



Religion, Media, and Materiality

Introduction

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ABSTRACT This introduction to the Special Issue “Religion, Media, Materiality” succinctly outlines the central themes of media and authority, serving as *tertia comparationis* within the volume, and evokes their significance in addressing media changes from a transdisciplinary perspective. It surveys three theoretical frameworks and general perspectives on the interplay between religion, media, and authority, as put forth by Stewart Hoover, Birgit Meyer, and David Morgan. The discussion emphasises how the case studies examined by Sarit Shalev-Eyni, Ines Weinrich, Hanna Staehle, Giulia Evolvi, and Tim Karis actively engage with these frameworks. In doing so, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricate connections between media, authority, and religion, offering a detailed exploration of these overarching concepts.

KEYWORDS media, authority, materiality, mediation, sensational forms, generative entanglement

The articles gathered in this Special Issue stem from a three-day workshop on “Religion, Media, Materiality: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religious Authority” which took place in January 2018 in Bochum. The workshop was organised by Giulia Evolvi and Jessie Pons within the framework of the research group “Religion and Media” at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg (2008–2022). The concept of media that we posit encompasses both tangible objects like images, books, buildings as well as intangible elements like music or performances. It further extends to digital forms such as websites, social media, or phone applications. These material and immaterial objects are entangled in religious practice in many ways. The statue of a god brings him within human reach. Rendering him more tangible and relatable, it bridges the immanent, the here and now of the practitioner, with the transcendent that exists beyond the realm of physical existence. A blog provides a platform for fostering discussions on doctrines, disseminating guidance on practices, or challenging the stance of religious institutions (Evolvi 2020a; Kołodziejaska and Neumaier 2017). A website or an application on a smartphone can facilitate religious practices, offering a digital alternative to the person unable to attend service at a temple (Helland 2010; Maes 2022). It can also serve as a helpful reminder for Christians to pray or keep track of a Buddhist’s karma (Karis 2020; Bellar 2021). Whether analogue or digital, these media may be authorised and legitimated by religious institutions or contested and

rejected. As we explore the mechanisms by which these media become imbued with religious potency and are deemed acceptable in religious practice or channel discourses on religion, the issue of authority becomes central. Media may be sanctioned or contested by religious groups and conversely, it can serve as a platform to reinforce or challenge the stand of religious communities. To put this bluntly: religion authorises media and media authorises religion. Corollary to this, is the role of media in intra and inter-religious contact. Media can become the object of disputes within and across religious groups who will coalesce around consensual media uses. They can foster the interaction among religious communities, exemplified by sacred sites in Kerala serving as places of worship for Hindus, Christians, Jews, and Muslims (Arfeen 2022), or the dissolution of sectarian affiliations in online environments (Grieve 2014). The articles gathered in this volume provide nuanced case-studies of the entanglement between religion, media, and authority.

The fields of religion and materiality, religion and media or digital religion are well-established. Since the 1980s, the cultural dynamics that “the material,” “objects” or “things” entail have become central to culture studies (Csikszentmihalyi and Halton 1981; Appadurai 1986). The notion that objects possess a social life or a biography, as articulated by Kopytoff (1986), and the recognition that throughout their trajectory, they become entwined in shifting value systems that warrant scrutiny, has had a profound impact on disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Building upon these paradigmatic changes, religious studies has turned its focus to the material dimension of religious life (McDannell 1995; Morgan 1998; Vásquez 2011; Eck 1985; Davis 2001; Schopen 2014; Pintchman and Dempsey 2016). Attention to the production, dissemination, and consumption of objects within various religious communities has not only amended the traditional emphasis on theologies and doctrines, but it has also provided a fresh prism through which to study them. To illustrate, Gérard Colas and Richard Davis have shown how competing Hindu theologies regarding divine corporeality or the ritual offering of *prasāda* can only be fully understood in connection with the rapid increase in the number of not only Hindu but also Buddhist and Jain cult images at the turn of the Common Era (Davis 2001; Colas 2012), leading Colas to speak of an “iconological crises of conscience” (“une crise de conscience iconologique”; Colas 2012, 36–38). These considerations on the intersection between religion and media have evolved at great pace in the last decade as mass media and new digital media have attracted scholarly attention (Hoover and Lundby 1997; Hoover 2006; Campbell 2012; Lundby 2013; Campbell and Tsuria 2021). Progressing through four waves that Morten Hosgaard and Margit Warburg as well as Heidi Campbell and Giulia Evolvi have delineated, research trajectory has shifted from a descriptive examination of new media practices to a more theoretical and interpretative framework (Hosgaard and Warburg 2005; Campbell and Evolvi 2020; Tsuria and Campbell 2021). The impact of the new media on belief systems, practices and their communities of users and their implications on notions of identity, community, and authority are explored through various theoretical and methodological approaches, often elaborated in relation to traditional media and attuned to digital culture (Helland 2005; Tsuria et al. 2017; Lundby and Evolvi 2021).

