

International Workshop

Materialities of Everyday Religiosity: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in Turkey and Iran

Workshop Date: 17-20 June 2021

Venue: Orient-Institut Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey (online via Zoom)

Meeting ID and password will be provided via e-mail

Contact: Materialitiesofreligiosity@gmail.com

Organised by:

Katja Rieck

Esther Voswinckel Filiz

Robert Langer



Image: New shrine of Imam Husayn, made in Qom on its way to Kerbala on the arch of deliverance', January 2013
Taken by: Amir Hesaminajd, kindly provided by Sepideh Parsapajouh, CéSoR-EHESS, Paris

About the Workshop

Until recently, the academic tradition of the study of religions in European and North American research institutions and universities did not systematically research the materiality of religious practices. A propensity of the academic study of religion, including *Islamwissenschaft*/ Oriental studies, to privilege textual traditions has shown itself to be persistent. However, since the 1980s, as an outcome of the constructivist turn in the social sciences and humanities, the field of ‘new materiality studies’ emerged, which contributed to the so-called material turn, influenced by authors such as Bruno Latour and Arjun Appadurai. By the 2000s, this ‘material’ research perspective was systematically taken up by scholars of religion. Taken forward by Birgit Meyer and the contributors to the journal *Material Religion* founded by her, but echoing and reinforcing the wider trend of new materialism in social science and humanities research, “material religion” serves as a framework for highlighting and analysing the role of the materiality of religion in different fields and aspects of human activity, such as the production and trade of commodities, arts and handicrafts, travel and pilgrimage, landscape, habitation and architecture, media, food, clothing, etc. Such a comparative study of materialities “offers possibilities for an interdisciplinary discourse which transcends the European arena and includes other religions.”¹

While older material-focused approaches, such as, for example, archaeology or museum anthropology, would rather understand all these areas of material-cultural production as manifestations of a mental or social structure, as popular *expressions* of belief or the like, the founders of the journal *Material Religion* wish to ask, “[H]ow religion happens materially, which is not to be confused with asking the much less helpful question of how religion is expressed in material form.”² Forms, materials, things, structures, etc. thus are not to be analysed simply as manifestations of faith but as generators of meaning. The material turn in the study of religions therefore shifts the focus from the analysis of people’s thoughts (beliefs) and language (discourses) towards religious practices from the perspective of what people do. What materials or forms do they use? How and what senses are invoked?

Yet, the material turn in the study of religion(s) is not limited to Europe and North America. As our ongoing discussions with colleagues in Iran and Turkey have shown, they too have begun to seriously engage with everyday religiosity and its materiality thereby bracketing normative, both ‘national-secular’ as well as ‘religious-theological’ considerations and discourses about ‘religion’ and setting the focus on ‘what people do’ and how religion is ‘lived’. However, the academic and wider contexts of this shared interest are different, which inflects upon the specific perspectives taken on the materiality of religion in the various scholarly settings. Although there is a strong tradition both in Turkey as well as in Iran to research material culture

¹ Belting, Hans, *Iconic Presence. Images in Religious Traditions*, (*Material Religion*, 12:2, 2016, pp. 235-237), quotation from page 235.

² Meyer, Morgan et al., “The origin and mission of *Material Religion*” (*Religion* 40, 2010) 207–211, quotation from page 209.

in folklore and heritage studies (stemming from the nation-building projects of the first half of the 20th century), very few publications have emerged from the respective academic fields that frame their work specifically in the context of ‘new materiality studies’. This points precisely to the emergence of alternative inflections of a material turn in the study of religions in the wider scholarly community outside of Europe and North America. However, within the global academic discussions about the materiality of religion so far, scholarly voices from Turkey and Iran have been rarely heard.

By bringing together scholars from Iran, Turkey, Germany and France, the workshop will highlight the current state of the empirical study of religions in the respective countries and research contexts, foster reflections as to how these contexts impact research perspectives and methodologies and bring these specific perspectives and methodologies into critical dialogue with the material religion approach.

Katja Rieck
Esther Voswinckel Filiz
Robert Langer

Acknowledgements

Special thanks must be extended to our dear colleague and friend Shahrzad Irannejad (OII), who was instrumental in helping us establish contacts to colleagues in Iran with shared research interests, many of whom would become participants in this workshop. The trip during which we met a number of the Iranian colleagues in attendance here, and during which discussions for this workshop began, was undertaken under the auspices of the *International Standing Working Group Iran and Beyond: Breaking the Ground for Sustainable Scholarly Collaboration* (IRSSC), which is part of the Max-Weber Foundation’s project “Knowledge Unbound: Internationalization, Networking, Innovation in and by the Max-Weber -Stiftung” that is funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The idea for this workshop began to germinate following engaging discussions with Mehrdad Arabestani (University of Tehran), Jabbar Rahmani (Institute for Social and Cultural Studies, Tehran), Hamed Arezaei (Imam Sadegh University, Tehran), Rasool Akbari and the colleagues at the Faculty of Theology Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, as well as Ali Yousofi and the colleagues at the Center for Tourism and Pilgrimage Studies at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Katja Rakow (Utrecht) provided valuable feedback on the workshop concept, gave helpful advice on various publication options, and agreed to give the opening, introductory talk for this workshop. Denis Herman (IFEA/IFRI) pointed us to further potential collaborating partners. Thanks also go to our acting director Richard Wittmann for his support of our event. Rasool Akbari, Shahrzad Irannejad, Sepideh Parsapajouh, and Amir Hesaminajd provided us with photographs relevant to material religion that allowed us to make our program booklet a bit more colorful. Last but certainly not least, heartfelt thanks to Prof. Raoul Motika (formerly OII, now Hamburg University) whose efforts resulted in the creation of IRSSC and introduced Iran as a research priority at OII.

International Workshop

Materialities of Everyday Religiosity: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in Turkey and Iran

Workshop Date: 17-20 June 2021

Venue: Orient-Institut Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey (online via Zoom)

Workshop program*

Thursday, 17 June 2021

- 14:00-14:30 Welcome remarks and introduction
Richard Wittmann, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 14:30-15:15 Materialities of Everyday Religion
Katja Rakow, University of Utrecht (Utrecht, Netherlands)
- 15:15-15:30 *Break*

Through the looking glass: Exploring the religious through its materials and artefacts

- 15:30-16:00 The Dynamics of Lighting Objects in the *Āstān-e Qods-e Razavī* Museum
Leila Tavangar Ranjbar, Philipps University Marburg (Marburg, Germany)
- 16:00-16:30 *Turbat al-Husayn*: Modern Presentation of an Early Shī'ī Practice
S. M. Hadi Gerami, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (Tehran, Iran)
- 16:30-17:00 The Cherished Mementos: Materiality, Exoticism and Piety of *Hajj* Souvenirs in Qajar Iran (1794-1925)
Peyman Eshaghi, Free University of Berlin (Berlin, Germany)
- 17:00-17:10 *Break*
- 17:10-17:40 Discussion and session closing remarks
Discussant: Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 17:40-18:00 *Informal online get-together*
(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

***Please note:** Times refer to UCT/GMT+3. Participants joining us from Europe, subtract one hour. Participants joining from Iran, please add 1 hour 30 minutes; from Pakistan add 2 hours.

