

## Call for Papers

Research Network “Dynamics of religious things in museum” (REDIM)

### Handling religious things: the material and the social in museums

International Workshop

10 - 12 June 2020, Philipps-Universität Marburg

**Museums** play an increasingly important role in the identity formation of individuals, communities and nations. Against this background, museums contribute significantly to the social perception of religious communities and believers. To what extent do museums influence those identities and perceptions, particularly as societies become more religiously diverse?

We assume that research on material religious culture, especially on **religious objects**, is a particularly fruitful means to acquire knowledge about forms of individualized, non-conformist, vernacular religious practices and ideas (see Houtman/Meyer 2012, Morgan et al. 2010, Cress 2014, Bräunlein 2014, Bowman/Volk 2014). Furthermore, we assume that the meaning of objects is a product of the interaction between people and artefacts. This applies to religious practices as well as to museum contexts. Both have to be taken into account and are deserving of analyzation.

We also consider **processes of museumization** as expressions of existing orders of knowledge. Thus, displays of religious objects represent categorizations, including the construction of religion. They offer elements of social interpretative repertoires (see Bräunlein 2012, te Heesen/Vöhringer 2014).

In our research, the focus is on different **contexts and actors** (believers/practitioners, collectors, curators, scientists, museum visitors) and their **relation to and interaction with** the objects. Our analyses are directed at the religious handling and affordance of objects, as well as at processes of museumization and exhibitions, and the provenance of various religious artefacts (Zillien 2008, Dudley 2012, Paine 2013, Scholze 2004). Special attention is paid to the staging and performance of religious objects in museums. On the one hand, we ask how religious atmospheres and religion(s) are constructed (Cress 2019, Radermacher 2018). On the other, we

analyze how the handling of objects in museums leads to the secularization of objects considered sacred by believers.

We welcome contributions from different disciplines and methodological approaches to theoretical questions and concepts as well as to the following questions and topics, among others:

- How is religion (as a category) or are religions (as traditional patterns) presented and reflected in the contexts of both secular and religious museums? How do particular ways of exhibiting religious objects in museums influence the perception of religion(s) in society?
- When and by whom is an object considered “sacred”? Which characteristics qualify objects as “sacred”? Who defines these characteristics? How can such processes be represented in a museum?
- What happens to religious objects when they become part of a museum collection? Does their previous “sacred” significance disappear?
- Which objects are selected for purchase by whom? Why are some objects exhibited while others disappear into the archives? Which orders of knowledge in general and categorisations of religion, non-religion, and secularity in particular become visible through these decisions?
- Do religious objects receive new meanings within the context of an exhibition? Does the secular space become sacred when religious objects are exhibited and staged? What happens to religious objects if they are presented in museums run by a religious community/organization with beliefs that differ from the religious tradition to which the objects belong?
- What effects do exhibitions of religion(s) have on the visitors’ perceptions of religion(s) in society?

**Proposals** have to be submitted electronically to [ramona.jelinekmenke@uni-marburg.de](mailto:ramona.jelinekmenke@uni-marburg.de). The deadline for paper proposals (title and abstract of max. 250 words) is **5 December 2019**.

The conference language is English.

There is no participation fee. Hotel and travel costs will **not** be covered.

For further information, please contact the organizer of the workshop.

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