In discussing how religious authority is framed in relation to religious life, scholars—not least those gathered in this volume—have often drawn upon Weber’s categorisation of legal (based on laws and regulations and their institutional instances), traditional (derived from long-standing customs), and charismatic (grounded in a leader with exceptional qualities) authority (Weber 1921). Expanding and adapting Weber’s classical categories to digital environments, Campbell identifies four layers of religious authority (Campbell 2007): hierarchy (religious

leaders and communities who are recognised), structures (established religious organisations), ideologies (beliefs and doctrines), and texts (accepted teachings or books). As Pauline Hope Cheong underlines in her review of the growing literature on authority in relation to digital contexts, these various components may be intertwined, negotiated and transient. For instance, charismatic authority may fade or be “routinized into traditional or legal structures” (2021, 88). Authority can be singular or plural, contingent upon the multimodality of online and offline communication. Evolvi’s article on Neo-Pagan fora discussed below provides a lucid illustration the polymorphic nature of authority and of the multiple loci in which authority operates. Central to considerations on religious authority in relation to media is the impact of the introduction of new technologies on authority structures. While the shift from orality to writing in early Christianity or the role of the introduction of the press on shaping the Protestant Reformation are commonly cited as prototypical examples (Horsfield 2015), other studies have examined the shift from orality to scripturally in Daoism (Bokenkamp 1999) or the transition from aniconic to iconic representations of the Buddha or Mahāvīra in early Buddhism and Jainism (DeCaroli 2015; Cort 2010). As Knut Lundby and Giulia Evolvi put it “[w]hat counts as ‘new media’ changes as time goes by” (Lundby and Evolvi 2021, 233). In this context, Cheong highlights two contradictory dynamics in the relationship between religious authority and new digital media. The first is a logic of “disjuncture and displacement,” characterised by the challenge that the technology poses to traditional forms of authority and their potential to offer alternative models of religious practice and a more democratised access to religious knowledge. The second, a logic of “continuity and complementarity,” sees traditional religious organisations reinforced as leaders capitalise on new communication forms to expand their presence, to reach out to offline congregations through social media, or to reinforce official beliefs. Although Cheong grounds her observations in the contemporary sphere of digital media, the dialectic of dynamic and stability, the interplay between “weakening and strengthening” (Cheong 2021, 95) she underscores remains relevant to the case-studies examined below. Media not only serves as a channel for the negotiation, displacement or reification of religious authorities, as explored by Stewart Hoover, Giulia Evolvi, Hanna Staehle, and Tim Karis, but it also functions as an agent in stabilising belief, as discussed by David Morgan and Sarit Shalev-Eyni or in authorising practices, as emphasised by Ines Weinrich and Tim Karis. Whether centred on digital media or traditional ones, the contributions gathered in this volume illustrate how the nature of authority is multifaceted and assumes many forms and functions. Authority is alternately ascribed by and onto institutions, persons, and media and as we will underline, it is intimately connected to processes of legitimisation, authenticity, trust, and permissibility.