Friday, 18 June 2021

Doors and windows: Architectural elements and the shaping of religious experience

- 14:00-14:30 Lattice Window and Shia Pilgrimage: Material Approaches to the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad, Iran
Jabbar Rahmani, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies (Tehran, Iran)
- 14:30-15:00 The Materiality of Sufi Saint Shrines in Istanbul: The Case of the *Türbe* of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi (1541-1628) in Üsküdar
Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:00-15:20 Discussion
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:20-15:30 *Break*

Spaces and places in the making of religious practices

- 15:30-16:00 Socio-Spatial Meaning of *Cemevis* in Urban Public Space: A Typology Study of Places of Worship in Istanbul
Erhan Kurtarır, Yıldız Technical University (Ankara, Turkey)
- 16:00-16:30 Praying and Meditating in Museums: A Visit to the Museum of Mawlana Jalal-ud-din Rumi (1207-1273)
Çiçek İleengiz, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany)
- 16:30-16:50 Discussion
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 16:50-17:15 *Break*
Optional informal get-together
(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

Pilgrimage and the body: Religiosity and the management of physical hardship

- 17:15-17:45 Between Self-Probation and Self-Preservation. The Role and Place of the Iranian Pilgrim's Body in the *Arba 'in* Foot Pilgrimage
Amélie Neuve-Eglise, Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Paris, France)
- 17:45-18:15 Hygienic Practices in the *Arba 'in* March Ritual: A Survey Study
Ali Yousofi, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
Atiyeh Sadeghi, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 18:15-18:45 Discussion and session closing remarks
Discussant: Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

Saturday, 19 June 2021

Pilgrimage and shared practices of devotion: Transformations and passages

14:00-14:30 Sainly Statues and Sacred Icons: Interreligious Materiality at Istanbul's Latin Catholic Churches

Vanessa de Obaldía, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Mainz, Germany)

14:30-15:00 *Baraka* and the Materiality of Shrine Visits in India and Turkey

Smita Tewari Jassal, Middle Eastern Technical University (Ankara, Turkey)

15:00-15:20 Discussion

Chair: Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

15:20-15:30 *Break*

Embodiment and disembodiment in rituals: Shifting materialities of ritual performances

15:30-16:00 The *Rifa'iyya* in South-Western Asia: Spiritual Organization and Performance of Ritual

Hasan Ali Khan, Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan)

Aliya Naqvi Iqbal, Institute of Business Administration Karachi (Karachi, Pakistan)

16:00-16:30 Dialogue in Shia Pilgrimage: Expressing *Haajat* [special need] in the Presence of a Living and Capable Object

Mahdi Kermani, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

Ahmadreza Asgharpour Masouleh, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

16:30-17:00 Corona Virus Pandemic and Innovative Forms of Religious Rituals in Iran

Masoud Fattahzadeh, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)

17:00-17:30 Discussion and session closing remarks

Discussant: Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

17:30-18:00 *Informal online get-together*

(Wonderme link and password will be provided)

Sunday, 20 June 2021

Faith on shifting grounds: Migration and the material challenges to religious practice

- 14:00-14:30 Reconstruction Centred on Material and Social Demands of the Traditional Ritual Context in Alevism
Mehmet Ersal, İzmir Katip Çelebi University (İzmir, Turkey)
- 14:30-15:00 Material Mediators of the Non-Material: Objects, Materiality and Change in Mandaean Religious Practice
Mehrdad Arabestani, University of Tehran (Tehran, Iran)
- 15:00-15:20 Discussion
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 15:20-15:30 *Break*

From state television to memes: Spiritual presence and religious practices in media societies

- 15.30-16:00 Digital Blessings for Holy Days: Performing Islamic Piety in the Age of Social Media
Erkan Saka, Istanbul Bilgi University (Istanbul, Turkey)
Ivo Furman, Istanbul Bilgi University (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 16:00-16:30 Digital Religion in Contemporary Iran: Everyday Religiosities on Instagram During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Rasool Akbari, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 16:30-17:00 The Relationship between Government and Everyday Religiosity in Iranian Media: The Dynamics and the Narration of *Arba'īn*
Azra Ghandeharion, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Mashhad, Iran)
- 17:00-17:20 Discussion
Chair: Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
- 17:20-17:30 *Break*
- 17:30-18:30 Plenary discussion & workshop wrap-up
Discussants:
Robert Langer, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
Esther Voswinckel Filiz, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)
Katja Rieck, Orient-Institut Istanbul (Istanbul, Turkey)

Book of Abstracts

Listed in the order of appearance in the programme



Image: A container of *mohr*, prayer stones made of the sacred earth of Kerbala.
Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Mashhad Iran, 2021
Taken by: Rasool Akbari, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

The Materialities of Everyday Religion

Katja Rakow

Materiality refers to matter, something that is concrete, substantial, physical, tangible, and real, as opposed to the immaterial, imaginary, ideal, spiritual, and intellectual dimension of human life. Usually the opposition of material/immaterial implies a hierarchy that ranks the immaterial, the spiritual, and the realm of ideas higher than the world of matter, the physical, and the corporeal. We find this notion inscribed in Protestant models of religion focusing on belief and inner conviction while downplaying religious material culture and religious practice as illustrations of beliefs and inner states of the mind. The Protestant-inflected notion of religion influenced how the category of religion was conceptualized and how religion was studied in academia. It gave precedence to religious beliefs, ideas, and concepts drawn from the authoritative sources of religious traditions while neglecting the material dimension and everyday religiosity. The reevaluation of the materialities of religion happened in the context of a broader paradigm shift within the humanities and social sciences referred to as “the material turn.” Based on the realization that material things are neither just illustrations of social facts and relations nor secondary expressions of ideas, materiality is recognized as an integral part of culture, which is shaped by humans and in turn shapes humans and the experience of their lifeworlds.

In the past two decades, many scholars have called for a “materialization” of the study of religion to counterbalance the tendency to emphasize the study of textual sources and theological or philosophical debates. These scholars perceive materiality to be the crucial element in the making of religious worlds. As anthropologist Matthew Engelke so famously stated, “all religion is material,” because religion depends on material media, such as images, objects, clothes, incense, spaces, but also on the acting, sensing, and experiencing human body engaging the material world. Since then, Religious Studies scholars recast their questions and broadened their analytical horizon. Instead of asking how elements of religious material culture represent and illustrate religious ideas, they ask how religious actors create and make use of things and objects and how the engagement with religious materiality simultaneously creates religious worlds and shapes religious subjects.

The lecture will provide a brief contextualization of the material study of religion and introduce a range of key concepts and analytical frameworks while discussing their application to historical as well as contemporary research on religion.

Katja Rakow is Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. She received her PhD in Religious Studies from Heidelberg University, Germany, in 2010 with a dissertation on transformations of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Her postdoctoral projects looked at contemporary forms of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in the United States and Singapore. Her research focuses on material religion, technology, and the materialities of religious texts and textual practices. She is co-editor of *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* (Taylor & Francis) and the book series “Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion”. Recent publications include “The Material Dimension of the Bible from Print to Digital Text,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and American Popular Culture* edited by Dan W. Clanton Jr. and Terry R. Clark (Oxford University Press, 2020) and “The Light of the World: Mediating Divine Presence through Light and Sound in a Contemporary Megachurch,” *Material Religion* 16.1 (2020).

The Dynamics of Lighting Objects in Āstān-e Qods-e Rażavī Museum

Leila Tavangar Ranjbar

Since the 16th century, important Shiite shrines have been converted into pilgrim centers, and many individuals and organizations have donated valuable objects to these shrines³. In addition to court collections, collections of objects of various provenance and purpose were created in the course of the early modern period in the large Shiite shrine complexes such as Ardabil, Mashhad, or Qom. Due to their sacredness, or their aesthetic, these objects were kept even after the end of their active use. Some of them ritualistic, these pre-modern collections of objects were rebuilt into modern-style museums in the 20th century's modernization process. In addition to manuscripts and copies of the Qoran, there were gifts donated from the pilgrims and patrons besides the shrine's furniture and ritual objects.

