



Nederlands Genootschap
voor Godsdienstwetenschap

Conference

“Religion and Pluralities of Knowledge”

Groningen, 11-15 May 2014

Joint conference of the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (NGG) and the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), also a special conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR).

In 2014, the University of Groningen will celebrate its 400th Anniversary. The joint conference of the EASR, IAHR, and the NGG will be held immediately before the official celebration weeks of the University will commence. The conference theme, too, is related to the 400th anniversary, as it focuses on various ways in which European universities have engaged the topic of religion since the Middle Ages and the Reformation. The place of religion in the global ‘entangled histories’ today, as well as the formation of the academic study of religion, have been determined by pluralities of knowledge in many ways.

The religious landscape in Europe is characterized by a pluralism of religious traditions, identities, and communities—forms of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have competed with one another. Memories and reconstructions of Greek, Roman, and other pre-Christian European traditions have also served as alternatives in a spectrum of religious identifications. Migration and globalization have further enhanced these multi-religious dynamics since the nineteenth century.

In addition to the pluralism of religious traditions, a pluralism of societal and cultural systems has formed the European discourse on religion since the Middle Ages. In critical distinction, as well as in transfer processes, philosophy, philology, law, the natural sciences, economy, politics, art, and other systems have exerted tremendous influence on the place of religion in Europe and the perception of religion worldwide.

The conference will address these forms of pluralism with a special attention to categories of knowledge that are intrinsically linked to them. Knowledge is a constitutive social value within modern societies. How knowledge is distinguished from belief, how both are mediated, and what counts as religious knowledge or as its derivatives and alternatives, are core questions in understanding the role of religion in contemporary societies, but also in earlier periods. The process of attaining shared knowledge in a society is closely linked to the attribution, legitimization, and negotiation of meaning systems. These processes can be scrutinized from historical and cross-cultural perspectives. The focus on knowledge and knowledge claims can provide a deeper understanding of pluralistic cultural processes.

Like pluralism, knowledge has become an important concept in the understanding of culture. Moving beyond Enlightenment notions of *ratio* and reason and considering everyday knowledge, as well as its media and its social and individual conditions, the concept of knowledge has been theorized in various disciplines, including philosophy, sociology of knowledge, anthropology, and history.

Cognitive and psychological perspectives have also provided important new insights. Reconstructing the 'archaeologies of knowledge' pertaining to religion suggests that what is regarded as legitimate knowledge changes from one region to another and from one historical context to another. Notions of 'tacit knowledge,' 'embodied knowledge,' local versus universal knowledge, but also the relationship between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' have proven to be relevant categories. The conference topic invites critical investigation and further exploration of these analytical concepts related to the study of religion.

Linking the notion of knowledge to the pluralistic understanding of religious dynamics also implies an analysis of collisions of knowledge claims and polemics of knowledge. These dimensions of the conference theme can be applied to contemporary issues, such as questions of multiculturalism, migration, radical religious claims, atheism, or juridical and cultural conflicts pertaining to freedom of religion and speech.

The conference will include contributions from various disciplines and perspectives to explore the nexus of religion, pluralism, and knowledge. It will provide a conversation among theoretical, historical, and empirical contributions. Among the topics to be addressed are the following:

- **The pluralistic nature of knowledge about religion**, including different disciplinary perspectives and new concepts: history as imaginative knowledge, sociology of knowledge, knowledge and space, materiality of knowledge (goods, objects, machines, instruments), aesthetics of knowledge, knowledge as related to gender and race, etc.;
- **Various forms of knowledge about religion**: rational knowledge, imaginative and poetic knowledge, explicit and implicit knowledge, embodied knowledge, ritual knowledge, etc.;
- **Historical developments, changes, and reconfigurations of knowledge systems** that relate to the field of religion;
- **Procedures and politics in the organization of knowledge about religion**: production, reception, circulation, transmission, (de)legitimization, (de)canonization, traditionalization, but also the rejection, marginalization, and exclusion of knowledge.

In addition to these subtopics and approaches, we encourage contributions that address other aspects of the conference theme. Proposals of contributions and panels that are not directly linked to the conference theme will also be considered. There will be panels for the presentation of ongoing doctoral research.

Keynote speakers

We are proud to present the following distinguished scholars as confirmed keynote speakers:

BRUNO LATOUR

Professor and Vice-President for Research at Sciences Po Paris, France

CARLO GINZBURG

Professor of History of European Cultures, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, Italy

BIRGIT MEYER

Professor of Religious Studies, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands

JÖRG RÜPKE

Professor of Comparative Study of Religion, University of Erfurt, Germany

Conference organization

Conference venue:

The University of Groningen, The Netherlands. The conference will be held in the beautiful Academy Building in the city center. Hotels, conference dinner, and other activities are on walking distance from the conference venue.

Conference Organization:

The Conference Director is Kocku von Stuckrad, University of Groningen, The Netherlands, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Department of Comparative Study of Religion. Furthermore, the Organization Committee works on behalf and in close collaboration with the Executive Committee of the NGG and is responsible for the concrete organizational work at the University of Groningen. Major parts of the logistic and administrative organization will be done by the Groningen Congres Bureau.

Scientific Advisory Board:

The Scientific Advisory Board supports the Organization Committee in putting together the academic program, in evaluating the proposals, and in reaching out to international networks and scholarly organizations. Members of the Scientific Advisory Board will also be actively involved as respondents and panelists during the conference:

Klaas van Berkel (University of Groningen), Michael Borgolte (Humboldt University Berlin), Maya Burger (University of Lausanne, EASR), David Chidester (University of Cape Town), Willem Frijhoff (VU University Amsterdam), Ingvild Sælid Gilhus (University of Bergen, IAHR), Dick Houtman (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Tim Jensen (University of Southern Denmark, IAHR), Rosalind Hackett (University of Tennessee, Knoxville, IAHR) Ab de Jong (University of Leiden), Hans G. Kippenberg (Jacobs University Bremen), Anne-Marie Korte (Utrecht University, NOSTER), Nancy Levene (Indiana University), José Pedro Paiva (Universidade de Coimbra), Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin), Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (Indiana University Bloomington), Ann Taves (University of California at Santa Barbara), Gerard Wiegers (University of Amsterdam), Frans Wijzen (Radboud University Nijmegen, NGG).

Further information:

The call for papers was launched in May 2013. For questions pertaining to the scientific program, please contact the Conference Director at ear2014.thrs@rug.nl. For all questions pertaining to the conference organization and logistics, please contact the Groningen Congres Bureau at info@gcb.nl.

For updates on the conference organization see the conference announcement on the NGG website: www.godsdienstwetenschap.org