The editors of the volume invited authors to engage with three theoretical frameworks, or more generic stances on the role of media in religious communication presented by key scholars in the field of religion and (digital) media—Stewart Hoover, Birgit Meyer, and David Morgan—whom we were honoured to win for this volume. Authors have taken up the challenge as the themes of authority and media addressed in these “discussion-triggering” articles are explored in case-studies rooted in various geographical and historical contexts. In the following, we will revisit the articles by Hoover, Morgan and Meyer and highlight how the focused case-studies analysed by Sarit Shalev-Eyni, Ines Weinrich, Hanna Staehle, Giulia Evolvi and Tim Karis offer a finer-grained appreciation of these broad concepts and their entanglement. [4]

Mediation and Media (de)Authorising Religion

Hoover (2021) examines the entanglement between religion and media—internet, TV channels and newspapers—in modern times. He primarily situates his discussion in the U.S., a context which is unique on three counts: its “prodigious religious marketplace,” its “equally prodigious media marketplace” and its global relevance. According to Hoover, the convergence of the two fields of religion and media prevents from thinking of these as two separate categories. While religion is remade through the media, Hoover contends, provocatively, that media has become religious. What is at play, is a reconfiguration of these broad categories, their hierarchies, and their functions through their mutual permeation. Mainstream confessional groups are destabilised as media afford alternative spheres of religious practice and living religion. Reciprocally, media become increasingly religious not because they are imbued with religious qualities (contrary to Birgit Meyer’s “sensational forms”), but because they integrate new religious content in response to the competing religious marketplace. In that sense, religion and media interact in ways that become determinative. Key to Hoover’s essay is his discussion of authority, primarily conceived in terms of institutional structures of established traditions, and his delineation of the processes by which media factors in the negotiation of authority. From the middle of the twentieth century onward, religious institutions have become undermined as public confidence declined and new, more individualised and autonomous approaches to faith, emerged. As the author argues, the proliferation of media sources results in a dual process, the commodification of religions on the one hand and the redefinition of media themselves, bearing significant implications for religious authority. The burgeoning of media outlets not only enhances the exposure of alternative religious communities but also allows to cater a more diversified and specialised religious content, serving the needs of communities seeking legitimisation. In turn, secular media must realign and become more receptive to religious content. Within this evolving landscape, traditional institutions must grapple with the increasingly mediatised religious marketplace. While they may adapt, religious authority undergoes a process of increasing relativisation and horizontalization, marking a departure from traditional hierarchical structures. This trend becomes more pronounced in a globalised context where media-generated messages reach a wider audience, undergoing trans-nationalisation, publicization, and politicisation. [5]

The articles by Evolvi (2020b) and Staehle (2020) offer illuminating case studies that shed light on the processes emphasised by Hoover, both introducing alternative religious communities harnessing the power of internet to skilfully navigate the realm of online identity and authority negotiation. The Neo-Pagan forum examined by Evolvi exemplifies the emergence of new religious movements in the digital age while Staehle explores how the internet serves as a medium where traditional religious institutions are contested. The digital landscape, as revealed in these studies, operates as a dual force: it authorises new religious narratives while simultaneously weakening old ones. This dynamic is integral to the formation of what Anderson termed “imagined communities” (1991) with digital media acting as a conduit to assemble people, as articulated by Meyer (2020). [6]

Evolvi examines the case of the Neo-Pagan forum, The Celtic Connection, to delve into the dynamics of authority negotiation within digital spaces, with a specific focus on the role of material culture. Neo-Paganism, marked by its heterogeneity and lack of institutionalisation, serves as a compelling case-study for investigating authority and the relevance of materiality on the internet. Indeed, within Neo-Paganism, a term encompassing varied movements with [7]

shared characteristics, the emphasis on individualised and personalised practices challenges traditional notions of institutional religious authority. The importance of ritual over belief underscores the role of embodied practices and material culture, elements that may not seamlessly align with digital platforms. The concept of authority within such traditions is intricate, as demonstrated by Evolvi. In the case of The Celtic Connection, as founder of the website, Kardia Zoe holds informal authority. Yet authority is “fluid,” collective, and self-determined. Users, including the Council Elders (the website moderators) as well as experienced practitioners, contribute advice based on their individual experiences and asserting their claims to expertise. However, this “informal charismatic authority,” which Elvovi describes is only partial and bound to the affordances of the website: it is a forum to exchange experiences and expertise, to require council on aspects as diverse as how to reconcile the religion of their upbringing and one’s affiliation to Wicca or the type of wand one should use in rituals. It does not facilitate online rituals and the user will necessitate offline mentorship to complete his spiritual journey. Evolvi’s study also explores the role of materiality in these digital venues. The visual presentation of objects, including various utensils used in rituals and the sites where Neo-Pagan ceremonies typically unfold, serves not only to enrich the sensory experience and imagination of users, thus bridging the perceived gap between offline physicality and online instantiations, but also functions as a means of showcasing expertise. The visual documents posted by users function as tangible expressions of their competence in determining what a wand should look and feel like, but also serve to anchor their firsthand experiences in spiritually charged places like Stonehenge, where they report having touched the stone and sensed the unique atmosphere. In this sense, Evolvi’s study provides an interesting example of Henry Jenkin’s remediation, defined as the circulation of objects on several platforms (Jenkins 2008).