The museum of Āstān-e Qods-e Rażavī is a collection exhibiting the objects of the Imam Reżā⁴ shrine in Mashhad. In one section of the central museum of Āstān-e Qods-e Rażavī, which is called the Museum of Rażavī Shrine's History, one can find three showcases of lighting instruments. These objects have considerable diversity in their function, form and design, historical period, and even their provenance. The goal of this paper is to study their materiality and its dynamics, by focusing on the social history of lighting instruments in Āstān-e Qods-e Rażavī Museum. These objects will be analyzed during their timeline, from the early times until their new identity in modern museums. The research seeks to describe and interpret the story of such objects within the Iranian culture, as things for doing religion, as collections in treasuries, and lastly, as a part of a modern museum.

Leila Tavangar Ranjbar studied industrial design at the Tehran Art University. There, her major was product design, which led her to a curiosity about things. Along with this background, she became increasingly interested in Iranian art and culture and added a cultural studies approach to her research on everyday objects. Consequently, she continued her studies with an MA in Iranian studies at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran. Currently, she is a research assistant at the Department of History of Religion at the University of Marburg in Germany. She works in the REDIM⁵ subproject "Social History of an Elephant Oil Lamp in Āstān-e Qods-e Rażavī Museum," and her Ph.D. dissertation is on "Lighting Instruments in Iranian Culture, Case Study: the Shiite Holy Shrines and Collections." Her research interest is in Iranian cultural studies and folklore by focusing on and analysing objects.

³ Rizvi, Kishwar. *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran*. I.B.Tauris, 2011.

⁴ Ridā, Abu al-Hasan or Reżā in Persian, was the eighth Imam for Twelver Shiites and also a descendant of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Turbat al-Ḥusayn: Modern Presentation of an Early Shīʿī Practice

S. M. Hadi Gerami

The martyrdom of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (the third Imam of Shīʿa) in Karbala in 61/680 is known as one of the most significant incidents of the early period of Shīʿism.⁶ In some Islamic societies, various elements associated with this “massacre” are viewed as sacred. One of these objects among Shīʿī believers is the grave soil of Ḥusayn (*turbat al-Ḥusayn*). Earlier studies (Meri 1999: 51-52) addressed how this grave soil, as an object of veneration and a source of blessing, may contribute to Shīʿī rituals. To seek both spiritual and physical blessings, a large number of pilgrims taste and/or take it back to their homeland in order to take benefit of its particular features (*khawāṣṣ*).⁷ Recently, Mehreen Jiwan has shown how this soil’s scent may have contributed to the Shīʿī worldview. She contends that smelling the soil of Karbala has shaped a collective memory revolving around the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, which eventually immortalize his loss.⁸

All available sources indicate that the soil’s sacredness can be traced back to the second Islamic century and became systematically a part of Shīʿī identity during the Buyid era. The therapeutic features of the soil are often addressed in Imāmī works, including supplications, visitations, and amulets, particularly those produced during the Islamic Middle Ages (fifth to tenth AH centuries).

When Shīʿism became the official state religion during the Safavid period, both religious figures and communities paid particular attention to Ḥusayn’s martyrdom and relevant mourning customs. Unsurprisingly, the grave soil of Ḥusayn became more important than before. It was more frequently used to ward off disasters and bring felicity, and also became a main part of Shīʿī legal treatises. Further, it was used as clay tablet on which Shīʿī prayers (esp. in Iraq and Iran) place their foreheads while in prostration. In the meantime, a number of religious objections raised against making *turbat* as a commercial product and getting money for that.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the grave soil of Ḥusayn was treated politically. Moṭahharī (d. 1979), tried to find a new link between *turbat* and the idea of martyrdom (*shahādat*) in Islam. Some other religious authorities gave a modern justification and explanation for the veneration of *turbat*.

On the basis of textual evidence as well as personal experiences, this paper aims to examine the origin and development of *turbat* rituals in Iran, with a special focus on the post-Safavid era. It also

⁶ See: Sachedina, Abdulaziz: "Ithna ʿAshariyya," in: *Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*. Oxford University Press, 1995, par. 2-3; Etan Kohlberg. "Some Imāmī-Shīʿī Views on Taqiyya," in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95, no. 3, 1975, pp. 396; Hodgson, Marshall G. S.: "How Did the Early Shīʿa Become Sectarian?" in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 75, no. 1, 1955, pp. 1.

⁷ Josef Meri, "Aspects of Baraka (Blessings) and Ritual Devotion Among Medieval Muslims and Jews," in: *Medieval Encounters* (1999) pp. 51-52.

⁸ Mehreen Zahra Jiwan, "S(c)en(t)ing the Soil of the grave of Ḥusayn in Ibn Qūlawayh’s (d.367/977) *Kāmil al-ziyārāt: Translocations, Transtemporalities, and Transformations in the construction of Early Shīʿī Identity* (Unpublished master's thesis)." The University of Toronto, Toronto, 2019. p. 95.

demonstrates the way modern economic and political concerns affected and re-actualized the *turbat* practices among the believers.

S. M. Hadi Gerami is Assistant Professor of Islamic and Qur'ānic Studies at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (IHCS) in Tehran. His co-authored volume *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran: Mullā Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qummī's Ḥikmat al-ʿĀrifīn* (Brill 2017) is about less-known aspects of Safavid intellectual history. He has also published several articles in English, Persian, and Arabic, and a number of books, such among others, as *Nakhosṭīn Monāsebāt-e Fekri-ye Tashayyu': Bāz-khāni-ye mafhūm-e gholoww dar Andīshe-ye jaryānhā-ye moteqaddem-e Emāmī* ("The First Shi'ite Doctrinal Interactions Revisiting the Concept of *Gholoww* in the Thought of Early Shi'i Social Networks") and *Nakhosṭīn Andīshe-hā-ye Ḥadīthī Shī'a* ("The Earliest Shi'i Ideas on *Ḥadīth*"); for the latter, he was awarded the Farabi International Award on the Iranian and Islamic Studies in 2018. His research expertise lies in Islamic intellectual history, history of Shi'ism, history of *ḥadīth* as well as *tafsīr*, medieval Arabic philosophy, anthropology of religion, and theory and method in the study of religion.

**The Cherished Mementos:
Materiality, Exotism, and Piety of Hajj Souvenirs in the Qajar Iran (1794-1925)**

Peyman Eshaghi

Iranian pilgrims in the Qajar era were traveling to Mecca through different routes. To reach Mecca, they usually preferred to select the route passing through Iraq to be able to visit the Shiite shrines of Najaf and Karbala. On their way to and from Mecca and when they were residing in the city, they bought or took some special things to keep for themselves or give to their families, friends, and relatives. These things are generally known as souvenirs, and they functioned in different ways. Some of them were acquired so they could evoke memories for the pilgrims themselves or those who were gifted with them. The others evoke a sense of exotism of a foreign land strange to the receivers of the souvenirs. In most cases, the souvenir entailed a kind of piety inside the framework of Shiite theology and religious practice and contributed to strengthening the religious life of the owners and recipients. Drawing on some hundred hajj travelogues written by Iranian pilgrims at the Qajar era, I show how the issues of Shiite piety contributed to the idea of selecting and keeping souvenirs, how materiality of souvenirs in their daily use contributed to shaping such a Shiite piety, and how the sacredness attributed to the objects taken as souvenirs was extended from the familiar ‘religious’ souvenirs to the ‘exotic’ ones.

Peyman Eshaghi is a Ph.D. student of Islamic Studies at the Free University of Berlin, Germany. His main areas of research are hajj and pilgrimage in Islam, ritual, and politics in the Muslim world and the anthropology of Islam. Among his publications are *Muslim Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (co-edited with Babak Rahimi, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), “To Capture a Cherished Past: Pilgrimage Photography at Imam Riza’s Shrine, Iran”, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 8(2-3): 2015, 282–306 p. and “Quietness beyond Political Power: Politics of Taking Sanctuary (Bast Neshini) in the Shi’ite Shrines of Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, 49(3): 2016 (439-512).

