

Gendering Ascetic Knowledge in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: Intra- and Interreligious Transfers and Transformations

Zeit & Ort

22.10.2015, 10:00 - 23.10.2015

Freie Universität Berlin, Seminarzentrum,
Otto-von-Simson-Str. 26, 14195 Berlin,
Room L 116



Sonderforschungsbereich 980
**EPISTEME IN
BEWEGUNG**

International Conference organized by project C02 “Asceticism in Motion: Forms and Transfer of Habitualized Knowledge in Antiquity and Late Antiquity” (Head: A.-B. Renger)

Pre-modern asceticism in the West has traditionally been mapped out with clear-cut boundaries separating religions, cultures, and genders. Processes of intra- and interreligious transfer and transformation have been largely ignored. Judaism and Islam, for example, while an integral part of the religious landscape of the post-Late Antique Mediterranean world, were all too often conceptualized as world-affirming religions devoid of ascetic practices, so that they could be excluded from the field of study. The ascetic peaks in the very landscape were perceived as undisputed domains of Christian hegemony, which remained, to a large extent, isolated from the asceticism championed by various non-Christian philosophers and religious sectarians in the Greco-Roman world. As for the Christian heroes who turned against the flesh to lift their spirits toward the heights, they were commonly classified in binary fashion, neatly separated into male monks and female nuns.

The distorted view propagated by such rigid conceptual demarcations has been debunked in the last two decades or so. A close reading of the sources reveals that the map of ancient asceticism drawn by past scholarship has included stereotypes and tropes derived from ancient rhetoric, which after all was in the business of creating realities and identities, not describing them. This recent conceptual blurring of religious, cultural, and gender boundaries brings with it its own challenges, such as the redrawing of the map of pre-modern asceticism.

The conference focuses on the role of gender in personal and impersonal transfers of knowledge between teachers and students, institutions and society, and different religions and cultures, in order to better understand the historical processes of knowledge transformation in pre-modern asceticism. Invited speakers will apply this rethinking of gendered knowledge, along with the latest theoretical insights from gender and body studies, to crucial examples of asceticism in the premodern world. Our goal is to shed light on the interconnectedness of gender, ascetic training, and the transfer and transformation of religious knowledge both within and among the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean world from antiquity to the dawn of modernity.

The following guiding questions frame our approach:

1. Can we identify gender specific ascetic practices in the surviving sources? Are such practices the result of consistent or competing gender models?
2. To what extent do ancient sources distinguish the religious knowledge that was produced, transmitted, assembled, adapted and/or altered by ascetic training according to gender?
3. What is the function of such discursive and practical differentiations in our sources? Can we link them to specific social contexts (individuals, groups, institutions, etc.) and actual shifts in the processes of transfer and transformation of religious knowledge?

The conference will explore these issues as well as how ascetic knowledge changed when it was transferred into different religions and cultures, focusing especially on the continuities, transformations, and discontinuities in how gender was conceptualized. We also ask how and to what degree processes of knowledge transfer and adaptation in these new religious and cultural environments reflect back on earlier traditions and what impact, if any, this reflection had on new traditions.

Conference coordination by Alexandra Stellmacher und Tudor Sala.