Hanna Staehle directs her attention to the Russian website “Ahilla.ru,” established in 2017 [8] by the former Russian Orthodox priest Aleksei Pluzhnikov and his partner Kseniia Volianskaia. The creation of this platform is a response to administrative reforms lead by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), its official rhetoric and its heightened politicisation following the enthronement of Patriarch Kirill in 2009. Ahilla.ru should be understood within the broader context of the ROC’s growing reliance on media to rejuvenate traditional religion, to engage with the unchurched and to shape a perception of Orthodoxy as “an integrative force of Russian society and a cornerstone of the state.” The ROC communicates its agenda through various channels, including broadcast media, official Church periodicals, Orthodox TV and radio stations, parish newspapers, and social networks. Staehle examines “how online communication enhances media non-professionals to reflect upon their experiences within institutional religious settings and make these experiences—previously unmediated and unknown—part of the media discourse.” This exemplifies Hoover’s assertion about the challenges posed by media to authority, illustrating that religious mainstream institutions can no longer maintain a “private conversation.” As Ahilla.ru provides a platform to empower unheard voices of the ROC to express themselves outside of the traditional frame of the church, the media sphere turns into “a battlefield.” Two competing narratives about the ROC emerge each related by distinct actors or groups: the organized ROC represented by high-clergymen and hierarchy, and low clergymen and laypeople who identify themselves as “church outcasts” and “wounded.” Ahilla.ru thus presents itself as a community united by its dissident purpose, shared values, and a collective disdain for offline hierarchies. This dialectic of opposition is communicated in terms of “them/us,” “the system/the people.” The narratives surrounding the ROC vary

significantly. On one hand, mainstream media's official narrative, criticised by Ahilla.ru, is perceived as distorted, politicized, corrupted, ritualized, and devoid of its sacred functions. On the other hand, Ahilla.ru presents an "authentic" narrative that delves into the unspoken issues within the Church, offering reflections and personal perspectives on beliefs and practices. The alternative narrative is expressed in a new genre of religious expression: the anonymous confession. Interestingly, this genre is inspired by *The Confession of a Former Novice*, a tale by Mariia Kikot and a critical portrayal of Orthodox establishment. The confessions stem from an anonymous questionnaire embedded into the architecture of the website which contains sixteen questions which touches on three levels of authority which align with Campell's categories: hierarchy, structure, and ideology. The questions are formulated in such a way that the confession both undermines the dominant rhetoric of the ROC authority and legitimises the alternative narrative. Having inside knowledge and first-hand experience, the "church" is legitimate to criticize the "Church" and in turn, establishes itself as the true, genuine, sincere ROC, guardian of its "original spiritual and moral qualities." This case study also unveils the embedded nature of media as elucidated by Birgit Meyer. Indeed, the dissenting views are articulated on a website through a distinctive format, employing a questionnaire that not only establishes a new genre—confessions—but also derives inspiration from a traditional medium, namely a novel. By tapping into the resonance of a well-known literary work, the website has the potential to enhance credibility of the messages it disseminates. This phenomenon aligns with McLuhan's concept that "the medium is the message" (1964), suggesting that the choice of medium itself imparts significant meaning to the communicated content.