Lattice Window and Shia Pilgrimage
Material approaches to Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, Iran

Jabbar Rahmani

In Shiite culture, pilgrimage and mourning rituals play a huge role in the shaping of identity, especially within folk religion. The Shia sacred spaces in Iran, like the shrines in terms of material religion, consist of a grave dedicated to a saint and a shrine on it. In the materialist approaches to religiosity, the emphasis is generally on the agency of material elements in the construction of a living religion. But the processes of experiencing this agency of the material elements in religion have not been sufficiently explained. The question is how do these material elements in a shrine (such as Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad) shape pilgrims' experiences of lived religion? How do these material dimensions affect a pilgrim visiting the shrine, and what is the role of the human senses in these relationships? The material elements must first be perceived by the senses and then be interpreted in people's minds.

In this paper, the central question is about the role of the senses in the relationship between religious experiences and the material elements of the holy places (Shia shrines). My theoretical framework is a combination of material religion and anthropology of the senses. From this perspective, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of the influence of material elements in shaping the religious experience of pilgrims requires understanding the relationship between the human senses and the sacred elements. This question is not to deny the agency and effectiveness of the material elements, but to focus on the sensory patterns of the material elements in the construction of their meaning and agency. Accordingly, material elements throughout the life history of a religion gradually develop their own cultural patterns in the construction of the experience of believers.

In this research, I attempted to present an ethnographic description of pilgrims' experience of Imam Reza's shrine in Mashhad. My central question is the relation between the material elements of the shrine and the formulation of its sensory perception in the construction of the pilgrimage experience among pilgrims. Therefore, I have considered how pilgrims relate to the material dimensions of the shrine (material structures such as *zarih*, *gonbad*, courtyards, porches, doors, domes, etc.) and the role of the five sensory systems in this regard.

Jabbar Rahmani is assistant professor of anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies in Tehran, Iran.

Materialities of Sufi saint shrines in Istanbul.
The case of the the mausoleum of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi (1541-1628) in Üsküdar

Esther Voswinckel Filiz

Istanbul is a religious landscape made up of several hundred saintly tombs (*türbe*) of Sufi personalities. In spite of the legal ban on Sufism which has been in act since 1925, some of them have not ceased to be vital focuses of local pilgrimage. Such shrines are often referred to as *manevi merkezler*, spiritual centres. In the rite of visiting tombs (*ziyaret*), sensual and aesthetic experiences including sound and smell, the use of perfume, taste, or the distribution of sweets and food and water are a vital part of what is often referred to as the experience of the ‘spiritual’.

In my contribution, I wish to offer a close look at the *türbe* of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi, a famous Ottoman Sufi saint whose tomb on the slope of a hill attracts people from all over Istanbul and beyond. Drawing on extensive fieldwork at this site, I will shed light on the multiple material layers, substances, and portable items which compose the place. Between 2013 and 2015, the *türbe* was restored. Numerous paraphernalia that used to be kept at the shrine were removed. Among these are the personal belongings of the saint (*emanet*): mantles (*hırka*), shoes, a stick, and pieces of ceremonial headgear (*taç*). How do these textile paraphernalia matter in the contemporary practices of relating to the saint? In my contribution, I will focus on the veneration of personal belongings and ‘contact relics’, on the ‘sacred craft’ of sewing textile paraphernalia for the shrine and also on earth, plants, dust and water as vital parts of a local religious ecology.

Esther Voswinckel Filiz is an anthropologist of religion. She studied cultural anthropology and religious studies in Tübingen and Bologna and was a Ph.D. student at the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES) in Bochum. As part of her doctoral thesis titled “Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi in Istanbul – Biography of a Place” (submitted in 2020), she conducted long term ethnographic fieldwork at and around the mausoleum of Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi in Üsküdar with a focus on the aesthetics, material engagements and “threads and traces” (Ginzburg 2012) of this saintly place. At present, she is a research fellow at Orient-Institut Istanbul in the research field “Religious History of Anatolia”.

Socio-spatial Meaning of *Cemevis* in Urban Public Space: A Typology Study of Places of Worships of Istanbul

Erhan Kurtarır

The *cemevi* has yet to be officially recognized by the Turkish government as a place of worship. Ever since the Alevis won the ECtHR case on discrimination against Alevi places of worship, they have tried to formulate steps to achieve the *cemevi's* official recognition. The central government rarely communicates what requirements and steps are involved to attain this status. This lack of clarity makes the recognition process time-consuming for both the government and the Alevis. The lack of legal status is not only a problem of official recognition; it also has consequences with regards to service allocation and urban planning. One of the biggest obstacles is that 'place of worship' is not a clearly defined category in Turkish law. Moreover, what constitutes 'religious services' is officially defined according to Sunni-Hanafi law, which is the dominant Islamic legal school in Turkey. For the benefit of all parties, exploratory research and explanatory studies are needed to reach better definitions that will allow the *cemevi* to achieve an official legal status.

This paper will share findings from the author's fieldwork conducted on minority sacred places' between 2010-2015 that aimed to open a discussion on an inclusive definition of 'places of worship'. For this purpose, the paper will focus on the *cemevi's* social construction process, its architectural symbolism, and its multifunctional character as a shared space in a comparative perspective. Better understandings of these socially constructed common spaces can be an opportunity for authorities to reach an inclusive official definition on places of worship in Turkey. The paper also aims to open a discussion on main indicators that can be used to classify the super-diverse places of worship in Turkey.

Erhan Kurtarır is an assistant professor at the Department of City and Regional Planning at Yildiz Technical University, Turkey, where, in 2012, he received his PhD. His PhD research, addressed an understudied problematic of urban planning: "What is the role of place and urban planning in the process of sustaining the cultural identity of religious minorities in Turkey and UK?"

He has worked voluntarily as board member in the Istanbul Branch of the Chamber of Urban Planners. He has also supported civil society works in different kinds of NGOs, including rights-based or profession related organisations. He has provided consultancy service to public institutions. His research interests include: cultural geography; human rights; identity and place, migration studies (urban refugees); local democracy and participation in planning; geography of religion. His most recent research focuses on inclusive, democratic, and sustainable urban planning policy and techniques.

**Praying and Meditating in Museums:
A Visit to the Museum of Mawlana Jalal-ud-din Rumi (1207-1273)**

Çiçek İlgiz

Thousands of love pilgrims following various spiritual and religious trajectories (from Osho to the Rainbow family), come every year from all over the globe (from Argentine to Malesia) to Konya during December to commemorate Mawlana's 'unification with God' (*vuslat*). Mawlana, who was a 13th century Persian Sufi poet, is known in neo-spiritual circles with his writings on spiritual love and the yearly visit to his tomb is considered the 'love pilgrimage'. For the pilgrims, gathering in Konya to watch/join whirling dervish ritual, recite his poems collectively and 'aligning with his energy' are ways to contribute to the greater universal energy of love. The tomb of Mevlana, which was transformed into a museum after the closure of dervish lodges in 1925, constitutes the heart of love pilgrimage. People visit the museum to pray and meditate along with learning about the everyday life in dervish lodges.

Reflecting on the field research conducted in December 2019 in Konya, the presentation engages with the intertwined relation of the sacred and the secular through the Mevlana Museum. It asks what happens to the form of museum when people visit it to pray, mediate and get aligned with energies? Instead of framing spiritual practices taking place in museums as challenges to the secular modernist notion of museum, the presentation traces how imperial and national legacies shape the understandings of materiality and spirituality. It argues that the Mawlana Museum offers love-pilgrims a material reference point both to energetically experience spiritual love and to cultivate personal/political positions of the spiritually enlightened, and the morally elevated through the experience of the love-pilgrimage.

