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## GUEST EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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The theme of books as bodies and as sacred beings has long played a role in my thinking about iconic and performative texts. Meerten ter Borg's essay, "Canon and Social Control" (1998), first stimulated me to think about this topic. Ter Borg pointed out that scriptural canons function as authorities less for people's beliefs than for their social identities. People feel like the scripture belongs to them, and that they belong to it. This identification and devotion gives the scripture, in ter Borg's words, a "quasi-personal charisma." George Heyman (2006 [2008], 221) built on ter Borg's ideas to describe the historical relationship between changes to Roman Catholic scriptures and canon law. He concluded that "the canonical quality of law and scripture is a belief in the numinous, quasi-personal mediations of the divine in both." When I began to theorize the social effects of ritualizing scriptures, I divided scripture rituals between three different dimensions of texts: the semantic dimension of interpretation, the expressive or performative<sup>1</sup> dimension of reading, memorizing, singing and acting out texts, and the iconic dimension of a book's material form and visual appearance. The theories of ter Borg and Heyman led me to identify the "quasi-personal charisma" of sacred texts as the rhetorical *ethos* generated by ritualizing especially their iconic dimension (Watts 2008 [2008], 151–152).

Confirmation of this thesis appeared in a collection of essays edited by Kristina Myrvold on disposal rituals for sacred texts in different religions and cultures. These essays repeatedly documented the human tendency to create disposal rituals for sacred texts that are modeled on

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1. Though I have called this dimensions "performative" in many of my previous publications, that term creates confusion with performing rituals, which can involve all three textual dimension. "Performative" also evokes a broader range of theoretical implications (see Velten 2012) and applications (see Burrus in this volume). Therefore, I suggest calling it the "expressive dimension" instead to focus attention more narrowly on how people express the contents of texts mentally, orally, visually and dramatically.

funerals for humans. The most vivid example was provided by Myrvold herself. In 1988, a businessman in the Punjab created a crematorium where worn-out copies of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, can be ritually disposed of in a respectful and devout manner. The grounds of the crematorium includes space furnished with beds where the books can lie in state. Then they are burned on “the respected pyre” in “a fire sacrifice” (Myrvold 2010,<sup>2</sup> 135). The popularity of this practice soon led to building several more Sikh crematoria for books around India. They are willing to dispose respectfully of the scriptures of other religious traditions as well. Other essays in the volume show that Jews and Hindus have often disposed of worn-out sacred texts by imitating the funerary rituals of their traditions (Schleicher 2010, 21–24; Broo 2010, 96–102). The ancient Buddhist practice of inserting sutras in stupas imitated doing the same thing with the Buddha’s bodily relics (Moerman 2010, 71). Even Christians, who have not institutionalized any rituals of book disposal, sometimes ritualize the disposal of bibles by imitating funerary burials or cremations (Parmenter 2010 [2012], 59–66). These examples show a widespread tendency to treat sacred books not only like beings and persons, but specifically like human bodies as well.

The tendency to regard iconic sacred texts as personal beings goes beyond disposal rituals. In India, it has led to granting a book legal rights comparable to those of humans or gods. In 2000, the Sikh’s Guru Granth Sahib was granted the legal right to own real property. The Indian High Court classified the Guru Granth as a “juristic person,” a status for corporations and other non-human legal actors that had previously been granted to images of gods ensconced in temples (Myrvold 2007, 151). Though recognizing that Sikhs regard their scripture quite differently than Hindus regard divine images, the court argued that, for legal purposes, ritual installation of the Guru Granth in its gurudwara functions similarly to divine images installed in their temples. It specifically distinguished the Guru Granth in this regard from other scriptures, such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, and the Qur’an (Rao 2000; Kapoor 2010).

This limited legal analogy between deities and one book of scripture reflects much more extensive analogies promulgated by the religions themselves. William Graham (2012, 16) noted that “There is an observable tendency in every tradition for a scriptural text to partake of the transcendent reality it is perceived to reveal, represent, or mediate.”

