

KNAW Akademie Colloquium 2015

**Making Sense of Religious Texts: Patterns of Agency, Synergy  
and Identity**

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The Trippenhuis, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW),  
Amsterdam

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**Call for Papers – deadline 15 April 2015**

Texts and textual analysis are still a much-discussed topic in social and cultural research. Foundational arguments on textual analysis have contested the role of language and logocentric expressions, however the study of religious cultures seems to be strongly text-coded, and indeed the study *of* and *on* texts has always been crucial in the academic research and teaching of religion. Up to date scholarship has, however, discussed ‘text’ predominantly within one specific religious tradition, with the effect that ‘text’ has been debated within the boundaries of one religious identity and not from an inter-religious and inter-cultural perspective. Furthermore, texts have been only seldom assessed through an interdisciplinary perspective that sets the ‘textual’ in relation and dispute with the ‘extra-textual’ (such as rituals and material culture).

This Colloquium will gather scholars in different fields and working *on* texts and *with* texts, in order to provoke a debate on textuality that goes across religious traditions and academic disciplines. The Conference Committee is formed by three scholars from the University of Groningen: Sabrina Corbellini (Medieval History/History of Reading in Premodern Europe), Mladen Popović (Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism, Qumran Institute) and Stefania Travagnin (Religion in China, Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia).

This debate on ‘text’ will be organised around the following five key issues: (1) modality (of texts), (2) authority (of/on texts), (3) practice (visualizing and ritualizing texts), (4) materiality (texts as objects) and (5) transmission (translation and transmission of texts).

Invited speakers are: Gideon Bohak (Tel Aviv University), Robert Ford Campany (Vanderbilt University), Angelo Cattaneo (New University of Lisbon), Lucia Dolce (SOAS, University of London), Wim Francois (KU Leuven), August den Hollander (Antwerpen University/Vrije Amsterdam Universiteit), Roberta Mazza (University of Manchester), Arie L. Molendijk (University of Groningen), Hindy Najman (University of Oxford), Anders K. Petersen (Aarhus University), Eyal Poleg (Queen Mary University of London), Fabio Rambelli (University of California Santa Barbara), Neil Schmid (Royal Asiatic Society China), Fiona Somerset (University of Connecticut), Rina Talgam (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Eibert Tigchelaar (KU Leuven), Benjamin G. Wright (Lehigh University), Stefano Zacchetti (University of Oxford).

In addition, we are inviting paper proposals that address one or more of the following questions within the contexts of Asian religions (preferably Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism), ancient Jewish, or medieval Christian traditions:

**(1) *Modalities of Text***

1. Which forms do texts take?
2. What are the distinctions between verbal and non-verbal texts?
3. Within the sphere of logo-centric textuality, what are the contrasts between written and oral texts?
4. How do the new media (such as internet) affect and redefine the possibilities of the contemporary state of textuality?
5. What are the religious and social implications of the aurality of texts?

**(2) *Authority of/on Text: Power, Identity, Agency and Process***

1. How do texts become instrumental in the process of conferring and/or claiming authority in a religious context?
2. How do texts become key elements in the hierarchical arrangement of religious and cultural systems?
3. What are the agents in the process of selecting 'texts' and turning a 'text' into a sacred 'scripture'?
4. How does the community participate in the process of endowing a text with authority?
5. When texts are used in conjunction with images and rituals, is the textual or the extra-textual (i.e., visual culture and ritual performance) to entail authority and legitimacy? In other words, is it possible to see texts as only instrumental to images and rituals in the authority discourse?

**(3) *Practice with Text - Ritualizing and Visualizing Texts***

1. What is the function of a text in the acts of reading, reciting, chanting and copying?
2. What are the processes that a text undergoes during a ritual performance?
3. How does the presence of the text affect the ritual and vice versa?
4. What happens to texts when they are translated into images?
5. What are the dynamics between texts and images within a religious context?
6. How can we reconsider the categories of 'word' and 'image' in light of the relation between textual and visual?

**(4) *Materiality of Text***

1. Which materials are texts made with? And what is behind the selection of those materials?
2. How is the material support of a text affecting the text's efficacy and authority?
3. What are the effects of textual production, printing and economy/market factors on the religious significance of texts?
4. Why and how does a text become a sacred object?
5. What are the religious and social roles that a 'text/sacred object' has?
6. What is the significance of texts/sacred objects in the making of religious history?

**(5) *Transmission of Text - Preserving the Past, Translation and Translators***

1. What happens to a text when it is transferred throughout history?
2. What is the role of that text in bridging one historical period with another?
3. How does a text preserve (or manufacture) the past in the present?
4. How does a text affect the present for being part of the past?
5. How can we infer the unity of a text through its fluid historical development?
6. What does the 'translation enterprise' entail?
7. What are the agencies involved in the translation of texts?
8. What are the key factors in the process of cultural and linguistic reception and domestication of a text?

Please send an abstract of 300 words (including the issue and question(s) that the paper would address) and a short CV via email attachment to Stefania Travagnin ([s.travagnin@rug.nl](mailto:s.travagnin@rug.nl)) by 15 April 2015; email subject should say 'KNAW Akademie Colloquium 2015' and the text of the email should include name, position, affiliation and contact details of the author of the abstract.

Selected speakers will be notified by 30 April 2015. All speakers will be provided with meals (coffee breaks, 2 lunches and 2 dinners) during the conference.

Those who are interested in attending the conference without presenting must register in advance and not later than 30 September 2015 by sending an email to Stefania Travagnin; email subject should say 'KNAW Akademie Colloquium 2015 - Registration', and the text of the email should include name, position, affiliation and contact details. Registration fee for the entire conference is € 75 for PhD Students and € 150 for the others, and covers conference attendance and coffee breaks. Payment will be made by credit or debit card at the registration desk on the first day of the conference.