



Towards a Global History of Religion: Editors' Note

Andrea Rota / Anja Kirsch

Published on 29/01/2024

Editors' Note


Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz's article at the core of this special issue of *ARGOS* marks an early foray into a subject that has recently gained traction in the conceptual and methodological debates within religious studies: the development of a *Global History of Religion*. Initially published under the title "Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte um aussereuropäische Religionsbegriffe," this work appeared in the conference anthology *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2013, 151–200). The anthology, edited by Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger, Christoph Kleine, and Astrid van Nahl, was a product of the 2010 conference held by the Workgroup on Asian Religious History (AKAR), which is part of the German Association for the Study of Religions (DVRW). Established in 1998, AKAR seeks to foster connections among scholars specializing in Asian religions and to particularly bolster historical research on non-European cultures. In this vein, the workgroup itself may be viewed as a global initiative, endeavoring to diversify academic perspectives on religion and to internationalize theoretical and methodological debates.

The conference, under the provocative title "Is 'Religion' a European Invention?", encouraged participants to critically examine possible semantic and functional equivalents to religion within Asian religious history. This discussion contributes to the development of a metalanguage, a central task of our discipline, yet it is deeply entwined with a pervasive challenge faced by all scholars who attempt to contribute to knowledge production across linguistic boundaries: the issue of translation.

Translations are inherently complex, as they necessarily involve acts of comparison and interpretation. To translate words is to translate concepts, and ultimately, cultures. Just as neutral knowledge production is unattainable, so too is neutral translation. Academic translations, laden with specialized topics and technical terminology, are certainly not exempt from these complexities. Despite not being professional translators, we have undertaken this challenge with the intention of making Kollmar-Paulenz's text accessible to a broader international audience.

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To quote this article: Rota, Andrea / Anja Kirsch. 2024. "Towards a Global History of Religion: Editors' Note." *ARGOS* 3 (2) Special Issue *Towards a Global History of Religion*, 3–5. DOI: 10.26034/fr.argos.2024.4768.

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We are convinced that her 2013 seminal article significantly contributes to the debate on the epistemic framework essential to ground a *Global History of Religion* that conceptually extends beyond the nineteenth century and the emergence of a (colonial) umbrella term “religion.” Indeed, we believe that a global approach to the history of religion that seeks to transcend cultural essentialism and the national paradigm must be translatable into other languages.

Echoing Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz’s assertion that “the realization of the cultural contextuality of academic languages should not lead to a rejection of a common academic vocabulary” (2024: 9),¹ we have invited experts in the fields of Asian religions and the global history of religion to respond to her research program drawing on their respective research fields and focuses. The ensuing contributions engage with ongoing conceptual, methodological, and theoretical debates in the study of religion, critically pointing to enduring challenges and new research opportunities. Some contributors encountered Kollmar-Paulenz’s work for the first time through its English translation, whereas most were already well acquainted with her writings, being close colleagues and friends. Reflecting this personal relationship, many authors affectionately address her as Nina. Thus, this special issue represents not only an academic endeavor but also a unique opportunity to celebrate Prof. Dr. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz upon her retirement in late 2023.

Due to various life circumstances, not everyone who wished to contribute to this special issue was able to do so. However, they join many others in congratulating Nina on her retirement. We extend our profound gratitude and respect to Nina, an outstanding scholar and a role model for future generations of academics:

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|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Sven Bretfeld | Michael Bergunder | Sergio Botta |
| Edith Franke | Oliver Freiberger | Maria Chiara Giorda |
| Amy Heller | Magali Jenni | Christoph Kleine |
| Yannick Laurent | Carola Lorea | Christoph Monnot |
| Anja Kirsch | Oliver Krüger | Alice Küng |
| Till Mostowlansky | Inken Prohl | Andrea Rota |
| Jens Schlieter | Hubert Seiwert | Piotr Sobkowiak |
| Ricarda Stegmann | Katja Triplett | Marion Wettstein |
| Michaela Wisler | Ülo Valk | |

Martin Baumann, president, on behalf of the *Swiss Society for the Study of Religion* and its affiliated institutes and organizations

¹ “Die Einsicht in die kulturelle Gebundenheit von Wissenschaftssprachen sollte jedoch nicht zu einem Verzicht auf ein gemeinsames wissenschaftliches Vokabular führen.” (Kollmar-Paulenz 2013: 155).

About the Editors

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