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2. References to *Postscripts* are dated as follows: cover date [publication date].

Mystical traditions especially tend to equate deity with divine scriptures. Jewish *kabbalah* describes the Torah as the body of God that is composed entirely of the divine name (Wolfson 2004, 223-24). Muslim theologians debate whether the Qur'an was created by Allah or was divinely preexistent (Suit 2010 [2012], 191). Christian theology describes both scripture and Jesus Christ as the "Word of God," and medieval Christian art could treat them interchangeably (Parmenter 2006 [2008], 168-72). According to the ancient Hindu Puranas, intoning a mantra expresses the essence of a deity in sound. A book that contains the mantra therefore also makes deity visible (Brown 1986, 81). Veneration of the Buddha's Dharma in its paradigmatic expression in the *Prajñāparamita* sutras led in medieval times to the sutra being depicted and venerated in the form of a goddess (Kinnard 1999, 114-75). Today, at least one Hindu community is extending similar veneration to the *Bhagavad Gita* (Joanne Punzo Waghorne, personal communication). Such rhetoric and ritual practices treat various scriptures as more than sacred objects. They turn books into divine beings and treat them like the sacred bodies of gods.

I was delighted, therefore, to accept Yohan Yoo's invitation to give the opening paper at a symposium at Seoul National University in October, 2017 on the topic "Books as Sacred Beings" and then to help edit the conference papers for publication. Yoo brought together an international team of scholars to address the theme of the conference from an impressively diverse range of primary materials and perspectives. As a group, their papers melded to advance previous research in solidifying the conclusion that human cultures, especially religious groups, often ritualize bodies as sacred books and books as divine beings. These studies collected here not only increase the range of examples of this phenomenon. They also show the wide variety of ways in which the identity of books, bodies and beings gets ritualized and theorized. The title of this collection, *Books as Bodies and as Sacred Beings*, therefore extends the conference title to better reflect the range of topics engaged by its chapters. The sequence of chapters roughly reflects the title's thematic sequence: we start with sacred texts as material objects that human bodies manipulate and end with transcendent textual bodies. Of course, when describing how people use books in general and sacred texts in particular, the boundary between material imminence and spiritual transcendence turns out to be very thin indeed.

Rituals frequently manipulate material scriptures while also expressing their contents using words and images. It is less common for recitation rituals to also physically reproduce scriptures on the spot in

writing and graphic displays. In the first essay, Yohan Yoo describes one set of rituals that does so: shamanistic rituals of scripture reading and reproduction in North and South Chungcheong Provinces, South Korea. In contrast to shamanistic practices in other parts of Korea, here their principle ritual activity involves seated recitation of scriptures while also writing key names and cutting out symbols derived from the scriptures on paper banners. Ritualizing the expressive and iconic dimensions of formerly Daoist and Buddhist scriptures in this way is believed to invoke the gods' presence, drive away demons, and bring healing to the sponsors of the rituals.

While internalizing a sacred text is usually taken as a metaphor for learning and practicing its teaching, it can also be physically imbibed in various ways. Katharina Wilkens builds on her previous research on imbibing Qur'anic verses and ideologies of reading (2017) to describe the aesthetic ideology that governs rituals of embodying and sounding the Qur'an as well as drinking its letters. The description of the Prophet Mohammed as "a walking Qur'an" epitomizes the goal of Qur'anic memorization to sanctify the student by embodying the scripture. Combining these examples with a review of recent academic theories about the aesthetics of religion, Wilkens lays out the case for distinguishing semantic from aesthetic ideologies of literacy in Islamic discourse as well as in academic studies of it.

In contrast to such rituals of physically imbibing texts, much discussion today about written textuality focuses on the transformative changes brought about by e-books and online texts. Though many people lament the loss of physical contact with material books, little of this discussion has actually focused on digitization's effects on iconic texts. That is the topic broached by Brad Anderson, who surveys popular as well as academic discussions of the digitization of religious scriptures. Despite much discussion of the ritual use or misuse of digitized texts, he finds that iconic ritualization of scriptures still tends to utilize, with very few exceptions, a material book rather than its digital equivalents. Contemporary investigations of materiality in religious practices underscore the agency of physical objects in ritual practice, and elsewhere. Ritualizing iconic books, therefore, draws attention to the limitations of digital formats.