Çiçek İlgiz is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Empires of Memory Research Group hosted by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Her academic interests lie at the intersection of memory studies, politics of emotions and anthropology of religion. She is currently conducting research on the role of heritage sites in the cultivation of future imaginaries.

**Between Self-probation and Self-preservation,
the Role and Place of the Iranian Pilgrims' Body in the *Arba'īn* Foot Pilgrimage**

Amélie Neuve-Eglise

In contrast to traditional pilgrimages to Mashhad or Mecca where a certain degree of material comfort is usually sought, the participation of Shia Iranians to the *Arba'īn* walk is in part motivated by a quest for a physical challenge. In this context, bodily hardships have various functions, from conveying the sincerity of one's devotion to accompanying an education of the self. However, the use of various artifacts and techniques aimed at preserving the body highlights a will to keep a distance from dolorism and mortification practices. Through an examination of Iranian pilgrims' discourses, this paper explores their multiple representations of the body as a mediator of the sacred as well as a vehicle of specific spiritual experiences and forms of knowledge in the frame of the *Arba'īn* foot pilgrimage. If intense physical efforts and a form of suffering remain valued as a means of establishing a connection with the sacred, the inclusion in the sociability of the walk, especially through the consumption of votive food and welfare services offered by the Iraqis, also converts the satiated and cared-for body into a central medium to capture the graces of this temporality. Observations of bodily practices of the Iraqi pilgrims also foster reflections on the meaning of exemplarity and sometimes contribute to questioning beliefs. Perceptions of the body and its artifacts thus fully participate in the elaboration of the meaning of pilgrimage and underline the various ways of weaving subtle links between the visible and the invisible.

Amélie Neuve-Eglise holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne and the University of Tehran. She has taught at the University of Tehran and is currently a lecturer at INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales), where she teaches Shia beliefs and practices in contemporary Iran. She was the Editor-in-Chief of *La Revue de Téhéran*, a monthly review on Iranian history and culture, in which she has written extensively on Islamic philosophy and mysticism. Her current research focuses on Shia pilgrimages and devotional practices in Iranian shrines.

Hygienic Practices in the *Arba'een* March Ritual: A Survey Study

Ali Yousofi
Atiyeh Sadeghi

Pilgrimage is a religious, spiritual, and mystical practice based on certain rituals; it is a meeting between individuals and places that pilgrims consider worthy of respect, dignity, and awe. One of the most important Shiite pilgrimage events is the *Arba'īn* march of millions of pilgrims from all over the world in Iraq who come from a great distance to Imam Hussein's (AS) shrine. Enduring the hardships of the travel to Karbala during the *Arba'īn* march, is one of the virtues of this journey. However, more recently pilgrims have come to believe that they can and should remain healthy despite hardship during pilgrimage travel. Consequently, practices of pilgrimage during the *Arba'īn* march have changed, and hygienic practices, sanitation, nutrition, and the accommodation of pilgrims have become important. The paper presents a survey study done to examine the hygienic practices and self-care patterns of pilgrims as well as the readiness of the health system to prevent infectious diseases during the *Arba'īn* march. Data was collected by a questionnaire completed by 1,503 pilgrims of different nationalities 15 years or older. The findings show that pilgrims depending on gender, nationality, education, occupational status and income have different perceptions of the hygienic or health situation on the *Arba'īn* march and engage in different practices. Self-care practices of pilgrims include preventive measures, walking patterns, rest, and consumption, as well as treatment patterns. The study also documented changes in normal living practices, including the correction of improper health habits during the *Arba'īn* march, which has become part of the *Arba'īn* march and pilgrimage prayers. In this case, the hardships and austerity of *Arba'īn* march will be part of the pilgrims' health care principles.

Ali Yousofi is an associate professor of sociology at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. His research interests include development Sociology, Sociology of religion and Political Sociology.

Atiye Sadeghi is a PhD candidate of economic sociology and development at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Her research interests involve charitable action, economic sociology, agent-based modelling and migration.

Saintly Statues and Sacred Icons: Interreligious Materiality at Istanbul's Latin Catholic Churches

Vanessa R. de Obaldía

Since Ottoman times, Christians and Muslims alike have sought the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of various saints at Latin Catholic places of worship in Istanbul and Anatolia with a multiplicity of petitions. Such popular practices, which had no grounding in canonical law, were expressed through various acts such as confinement to a chapel dedicated to a particular saint and the visitation of Marian shrines as well as through material mediums such as bread and water. Similar manifestations of everyday religiosity among the two communities of believers can still be observed in contemporary Istanbul.

This study seeks to explore the shared devotional practices which have developed around the materiality of saintly statues and Marian icons at Istanbul's Latin Catholic churches while arguing that such forms of devotion remain strong in spite of the revival of Islamic sentiment in contemporary Turkey along with the promotion and imposition of Sunni orthodoxy. Ever since the seventeenth century, cures were sought from the popular Franciscan saint, Anthony of Padua, at his eponymous chapel at the prison for Christian slaves in the Ottoman capital. His intercession continues to be sought today, with votive offerings in the form of bread placed at the feet of his statues located in Istanbul's Franciscan churches. Similarly, belief in the Virgin Mary's intercession has been manifested by believers from the two faiths through the visitation of Marian religious icons at the Dominican church in Galata and the Franciscan church in Pera which were miraculously preserved from the numerous fires which ravished the area in Ottoman times.

Such a study would be incomplete without examining the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on shared devotional practices and the extent to which lockdown and restrictions on opening hours and the numbers has hindered exopraxis within Istanbul's Latin Catholic churches. The response of the churches in facilitating alternative forms of access for devotees to ritual and spiritual worship shall likewise be highlighted including the adaptation of traditions associated with St. Anthony which enabled those in need to continue to receive the saint's blessings regardless of faith.

Vanessa R. de Obaldía has a BA in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from the University of Cambridge (2009), an MA in Islamic Law from Marmara University (2014), and a Graduate Diploma in Law from BPP University (2017). She was awarded a PhD in History by Aix-Marseille University (December 2018) for her thesis titled "A Legal and Historical Study of Latin Catholic Church Properties in Istanbul from the Ottoman Conquest of 1453 until 1740." Vanessa holds a three-year postdoctoral position at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz for the ERC Starting Grant project titled *Mount Athos in Medieval Eastern Mediterranean Society (MAMEMS): Contextualizing the History of a Monastic Republic, ca. 850-1550*. She has published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and is currently co-editing a multi authored volume on Latin Catholicism in Ottoman Istanbul which will be published in late 2021. Her research interests include doctrine and practice in Islamic law, non-Muslims and their communal and religious institutions in the Ottoman Empire, and the study of historical and contemporary charitable endowments.

***Baraka* and the Materiality of Shrine Visits in India and Turkey**

Smita Tewari Jassal

Ziyaret or the ritual visiting of Muslim saints' shrines is common in the Middle East and across the Indian subcontinent. These historical structures as monuments of the past remind devotees of glorious saintly deeds as well as the *baraka* (blessedness) of saints. In this essay I focus on two distinct geographies, Turkey and India, to answer questions about the internal or bodily transformations that people seek from visits to saint shrines.

On the one hand, I ask how the space of the shrine impacts visitors, especially with regard to ongoing practices and forms of knowledge associated with the shrine universe. In focusing on shrine protocols and other ways in which spaces are conceived, I ask about people's expectations from these spaces. On the other hand, my interest is to learn how *bereket/baraka* is understood. If *baraka* is the quality of blessedness of the saint that lingers on and may even multiply after the saint has died, I ask how this transcendent and miraculous spiritual quality is experienced and understood by visitors in order to effect spiritual, mental and bodily transformations.

