Photographic Practices and the Making of Religion (Leipzig, 25-26 Nov 22)

Universität Leipzig, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Nov 25–26, 2022
Deadline: Jul 15, 2022

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Photographic Practices and the Making of Religion

Within the growing field of photography studies, particular interest has been devoted to the social and material qualities of photographs through which practices and meanings are produced. However, less attention has been given to the ways in which these qualities of photographs interact with and affect the sphere of religion. The aim of the conference is to investigate this relationship by showing that not only the visual information in photographs, but also their multi-material, sensorial, and haptic features play an important role in the shaping and transformation of religious communities, practices, and cults.

Ever since their introduction in the 19th century, photographic images have been used in religious contexts. Photographs of cult images, martyrs, religious leaders or pilgrimage sites circulated in both Western and non-Western religious traditions, including Buddhist, Christian, and, within limits, Muslim traditions. Despite their opto-chemical nature, which distinguished them from traditional means of image production, they were quickly integrated into the respective religious cultures, where they could serve different purposes. As devotional objects, photographs were not only looked at, but also touched and kissed; as part of religious rituals, they were treated with holy substances or relics, turning them into powerful agents of divine authority which could perform miracles. At a commercial level, they became collectible items, which were produced, marketed, and often collected in personal albums. Moreover, vernacular photographs were used as votive offerings at religious sites, allowing visitors to leave a physical trace of their presence in time and space. At the same time, photographs of religious phenomena were also treated as documentary and scientific evidence. Labelled with descriptive terms, classified according to knowledge systems, and filed in image archives of academic institutions and museums, they created stereotypes and, even now, contribute to the othering of religious traditions.

In recent years, various disciplines have drawn our attention to the importance of material, emotional, and social practices for the shaping of religion. Authors such as Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (Photographs, Objects, Histories, 2004), Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (Religion in Cultural Imaginary, 2015), Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Feeling Things, 2018), and David Morgan (The Thing about Religion, 2021), have analyzed the way in which material objects such as photographs not only interact with religious practices and experiences but often create them in the first place. Following these methodical approaches, the conference seeks to clarify the role of photography in the making of religion from the 19th to the 21st century. Researchers,

archivists, and doctoral students from the fields of photography studies, art history, postcolonial studies, anthropology, religious studies, and other disciplines are invited to submit a paper.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:
- How was the introduction of photography discussed in theological contexts?
- How can the conception of photography as trace, impression, or index be read within the history of relics?
- What was the relationship of photography to other forms of visualization and what kind of instructions for its use were provided?
- Who produced, sold, or collected photographs of pilgrimage sites, religious events, or encounters?
- What materials and techniques were used to manipulate and amplify photographs, especially with regard to coloration, collage, or retouching?
- In which ways was photography used for the othering of religious communities and what role did it play in the history of evangelization and colonization?
- How does digital technology change the use of devotional photographs?

Practical information
- This event is currently planned as a face-to-face event in compliance with Covid-19 protection measures; remote participation might be possible upon request
- Call for papers deadline: July 15, 2022
- Successful applicants will receive a notification by August 15, 2022
- The final program will be communicated in September 2022
- The papers can be held in English, German, or Italian
- The papers, illustrated by a slideshow, should be no longer than 20 minutes
- It is possible to contribute towards the transport and/or accommodation costs of speakers
- The publication of the conference proceedings is planned for Autumn 2023

How to submit your proposal
- Write an abstract in English of approx. 500 words
- Include a short CV and your contact details, specifying whether you prefer to participate remotely or on site
- E-mail to moritz.lampe@uni-leipzig.de

Reference:

CFP: Photographic Practices and the Making of Religion (Leipzig, 25-26 Nov 22). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 5, 2022 (accessed Nov 13, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/36865>.