

Call for Papers for the Conference on  
*Interpreting Rituals: Historiographical Perspectives and Pluralistic Contexts*  
Leiden University, October 29-31, 2018

The Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion (LUCSoR), the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (NGG), The Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER) in cooperation with the University of Erfurt Research Centre „Dynamics of Jewish Ritual Practices in Pluralistic Contexts from Antiquity to the Present“ are pleased to announce their joint conference on *Interpreting Rituals: Historiographical Perspectives and Pluralistic Contexts*, to be held on October 29-31, 2018 at Leiden University.

The study of ritual and ritualized practices has become a multidisciplinary endeavor during the past century. The contributions of Harrison, Durkheim, Jung, Otto, Eliade, Turner, Douglas, Leach, Geertz, Rappaport, Assman, Ricoeur, Bell, Asad, Buc and Grimes are among those that have permanently influenced the directions taken in the development of ritual study. While the perception and conceptualization of Jewish rituals – like all ritual – have changed over time, the academic study of Jewish ritual and the historiography of Jewish ritual, unlike the study of Christian and other rituals, are still in their inception. The aim of the conference is not only to gain insight into this particular phenomenon, but to transcend the conventional (Western) Christian bias inherent in the study of ritual in search of other and new vantage points. We invite participants in this conference to present papers on rituals and their historiography, in Jewish but *also in other religious contexts*, with a *focus on ritual in pluralistic contexts*.

Jewish rituals have been a topic of discussion and contention both in Jewish and non-Jewish sources since antiquity. In antiquity both Greeks and Romans pointed to the rituals of the Sabbath, circumcision and dietary laws as the distinguishing marks between Israelites/Jews and non-Jews. Sabbath observance, for example, was understood as a sign of laziness. The waning of ancient religious systems based upon sacrifice led, according to some scholars, to alternative ritual performances. What impact did the fall of the Second Temple have on Jewish ritual? And what role did the rise of Christianity play in the development of ritual in the rabbinic period? The New Testament *Acts of the Apostles* portrays Paul and Peter as arguing about the need for Christians to practice Jewish rituals. The Pharisees – and later the rabbis – placed great emphasis on proper ritual performance. Clearly changes in political contexts influenced the transformation, innovation, understanding and framing of Jewish rituals as well as the rituals of those groups among whom Jews resided and/or by whom they were ruled.

Similarly, in the Enlightenment and the subsequent process of political emancipation new discourses on Jewish rituals developed and led to great change and experimental practices. For the first time the development of liturgy was studied by scholars associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the academic study of Judaism. Yet scholarship, politics and apologetics were deeply entangled in this 19<sup>th</sup> century endeavor. Some rituals, labeled as “oriental” by European and American Christians, were subsequently perceived as such by rabbis who argued for their abolishment in the struggle for legal equality. Other rituals such as circumcision were retained but have remained a bone of contention until the present. Yet others, such as the celebration of

Chanukah – a minor holiday –, gained importance as an answer to the increasing popularity of Christmas in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. In all these examples, rituals, ritual change, the perception of and academic discourse on ritual are entangled in the processes of modernization and the negotiations taking place between minority and majority groups.

Finally, the rise and development of new media and technology have undoubtedly led to ritual change and innovation. How, for example, have printing technologies and – more recently – the Internet influenced Jewish and other rituals? How and to what extent has the rise of photography and the film industry and newer visual technologies had impact on rituals? The Lubavitcher Hasidim, for example, now make extensive use of the web and YouTube in their outreach to secular Jews and stimulation of ritual practice as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic affair. What changes do off-line rituals undergo when they become rituals online and what sorts of new online-rituals have developed? How are these developments being interpreted in scholarly discussions and how are these understandings commensurate with the study and historiography of ritual in the past?

We invite participants in this conference to present papers on rituals and their historiography and encourage a focus on Jewish and other rituals in pluralistic contexts. We especially seek to understand how both normative and descriptive methods have reflected upon ritual – including space (virtual/cyber and real), sound and gender – in religious, secular and geographical contexts in cross cultural, comparative and historical perspective. Which rituals were chosen for study and how were they understood; and which rituals were criticized or contested by whom in academic and normative, religious and non-religious contexts. How do studies of rituals of one religion accord with or differ from the study of the rituals of other religions? Has ritual study led to the transformation of rituals? Did and do new understandings of “religion” exert any influence on the notion of rituals or vice versa? What are the repercussions of these new understandings for the study and interpretation of Judaism and Jewish ritual or of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and their rituals?

**Proposals:** We invite proposals for papers and panel sessions

**Deadline for submissions:** June 30, 2018

*Individual papers:* Please send us a proposal (about 300 words) for a 20-minute presentation, including title of the paper, technical equipment required for the paper and name, affiliation, and full contact details of the speaker.

*Panel sessions:* Proposals should include the title of the session, an abstract of its content and purpose (max. 500 words), the titles of the papers and the names, affiliations and full contact details of the speakers.

All proposals should be sent to Judith Frishman, chair Jewish Studies, Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion (LUCSoR): [j.frishman@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:j.frishman@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

**Masterclass:** A masterclass led by prof. J. Rüpke (University of Erfurt) will be held on Monday, October 29th. The topic of the masterclass is Prof. Rüpke’s new book *Pantheon. A New History of Roman Religion* (Princeton University Press 2018). PhD students and Research Master students are kindly invited to consult [www.religion.leidenuniv.nl](http://www.religion.leidenuniv.nl) for information and updates on the terms of admission and guidelines.

**Registration, further information and updates may be found on the Conference website: [www.religion.leidenuniv.nl](http://www.religion.leidenuniv.nl)**