

Call for Presentations

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

Religious Materials Emic Perspectives - Etic Constructions - Museum Classifications

Online Conference

3rd – 6th June 2021

Religious materials are objects in diverse contexts: religious beliefs and practices; academic research and theories; as well as museum inventories, restorations, and displays. As different as these contexts may seem, they are intimately entangled: Academic research claims to reconstruct religious contexts (**emic perspective**) from an outsider's position, to analyse them, and eventually to make them comprehensible to others. In doing so, researchers create a network of terms and concepts, in order to systematically capture emic perspectives, their conditions, and their consequences, in a way that is academically accessible. They thereby create their own interpretation of reality (**etic construction**). However, research not only takes place in the religious field, but also may refer to religious objects in the museum. Museums, in turn, make reference to both religious contexts and academic research. For example, in determining whether an object is religious and, if so, to which religious tradition it is assigned (**museum classifications**), museum staff rely both on observation of everyday religious life, as well as on insights and concepts from research. Furthermore, they also reflect on these when exhibiting religious materials. It should be recognised that neither research nor museums are free of individual, socio-politically motivated premises. Religious materials thus always exist in relation to various actors – to those who use them, who research them, who exhibit and view them – and this relation, in turn, results in its own particular dynamics, depending on the context.

With their exhibitions and other offerings, museums have an impact on society. They offer elements of socially interpretative repertoires (Bräunlein 2012, te Heesen/Vöhringer 2014). This also includes religious individuals and groups receiving academic research, and relating to museums and their objects. For some, museums become places of identity and community building – for others, museums are places of injustice. In some cases, looted objects are then returned. Against the background of the latter, the understanding of the function of museums has changed in recent years: While museums in the 19th and 20th centuries were seen primarily as archives and preservers of a so-called cultural heritage (*old museology*), in *new*

museology they are understood as social, fluid spaces (Cameron 2013, Gonçalves 2019) that are open to processes of negotiation and encounter.

Religious materials, as well as their collection and exhibition, reflect all these dynamics. Nevertheless, it is important to note that religious materials are not simply points of reflection, and thus passive objects. From a religious perspective, materials can be living and active subjects. This emic perspective is increasingly taken into account in academic research, and is partly integrated into its theoretical approaches (Hazard 2013). In the museum, the question arises of how to deal with objects that are, from certain perspectives, alive and effective. At the very least, museums are faced with the challenge of appropriately presenting this perspective – the living contexts of the objects and the dynamics associated with them – in an apparently static, and often secularly framed, place. This means that museums have to deal with both emic and etic perspectives and demands.

The conference focuses on these **dynamic entanglements of religious materials** and raises numerous questions, namely:

- How do religious contexts relate to the material dimension of the social? What role do material objects play in or for religious beliefs and practices? What identifies these beliefs and practices as religious?
- To what extent do religious actors refer to academic research on religious materials and/or the musealisation of religious objects?
- What are the differences between religious and academic approaches to religious materials?
- What are the different academic approaches to religious materials?
- How can an etic construction of emic perspectives on religious materials succeed?
- What role do museums play in academic research on religious materials?
- How do museums deal with religious materials? What are the specific challenges in doing so?
- What roles do both religious everyday life and academic research play in different work involving religious materials in the museum?
- What are the consequences for museums, of the tension between emic perspectives and etic constructions?

We welcome contributions from various disciplines, and with different methodological approaches to case studies as well as to theoretical questions and concepts.

The conference **will take place online from 3rd to 6th June 2021**. It is intended that the contributions will be produced in audiovisual form prior to the conference, and made available to the participants. During the conference, the contributions will be discussed in panels. There is the possibility of publishing contributions in an audiovisual conference volume.

Proposals must be submitted electronically, to ramona.jelinekmenke@uni-marburg.de. The deadline for paper proposals (**title and abstract of max. 200 words**) is **7th March 2021**.

You will receive an acceptance or rejection by 15th March 2021. Upon acceptance of your abstract, you will receive further information about the format of your audiovisual contribution.

The **audiovisual contributions** must be submitted by **1st May 2021**.

The conference language is English.

There is no participation fee.

For further information, please contact the conference organiser (ramona.jelinekmenke@uni-marburg.de).