A further question concerns the extent to which practices might carry forward or challenge state discourses. In Turkey, for instance, while the state may attempt to disembodify shrine spaces, women strive to 'embody' their faith through their practices. The expression of religiosity through women's bodies also establishes and affirms traditions learnt from mothers and grandmothers. In the Indian context, shrines by their very nature have come to signify the blurring between Hindu and Muslim, and many saint shrines have evolved as potent spaces for healing. Here, I explore how people's expectations, along with what transpires at shrines, conveys something about them as shared religious spaces, as well as how and what societies remember.

This essay based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ankara, Turkey and Jaunpur, India, finally raises methodological questions about comparative perspectives that might offer more layered and deeper insights. The analytical exercise will draw upon comparisons and contrasts, to see if issues from one context might illuminate another. In this sense, the empirical evidence I offer has wider implications for cross-cultural conversations between the Middle East and South Asia, more generally.

Smita Tewari Jassal teaches Sociology at the Department of Sociology, and Graduate School of Social Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. From 2016-2019 she was Professor of Sociology at Ambedkar University, Delhi, prior to which she had been teaching at METU, Ankara from 2010. In 2013, she spent a year as research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) Delhi. She was the Madeleine Haas Russell Visiting Professor of Anthropology, Brandeis University in 2008–2009 and between 2005-2008 taught courses at Columbia University, New York and SAIS, Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC. She was Visiting Fellow at the Truman Institute for Peace, Hebrew University, Jerusalem between 2003

and 2004. Between 1995-2003 she was Senior Fellow at the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi. She received her PhD in Sociology from Delhi University in 1989.

Professor Jassal teaches courses on gender, theories and methods in social anthropology, culture, and courses on India. Her research interests include marginality, gender, religion, rural transformations, caste, collective memory and cultural production. She has authored *Islamic Conversation: Sohbet and Ethics in Contemporary Turkey* (Routledge UK 2020), *Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India* (2012, Duke UP), *Daughters of the Earth: Women and Land in Uttar Pradesh* (2001, Manohar) and co-edited *New Perspectives on India and Turkey: Connections and Debates* (2017, Routledge, U.K) and *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts* (2006, Sage). She is currently completing a manuscript on caste memory along the river Ganges.

The *Rifā'īyya* in South-Western Asia: Spiritual Organization and Performance of Ritual

Hasan Ali Khan
Aliya Naqvi Iqbal

As a Sufi order, the *Rifā'īyya* is better identified with Iraq, parts of Anatolia and the Levant. But, a branch of the order is also to be found in Karachi, with strong connections to Pakistani Baluchistan, Iranian Baluchistan, and the coast of Oman. The *de facto* head of the order today is Safiya, Zain al-'Ābidīn's daughter, who retains a special role for a non-reformed Sufi *tarīqa* led by a woman – the first example of such a female head known to the researchers, Hasan Ali Khan and Aliya Iqbal Naqvi. This paper will focus on the particular rituals of the Karachi-based *Rifā'īyya* lodges.

Amongst the central rituals performed in a *majlis* of the *Rifā'īyya* is the “*ḍarb*” or “*rātib-i- rifā'ī*,” a body-piercing ritual that does not cause the adherent any harm or bleeding: it is represented as a corporeal performance of spiritual power, faith, health, and healing. A second ritual is known as the “*bhandāra*,” which is in some parts similar to the wider array of *zār* ceremonies spanning the Persian Gulf region, in which conga-like drums are used for healing spiritual afflictions. In the *Rifā'īyya majlis*, however, specific precautions and spiritual rules are followed, separating it (in the minds of its adherents), from its “less” Muslim *zār* counterparts (such as the live chanting of Arabic *dhikr* formulas by the officers of the order).

During the rituals, specific material objects are imbued with power generated by spiritual songs and chants, and simultaneously mapped onto the performing body of the believer. Most important amongst these objects are the metal spikes used in the *ḍarb* rituals, two kinds of drums, the *daff* and the conga-like drum, as well as an enormous metal chain. These objects have a certain method of use in ritual, activated by synchronized mantras and bodily performances, in a process that is an obvious crossover between “verbalized and procedural” religious knowledge, in the words of Mohan and Warnier. The paper will, amongst other things, examine this process in detail.

Hasan Ali Khan is principal investigator (PI) for a research project: ‘Changes among *Thari* communities during the last decade: economics and social uplift, an analysis.’ His doctorate was on the medieval *Suhrawardi* Sufi Order and its related architecture in Multan and Uch, which has been adapted and published as: *Constructing Islam on the Indus: The Material History of the Suhrawardi Sufi Order, 1200-1500* (2016). His forthcoming book *Essays on Religions and Culture: Multan and Sind*, will be published with OUP (2021). He is a fellow of the Shi'ah Institute in London and is interested in visual ethnography. To that end, he has made a number of documentary films with his colleagues, based upon his research.

Aliya Iqbal-Naqvi is scholar-in-residence and permanent faculty in the Department of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. She holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, and is completing a Ph.D. from the same institution. Aliya's research interests include Perso-Islamic intellectual history and the Muslim cultures of South Asia. Her professional focus is on the development of locally contextualized curricula for the teaching of humanities in Pakistan. Aliya is also actively involved with several non-profit social enterprises.

**Dialogue in Shia Pilgrimage:
Expressing *Haajat* [the special need] in the Presence of a Living and Capable Object**

Mahdi Kermani (corresponding author)

Ahmadreza Asgharpourmasouleh

This study seeks to qualitatively examine the pattern of pilgrims' communication with the object of pilgrimage in Shia religious culture based on the method of content analysis. For this purpose, interviews have been conducted with twenty-seven Iranian men and women in the city of Mashhad. Mashhad is the mausoleum of one of the Shia Imams and the largest pilgrimage center in Iran. The data from the interviews were coded in three main stages and several sub-stages. Based on the findings, most respondents believe that there are three characteristics of holy personalities (including Shia Imams and their children), even after their death. These characteristics are: being alive and hearing, being able to intervene in worldly and hereafter currents, having the ability to mediate between the pilgrim and God. It is on the basis of these characteristics that a particular process of dialogue between the pilgrim and the subject of pilgrimage takes place. On one hand, the pilgrim has the experience of presenting his '*haajat*' [the special need], which is called '*raaaz 'o niyaaz*' [mystery and need], and on the other hand, the holy person puts the fulfillment of those requests on the agenda. In this process, '*tazarro*' [supplication] by the pilgrim, that is, the expression of the desire with a high degree of entreaty and humiliation, is of particular importance. Requests can be related to the affairs of this world or issues related to the world after death. The saint may speak directly to the pilgrim through a '*ro'yaaye saadegheh*' [sincere dream] or '*mokaashefeh*' [revelation]. Or indirectly convey references to him through other people, especially those who are considered '*saaleh*' [righteous]. Also, sometimes his response to the pilgrim can be perceived only in the fulfillment of the pilgrim's request. However, this study shows a dynamic and very diverse process of forming attractive dialogues between pilgrims and the object of pilgrimage in Shia culture.

Mahdi Kermani is assistant professor of sociology at the Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Letters & Humanities at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. His research focus areas include economic sociology, empowerment, women's studies, cultural studies as well as quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Ahmadreza Asgharpour Masouleh is assistant professor of sociology at the Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Among his focus areas are economic sociology and social simulation, especially agent-based modelling.

Coronavirus Pandemic and the Innovative Forms of Religious Rituals in Iran

Masoud Fattahzadeh

The COVID-19 pandemic has unprecedentedly influenced human life and affected everyday religiosity. Collective rituals of different religions and countries have been cancelled: the *tawaf* at the Ka'ba, the holy shrines of Imams in Iraq and Iran in the Islamic world; public participation at the Pope's Easter mass at St Peter's Basilica and his blessing at St Peter's Square; the closing of mosques, churches, synagogues, and other places of worship all over the world.

