

## Call for Papers

# Religious Secrecy as Contact: Secrets as Promoters of Religious Dynamics

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The proposed volume focuses on “strategies of secrecy” and their role in the history of religious contacts, a neglected field of research in Religious Studies. It comprises a collection of papers presented in a series of interdisciplinary workshops and conferences on the subject of “religion and secrecy” held at the Käte Hamburger Consortium “Dynamics in the History of Religions” between 2008 and 2012.

The contributions of the volume analyse the phenomenon of „secretizing“: As Mark Teeuwen pointed out, secrecy — „a form of religious practice in its own right“ — refers to a certain process within a given social situation where the secret functions in a certain institutional framework (Teeuwen, Mark and Scheid, Bernhard, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, New York: Routledge 2006, p. 4). The secret itself may be replaced by ritualized secretism that is independent of the content of the secret (Johnson, Paul Christopher, *Secret, Gossip, and Gods. The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 3).

The volume challenges the traditional analysis that understands secret merely as a social and epistemological device that prevents contact between an „ingroup“ and an „outgroup“ and provides the means to cut one’s own tradition from external influences. The present volume will rather build on Assmann’s insights on secrecy as “interaktives Geschehen”, because secrecy involves an interactive dimension which fulfils an important function in cross-cultural contacts”. (Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, „Die Erfindung des Geheimnisses durch die Neugier“, in: Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, eds., *Schleier und Schwelle III. Geheimnis und Neuzeit*, München: Fink 1999, p. 8). Accordingly, the general hypothesis of the volume is that secrets play a significant role in the inter-religious and intrareligious exchange and all the essays shall examine the function of secrets in examples of religious contacts.

While aspects of secrecy usually seem to play a role in religious conduct, analysing the role of secrets within religious traditions involves difficulties. Since, by definition, one cannot hope to grasp „the secret“ on the level of the object language, the field of possible investigation is reduced to the functional and the linguistic field. More precisely, secrecy can be analysed as a semantic structure that can be identified and described phenomenologically. Hence, it is also not necessary to assume that the terminology of secrecy should be translated one to one across cultures.

Secrets are by no means neutral or indifferent notions in religious processes: They rather function as privileged zones of contact. A secret might be described as a catalyst for specific forms of communication since the elusive nature of secret offers rich opportunities for translations from one religious tradition into another and often the results are miscomprehensions, which are harshly rejected by the old secret-keepers. In any case, secrets may function as interfaces of inter-religious and intrareligious contact. As such, they should be analyzed as a blank space that can be identified in distinct ways and understood as a process of emptying conceptual content in different linguistic contexts. Finally, because the content of secrets cannot be determined and translations remain in flux, secrets promote rather than prevent the concrescence of religious traditions.

**Editors:** A. Akasoy, L. Di Giacinto, G. Halkias, A. Müller-Lee, P. Reichling, K.M. Stünkel

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