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Matthias Egeler (ed.), *Germanische Kultorte. Vergleichende, historische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Zugänge* (Münchener Nordistische Studien 24), Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag 2016, ISBN 978-3-8316-4529-9, 376 pp.

This anthology about comparative historical and archaeological approaches towards and the reception of Germanic cult places is based upon the lectures during an interdisciplinary symposium at the Institute for Nordic Philology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, in October 2015 and comprises eight articles in German and English. The anthology aims at fostering a multidisciplinary discourse about the concept of sacred spaces and cult places based on case studies of sacred spaces in Germanic religion, supplemented by perspectives on this topic from other disciplines such as the history of religions, or social studies.

Although the concepts of sacred space and cult place have been firmly established within a broad range of different disciplines such as archaeology, history of religions, and cultural as well as social studies, a standardized nomenclature for different conceptions of room and space and a clear-cut definition for important terms as *cult place*, *sacred landscape/space* remains a desideratum—even within single disciplines—, so that an interdisciplinary communication about this topic is frequently impeded. The present volume attempts to close this gap—at least within the study of Germanic pre-Christian religion—by presenting consistent definitions of essential terms and a broad overview about the current theoretical discussion as well as potential approaches to the study of the concept of sacred spaces.

The anthology is divided into four subject areas: terminology and theoretical concepts, comparing perspectives from historical and modern analogies, case studies on Germanic cult places and their modern reception in neo-pagan religion. These four main parts are framed by an extensive introduction and an epilogue in both German and English.

The first section comprises an extensive overview of the current theoretical debate and different approaches towards the essential nomenclature for the concept of cult places. Based on the terminology of cult, ritual and sacred space, chiefly stemming from the field of religious studies, and the approaches to spatial understanding and conceptions of room in ritual theory and cultural studies (especially the spatial turn), Jens Kugele presents a range of promising spacial-sociological options and illustrates their potential to analyze the interdependence of space and cult, which he demonstrates on the case study of a modern mosque, which was established in the rooms of a former goods station.

The second section presents possibilities and problems relative to

the analysis of cult places and religious spatial perspectives from both an historical and a contemporary sociological point of view, containing contributions by Christopher Metcalf about the entanglement of cult and architecture in Sumeric literature and by Isabel Laack about the contemporary neo-pagan adoption of the site of Glastonbury as ritual landscape. While Metcalf's short article focuses on the multidimensional spatial conception of architecture in the Sumeric cult and thereby relates to the problem of a consistent definition of use and function of cult rooms as addressed by Kugele, the elaborate contribution by Laack about her sociological field studies concerning neo-pagan ritual practices offers unique insights into and new perspectives on the (re-)construction of cult places and sacred spaces and provides new analogies and starting points for historical and archaeological research.

The third section contains the main part of the present volume with contributions by Lydia Carstens, Leszek Gardęła, Sigmund Oehrl and Matthias Egeler about the research on cult places in Germanic culture.

In her article, Carstens critically evaluates the traditional interpretation of Iron Age hall buildings as central places of cult and ritual by a detailed analysis of the archaeological findings inside these buildings. Her results emphasize the importance of a multidimensional spatial conception for the understanding of cult and ritual as already postulated by Kugele in his theoretical approach, which showed that the Iron Age hall has to be regarded primarily as a place of power and an element within a larger ritual landscape.

The concept of ritual landscapes as significant element for the Germanic understanding of cult places is also the focus of Gardęła's article, who chooses an interdisciplinary approach towards the interspaces between the graves in Viking Age cemeteries in Scandinavia. Based on archaeological features as well as accounts in Old Norse literature he highlights the holistic importance of pagan cemeteries as sacred space and cult place beyond their function as mere burial grounds.

With the example of the Gotlandic church of Bro, dating to the thirteenth century with a preceding building from the second half of the twelfth century, Oehrl critically investigates the often-neglected question of the importance of the continuous use of pagan cult places even after the Christianization of Scandinavia. Through a contrasting juxtaposition of the archaeological features and oral traditions, he emphasizes the ambiguities in the interpretation of an intended cult place continuity from pagan to Christian times.

Egeler's contribution shifts the focus from an archaeological perspective towards an analysis of cult places based on literary studies and

the history of religions, with an examination of three sacred places mentioned in *Landnámabók*, a medieval literary record of the settlement of Iceland. He provides strong evidence that these allegedly pagan conceptions of room and holiness are mostly younger narrative constructions within the cultural memory of a medieval Christian society.

The only contribution in the fourth section picks up on the reception of (actual or alleged) pagan cult places as approached from an historical-archaeological point of view by Oehrl and Egeler. Julia Dippel puts these within a contemporary context and thereby relates to Laack's article in the second section. Starting with an overview of the different developments of present day Germanic neo-paganism, Dippel presents some examples of how the identification and legitimation of a specific religious self-image and the establishment of a distinct identity in opposition to the modern world are based on and connected to the (re-) construction and conception of (alleged) prehistorical cult places.

Albeit not a complete overview of the current state of research due to the limited range, the present volume gives a good survey of potential approaches, problems and concepts for the analysis of the entanglement of place and cult against the background of the spatial turn. The book's initial theoretical debate which presents different models for the approach of spatial perspectives as well as a substantiated nomenclature for important termini, can be regarded as an especially valuable help for further investigations of the sacred space.

The two contributions about the current (re-)use of cult places against the background of the often scarce and ambivalent sources in archaeological investigations are also of special value and interest, as they present the multidimensional and rarely dogmatic modern approaches towards cult places from a sociological perspective. Moreover, they provide impressive demonstrations of how scarce and disparate traces the cultic use of sacred spaces might leave in the soil. Thus, both investigations help us broadening our understanding of archaeological features in a cultic context.

With this combination of theoretical, historical and sociological perspectives, the volume provides an excellent basis for the analysis of the conception of the sacred space in Germanic culture as well as several case studies with new and relevant results from archaeological research on this special topic.

Matthias Toplak

Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Germany

matthias-simon.toplak@uni-tuebingen.de