Iran's government too has prohibited collective activities and gatherings in public places including religious rituals and places. Religious communities have responded differently to this decision based on various perceptions of the nature of the disaster and the possible solutions upon them. In a rough classification, some believe that this disaster is the consequence of troublesome activities and others consider it as a divine examination for humans for which they don't know its reasons and results. Accordingly, they suggest different solutions. The first group does not follow the modern medical instructions seriously and believes that the only way to salvation is recourse to God and the saints, including the prophet Muhammad and the imams. The other group feels it important to follow medical instructions as well as to trust in God and the saints.

Both groups believe that the recourse to God and the saints is important to overcome the pandemic, and they have always done it in collective religious rituals like holding *hejats* and *rowzehs* or going on pilgrimages. Therefore, they tried to find new ways to hold religious ceremonies considering the governmental limitations on the collective events. They are using various innovative ways, but the most important innovation of holding such rituals is to challenge the concept of the place employing social media like Instagram. The Instagram advantages for this purpose are the high penetration rate, the *live* possibility, and its fitness to the social structure of the ritual holding in Iran. Such an innovation would cause different results like the deconstruction of religious NGOs as efficient organizations in Iranian religious society. In this presentation, I will concentrate on the details of the religious reactions to the coronavirus pandemic, the innovative ways of holding religious rituals, and the consequences of novel experiences on everyday religiosity in Iran.

Masoud Fattahzadeh is a PhD candidate of economic sociology and development in the Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran.

Reconstruction, Centred on Material and Social Demands, of the Traditional Ritual-Context Alevism

Mehmet Ersal

Rituals, with their mythical and theological backgrounds, have a power that shapes their members in many aspects. Rituals especially determine the religious and social structure of the Alevi belief system. Within the Alevi community, rituals transfer cultural and social values, provide the system of belief and social auto-control with their mythical and theological background, make necessary updates and new creations.

Despite all political and social developments, Alevi communities generally succeeded in maintaining their ritual-centred religious system until the 1960's. From this time on, migration has strongly affected Alevi communities and led to rapid changes that have transformed the ritual-centred system. Especially with the disappearance of the *dede* (spiritual leader)-aspirant relationship, the sacred place-individual relationship, the stages of *ikra'* (confession) and *musahiplik* (companionship) that ensure a place in the religious ring, Alevism has started to evolve from a belief structure into an organized life centred on identity, ideology, ethnicity, and needs. In this transformation, material and social needs were at the forefront more than the religious and social order built by rituals.

Based on data from our fieldwork done in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, this paper will analyse the traditional ritual system and the changes caused especially by the formation of non-governmental organizations. Drawing on case material the paper will discuss the changes in the ritual-centred belief system in terms of the material world.

Mehmet Ersal is assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at İzmir Katip Çelebi University University. His research focuses on Alevism, Bektashism and Islam.

Material Mediators of the Non-material: Objects, Materiality, and Change in Mandaean Religious Practice

Mehrdad Arabestani

To a large extent, being a religious Mandaean means the commitment to perform the rituals strictly through the proper bodily moves, using the authentically made regalia and ritual objects and artifacts, and consumption of ritually lawful foods. The scriptures describe the moral codes and religious laws as well as cosmogonic narrations that lay the ground for their specific worldview. Moreover, the inviolable scriptures include detailed instructions for making the ritual objects and their application. This contextual setting makes materiality a permanent fixture of the everyday religiosity and indispensable part of religious practice. The rituals must be exclusively performed with running water. Particular plants are to be used for ritual purposes. Certain materials are essential for the construction of artifacts necessary for the rituals. There are also instructions about the designs and the construction techniques of these materials. Other materials, like Mandaean silver and gold handcrafts and amulets, even though they are not an essential part of the religious practice, are tightly associated with the community and its cultural heritage. However, despite the fact that material objects and artifacts are omnipresent and indispensable parts of religious practice among the Mandaeans and their cultural identity, little heed has been paid to them in scholarship.

This paper, which is based on ethnographic data from a long involvement with the Mandaean community of Iran, will approach the materiality of the everyday religious practice from a three intertwined dimensional methodological strategy. The paper describes the objects and material aspects of religious practice and their interaction with other actors [actants] in the network of religiosity. On the other hand, the paper deals with the symbolic significance of the material aspects and the way they represent the worldview and consequently re-establish their cultural identity. Wars, political instabilities, insecurities, and religious intolerance in the last decades in the Mandaean homelands, have led to a precarious life and also resulted in the emigration and formation of the worldwide diasporic communities. All these changes introduced new concerns for cultural identity and desires for rethinking the religious practice, and for that matter, the part of materiality in the religion. The latter subject comprises the last dimension of the study that deals with the changing part of the materiality in the religious practice.

Mehrdad Arabestani is an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Tehran. He received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Malaya. He has carried out extensive fieldworks among the Orang Asli (indigenous people of Malaysia), the Mandaeans, as well as among the Kurds. His research interests are minorities, religion, identity, subjectivity, and cultural psychodynamics. For the time being he is the head of department of anthropology, the University of Tehran.

Digital Blessings for Holy Days: Performing Islamic Piety in the Age of Social Media

Erkan Saka

Ivo Furman

Over the past decade, social media has become an important medium for performing Islamic piety in Turkey. One way piety is performed online is through the communal sharing of blessings commemorating the holy days of Islam. These digitized blessings are often transmitted in a Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) and shared on platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp. The contents of GIF messages are visually appealing and do not require a high standard of digital literacy to understand. As a file format, GIFs are used for producing silent animations and low-resolution video clips (Chin, Iverson, Campesato and Trani, 2011). Free GIF producing software is readily available online and small file size means that output can be easily shared through networked digital devices such as smartphones. Due to their popularity and ease of production, one can argue that the practice of sharing blessings to mark important Islamic occasions constitutes an example of “lived religion in digital environments” (Campbell, 2012). By exchanging GIFS, users reiterate the collective definition of ‘we’/‘them’, but also spread it to bystanders, setting in motion further cycles of exchange and negotiation (Milan, 2015; p. 896).

Remaining within the framework set out by Birgit Meyer, this paper examines the role of religion in the production and circulation of digitized blessings on social media. Religion, within this context, refers to both collective practices of established traditions and institutions as well as the individual religiosities observable in contemporary societies. Utilizing a digital ethnographic approach (Pink, 2016), we study the assemblages and practices through which GIFs are produced and circulated online. In doing so, we also pay particular attention to the notion of mediation and how the technological affordances of the GIF format shape the way blessings are expressed on social media.

Mediation can be defined as “any process in which two elements are brought into articulation by means of or through the intervention of some third element that serves as the vehicle of medium of communication between them” (Parmentier, 1985: 25). This line of reasoning argues that digital media offers groups a language to communicate amongst themselves. When applied to the realm of everyday religiosity, mediation not only transforms established cultural practices but also creates new opportunities for the performance of piety. Building on this, one can argue that within the cultural context of Turkey, sharing GIFs not only adds a digital dimension to the practice of commemorating important religious occasions but also introduces a new vernacular through which piety is negotiated and performed online.

