

KHK WORKING PAPER SERIES

V - GENDER

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(Contact: alexandra.cuffel@rub.de)

Our Goal for ERiC is to create a comprehensive, easy-to-use online companion to **Eurasian Religions in Contact** that informs readers about occasions, themes, modes, conditions and consequences of contacts between religious groups and the way religious thought and practice developed in and through such contact phenomena, eventually creating both the larger and smaller religious traditions of today and the religious field as a social entity distinct from other fields such as politics, economics and art. The companion will be comprised of **case studies** with each case study focusing on a particular geographical region, a particular moment in or period of time and a particular constellation of two or more religions encountering each other. Each case study will extrapolate the occasions as well as the historical and social contexts of such encounters and, most importantly, shed light on the issues, notions, themes and practices addressed in the particular contact situation.

In each case study, authors will present their material in light of a specific theoretical concept or approach. We particularly encourage authors to consider engaging their material with theoretical concepts and approaches **developed at the KHK *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe over the past years***. This includes specific understandings of the role of concepts such as "purity", "secret", "tradition", "gender", "media", "the senses", "the immanence/transcendence-distinction" and "dynamics/stability". The **KHK Working Paper Series** informs readers about some major aspects within the KHK's thinking about these concepts. We are looking forward to your contributions to this ongoing conversation!

Like for history, gender is a useful, indeed essential, category of analysis for religious studies on multiple levels.¹ Scholars have examined the degree to which given religions are or have been practiced and experienced differently by men and women, sometimes to the point that one may speak of "women's" religion as opposed to men's, because cultic practices have been segregated according to gendered categories. Such divisions may be according to simple biological binaries of male and female, for example, in divisions between men and women's religious roles in ancient Greece and Rome.² Rituals focusing on the bodily differences, fluids and functions of men and women, for example, initiation rites centering on the alteration of boys' or girls' genitalia, purity regulations relating to semen and menstrual blood; religious laws and rituals celebrating and/or regulating the birthing process or the relationship between mother and child – are key elements in the ritual cycles and the conceptualizations of the boundaries between sacred and profane in numerous religious traditions.³

Yet gender is not a mere binary within the field of religion. The concept of constructed or “third” genders also have a powerful role, both in forms of segregated religious experience and practice, and in the symbolic vocabulary adopted to define self and “other”, sacred individuals, and finally in humans’ imagining of the divine and the cosmos. Instances in which a “third” or other gender outside a binary of male and female has particular roles, rituals and experiences within the larger community include the hijras (sp?) in India and the so called “bardache” among certain tribes of the Americas.⁴ The eunuch in Byzantine Christianity was alternately perceived as problematic and devious, but also, according to some scholars, closer to the angelic body, a status they shared with prepubescent adolescents, and occupying a liminal state between the human and divine worlds.⁵ This symbolic imagining was reshaped in the Islamic world.⁶ The idea of the “manly woman”, a woman, who because of her spiritual endeavors, often including extreme asceticism, and behavior is transformed to a masculine (and thus superior) spiritual status has a long history in both eastern and western Christianity, and echoes within Judaism and Islam.⁷ In theosophic Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, gender is an essential component in conceptualizing the divine and the demonic, both of which are divided in to masculine and feminine pairs, and in describing the relationship between God and human, where the Shekhinah, feminine in her relationship with other divine sefirot, or aspects of the divine, is often understood as becoming masculine in her encounter with male students of the Torah, even as these normally male scholars, become feminine relative to her.⁸ In such a system, as in others, gender is mutable, and what and who is male, female, or something else, has as much or more to do with the symbolic meanings assigned to these designations than with the genitalia of individual humans.

The brief discussion above outlines but a few of the ways in which gender is significant in analyzing religious ritual, law, and symbolism, generally. However, gender often plays a particularly important role in processes of religious demarcation, transfer, adaptation, and resistance between different religious communities or between competing segments of the same community.

