

Editorial

Jan N. Bremmer: Scholar, Teacher, and Friend

This special issue of *Communio Viatorum* is dedicated, with gratitude and affection, to Jan N. Bremmer on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. It goes back to a small symposium held in his honour in Regensburg in December 2023, at which most of the papers published here were presented. The symposium was organized as a surprise celebration for his 79th birthday. This issue brings together contributions from his friends, colleagues, and former students, and it reflects the remarkably broad range of subjects that have occupied Jan throughout his distinguished scholarly career.

Jan Bremmer has been one of the most influential and prolific scholars in the study of the ancient world for more than five decades. His work has profoundly shaped our understanding of various aspects of Greek religion and mythology, including ancient concepts of the soul and afterlife, mystery cults, ritual and initiation, and magic. He has also made significant contributions to the study of early Christianity, especially martyrdom traditions, and Christian apocryphal literature with a special focus on Apostle narratives. By combining philological precision with historical insight and an openness to anthropological and comparative approaches, he has consistently shed light on fundamental questions concerning religious beliefs, practices and identities in antiquity.

Jan was born in Groningen in 1944 to Rolf Hendrik Bremmer, a Calvinist minister and church historian, and Lucy Lindeboom. He received his education at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Bristol. His academic career began at Utrecht University, after which he served as Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Groningen from 1990 until his retirement in 2009, where he also held the position of dean from 1996 to 2005. He has received international recognition for his scholarship through numerous visiting lectureships, fellowships and honours, including the Order of Orange-Nassau and his election as Corresponding Member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

One could not imagine Jan without his wife. Since 1969, Jan has been married to Christine (née Bartlett), whom he met during his student years. Throughout his long academic career, Christine has been a constant source of support and companionship, accompanying him to countless conferences, lectures, and scholarly gatherings. Together, Jan and Christine have raised four children – Benjamin, Melissa, Rebecca, and Daisy. Furthermore, throughout his illustrious career, Jan successfully supervised numerous undergraduate and postgraduate students, and he also became a teacher and mentor to many others, including the two of us, as well as those contributing to this issue.

One of Jan's most remarkable qualities as a scholar is his ability to combine an extremely broad overview of source material and encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of scholarship with a constant engagement with most recent approaches and discoveries. His work reminds us that genuine innovation does not arise from neglecting the achievements of previous generations, but from building upon them critically and creatively. Equally characteristic is his keen historical judgment and his capacity to distinguish the plausible from the merely fashionable, the well-founded argument from the attractive speculation. In an academic world often tempted by novelty for its own sake, Jan has consistently demonstrated that rigorous scholarship requires both intellectual curiosity and critical discipline.

Although Jan has never been a scholar primarily concerned with producing a large number of monographs, the books he has written, such as *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (1983), *Greek Religion* (1994, ²2021), and *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (2001), have become standard reference points in the study of ancient religion.¹ Yet his scholarly achievement is more fully reflected in the hundreds of articles, essays, encyclopaedia entries, and studies that he has contributed to journals and collective volumes over the course of five decades. These publications have repeatedly opened new avenues of inquiry and provided authoritative assessments of longstanding problems. A representative selection of this immense body of scholarly work is now available in three volumes of collected studies, published by Mohr Siebeck in Tübingen. These volumes vividly demonstrate the breadth of his

¹ Jan N. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, New Surveys in the Classics 24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Second revised edition as *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

research interests and expertise.² Together, they offer a fitting testimony to a career distinguished not only by erudition and productivity, but also by an exceptional capacity to ask important questions and to illuminate them with clarity, balance, and critical insight.

As previously mentioned, Jan has also made a significant contribution to the study of early Christian apocryphal literature, particularly with regard to apocryphal acts, martyrdoms and related traditions. His influence on the field extends beyond his own publications, as he became the founding editor of the *Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha* (SECA) series with Peeters Publishers, Leuven. This series has become a major platform for world-leading scholarship in the field.

However, this is by no means exhaustive. Jan is a humorous, open-minded, lifelong learner and a wonderful partner in dialogue. He always has an open ear for the needs of early career scholars. In other words: Jan is young! We hope he always will be.

We are grateful to the editors of *Communio Viatorum* for hosting this collection of essays, despite it not being their usual practice. We appreciate their help and flexibility. It allows us to celebrate a great scholar and wonderful friend with this little volume. *Ad multos annos!*

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- 2 Jan N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity. Collected Essays I* (WUNT 379; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Jan N. Bremmer, *The World of Greek Religion and Mythology. Collected Essays II* (WUNT 433; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019); Jan N. Bremmer, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire Collected Essays III* (WUNT 547; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025).