Erkan Saka is an associate professor of media and journalism studies at the School of Communication at Istanbul Bilgi University. He is currently the Head of the Media Department. He was recently a research scholar of anthropology at UC Irvine (Fall 2018) and Science and

Technology Studies at MIT (Spring 2019). His recent and current research topics include citizen journalism and social movements, online information fact-checking and verification issues, digital web archiving and internet histories, and ethnography of cryptocurrency circles in Turkey. He is a long-time political blogger (erkansaka.net) and a coordinator of a local TV show on social media (sosyalkafa.net). He is the author of *Social Media and Politics in Turkey. A Journey through Citizen Journalism, Political Trolling, and Fake News* (Lexington Books, 2019) and "Big data and gender-biased algorithms" In *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*. New York: Wiley Blackwell

Ivo Furman is assistant professor and graduate program director at Istanbul Bilgi University's department of Media. He completed his PhD in Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2015. His research has been supported by numerous institutions including the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education, Turkish Science and Technology Foundation (TUBITAK) and Stiftung Mercator. His research interests include computational social science and digital culture. He is co-editor of the upcoming volume "Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey" (Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

Digital Religion in Contemporary Iran: Everyday Religiosities on Instagram during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rasool Akbari

For at least a decade, ‘digital religion’ as a conceptual turn has contributed to the study of religion ‘in relation to digital artifacts and the culture in which it is situated’ (Campbell 2013). The growing field of inquiry on digital religion (e.g., Campbell and Evolvi 2019) deals specifically with the ways religion becomes a socially mediatized phenomenon. More particularly, with the incremental expansion of social media usage, digital technology in both its software and hardware features has become an add-on social space contextualizing religion. Hence, at least two important aspects of such a social mediatization and contextualization of religion can be noted: 1) the way in which digital religion is not confined to the activities of formal religious institutions but is rather part of the everyday religiosities of many practitioners; 2) the materiality of digital religion in the ‘institutionally diffuse’ (Luckmann 1967) and lived experience of those populations. The present study addresses the everyday as well as material aspects of digital religiosities in Iran as they came to be shaped during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Instagram is a popular platform used by the Iranians for photo and video sharing, the study methodologically examines some of the most viral Persian content shared as feeds, stories, and live streams during the period of late February 2020 (the approximate date of the first diagnoses at the national scale) and June 2021 (the estimated date by Iranian government for the end of ‘the fourth wave’). At the theoretical and categorical level, this study seeks to understand what different dimensions of religion (Smart 1999) are digitally as well as materially enacted, embodied, emplaced, mediated, and impersonated. For the analysis phase, a particular employment of ‘Hypermediated Spaces’ theory (Evolvi 2018) can help explain how contemporary Iranian religion is reflected throughout these everyday digital religiosities and lived out in a wide variety of ‘alternative/ mainstream, public/private, and real/imaginary’ spaces. Moreover, the presumption of religious as well as nationalistic values, including saliently those of ‘jihad’ and ‘martyrdom’, can be discerned within different networks of ‘actions and actors’ and on ‘various media platforms and physical spaces’. In conclusion, this study argues that the digital-material mediation of religion happens at its various doctrinal, ritualistic, narrative, emotional, legal, ethical, institutional, political, and aesthetic dimensions; and that these dynamics reflect and influence everyday religiosity in contemporary Iranian society.

Rasool Akbari holds a PhD in Comparative Religions and Mysticism from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. To carry out his bi-nationally supervised doctoral project, between 2018 and 2020 he was an invited researcher at ZeKK (the Centre for Comparative Theology and Cultural Studies), Paderborn University of Germany. His postgraduate research was particularly focused on the ambivalent presences of religion in conflict and peacebuilding. He is currently interested in the sociocultural study of religion in contemporary society in view of global issues. His research and teaching mainly includes Digital Religion, Multi-Religious Space, Contemporary Shiite Islam, Political Islam, Iranian Religiosities in Diaspora, and Religion in Contemporary Iran.

The Relationship between Government and Everyday Religiosity in Iranian Media: The Dynamics and the Narration of *Arba'īn*

Azra Ghandeharion

Karbala, one of the most venerated and popular pilgrimage destinations in Shi'ite tradition, is the burial place of Imam Hussayn Ibn Ali, who was killed in the battle against Yazid Ibn Mu'awiah, the Umayyad caliph (680 C.E). Walking to the holy shrine of Imam Hussayn to commemorate the 40th day of his martyrdom is a religious ritual modelled after the march his captured family, the *Ahlul Bayt*, took to visit his grave. This ritual is called the *Arba'īn* trek or march.

Despite its admiration among Shi'ites and its cultural and financial significance, the pilgrimage was forbidden during Saddam Hussein's reign in Iraq (1979–2003). After his downfall, this pilgrimage found momentum among many Shi'ites all over the world, especially Iranians since 2003. From 2013 until now, the Iranian government, not only as a Shi'ite administration but also as a neighbouring country, took an active role in advertising the *Arba'īn* trek. I discuss how Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, IRIB, promotes, represents, and narrates *Arba'īn*. Considering the vast audience of TV, IRIB would serve as the best representative of the relationship between government and everyday religiosity.

IRIB fully covers *Arba'īn* in every walk of life: from mosques, holy shrines in Iran, universities, schools and kindergartens to national news, documentaries, religious NGOs, governmental administrations, and even the support of *Arba'īn*'s mobile apps in 52 channels. Furthermore, the locations and the activities of *Mookeb*, (un)officially registered service stations for *Arba'īn* pilgrims in Iraq, are inseparable from the IRIB narrative. Benefitting from the tenets of cultural studies, I elucidate how the promotion of and the motivations behind *Arba'īn* broadcasted via IRIB (2013-2020) are not exclusively religious. The results show that fluidity and dynamicity of the *Arba'īn* trek are summarized in four competing yet overlapping discourses: popular and intuitive, religious, geopolitical, and financial.

Azra Ghandeharion, a faculty member of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, is the youngest Associate professor of English literature and cultural studies in Iran. Her interests in research include contemporary Middle Eastern art and culture. Her emphasis is on 'Otherness' issues, media studies, body politics, and literature of diaspora. She is also head of the International Academic Collaborations Group at the same university.

List of Presenters



Image: Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Mashhad Iran, 2021
Taken by: Rasool Akbari, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

Rasool **AKBARI**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, akbari.iru@gmail.com

Mehرداد **ARABESTANI**, University of Tehran, m.arabestani@ut.ac.ir

Ahmadreza **ASGHARPOUR MASOULEH**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, asgharpour@um.ac.ir

Peyman **ESHAGHI**, Free University of Berlin, eshaghipeyman@gmail.com

Mehmet **ERSAL**, İzmir Katip Çelebi University, mehmetersal@gmail.com

Masoud **FATTAHZADEH**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, masoud.fattahzade@gmail.com

Ivo **FURMAN**, Istanbul Bilgi University, ivo.furman@bilgi.edu.tr

Azra **GHANDEHARION**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, ghandeharion@um.ac.ir

S. M. Hadi **GERAMI**, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, m.h.gerami@hotmail.com

Çiçek **İLENGİZ**, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, ilengiz@mmg.mpg.de

Smita Tewari **JASSAL**, Middle Eastern Technical University, smitajassal9@gmail.com

Mahdi **KERMANI**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, m-kermani@um.ac.ir

Hasan Ali **KHAN**, Habib University, hasan.ali.2020@outlook.com

Erhan **KURTARIR**, Yıldız Technical University, erhankurtarir@gmail.com

Aliya **NAQVI IQBAL**, Institute of Business Administration Karachi, aliyaiqbalnaqvi@gmail.com

Amélie **NEUVE- EGLISE**, Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, amelie.neuveeglise@gmail.com

Vanessa de **OBALDÍA**, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, v.r.deobaldia@gmail.com

Katja **RAKOW**, University of Utrecht, k.rakow@uu.nl

Jabbar **RAHMANI**, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies, J_rahmani59@yahoo.com

Atiyeh **SADEGHI**, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Atiye.sadeghy@gmail.com

Erkan **SAKA**, Istanbul Bilgi University, erkan.saka@bilgi.edu.tr

Leila **TAVANGAR RANJBAR**, Philipps University Marburg, tavangal@staff.uni-marburg.de

Esther **VOSWINCKEL FILIZ**, Orient-Institut Istanbul, Voswinckel@oiist.org

Thank You All for Participating!



Image: Rosewater distillery, Kashan, Iran, n.d.
Taken by: Shahrzad Irannejad, Orient-Institut Istanbul