Demarcation. Competing religious and ethnic groups are often described as “feminine” in relation to the true, superior, masculine group making such claims. This kind of discourse has long been part of western, European Christian rhetoric, whether in describing the weak, cursed, fearful menstruating feminized Jewish men in relationship to the rational, spiritual, masculine Christians during the Middle Ages, or contrasting feminized Bengali Muslim and Hindu men to properly masculine British Christians in the nineteenth century.⁹ Medieval Jews, Muslims, and Christians, also used excessive, “wrong,” animalistic masculinity as a way of condemning those in power or competition with them,

both within their own circles, or in their polemic against Christians and Muslims respectively.¹⁰ Accusations of sexual misbehavior has often also been a common method of marking given groups or individuals as religiously problematic or undesirable, at least within religious traditions stemming from the Mediterranean.¹¹ Finally, women's behaviors, bodies, customs, clothing, treatment or roles within a given tradition have frequently become a means by which women's roles may circumscribed and women may be marked as religiously problematic within a tradition, or by which one religious tradition may criticize another.¹² This method of demarcation is exemplified most recently in the arguments and legislation regarding Muslim women's clothing in Europe.¹³ All of these various rhetorical strategies serve in some way to create clear(er) dividing lines between religious desirable and undesirable individuals and communities.

Transfer, Adaption, and Resistance: Processes of transfer, adaption, and resistance are also frequently gendered, whether on a symbolic or experiential level. Goddesses and saints associated with fertility are among the most common which are transferred and adapted from one religious milieu to another, Isis and the Virgin Mary, being merely among the best known examples.¹⁴ In pre-modern societies missionizing via preaching and teaching was often (though not always) done by men, particularly when it involved traveling over long distances, whereas women were used to transfer religious ideas through inter-marriage.¹⁵ Martyrdom as a form of testimony to the truth of a given religious tradition, and the establishment of monasteries in frontier areas, on the other hand, are aspects of religious transfer in which both men and women engaged. During antiquity and the Middle Ages, modes of representing such martyrdoms were often stylized along gendered lines; however. Descriptions of women martyrs often emphasized issues of purity/impurity, virginity/motherhood relating to the martyrs themselves, and brutality and sexual excess on the part of male persecutors, so that the representation of martyrdom serves not only to teach and transfer, but in its representation, is a form of rhetorical, gendered, demarcation.¹⁶ In modern contexts martyrdom continues to be "educational" – a form of transferring not merely acceptable and unacceptable forms of religious practice and attitudes, but also serve to enforce ideals of masculinity and femininity.¹⁷ Monasteries were often segregated or semi-segregated between men and women, so that their function as nodes of knowledge/religious transfer were structured according to gendered divisions and organization.¹⁸ In the past, men were often under greater pressure to convert from one religion to another, whether because of increased exposure and public access, or for the sake of economic advancement, whereas women frequently served as the carriers and preservers of religious traditions and practices, especially during periods of persecution or pressure from the outside, and thus served as a main source of resistance to compulsion

to change religious affiliation. In both pre-modern and modern milieu, the experiences and expectations of new converts continue to be divided along gender; indeed conversion constitute both a religious and “gender” transformation.¹⁹

For the **online handbook of *Eurasian Religions in Contact***, authors are encouraged to consider these and other issues relating to gender and inter-religious encounter, exchange and resistance in individual case studies. The trends sketched above are meant as examples, contributors are encouraged to select what paradigms most fit their own findings within their research areas.

¹ Joan Wallach Scott “Gender: a useful category of historical analysis,” in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 28-50

² On the concept of “women’s religion” see for example: Evy Johanne Håland, “‘Take Skamandros, My Virginité’: Ideas of Water in Connection with Rites of Passage in Greece, Modern and Ancient,” in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, ed. Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009) 109-148; idem, . “Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative Approach,” *Cosmos*, 17 (2001) 197-251; Alexandra Cuffel, “From Practice to Polemic: shared saints and festivals as ‘women’s religion’ in the medieval Mediterranean.” *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68/3 (2005) 401-419; G. R. G. Hambly, “Becoming visible: medieval Islamic women in history and historiography.” In *Women in the Medieval Islamic world: power, patronage, and piety*. d. G.R.G. Hambly. (New York: St. Martin’s Press. 1998) 1-27; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987); F. Mernissi, “Women, Saints and Sanctuaries,” *Signs*, 3/1 (1977) 101-112; R. Fernea and E. Fernea, “Variation in Religious Observance among Islamic Women.” in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim religious institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. N. R. Keddie. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1972); On women’s religion and gender segregation in some Greek and Roman religions see: Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); Evy Johanne Håland, “The Ritual Year as a Woman’s Life: The Festivals of the Agricultural Cycle, Life-Cycle Passages of Mother Goddesses and Fertility-Cult,” *First International Conference of the SIEF working group on The Ritual Year. In association with The Department of Maltese University of Malta, Junior College, Msida, Malta, 2005: Proceedings*, ed. George Mifsud-Chirop (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group (PEG), 2006) 303-326; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 76-78, 80, 90, 102, 116-117, 120,150-152, 173-174, 199-201; W. H. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (Ithaca: University of Cornell Press. 1977) 82-88, 159-160; Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian Books. 1957) 99-100, 107, 120-162.

