

**Special Issue:**

## **Lived Ancient Religion in the Circum-Mediterranean Region**

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These articles are part of the achievements of joint research of two groups of researchers in Japan and in Europe. H. Ichikawa has organized corporate researches with mainly Japanese researchers for the understandings of the development of Jewish and Christian movements in the East-Mediterranean in the late antiquity with the financial aid of “Kakenhi”, Grant-in Aid for Scientific Research (A) 20H00004 of JSPS, in 2020–2023. It was vital to put these religious movements in the historical contexts of East-Mediterranean region in the Roman Empire in the late antiquity, and for that purpose we found the most appropriate perspective of Lived Ancient Religion advocated and demonstrated by Prof. J. Rüpke of Erfurt University. This perspective requires the methodology to see religious phenomena from below, from an individual person with the special emphasis on the religious actors and their competences and communications to form a sort of identity groups. So, the Kakenhi-group of Japanese scholars have exerted the researches on “Lived Ancient Jewish Religion (LAJR) with various disciplines, including theoretical studies on LAR, Jewish religion in view of LAR, and applied research of Tel Rekhesh synagogue of the first century CE in the Galilee discovered by

Japanese archaeological team in 2018. As Jews in Palestine and Diaspora lived in the Roman Empire, our research is to be firmly related in many respects with the studies of Professor Rüpke and his *Pantheon*. So that we have promoted research exchanges with him and finally we could have corporate study meetings with his research group almost once a month for a year. I greatly appreciate Prof. Rüpke for realizing this corporate research with the aid of remote online meetings held in 2023 and early 2024.

It was fortunate enough to know that the Japanese Biblical Institute of which I am a member has made a decision to accept achievements of such corporate research as Kakenhi project in this annual periodical for publication. On behalf of our group and also the European partners, I sincerely express gratitude for the Institute to accept our special issue including articles which may deal with broader sphere of topics than proper Biblical themes.

The lived ancient religion project, pursued at the University of Erfurt and initially funded by an Advanced Grant of the European Research Council (ERC AdG 295555) started from questioning notion of ancient religions that took all meaningful religious action as being defined by a set of public norms and institutions. Individual religious action was seen as either using the spaces left by elite projects or private imitation. In the project “Lived Ancient Religion”, based at the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Research (University of Erfurt) and started by researchers from Denmark, Italy, Greece, and Germany the question of the arrogation of religious competence by individual actors, the creation of meaning in specific situations, and the creative appropriation of different models of religious action was brought center-stage. The invitation by Prof. H. Ichikawa to continue this line of research together and apply it to further cases in the ancient Mediterranean world was enthusiastically welcomed and allow to further develop ideas in new case studies. Thus, for the European side, the online seminars brought together researchers not only scholars from Erfurt but also old

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and new members now based at the universities of Marburg, Bologna, Milano, and Sao Paolo. We join the Japanese colleagues and Prof. Ichikawa in thanking the AJBI for enabling this thematic issue.