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

Organised by:
Katja Rieck
Esther Voswinckel Filiz
Robert Langer

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
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.”

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.” 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

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in folklore and heritage studies (stemming from the nation-building projects of the first half of the 20th 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
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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-Ḥusayn: Modern Presentation of an Early Shīʿī 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 İlengiz, 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 ‘in Foot Pilgrimage
Amélie Neuve-Eglise, Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Paris, France)

17:45-18:15  Hygienic Practices in the Arba ‘in 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 Saintly 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 Rifāʿīyya 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 (İstanbul, 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 (İstanbul, Turkey)
Ivo Furman, Istanbul Bilgi University (İstanbul, 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 ʿīn
Azra Ghandeharion, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
17:00-17:20  Discussion
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (İstanbul, Turkey)
17:20-17:30  Break
17:30-18:30  Plenary discussion & workshop wrap-up
Discussants:
Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (İstanbul, Turkey)
Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (İstanbul, Turkey)
Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (İstanbul, Turkey)