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Comparative Religion, History of Religion

Bookish Traditions: Authority and the Book in Scripturalist Religions

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As this course is supported by a grant from [INTAS](#), which covers the participation costs of selected applicants from NIS countries (New Independent States of the former Soviet Union) applications from these countries are encouraged.

NIS countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Grant recipients are expected to be of 35 years of age or less at the starting date of the course and must be permanently living in one of the NIS and be NIS citizens. (NIS scientists with a permanent residence outside the NIS or with a temporary research position lasting longer than 6 months outside the NIS at the time of the summer school are not eligible to receive INTAS support.)

The INTAS grant includes tuition fee, accommodation, subsistence and travel costs at the cheapest possible price (APEX, PEX or "excursion" must be used). Visa and travel insurance expenses may be included in the travel costs.

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PREAMBLES

As a follow-up to our Summer School 2004 "Reconsidering Islamic Reformism in Comparative Perspective", and in anticipation of the possibility of nursing the growth of comparative religion at the CEU, we are shifting the focus for 2005 to reflect both the outcome of the 2004 Summer School and the need to work more strongly in comparative terms with other religious traditions.

For Latin Christianity religious Reform could not exist without a reconsideration of Scripture in terms of the technical and conceptual means that became to a large extent central as they crystallized with the advent of print culture and the rise of humanistic philology correlative with it. Both generated a notion of textual and interpretative definitiveness, facilitated by the techniques adumbrated by humanist antiquarianism and energized by the Reformation slogan *ad fontes*. The subsequent rise of positivism in historical study in the nineteenth century completed this movement. A broadly parallel, but by no means identical, development holds true for Islam or Orthodox Christianity. In both, manuscript culture and traditional philology lasted long into the nineteenth century before developments took place that laid the grounds for Muslim reform (but paradoxically not for reform in Orthodox Christianity) as well as reformed and modernized forms of Hinduism and Buddhism. Scripture acquired a very new conception in terms of this process, and the proposal below seeks to describe, analyze and take stock of this shift in terms both of notions of scripture antedating it, and of its outcomes for major world religions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

It is one of the ironies of the modern age that the advent of modernity reinforced the status and the authority of the Book in scriptural religions, and facilitated the rigors of its literal reading. Even at the present transitional moment, which with Information Technology is acquiring yet another epochal revolution with results still unforeseeable, the authority of the Book seems smoothly to accommodate the new means and tastes in the transmission of knowledge, religious and profane, and its modes of communication and easy generalization.

While during the modern age secularism and religious Reformism entered into a variety of relationships, all attempts at religious reform, both in theory and in practice, were based on a return to the textual foundations of religion. Such textuality acquired a new sense and a new form of stability and self-referentiality, made more accessible by rising literacy and by the vernacular translations of the canon, now rendered more stable with print and philology, all of which was in many instances allied with the historicism of nationalist and para-nationalist movements. This is a conspicuous feature not only of monotheistic religions, but is a development that led also to the creation of a new, textualized form of Hinduism based on the Vedas, and a form of Buddhism which has been described as "Protestant". In monotheistic religions, as in what a prominent scholar called the "semitization of Hinduism", it has made possible the rise of fundamentalism. One of the questions that require the attention of the Summer School the distinctions and convergences between fundamentalist literalism, and pre-modern movements of revivalism based on scripturalist impulses.

The return to the textual foundation of the religion does not, however, relate to the Book as divine or otherwise hallowed word alone. It has very determinate consequences for the Book as text definitively established, for the text as physical object, and for the Book as a concept, not least a concept that in the modern redaction is in a sense de-traditionalized, rid of the techniques of medieval glossators and commentators. Of equal importance is that this return to textual foundations calls up new techniques of reading and interpretation informed by novel notions of objectivity and historicity, clearly distinct but not entirely removed from the rhetorical techniques of late antique and medieval interpretation Jewish, Christian and Muslim. By the same stroke, the move *ad fontes* embarks upon a re-writing, refashioning and reconfiguration of religious traditions, exegetical and otherwise, and ultimately the systematic reordering of canonical literature.

Thus the purpose of the Summer School is to examine the transformations from the pre-modern to the early modern and modern periods in the textual formation of major religions. This calls for considering the imprint of modern modes of text production (the definitively fixed physical text), modern styles of text arrangements (refashioning the canon and regimes of intertextuality), and the very notion of canonical text (hermeneutics and techniques of reading).

It would also be a desideratum to develop a vocabulary, which allows for communication among scholars from the various domains relevant to this issue. To this end, the Summer School will bring together experts from the various disciplines involved (history of religion, rhetoric and hermeneutics, historiography and philology), and address studies from these respective fields.

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE:

1. Thematic

The central focus of the discussions will be the authority of the Book. While the authority in the pre-modern lay with the exegetical and commentarial traditions, as well as the pragmatic occasions (doxological, theological, devotional, institutional, social, political, and cultural) in which the Book was conceived, received and used, the early modern and modern ages reaffirms the authority of the Book as a primary and integral text -- Catholic "integralism", for instance, is unthinkable without this shift. Only with the Book bereft of the long traditions of its reception and commentary, and with religion taking on the aspect of an abstract order separate from societies undergoing secularist transformation in a variety of respects, is it possible to suppose that a Levitical order, in which bookish traditions stand for social practices, might be taken as a political utopia.

Thus the summer school would address questions of how textual authority was established, how authority of the text and of the interpreting agency was established, what conditions made particular interpretations authoritative and enabled them to police the entire realm of the respective religion. The comparative element will come in on two axes, a vertical axis which examines the shifts and changes from the pre-modern to the modern periods, and a horizontal axis comparing Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Vedic versions of this movement *ad fontes*.

2. Procedural

While the first two days will serve as a general introduction to the overall theme, the third and fourth days will be devoted exclusively to the pre-modern period, including a one-day *practicum* at the end of the week devoted to the reading of specific medieval manuscript page from all religious traditions and their composition (text, commentary and supercommentary). The course will by the end of the first week continue with the moment of historical transition in preparation for the second week, during which subjects that are most salient for religious reformism will be addressed by way of topical discussions, allowing for direct comparative discussion.

For the overall procedure please consult the attached preliminary Timetable. Apart from the practicum day, every morning session will open with of a plenary seminar session, with the possibility to split the plenum for the second half of the morning, pending on interests and skills. The early afternoon sessions are mainly devoted for the presentation and discussion of the students' research, alternating with some afternoons for individual study or consultation. The late afternoon lecture series, given by the Summer School faculty, will be open to the public. All sessions will be attended by all participants and, if finances allow, the entire faculty.

PARTICIPANTS

It is hoped to attract students from all disciplines related to the themes discussed (patristics; medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the Reformation; religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Humanist antiquarianism and philology; historiography; hermeneutics), and from various regions reflecting different styles of dealing with these traditions.

Non-discrimination policy statement

Central European University does not discriminate on the basis of - including, but not limited to - race, colour, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation in administering its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.