



CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Co-produced Rituals between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:
Uncovering a Common Late Antique and Early Medieval
Religious Culture**

University of Bern, Switzerland, 2-3 April 2025

Historical and anthropological studies often point out what they consider to be ritual similarities between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. When first identified, those similarities were often interpreted as the result of the influence of one tradition on another (Geiger 1833), or, for some, as the result of a purported universal impulse which would have triggered common expressions of popular piety built on a shared biblical background. The accuracy of those explanations has since been questioned. In some case, resorting to influence, whether one directional or reciprocal, has proven insufficient (Satlow 2008), while the popular piety category is the result of normative and polemical discourses (Prandi 1980). The notion of “Abrahamic religions/traditions/faiths”, forged by academics as part of an interfaith initiative during the mid-20th century, has enjoyed immense popularity but often oversimplifies complex historical data (Hughes 2012).

The study of both literary and material data suggests that many of those rituals originated from or developed upon practices performed by all inhabitants of the Roman and/or Sassanian empires. Many similar objects – oil lamps, unguentaria, golden-glass medallions, amulets, incantation bowls, funerary tables etc. – have been found in various religious contexts. What’s more, these objects were often recovered in areas which were characterized by similar architecture, decor, and functions, and, in some cases, in shared sites where people who defined themselves as members of different religious groups came to perform sometimes similar rituals (Massa, Attali 2023). This dynamic is particularly visible in sepulchral spaces, where the separation of funeral grounds based on religious identity remained an epiphenomenon in the Roman empire until it was progressively turned into law by Christian authorities during the Carolingian Period in the West (Treffort 1996) and the Middle Byzantine period in the East.

This workshop proposes to investigate the formation processes and early development of so-called Abrahamic rituals, which can be traced back to the late antique and early medieval periods, and their cultural contexts by using the notion of co-production (Heyden and Nirenberg forthcoming). Coproduction seems a valuable tool for understanding the complex dynamics at work in the development of ritual practices, their cultural background and their contribution to theological constructions and evolutions. Similarities beyond the boundaries of religion create a frame suitable for co-production dynamics, such as the production of new forms, the exchange of vocabularies, the dynamics of re-semantisation in texts and images, or even literally coproduced artefacts and spaces.

Among possible lines of inquiries are paradigmatic cases, when shared or similar practices documented by material culture were polemicized against by religious authorities, who questioned their religious orthodoxy. In some cases, customs drawn from a common (religious) culture ended up receiving theological legitimacy, while still being used as polemical tool to question the validity of the religious Other(s). For instance, the widespread practice of food consumption and/or deposit in funerary spaces opens the question of the relationship between the *marzeah* mentioned in Jewish documents and the Roman funeral meal (*refrigerium*), which was vilified as a marker of Paganism by Christian writers in a boundary making effort and ultimately superseded by the Eucharist and agape in Christianity. Another case is the pilgrimage on the tombs of major religious figures, institutionalized by Christianity after a long debate (Dal Santo 2012), reluctantly accepted by Rabbis while criticized by Karaites (Boustan 2015; Nemoy 1970), and controversial among Muslim communities (Arjana 2017).

We invite proposals for papers from the fields of ancient and medieval history, archaeology, art history, religious studies, theology, and related disciplines addressing especially, but not exclusively, the following topics. **Papers simultaneously addressing various religious backgrounds and traditions are particularly welcomed.**

- Religious interactions through ritual practices
- The role of ritual in defining religious identities/categories
- Shared ritual spaces and/or artefacts
- Methodological and theoretical approaches to rituals, taking into account the concept of “religious co-production”
- Questioning the religious identity of ritual artefacts based on their iconography
- The co-produced materiality of ritual texts (scrolls, *codices*, inscriptions etc.)
- Comparing material culture with literary descriptions of rituals
- Rituals as conscious or unconscious markers of both intra and inter-religious deviance
- Roman and Sassanid (pagan) origins of “Abrahamic” rituals

The participants are expected to deliver a **20-minute talk**, followed by a Q&A session. The workshop will take place in-person at Bern University on Wednesday and Thursday 2-3 April 2025. The keynote lecture will be delivered by Prof. Timothy Insoll from the University of Exeter. The conference and planned publication will be in **English**. Travel and accommodation costs (up to 3 nights) will be covered by our travel agent.

Please submit an abstract of 300 words and a short bio, including your institutional affiliation, **by July 15th, 2024**, to both Dr. Caroline Bridel (caroline.bridel@unibe.ch) and Dr. Maureen Attali (maureen.attali@unibe.ch).

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