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The points of contact between gender, sex and the sacred represent a particular problem area when it comes to locating gender and sexuality in ancient societies. Older research, which was predominantly influenced by Christian moral standards, found any link between sexuality and religion inappropriate and repulsive, but was fascinated at the same. Accordingly, "temple prostitution" appeared as a marker of alterity that was not fundamentally questioned. However, the phenomenon was either culturally outsourced, especially to the "East", or temporally passed on to the distant past. Supposedly it was widespread in "foreign cultures" and to be understood as a "fertility ritual".

The volume aims to avoid the methodological pitfalls and circular reasoning that threaten such approaches by bringing together contributions from various academic disciplines on the topic of temple prostitution. Specialists in the cultures of the Ancient Near East and Biblical studies, of Egypt, Persia and Greece comment on the relevant terminology and definitions of "temple prostitution". They present sources from different cultures as well as the respective state of research. A contribution about India, where the Devadasis system was only officially banned in 1988 opens up the topic to the present.

For each culture discussed, the question arises as to whether temple prostitution ever existed in its area. Is it possible that in many individual cases it is a foreign attribution from ancient sources or even a fantasy constructed by modern research? However, the interest of the contributions clearly goes beyond this narrowing of the question. Rather, they attempt to situate sources previously discussed in the context of temple prostitution within culturally specific religious discourses and gender images, thus expanding our knowledge of the relationship between sexuality, prostitution and religion in individual cultures.

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