

Religion as a Colonial Concept in Early Modern History (Africa, America, Asia)

The concept of religion transformed during Early Modern History, both in the “inner” debate generated by the collapse of Christianity, and in “outer” contexts, following a reaction to contacts with other cultures (Strenski 2006). Meant as a thematic section of our journal, the present call for papers aims to investigate “religion” as a modern concept and a colonial dispositif (Fitzgerald 2000, Masuzawa 2005). The modern concept of religion inspired different processes of “spiritual conquest” (Ricard 1933) – in discursive and practical terms – within the dynamics of the “mondialization” produced in the age of discoveries (Gruzinski 2004). The theme section will investigate, through a comparative methodology, the historical resemblances among simultaneous colonial processes taking place in the Americas (Bernand - Gruzinski 1988, Duviols 1971, and MacCormack 1991), Africa (Chidester 1996), and Asia (Županov 2005). Critical reflection on historical analogies and differences will contribute to a global cartography of the uses of the concept of religion during Early Modern History. We aim to provide, on the one hand, an archaeology of the general modern concept of religion, and, on the other, a genealogy of religious studies (Borgeaud 2004, Stroumsa 2010), as a result of the international academic efforts towards a description, comparison, classification and explanation of religion. We expect the authors to investigate the “invention” of religion as a “generalized” concept. Critical voices making use of colonial sources, such as missionary works, travel writings, etc., would be particularly welcome, as well as contributions aimed to emphasize a “connected history of religions” (Subrahmanyam 2005).

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Scientific board:

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