

International Workshop

**Materialities of Everyday Religiosity:  
Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in Turkey and Iran**

Workshop Date: 17-20 June 2021

Venue: Orient-Institut Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey (online via Zoom)

To register contact [Materialitiesofreligiosity@gmail.com](mailto:Materialitiesofreligiosity@gmail.com)

Organised by:

Katja Rieck  
Esther Voswinckel Filiz  
Robert Langer



Image: Image: New shrine of Imam Husayn, made in Qom on its way to Kerbala on 'the arch of deliverance', January 2013  
Taken by: Amir Hesaminajd, kindly provided by Sepideh Parsapajouh, CéSoR-EHESS, Paris

 ORIENT-INSTITUT  
ISTANBUL

Max Weber  
Stiftung  
  
Deutsche  
Geisteswissenschaftliche  
Institute im Ausland

SPONSORED BY THE  
 Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research

## About the Workshop

Until recently, the academic tradition of the study of religions in European and North American research institutions and universities did not systematically research the materiality of religious practices. A propensity of the academic study of religion, including *Islamwissenschaft*/ Oriental studies, to privilege textual traditions has shown itself to be persistent. However, since the 1980s, as an outcome of the constructivist turn in the social sciences and humanities, the field of ‘new materiality studies’ emerged, which contributed to the so-called material turn, influenced by authors such as Bruno Latour and Arjun Appadurai. By the 2000s, this ‘material’ research perspective was systematically taken up by scholars of religion. Taken forward by Birgit Meyer and the contributors to the journal *Material Religion* founded by her, but echoing and reinforcing the wider trend of new materialism in social science and humanities research, “material religion” serves as a framework for highlighting and analysing the role of the materiality of religion in different fields and aspects of human activity, such as the production and trade of commodities, arts and handicrafts, travel and pilgrimage, landscape, habitation and architecture, media, food, clothing, etc. Such a comparative study of materialities “offers possibilities for an interdisciplinary discourse which transcends the European arena and includes other religions.”<sup>1</sup>

While older material-focused approaches, such as, for example, archaeology or museum anthropology, would rather understand all these areas of material-cultural production as manifestations of a mental or social structure, as popular *expressions* of belief or the like, the founders of the journal *Material Religion* wish to ask, “[H]ow religion happens materially, which is not to be confused with asking the much less helpful question of how religion is expressed in material form.”<sup>2</sup> Forms, materials, things, structures, etc. thus are not to be analysed simply as manifestations of faith but as generators of meaning. The material turn in the study of religions therefore shifts the focus from the analysis of people’s thoughts (beliefs) and language (discourses) towards religious practices from the perspective of what people do. What materials or forms do they use? How and what senses are invoked?

Yet, the material turn in the study of religion(s) is not limited to Europe and North America. As our ongoing discussions with colleagues in Iran and Turkey have shown, they too have begun to seriously engage with everyday religiosity and its materiality thereby bracketing normative, both ‘national-secular’ as well as ‘religious-theological’ considerations and discourses about ‘religion’ and setting the focus on ‘what people do’ and how religion is ‘lived’. However, the academic and wider contexts of this shared interest are different, which inflects upon the specific perspectives taken on the materiality of religion in the various scholarly settings. Although there is a strong tradition both in Turkey as well as in Iran to research material culture

---

<sup>1</sup> Belting, Hans, *Iconic Presence. Images in Religious Traditions*, (*Material Religion*, 12:2, 2016, pp. 235-237), quotation from page 235.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, Morgan et al., “The origin and mission of *Material Religion*” (*Religion* 40, 2010) 207–211, quotation from page 209.

in folklore and heritage studies (stemming from the nation-building projects of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), very few publications have emerged from the respective academic fields that frame their work specifically in the context of ‘new materiality studies’. This points precisely to the emergence of alternative inflections of a material turn in the study of religions in the wider scholarly community outside of Europe and North America. However, within the global academic discussions about the materiality of religion so far, scholarly voices from Turkey and Iran have been rarely heard.

By bringing together scholars from Iran, Turkey, Germany and France, the workshop will highlight the current state of the empirical study of religions in the respective countries and research contexts, foster reflections as to how these contexts impact research perspectives and methodologies and bring these specific perspectives and methodologies into critical dialogue with the material religion approach.

Katja Rieck  
Esther Voswinckel Filiz  
Robert Langer

## International Workshop

### **Materialities of Everyday Religiosity: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in Turkey and Iran**

Workshop Date: 17-20 June 2021

Venue: Orient-Institut Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey (online via Zoom)

#### **Workshop program\***

##### **Thursday, 17 June 2021**

- 14:00-14:30 Welcome remarks and introduction  
Richard Wittmann, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)  
Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 14:30-15:15 Materialities of Everyday Religion  
Katja Rakow, University of Utrecht (Utrecht, Netherlands)
- 15:15-15:30 *Break*

#### **Through the looking glass: Exploring the religious through its materials and artefacts**

- 15:30-16:00 The Dynamics of Lighting Objects in the *Āstān-e Qods-e Razavī* Museum  
Leila Tavangar Ranjbar, Philipps University Marburg (Marburg, Germany)
- 16:00-16:30 *Turbat al-Husayn*: Modern Presentation of an Early Shī'ī Practice  
S. M. Hadi Gerami, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (Tehran, Iran)
- 16:30-17:00 The Cherished Mementos: Materiality, Exoticism and Piety of *Hajj* Souvenirs in Qajar Iran (1794-1925)  
Peyman Eshaghi, Free University of Berlin (Berlin, Germany)
- 17:00-17:10 *Break*
- 17:10-17:40 Discussion and session closing remarks  
Discussant: Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 17:40-18:00 *Informal online get-together*  
(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

**\*Please note:** Times refer to UCT/GMT+3. Participants joining us from Europe, subtract one hour. Participants joining from Iran, please add 1 hour 30 minutes; from Pakistan add 2 hours.

