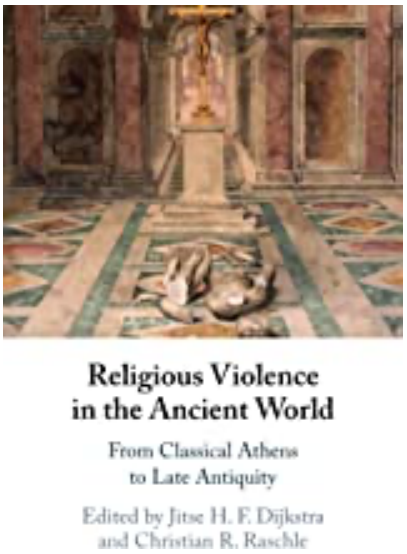
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Jitse H. F. Dijkstra and Christian R. Raschle, eds.

Religious Violence in the Ancient World: From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity

Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xiv + 432. Paper. $37.99. ISBN 9781108816557.

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This collection of seventeen essays resulted from a conference in Montreal and Ottawa in 2017. The expression "religious violence" seems clear, and in some of the contributions it is taken for granted, but several essays rightly problematize it. Editors Jitse H. F. Dijkstra and Christian R. Raschle admit that the increased interest in the topic of the conference and of this volume was brought about by the 9/11 attack in 2001. Indeed, in its aftermath many other conferences and volumes were dedicated to this theme, most of which are referred to in the present work.

The first of two introductory, methodological chapters, by Hans G. Kippenberg, criticizes David Hume and Jan Assmann's assumption that monotheism is intolerant and violent whereas polytheism is tolerant, a point that returns elsewhere in this volume. Kippenberg focuses on religious persuasions being embedded in communities that apply violence for secular reasons instead, such as the humiliation and suppression of Muslims by the United States and Israel. This violence is expressed in religious terms, but he questions whether it is religious violence per se. Kippenberg points to "sacred prefigurations" found in, for example, Muhammad's interventions and Phinehas's zeal (Num 25), as scripts of action that may be realized in conflicts that are basically secular. One may wonder, however, whether the religious motivation of the perpetrators is gauged sufficiently in this approach.

Jan N. Bremmer discusses several episodes in which violence and religion were interrelated, from the execution of Socrates and the trial of the Athenian courtesan Phryne, who had founded a new cult, to the so-called pogrom at Alexandria in 38 CE, the Roman persecutions of Christians

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(which he does not consider a myth), the Christian destruction of pagan temples in Gaza, the excommunication of Spinoza, and the murder of Coptic Christians by the Islamic State in 2015. He notes that the Greeks had no word for religion, distinguishes between cultural and physical violence, and argues, like Kippenberg, that Hume's and Assmann's assumption cannot be accepted without query. Bremmer summarizes his points in seven theses, the last of which is: "in Antiquity not all religious violence was that religious and not all religious violence was that violent."

Other essays discuss mostly particular topics, some including reflections on the methodological considerations of the introductory chapters. Esther Eidinow examines the use of ancient Greek binding spells intending to harm personal or political opponents. She demonstrates that the language of binding someone's body parts and mind reflects physical imprisonment and could have political objectives. Christian R. Raschle discusses the expulsion of Isis worshipers and astrologers from Rome in the late republic and early empire. He, too, criticizes Assmann's simplistic distinction between monotheism and polytheism regarding violence and tolerance, citing the violent measures against the Isis cult and astrologers in Rome. The introduction of foreign gods was not problematic if their cults facilitated the integration of foreigners, including vanquished enemies. However, the cults of Isis, Sarapis, and Cybele raised suspicion and were thwarted as being un-Roman, to the extent that the precincts of Isis and Sarapis on the Capitoline hill were destroyed and their cults banned. Yet after Egypt had been integrated into the empire, the ban was canceled. Astrologers were expelled as well, but likely not on religious grounds. Raschle highlights the pragmatic reasons of the Roman policy toward foreign gods and practices.

Steve Mason studies two stories of massacres on a Sabbath at Jerusalem and Caesarea in 66 CE, wondering whether these calamities should be described as religious violence, which Josephus, our only source, does not do, but he did not recognize religion as a special category. Mason even concludes that we cannot be sure if the massacres actually happened. In line with Bremmer and Mason, Andreas Bendlin observes that the notion of religious violence causes terminological and phenomenological confusion. He argues that religion constituted a salient domain of social practice, fueling motivations, actions, and suffering, and distinguishes between physical, structural, and cultural violence. In fact, his rich methodological essay serves as an introductory paper like Kippenberg's and Bremmer's. Bendlin exemplifies his views by studying the message *Iudaea capta* on coins of 70 CE, which he considers a manifestation of cultural violence, and the "Jewish tax" introduced at the same time. The same methodological observations return in James B. Rives's essay on the role of animal sacrifice, especially idol offerings, in the Roman persecution of Christians in the second to early fourth centuries. He focuses on the Christian view of offering meat to idols as worship of demons. Erika Manders investigates the message of tetrarchic coins minted during the persecution in the early fourth century, in comparison with coins from earlier periods. Coins mention the reigning emperors, deities, and moral or political ideals and therefore reflect the ideological framework of the period in which this persecution took place.

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Elizabeth DePalma Digeser demonstrates how Lactantius framed Constantine as a Christian emperor who gained a violent triumph over his other, persecuting colleagues, following the risen Christ's example of conquering death, sin, and tyranny. Likewise, the orator and apologist justified Constantine's "militant piety" in the subsequent years, referring to Christ who would come to earth in arms. DePalma even holds that Lactantius presented the emperor as a god incarnate, like Apollo, Victory, or Sol Invictus. Wendy Mayer, like previous authors, discusses the question of when violence can be called religious and how late antique Christian testimonies to violence relate to historical reality. Peter Van Nuffelen's contribution seeks to understand how coercion was conceptualized in late antiquity and to trace its origins. He shows that Augustine's eventual policy of conversion of the Donatists by means of state coercion agrees with contemporaneous philosophical strategies of putting people on the right track. However, Augustine saw this as holding for errant Christians such as the Donatists, not for people who still had to accept Christianity; they should and could not be forced into conversion.