Mediation and Authorising Sensational Forms

In her essay, Birgit Meyer (2020) pleads to approach religion as mediation, which she considers a powerful *tertium* to explore religion from a comparative perspective. As the author posits: "Religious transformations in past and present can fruitfully be analysed by tracing clashes over the use of old and new media (for example, the rejection of devotional images in favour of Bible reading in the post-Lutheran Reformation) in gathering followers and addressing the divine, just as tensions between adherents of different religions can be analysed as conflicts over appropriate uses of media." Meyer's conception of the religion-media nexus departs from that of Hoover's and Lundby's (1997) which takes media and religion as separate fields that become enmeshed in communication processes (and increasingly so with the appearance of new media). In this understanding of mediation, media plays a pivotal role in not only representing religion by sharing religious content but also in fostering communication among religious groups. In Meyer's take on mediation, media are understood as "material means for religious communication among humans and as material harbingers of a professed beyond conventionally referred to as spirits, gods, demons, ghosts, or God." Meyer does not presuppose the existence of the divine, a stance that critics argue would potentially confuse emic and etic categories. Instead, her methodology involves scrutinising the dialectics surrounding the articulation of the immanence/transcendence distinction and the role of media within that framework. Media are sensational forms through which a sense of transcendence is evoked and made tangible (forms that make the transcendent "sense-able"). They are not reducible to the object, the "stuff" that they constitute (a primary level), but encompass several levels: their materiality, their technological affordances in the sense of Gibson (1966), the ways in which they are deployed in religious practice, the sensory response they elicit, how their meaning is

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interpreted by their users and beholders, and the authorisation process they entail. As they are expected to “herald transcendence and enshrine sacrality,” sensational forms must be imbued with religious meaning, authenticated, and authorised. They must be “handled with care” within the framework of the religious habitus developed by religious groups. For Meyer, these “theologies of mediation” articulated by religious groups constitute a valuable *tertium* not only to identify commonalities and differences between traditions but to grasp their entanglement or trace clashes between competing conceptions of sensational forms.

The contributions of Tim Karis (2020) and Ines Weinrich (2020) significantly enrich this ongoing discourse and Birgit Meyer’s plea to “take the materiality of sensational forms seriously” and “question how these material forms impact on and are entangled with their users” finds resonance in these two articles. Through their focused case studies set in divergent contexts—twelfth-century Levant and the present day—Karis and Weinrich delve into the intrinsic embeddedness of media. They compellingly demonstrate how the material qualities of media not only garner authorisation suitable for their integration into religious practice but also play a pivotal role in shaping the strategies employed for authorisation. Sensational forms are both authorised and authorising. [10]

In her article, Weinrich examines the practice of chanting in Arab Sunni communities in Syria and Lebanon which she understands as a “sensational form” that serves religious mediation. The starting point of her exploration is the work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a twelfth century Sunni scholar, whose *Kitāb Ādāb as-samā‘ wa-l-wajd* (Book on the Etiquette of Listening and Ecsatsy) is often cited by Muslims in intra-religious disputes to defend the use of music in religious rituals. Weinrich’s case-study proves especially illuminating because it offers a clearer understanding of the composite nature of sensational forms and unveils the authorisation processes which underpin mediation. Although grasping the material properties of sound and its potential affordances may pose a challenge, Weinrich eloquently elucidates the sonic materiality inherent in chanting. As sensational form, chanting comprises the poetic and musical material (rhythm, type of instrument), the sounds produced by the performer (quality, technique, with words or without words) and the interaction between the performer and the listener. The listener’s response goes beyond the sensory perception of the audience but is evident in the physiological impact on the listeners and hereby becomes tangible. Music is classified in different musical modes according to the type of emotion they will elicit which will then manifest (i.e. become tangible) in outwardly responses, affects, emotions, and behaviour. Key to understanding Meyer’s concept of mediation and how music can be conceived as an authorised harbinger of the divine is Weinrich’s discussion of the concept *ḥuzn* (sorrow), which listening should evoke. As the author explains, *ḥuzn* is the feeling which “the result of the listener’s interaction with God, more precisely, the realisation of human shortcomings vis-à-vis divine excellence and grace.” It becomes clear how the choice of the correct mode—which generates a somatic response deemed acceptable for religious practice—is one condition of the authorisation. The analysis of al-Ghazālī’s work sheds light on further processes of authorisation. Authorisation is intricately linked to permissibility which is conditioned and contextual. Al-Ghazālī argues that the permissibility of performing and listening to music is for instance contingent upon the listener’s circumstances (e.g. gender, age), and that certain wind instruments and chordophones are deemed forbidden not solely due to their sonic characteristics but rather their association with reprehensible activities such as drinking or eroticism. Importantly, al-Ghazālī employs legal terminology to construct and legitimise his position, systematically dismantling the arguments of his opponents. To strengthen his stance, [11]

he draws upon common Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions. The authorisation of music as a sensational form is therefore classified according to effect and context.

