

## Notes from the SBL Meals in the Greco-Roman World Seminar (New Orleans, 2009)

[Presentations on Hal Taussig's monograph by Dennis Smith, Angela Standhartinger, Matthias Klinghardt]

[discussion]

DS: question about the definition of "ritual" being used relative to the meal: the meal as a whole (HT) or the components (MK).

MK: it is important to consider whole sequence of events that is set, perhaps should not isolate particular aspects, though sources seem to be more interested in talking about particular aspects of the meal.

[short discussion and some questions on hymns/prayers]

MK: relative to prayers, it is hard to distinguish prayers and hymns form-critically. Sources make no distinction.

HT: Prayers and songs can be the same or different, depending on the context

AS: What is missing in Philippians 2 is invocation and request – that would be a normal greek hymn (only the middle part). Where is hymn situated in "grammar" of meal?

Andrew McGowan: on libations and imperial cult – imperial cult changes over first two centuries CE, so this is dynamic, not fixed horizon of interpretation. Did they really pour the libation on the ground? K. Bell would say it makes a difference whether they did or didn't.

HT: agrees with libation issue raised – just trying to free 1 Cor. 10 of mandate; Roman imperial practices not fixed script, but it is relatively crucial in 1st century as well.

MK: 1 Clement – an intercession for the emperor in the middle; possible to sing a prayer or hymn to the emperor w/o pouring to the emperor

Susan Marks: sometimes not doing an action is a way of engaging it; not pouring doesn't take it out of the ritual discussion. On the issue of "social experimentation" – this language seems to go further than the ritual discussion. Bell is careful not to recuperate action. There is rather implicit experimentation. Other memorable social experimentation is beyond that. What can we know separate from the texts? Notes that it is interesting that readers of this monograph want "thick description." In Bell, emphasis not on ritual shaping texts and actions but *bodies* shaping texts and actions.

HT: notes these two meals sessions complement one another. The bodies focus is more extensive than ritual theory, but other theorizing needs to be done as well.

Phil Harland: likes meal as location for identification, locus for understanding similarity/difference, unity/diversity. There is a tension in HT's approaches: similarity/difference – common practice across Mediterranean, but Christians specifically different in their alternative social visions, bold experimentation. Unity/diversity – diversity of groups of Jesus followers, but not much diversity in terms of Christians and anti-imperialism.

HT: (response to PH) indebted to PH's work in this book; meals are same in saying "let's talk about difference." Rhetoric of social experimentation is meant to be over-against "belief." Perhaps rhetoric is hyperbolic. On unity/diversity – PH reads him correctly, but HT will continue to press this question. Importance of counter-imperial lens remains.

AS: must start thinking about special Christian adaptations of the meal practice, and space issues (Luke 24:28, upper room in Passion, graveyard in Acts of Thecla)

MK: detects a common grammar for meals, wants to tune into semantics; to say "Christian adaptation" is misleading b/c one cannot speak without using grammar. Must look at single instances of meal practices – one can assume each part of ritual is there in minds of participants, even if not mentioned. On "thick description": don't get too thick, since particular semantics need to get through

Jennifer Glancy: Three issues: 1) in terms of AS's paper: where are the places/spaces where these are taking place (centrality of graveyard meals). 2) practice/text relationship is a thorn in the side – Liz Clark on linguistic turn, then Patricia Cox Miller on "material swerve." 3) relative to K. Bell – so convinced by "performance" that "adaptation" is troubling for its suggestion of norm and variations.

EA: imperial/anti-imperial questions: everyone in the world is negotiating relationship to imperium, and this is not just about cult. We need a thick-description of ways that this is taking place. Wary of "anti-imperial." Wants to get a form-critical handle on hymns/prayers, but perhaps even a "form criticism of action" might be developed. She is not convinced that utterances stay put in their forms (for instances where Paul quotes (maybe) a piece of a hymn). This is not a quotation, but a new construction, new performance. Recontextualization is a new performance. Form questions are important for seeing shifts but should not blind us from these shifts.

HT: Clarification: "counter-imperial": anxiety about living under imperial control so high that it can only be addressed with implicitness of ritual.

DS: response to EA and JG: reminder that what fits into these text is performed and interpretation is in mix of text/place/people. Is meal context a default contexts for community conversation?

Jae Won Lee: thick description is important, but there is always a space left to fill. HT's methodology allows for this space. Is it relevant to ask "origins" questions of social experimentation? What causes a community to practice/improvise through meal context? The question of narrative and the meal: form-criticism is not criteria for whether something is happening at the meal

Lillian Larsen: considering the trajectory of meals through monasticism, how destabilization changes to restabilization in monastic context. How does later practice cause one to rethink or enrich our thinking on earlier practices?

[questions from gallery]