³ Shai Secunda, “Relieving Monthly Sexual Needs;: On Pahlavi daštān-māh wizārdan,” *Dabjr*, 1/1 (2015) 28-31; Kaja Smid, “Leyes de pureza ritual en judeoespañol: entre la normativa rabínica y las practicas de las mujeres,” *Sefarad* 72.2 (2012) 389-429; Ian Werett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Leiden, Brill, 2007) 46-92, 153-168, 197-202, 277-287; Marion Holmes Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) 86-96, 123-144, 187-203; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Impurity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press,1997) 1, 15, 40, 50-59, 97-98, 101, 238-239, 258; Julia Leslie, “Some Traditional Indian views on Menstruation and female sexuality,” in *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 63-

81; Hannah K. Harrington, *The impurity systems of Qumran and the rabbis: biblical foundations*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Kevin Reinhart, "Impurity/No danger," *History of religions* 30/1 (1990), 1-24; Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Purity and pollution in Zoroastrianism: triumph over evil* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989); Robert Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966)

⁴ *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (Zone Books, 1994)

⁵ Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); idem, "Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium," in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, pp. ; *Women, men and eunuchs: gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London : Routledge, 1997)

⁶ Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and sacred boundaries in Islamic society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

⁷ Thomas Honegg, *Riddles, knights, and cross-dressing saints: essays on medieval English language and literature* (New York, 2004); Kari Vogt, "Gender metaphors in Fariduddin Attar's Memoirs of the Saints" *Christian and Islamic gender models in formative traditions*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Rome: Herder, 2004) 163-178; Stephen Davis, "Crossed texts, crossed sex: intertextuality and gender in early Christian legends of holy women disguised as men" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10/1 (2002) 1-36; Sahar Amer, "Lesbian Sex and the Military: from the Medieval Arabic Tradition to French Literature," in *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé and Pamela Sheingorn (New York, 2001) pp. 179-98' Giselle de Nie, "'Consciousness fecund through God' : from male fighter to spiritual bride-mother in late antique female sanctity" in *Sanctity and motherhood* (New York : Garland, 1995) 100-161; Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age AD 350-450* (New York, Routledge, 1995); Emna Ben Miled, "Le féminin, le masculin, la dialectique en amour chez Ibn Arabi" *Actes du colloque: L'homme, la femme et les relations amoureuses dans l'imaginaire arabo-musulman, Tunis ... 1992 / Ashghāl multaqa: Al-Rajul wa-'l-mar'a wa'l-ḥubb fi 'l-khayāl al-'Arabī al-Islāmī* (Tunis: Université des Lettres, des Arts et des Sciences Humaines, Tunis I, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales, 1995) 47-60; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in early Byzantine hagiography : reversing the story" in *That gentle strength: historical perspectives on women and Christianity*, ed. Linda Coon (Charlottesville, Va : Univ Pr of Virginia, 1990) 36-59 Marvin W. Meyer, "Making Mary male : the categories "male" and "female" in the Gospel of Thomas" *New Testament Studies*, 31 (1985) 554-570; John Anson, "The female transvestite in early monasticism : the origin and development of a motif" *Viator* 5 (1974) 1-32

⁸ Sharon Faye Koren, *Forsaken: the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011); Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005); Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) ; idem, „On Becoming female: crossing gender boundaries in kabbalistic ritual and myth," IN. *Gender and Judaism: the transformation of Tradition*. Ed. T. M. Rudavsky (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 2009-228; idem, *Through a speculum that shines: vision and imagination in medieval Jewish mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) idem, "Woman – the feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah: some philosophical observations on the divine androgyne," *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity* ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 166-204 idem, „Left contained in the right: a study in Zoharic hermeutics," *AJS Review*, 11.1 (1986) 27-52 ; Daniel Abrams, "'A light of her own': minor kabbalistic traditions on the ontology of the divine feminine," *Kabbalah* 15 (2006) 7-29