Tim Karis examines Christian prayer apps, offering a contribution to this younger digital phenomenon from a much-needed systematic perspective. Karis engages with Meyer's concept of mediation and expands on the notion of authority, highlighting further authorisation strategies. By drawing on Meyer's take on mediation, Karis can establish a systematic (and typological) distinction between apps and how they relate to the mediation between immanence and transcendence. Apps such as *PrayerMate* or *Prayer Notebook*, remind the users to pray at a later point and outside the digital environment of the application. Other apps however, such as *Pray with Me*, give users the option to click "Pray" hence allowing them to directly perform a religious practice. Whereas in the former case, the app facilitates traditional religious practice outside of the digital environment of the app, in the second case, prayer takes place within the digital environment. In one case, the phone allows the user to pray, in the other case, the phone prays, "allegedly bridging the gap between the immanent and the transcendent." Karis raises here an important terminological and conceptual point: when we speak of a religious medium, a distinction must be drawn between a medium that transcends time and/or space (like any medium) in religious practice and a medium that generates the transcendent in religious practice. To explore how religious authority is produced in and through prayer apps, Karis draws on Campbell's four-layer model of religious authority (Campbell 2007) and Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988). Regarding their design and content, prayer apps do not move entirely away from traditional religious authority but may refer to it. This is manifest in the following: apps embed authoritative texts (Campbell's fourth layer), they are recommended by local priests (first layer), they are developed by local institutions (second layer), they refer to sacred spaces (Western Wall in Jerusalem) or they use a design and aesthetics that mimic traditional media (parchment). The aim is to give an authentic feel and as Karis puts it "the new immaterial medium borrows authority from the materiality of the traditional medium." Regarding their effect, Karis contends that apps displace traditional models of authority in that they are tools which allow practitioners to take their religious matter into their own hands. In that sense they "free themselves from traditional offline authority." However, while apps self-empower the individual, they also exert a form of more subtle power and "self-induced pressure" by micro-coordinating one's religious life and practice.

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Generative Entanglement, the Mutual Authorisation of Media and the Stabilisation of Belief

David Morgan evaluates the concept of "generative entanglement" (2020), understood as the interplay of two media—word and image—and how this interplay allows to give substance to evanescent, ephemeral, or undefined religious experiences and narratives. The premise to Morgan's discussion is that word and image are distinct in their essence and incommensurate: they comprise many variations (e.g. images can be mental or diagrammatic and words can be mental or textual), each have their own valence and agencies, impacting the hearer or viewers in distinct ways. This, Morgan argues, "urges the cultural analyst not to sever the performance or material work of the word or image from its 'meaning,' as if the medium could be extricated from either the significance or the speakers and viewers that it mediates." Word and image are not, or not only, accepted as carriers of meaning but meaning results from and consists in the

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configuration of several factors in an extended network of objects, agents, relationships, and experiences. Becoming entangled, word and image co-operate in the sense that they mediate and shape religious experience and produce new meaning through a synergistic effect. Morgan roots his demonstration in two case-studies: Our Lady of Fátima and Saint Jude. The first case examines a series of apparitions of Fátima to young children in 1917 and highlights the role of pious images (statuary, lithographs, engravings) in interpreting Fátima's apparition in cloud formations and luminous effects. These stock pictures of devotional iconography help the children make sense of what they saw and generate a more detailed recollection and report of their divine encounter. Images not only give substance to the vision, but they also confer more credence to the religious experience (a phenomenon not too distant than that highlighted by Evolvi). In the second case, Morgan highlights how the fluid and multivalent iconography of Saint Jude which draws on that of other saints or episodes of his hagiography becomes "a medium of the lore," making tangible what people have heard about the saint. The iconographic variations offer a "missing origin," a "backstory," ultimately offering a justification in the rich matrix of needs of believers. The image emerges as an enabler, providing reliability and authenticity, thus becoming a stabiliser for belief. This interplay of word and image operates as a catalyst to anchor the evanescent or elusive origine of the saints and access their reality. The entanglement of word and image, generatively intertwined, serves as a force that mutually reinforces and bolsters each other, creating an authorising relationship.