Jitse H. F. Dijkstra discusses the social-psychological role of crowd behavior in the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391/392, as described by Rufinus. A minor incident may escalate into a full-blown riot that attracts the attention of the authorities. Even though religion is involved, it need not be called a religious conflict, since usually other factors are in play as well. Thus the renovation of a public building that Bishop Theophilus wished to turn into a place of worship developed into a Christian-pagan conflict leading to the plundering of the Serapeum and the intervention of the authorities. To a certain extent Dijkstra writes for the well-informed, as he does not explain who were "the Greens and the Blues." Fabricio Vecoli investigates how it is possible that monks who were supposed to cultivate meekness and to search for tranquility and spiritual peace are told to use physical violence against pagans and Christians with other beliefs, though recommendation of such violence is absent from ascetic treatises. Vecoli points to Jesus's saying that the kingdom of heaven will belong to the violent (Matt 11:12), which monks applied to the infliction of spiritual violence on themselves in subduing the demons that inspired them to evil thoughts and vices. He suggests that these words were susceptible to be taken literally besides their usual mystical interpretation in a monastic context. This is a fascinating hypothesis that may perhaps be related to the psychological insight that everything that is repressed turns up in another form. Chris L. de Wet pursues the investigation of monastic asceticism interacting with violence. He zeroes in on Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Historia religiosa* from 440, where the lives of Syrian monks who try to imitate biblical heroes of faith are characterized by military rhetoric. Their spiritual war concerns both themselves, that is, in their ascetic practices, and, for example, Arian Christians. In addition, de Wet refers to monastic curses mentioned by Theodoret as instances of domination by means of coercive asceticism and curses that effectuated someone's death without the immediate, physical involvement of the monks.

Christine Shephardson introduces the narratives of violence perpetrated by Chalcedonian on non-Chalcedonian Christians. Efforts of compromise did exist, but nonetheless the latter group

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suffered from imperial measures that might even lead to martyrdom, including nonfatal witnessing to one's beliefs. Hugh Elton adds another chapter about the tensions between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians. In 513 CE, general Vitalian revolted against the emperor Anastasius in Constantinople because of the latter's anti-Chalcedonian politics. The emperor promised to invite the pope for mediation. When this effort failed, Vitalian overcame the imperial army in 514, but a year later his own army tasted defeat. Elton describes the historical background to this exceptional military clash started by a general who was ready to fight for the Chalcedonian Christology. Geoffrey Greatrex authors the final chapter, about "The Emperor, the People and Urban Violence in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries." He demonstrates that in the Eastern capital of this period the emperors' position was undermined by church leaders and various factions. He distinguishes three types of disturbance: religious and doctrinal riots against pagans, heretics, or Jews; battles between opposing factions, including monks; and protests against the government, mainly because of food shortages. Curiously, like Dijkstra he considers the terms "Blues and Greens" to be self-evident. Greatrex concludes that usually violence was not initiated by the state but by individuals or crowds.

All these contributions are most interesting (no irony intended!), so that all of them deserved to be briefly characterized. Only rarely did I put a question mark in the margin or disagree with an argument or doubt its validity. Dijkstra and Raschle and all other authors may be congratulated on this valuable collection on a theme that, unfortunately, is still more topical than one would wish.

Part 1. Methodology

"Sacred Prefigurations of Violence: Religious Communities in Situations of Conflict," by Hans G. Kippenberg

"Priestesses, Pogroms and Persecutions: Religious Violence in Antiquity in a Diachronic Perspective," by Jan N. Bremmer

Part 2. Religious Violence in the Graeco-Roman World

"Ancient Greek Binding Spells and (Political) Violence," by Esther Eidinow

"The Expulsion of Isis Worshippers and Astrologers from Rome in the Late Republic and Early Empire," by Christian R. Raschle

"Religious Violence? Two Massacres on a Sabbath in 66 CE: Jerusalem and Caesarea," by Steve Mason

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"Religion, Violence and the Diasporic Experience: The Jewish Diaspora in Flavian Rome and Puteoli," by Andreas Bendlin

"Animal Sacrifice and the Roman Persecution of Christians (Second to Third Century)," by James B. Rives

"The Great Persecution and Imperial Ideology: Patterns of Communication on Tetrarchic Coinage," by Erika Manders

"The Violent Legacy of Constantine's Militant Piety," by Elizabeth DePalma Digeser

Part 3. Religious Violence in Late Antiquity

"Religious Violence in Late Antiquity: Current Approaches, Trends and Issues," by Wendy Mayer

"Coercion in Late Antiquity: A Brief Intellectual History," by Peter Van Nuffelen

"Crowd Behaviour and the Destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391/392 CE," by Jitse H. F. Dijkstra

"Violence and Monks: From a Mystical Concept to an Intolerant Practice (Fourth to Fifth Century)," by Fabrizio Vecoli

"The Discipline of Domination: Asceticism, Violence and Monastic Curses in Theodoret's Historia Religiosa," by Chris L. de Wet

"Suffering Saints: Shaping Narratives of Violence after Chalcedon," by Christine Shepardson

"Fighting for Chalcedon: Vitalian's Rebellion against Anastasius," by Hugh Elton

"The Emperor, the People and Urban Violence in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," by Geoffrey Greatrex

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