⁹ Irven Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America 2012) 181-214; Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) 160-182; Mark Harrison, *Climates and constitutions: health, race, environment and British imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (New Delhi/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).; David Arnold, *Colonizing the body: state medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Scott, "Gender, a useful Category"

¹⁰ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, pp.118-119, 146-148, 153, 186-187, 214-224; Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 266, 270-274, 276, 285, 301-303, 317-318.

¹¹ Ross Kraemer, "Jewish Women's Resistance to Christianity in the early fifth century the account of Severus bishop of Minorca," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17/4 (2009) 635-665; Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400-1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) ; Frederico Garza Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn: prosecuting sodomites in early modern Spain and Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); David Cook,

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¹² Adam Knobler, "S(m)oothing the Savage('s) B(r)east: Covering and Colonialism in the Age of Euro-American Expansion," in *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the pre-modern world*, ed. Brian Britt and Alexandra Cuffel. (New York: Palgrave Press, 2007) 241-250; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, pp. 13, 333-344; Leslie, "Some Traditional Indian Views;" Ross Shepard Kraemer, "The Other as woman: an aspect of polemic among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman world." In *The other in Jewish thought and history: constructions of Jewish culture and identity*. Ed. by Lawrence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn. (New York: New York University Press, 1994) ;Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) 3-59

¹³ Sahar Amer, *What is Veiling?* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014) 75-130

¹⁴ Amy Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old and New Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Joseph Kroger and Patrizia Granziera, *Aztec Goddesses and Christian Madonnas: Images of the Divine Feminine in Mexico* (London/New York, 2012); Rivka Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009) 215-243; Cecelia Busby, "Renewable Icons: Concepts of Religious Power in a fishing village in South India," in *Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006) 77-98; Mareile Haase, "Kulte der Isis in den germanischen Provinzen", in: Y. Le Bohec, L. Bricault (eds), *Isis en Occident: Deuxième congrès international des études isiaques*, Table ronde Lyon 2002. (Leiden: Brill 2004) 107-136; idem, „Signum in modum liburnae figuratum (Tacitus, Germania 9,1): Überlegungen zum Beginn des Isis-Kults in Germanien,“ in: W. Spickermann et al. (eds), *Religion in den germanischen Provinzen Roms*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001, 317-338.; David Frankfurter, "Tabitha in the Apocalypse of Elijah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990) 13-25

¹⁵ Jeffery Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Ann Sophie Gräslund, "The role of Scandinavian Women in Christianization: neglected evidence," in *The Cross goes North: Processes of Conversion in northern Europe AD 300-1300*, ed. Jörn Staecker (Woodbridge/Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2003) 483-496; Renee Levine Melamed, "Crypto-Jewish Women facing the Spanish Inquisition: transmitting religious practices, beliefs and attitudes," in *Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed Mark Meyerson and Edward English (Notre Dame: University Press, 1999) 197-219; James Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. 3 7:3 (1998) 411-421; Jo Ann Macnamara, "Living sermons: Consacrated Women and the Conversion of Gaul," in *Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 2, *Peaceweavers*, ed. Lillian Thomas Shank and John Nicols (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Press 1987) 19-37

¹⁶ Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France*. (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) ; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying For God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

¹⁷ Maleeha Aslam, *Gender Based Explosions: The Nexus between Muslim Masculinities, Jihadist Islamism and Terrorism*, (United Nations Press, 2012); Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 76-105, 155-174.

¹⁸ Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta, eldest daughter of Ashoka, emperor of India, is credited establishing female monasticism (Buddhist) in Sri Lanka in the 3rd cent. BCE. Garima Kaushik, *Women and Monastic Buddhism in Early South Asia: Rediscovering Invisible Believers* (Routledge, 2016); Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Paula Kane Robinson Arai, *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (University of Hawaii Press, 2010); Lynda Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinities in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Thibodeaux (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jeffery Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, (Zone Books, 1998); Penelope Johnson, *Equal in monastic profession: religious women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

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