In her article, Sarit Shalev-Eyni (2020) takes up the concept of generative entanglement and explores how word and image collaborate in the Ashkenazi liturgical domain in the Holy Roman Empire around 1300. She examines the mechanisms of this interplay in two Ashkenazi liturgical manuscripts from Brussels and Esslinger: the Brussel Pentateuch and the Dresden-Wroclaw prayer book. These prayer books illuminated by narratives and figures used by the cantor during service offer a valuable interface to study word and image as figural decorations are typically absent from the visual repertoire of synagogues. Furthermore, while the texts recited or sung by the cantor and the believers remain consistent and obligatory components of the ritual, the images, often derived from Christian visual formulas, introduce an element of flexibility and variation, and operate on a more allusive register. The integration of textual and visual elements in the prayer books generates a new medium that, during liturgies, runs parallel to the written message orally transmitted by the cantor or read by the believer. This generative entanglement enhances the overall liturgical experience and brings an alternative or additional dimension to the ritual. Shalev-Eyni examines two instances of such cooperation in the treatment of the biblical narrative of Isaac's sacrifice. In the case of the Brussel Pentateuch, the Jewish illuminator includes the *tallit*, a prayer shawl, worn by Abraham. The *tallit* is not normally part of the visual tradition of the scene but an attribute of the cantor in the synagogue. By introducing this motif in the scene, the illuminator achieves the following: he emphasizes the Jewish understanding of the concept of atonement, he identifies Abraham with the cantor, transfers the biblical scene into the public liturgical domain and conflates the temporal dimensions of the biblical past and the liturgical present. In the Dresden-Wroclaw prayer book, the illuminator with a Christian background introduces a large wax candle next to the altar where Isaac is to undergo sacrifice. The wax candlestick is not foreign to Ashkenazi liturgy as it is used in the feasts of the New Year and the Day of Atonement. Thus introduced into the biblical scene, the candlestick also allows to connect the liturgical service to the biblical past. The juxtaposition of the candle stick with the altar is however idiosyncratic to the Jewish context and results from the artist's interpretation of the Jewish liturgical hymn

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in his own “Christian terms.” The Pillar of Fire seen by Isaac and Abraham described in the hymn recalled the Paschal candle that the Christian artist/devotee would naturally associate with the altar in a local church at Easter. In this instance, there is no direct challenge to religious authority. Instead, the manipulation of iconographic conventions and the intricate interplay among various media, including the written word, the recitation, the illustration, the mental imagery, and its connected biblical narrative, serves to merge temporal dimensions. This amalgamation enhances the lived experience of the ceremony by invoking biblical figures through their allusive power of media.

The workshop and the edited volume from which it results sought to establish a dialogue among scholars who work on historical and contemporary sources to bring the present in dialogue with the past and add complexity to the current understanding of religious contact through the *tertium* of media and authority. It was further motivated by the necessity to shift away from an Euro-centric perspective and the focus on contemporary media logics with which the academic discourse of religion and media has long been associated. This tendency has nevertheless changed as more studies have been dedicated to non-Western contexts and media shifts are explored in a historical perspective (Grieve and Veidlinger 2014; Zeiler 2021). The range of case-studies presented in the workshop covered a broad geographical scope (North America, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, South and East Asia), an extensive chronological frame (from the few centuries before the common era until present-day), a great diversity of religious communities (various Christian denominations, Islam, Judaism, Yezidism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Confucianism, Daoism, Neo-Paganism) and, last but not least, numerous media types (orality, printed books, manuscripts, paintings, sculptures, buildings, websites, web boards, online forums and apps). Although it has not been possible to include all the original papers in this volume, the articles published here are situated at the crossroads of several disciplines: religious studies, media studies, art history, philology, and ethnology. These refine our understanding of the impact of media and media-changes on religious communities, semantics, or practices from a comparative perspective, shedding light on inter and intra-religious configurations. As Meyer puts it “[t]he availability and negotiation of media fuels processes of religious transformation and shapes the ways in which religious groups are positioned in society” (Meyer 2020). [15]

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