ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-LiU
Conference Title:	Historiography of Religion
Dates:	10-14 September 2012
Chair:	Jörg Rupke
Rapporteur:	Barbara Baert

General Comments

Concept and goals of the conference

The question is under which conditions are religions "historicized", and with which consequences for their practices and institutions
So there are different aims:
-study of religion by analysing how religions employ history in search for their identity (if religion is cultural phenomenon immoveable for external principles, what is the process of historicizing then? (=paradox))
-question of approaches to this history of religions= historiography of history of religion.
-interplay what people do on the ground en what other peoples in their first professional quality: this is an analytical distinction. Textual basis, documentary basis, monumental basis=methodological importance of narrations, that create idea of identity and time. Time as change, fashions, new inventions (*topoi*). And is religion still valid is it only result of history?

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

The conference is interdisciplinary: philologists, philosophers, theologians: *how can we discuss in a trans-disciplinary debate for remaining values, structures, believes, as everything is questioned by historicizing: unfamiliarity between history and religion. Self-narration; self-historicizing as a subjec*t (Jörg Rüpke).

The specialists are selected from all over Europe, even outside Europe. The topic is important from an institutional point of view: historiography of religion. It's a neglected field in academic teaching and research. Historiography confronting with (the history of) religion is still a challenge.

The conference is organized around 6 sessions

1. contexts to historicization
2. writing history of religion

4. practices to historicize the past
5.Historization to modify characteristics of religion
6. different disciplines dealing with religion

The sessions were smartly built up: the different speakers mapping out with their papers the different aspects of world religions, within each session/research question. The conference combined overview with a deep and strong interest in methodological problems.

At the last day the discussion evolved in a rather polemic way towards the transdisciplinary sciences with biology and neuro-sciences, cognitive scholarship. Is culture, is religion a Darwinian, biological mechanism? Evolution theory as problematic or as a necessary analysis? Here conflicting paradigms came above during the conference. Provocative: culture = biology.

Small remark:
I missed feedback on the topics from a more anthropological way on the other hand (archetypes), and from a more iconographical point of view on the other (material culture). Also few speakers 'dared' (?) to reflect on political consequences and transgressive dangers in historiography of religions (except for one short talk that involves contemporary media and cinema about jihad, for ex.). And finally, only one speaker had a direct views on the problem from a gender point of view. Gender was underestimated in this conference.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

The atmosphere was just fine for discussion. There was sufficient time to discuss after the individual lectures. Moreover the organizer installed round tables with shorter talks, which lead to relevant discussions. During these round tables, the younger scholars were involved better, since they felt more at easy, or for speakers who only wanted to give a shorter statement. So, this worked well, except in one case there was a little incident, that the speaker did not felt interpreted fairly, due to the fact that the speaker had too less time to defend during discussion time.

There were also poster presentations.
In the audience were also PhD students, which is positive.

Short remarks though:.
The speakers were not introduced biographically, nor in the program. This is a pity given the fact that several disciplines were brought together recruited from different fields and networks. Not everybody was familiar with the other colleagues' work and career.

Balance of Participants

I think the selection of participants is well balanced, not only regarding the different EU states (and abroad) , but also regarding gender.
I noticed several young scholars, mainly dispatched for poster sessions and round tables. Maybe younger full key speakers is a 'risk' the organizer must take in the future (for example (post)docs).

Outlook and Future Developments

Key questions that at the end keep coming up are for future work
-comparative perspective, 'comparison is amazing'
-is there an anthropological matter, dynamics: political, social
-circumstances in which historicization occurs
-terminology: for example: dogma + history?
-to give agency to religion. Knowledge of a certain kind. Historical knowledge = Useful knowledge for someone and which purpose? How is it stored (memory and oblivion)
-deeply eurocentric?
-term secular? Secularization?
-historiography is not the same as epistemology... .
-institutionalization question was lacking, stigmatization

Future collaborations:
Cfr. XXI world congress of the international association for the history of religions, Erfurt, Dynamics of Religion. Past and Present. august 2015 Erfurt

Follow-up

I suggested to try for a consortium/networking funding

Organisation and Infrastructure

The Linköping Campus in Norköping was a well organized host house. The university itself has a tradition with interdisciplinary research in the Humanities, and also a well established experience in hosting ESF conferences.

A pity that we had no excursion, given the theme of the conference, to the abbey of Brigitta of Sweden in the nearby Vadstena.

Summary & Overall Assessment

I think this conference was well-balanced, successful regarding solving questions, putting out methodological frameworks and suggesting future conglomerates and

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networks regarding a true mapping out of historiography in the different religions, and this approached in a multi-plural inter-disciplinary way. People were very keen to discuss. Sometimes extra time for discussions was even asked for.

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme
This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format
The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks
The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences