



Call for Papers

Iconic Figures: Intersecting Religious and Political Narratives of the Past

7 – 9 December 2022

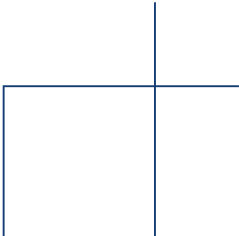
at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin

organized by

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The revival and contestations of iconic figures and role models intended to shape presents and futures can be observed around the world. Saints, religious leaders, social and political figures, thinkers or scientists who often have not been remembered for decades or even centuries, are rediscovered and endowed with new significance. As part of the representations of the past that operate also as a mobilizing force, these processes inevitably involve inclusion and appropriation, while producing at the same time otherness. Often, the alterity at work in the constructions of the past are not only to celebrate icons and role models, but also to reject those that are deemed undesirable and unvaluable. These can be alleged heretics, leaders of other religious communities, or ideological adversaries, each feeding particular narratives and representing specific pasts. A major question behind such observations is: when and how societal transformations or crises and historiographical lags or gaps are instrumentalized by political and religious groups in order to produce alternative values and norms, selective readings and constructions of the past?

As a systematic discourse on the past, historiography carries diverging and even competing visions of community's life and collective experience. Prophets, saints, ancestors, caliphs and imams are figures and models around which religiosity and desires to revive and reconnect with the past meet and set normative frameworks for everyday life. Similar processes can be explored with regard to "secular" historical figures, political



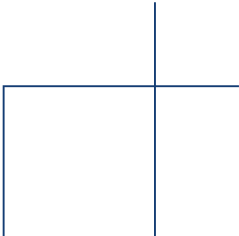
leaders, inventors or victims of violence. Indeed, these processes of revivifications, displacements or expulsions are in many contexts at the center of local, communal and national political aspirations, actions and struggles, often grounded in particular understandings and imaginations of politics and religion.

The proposed conference aims to critically examine the construction, deconstruction and functioning of iconic figures as (positive and negative) role models from a transregional perspective. It focuses on **intersections** between on the one hand, competing narratives within and between religious traditions, and on the other hand, political and religious appropriations and uses of historical personalities to construct role models. Thus, we are as much interested in the debates around prophetic figures within various religious traditions in Africa, as the making of missionary saints in Imperial Russia or the rediscovering of forgotten anti-colonial fighters of the early 20th century in political struggles in India. Of special interest are **multi-religious contexts** and spaces of **intercultural encounters**, where diverging historical narratives about the same figures come to interact with each other. How to identify the modes of appropriation (or refutation) of historiographies and their usage as a mobilizing force for the future is of prime interest to the conference.

Since part of the agenda is also to examine both the intersection and the interdependence of religious and secular narrations in historical knowledge production, identity formation and belonging, we will discuss the ways in which iconic figures are evaluated, (re)valued and used to feed specific societal and political agendas. As one may observe across traditions, regions and time periods, iconic figures can be bearers of witness of the past, symbols of the present and role models for the future. In this process, boundaries between reality and myths might become blurred, secular figures sacralized, or religious figures—real or not—become “history”. Such practices of revival or deconstruction could be observed for instance through competing narratives and institutionalized discourses (school books, traditional media, new media), the production of and encounters with art (music, literature, visual art) as well as the relationship with material manifestations (monuments, sites of memories, religious sites).

While focusing on the **intersections between narratives and practices** of construction and de-construction of iconic figures, the conference also aims to provide a platform for transregional and interreligious comparative examinations. It will bring together scholars of various disciplinary orientations and working on different regions to examine the intersections and the entanglements between religious and political construction and deconstruction of historical icons and role models. It will pay particular attention to the ways in which discursive traditions in multi-religious contexts influence these processes.

Empirical case studies could be current as well as historical, and from any geographical area. The aim is to formulate questions and devise methodological tools which would allow for comparison both temporally and across regions.



The conference is planned for 7–9 December 2022 at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin and will be held in presence or in a hybrid format. A final decision will be made in late summer depending on the pandemic situation. Depending on the funding we will cover the costs for travel (economy class flight / 2nd class train) and accommodation.

Please send a title and an abstract of **ca. 300 words until 31 March 2022** to ConferenceValuePast@zmo.de

Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by 30 April 2022. They are expected to submit a paper of 7–10 pages by 1 November 2022. We intend to publish selected contributions of the conference.