

Call for Papers

Authenticity, Origins, and Authority in the Practice and Study of Religion

An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference
Hosted by the Religious Studies Department

Brown University

Providence, Rhode Island

March 16-18, 2012

with a keynote address delivered by

Bruce Lincoln

Caroline E. Haskell Professor of the History of Religions,
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Notions of authority, claims to authenticity, and appeals to origins are intimately related concepts deployed in both the practice and study of religion. The relationship between these concerns is complex, however, and varies widely within religious thought, religious practice, and academic discourse on religion. Scholars have long studied, for example, the ways in which notions of the “original” or “authentic” are used to authorize religious ideologies, both among ancient and modern practitioners. With the rise of secularism, increasing attention has also been given to studying the ways in which authenticity itself serves as an authorizing force, as individuals and groups attempt to define meaningful existence through appeals to “authentic” sources of “authority,” be they gods, society, or the individual. And finally, this nexus of concerns manifests itself in the works of academics themselves: sometimes assertions of “authentic traditions” and “original meaning” creep into scholarly discourse on the study of religion.

This conference aims to probe the multiform connections between notions of authenticity, origins, and authority among religious actors as well as within academic discourse on religion. We invite papers from a wide variety of disciplines within the university that seek to explore the variegated relationships between these concepts, considered through the lenses of religions studied and the scholars who study them.

Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- claims to authenticity and authority in the invention of religious practices
- divine origins and other kinds of authenticating claims
- the role of secularization in claims to authenticity
- authenticity in modern moral philosophy (authenticity, “the self” and ethical formation)
- religious praxis through media (e.g. cyberpilgrimage) and issues of authenticity
- classifications of religious writings as authentic and inauthentic, and concomitant appeals to origins

- differentiations between canonicity and authenticity
- manuscript variations among religious texts and related discussions of authenticity, origins, and authority
- deployment of gender categories in discourses about authenticity and origins
- authenticity and ideologies of power
- analyses of the ubiquity of strategies involving claims to the authentic and original
- apocalyptic and future-oriented authenticating claims among religious groups
- issues of authentication and religious actors' attempts to construct religious space

Please submit a **250 word abstract** for a 15-20 minute paper by **November 30, 2011** to Brown.Religion.Conference.2012@gmail.com. Proposals should include the title of the paper, the presenter's name, institutional and departmental affiliation, and any technology requests. Responses will be sent out by December 20, 2011.