## Friday, 18 June 2021

### Doors and windows: Architectural elements and the shaping of religious experience

- 14:00-14:30 Lattice Window and Shia Pilgrimage: Material Approaches to the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad, Iran  
Jabbar Rahmani, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies (Tehran, Iran)
- 14:30-15:00 The Materiality of Sufi Saint Shrines in Istanbul: The Case of the *Türbe* of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi (1541-1628) in Üsküdar  
Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:00-15:20 Discussion  
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:20-15:30 *Break*

### Spaces and places in the making of religious practices

- 15:30-16:00 Socio-Spatial Meaning of *Cemevis* in Urban Public Space: A Typology Study of Places of Worship in Istanbul  
Erhan Kurtarır, Yıldız Technical University (Ankara, Turkey)
- 16:00-16:30 Praying and Meditating in Museums: A Visit to the Museum of Mawlana Jalal-ud-din Rumi (1207-1273)  
Çiçek İleğiz, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany)
- 16:30-16:50 Discussion  
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 16:50-17:15 *Break*  
Optional informal get-together  
(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

### Pilgrimage and the body: Religiosity and the management of physical hardship

- 17:15-17:45 Between Self-Probation and Self-Preservation. The Role and Place of the Iranian Pilgrim's Body in the *Arba ĩn* Foot Pilgrimage  
Amélie Neuve-Eglise, Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Paris, France)
- 17:45-18:15 Hygienic Practices in the *Arba ĩn* March Ritual: A Survey Study  
Ali Yousofi, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)  
Atiyeh Sadeghi, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 18:15-18:45 Discussion and session closing remarks  
Discussant: Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

## **Saturday, 19 June 2021**

### **Pilgrimage and shared practices of devotion: Transformations and passages**

14:00-14:30 Sainly Statues and Sacred Icons: Interreligious Materiality at Istanbul's Latin Catholic Churches

Vanessa de Obaldía, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Mainz, Germany)

14:30-15:00 *Baraka* and the Materiality of Shrine Visits in India and Turkey

Smita Tewari Jassal, Middle Eastern Technical University (Ankara, Turkey)

15:00-15:20 Discussion

Chair: Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

15:20-15:30 *Break*

### **Embodiment and disembodiment in rituals: Shifting materialities of ritual performances**

15:30-16:00 The *Rifa'iyya* in South-Western Asia: Spiritual Organization and Performance of Ritual

Hasan Ali Khan, Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan)

Aliya Naqvi Iqbal, Institute of Business Administration Karachi (Karachi, Pakistan)

16:00-16:30 Dialogue in Shia Pilgrimage: Expressing *Haajat* [special need] in the Presence of a Living and Capable Object

Mahdi Kermani, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

Ahmadreza Asgharpour Masouleh, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

16:30-17:00 Corona Virus Pandemic and Innovative Forms of Religious Rituals in Iran

Masoud Fattahzadeh, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

17:00-17:30 Discussion and session closing remarks

Discussant: Esther Voswinckel Filiz (Orient-Institut Istanbul)

17:30-18:00 *Informal online get-together*

(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

## Sunday, 20 June 2021

### Faith on shifting grounds: Migration and the material challenges to religious practice

- 14:00-14:30 Reconstruction Centred on Material and Social Demands of the Traditional Ritual Context in Alevism  
Mehmet Ersal, İzmir Katip Çelebi University (İzmir, Turkey)
- 14:30-15:00 Material Mediators of the Non-Material: Objects, Materiality and Change in Mandaean Religious Practice  
Mehrdad Arabestani, University of Tehran (Tehran, Iran)
- 15:00-15:20 Discussion  
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:20-15:30 *Break*

### From state television to memes: Spiritual presence and religious practices in media societies

- 15.30-16:00 Digital Blessings for Holy Days: Performing Islamic Piety in the Age of Social Media  
Erkan Saka, Istanbul Bilgi University (Istanbul, Turkey)  
Ivo Furman, Istanbul Bilgi University (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 16:00-16:30 Digital Religion in Contemporary Iran: Everyday Religiosities on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic  
Rasool Akbari, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 16:30-17:00 The Relationship between Government and Everyday Religiosity in Iranian Media: The Dynamics and the Narration of *Arba'īn*  
Azra Ghandeharion, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 17:00-17:20 Discussion  
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 17:20-17:30 *Break*
- 17:30-18:30 Plenary discussion & workshop wrap-up  
Discussants:  
Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)  
Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)  
Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)