Nowhere are the advantages of material books more apparent than when displaying them to make religious or political points. Dorina Miller Parmenter describes the development of a very recent Bible ritual in the United States: Bring Your Bible to School Day. This attempt to counter the appearance of secularization in American schools and

culture has mobilized as many as 650,000 Christian school children to carry and display their bibles at their schools. Parmenter analyzes the rhetoric around this Evangelical movement on the basis of traditional Protestant doctrines of scripture dating back to the sixteenth century. She points out how processing bibles and the images of doing so in news media, advocate websites and social media engage both Lutheran and Calvinist theologies of scripture. In the end, it is not the bibles but the children carrying them whom the books index as “showing God” to their schoolmates and teachers.

Such an emphasis on people embodying sacred texts is common. Rachel Fell McDermott analyzes Bengali Tantric poetry dedicated to the goddess Kālī. Culling examples from her previous publications about this tradition, she shows how Bengali court poets in the eighteenth century popularized the esoteric Tantric traditions that had become associated with Kālī over the preceding millennium. These traditions emphasized entextualizing Tantric teachings through meditation so as to reproduce the macrocosm within the microcosm of one's own body. However, later Bengali poets reflect the rising popularity of Bhakti traditions that simplify the tradition into pure devotion to the goddess herself, rather than trying to reproduce her journey within the body. McDermott thus charts the transition from esoteric to exoteric tradition that, for most people, changed their dedication to this Tantric deity from practices to be mastered into feelings of love and devotion.

Bodily practices with written sacred texts usually take place in religious cultures that encourage a wider variety of bodily disciplines for spiritual attainment, such as fasting and purification rituals. Some people become famous for going to ascetic extremes, and as a result attract admiring hagiographers who chronicle their lives. In an essay added to this collection after the Seoul conference, Virginia Burrus recounts some vivid early Christian examples. She compares their practices to those of modern performance artists who use their own bodies as the medium for their art. Burrus notes that how the bodily performances of saints and artists affect their audiences vividly and viscerally, but also how both depend on mediation to extend their performances: the ancient saints through the texts of their hagiographies, the modern artists through photography and video technology. More than other kinds of textual mediation, however, the bodily performance draws readers' and viewers attention away from its forms of mediation. Burrus argues that the saints' performances get mediated also by art in the form of iconography and by things in the form of relics. They thus exhibit three dimensions of performativity: textual,

visual and thingly.

Narratives about venerated spiritual leaders also feature prominently in Buddhist traditions and art. It has long been known that Buddhist sutras have functioned as relics to embody the Dharma since at least the first centuries C.E. Jason Neelis focuses on narratives of the Buddha's past lives to show that these stories also transmit the Dharma both verbally and visually. He describes the religious lives of these narratives by tracing them in the iconographic programs of reliefs from ancient Gandhāra, some of the earliest extant examples of Buddhist art. Gandhāri scribes and artists appropriated these narratives by associating them with local people and shrines. As a result, people made pilgrimages to these places from as far away as East Asia in order to retrace the path by which the Buddha became enlightened across his many lives. Neelis argues that the goal of such pilgrims, and of the artists who marked their routes for them, was to come closer to enlightenment themselves by bodily following the spiritual path of the Dharma as described in these narratives.

There is a mystical tendency in many religious traditions to consider their scriptures transcendent in one way or another. There are, for example, old Jewish and Muslim claims that the prototype of the Torah or Qur'an was written by God at the creation of the world and continues to reside in heaven. Jihyun Kim describes how ancient Daoists made an even more fundamental claim. They regarded their scriptures as embodying *qi*, the fundamental energy of the cosmos. It produced scripts and scriptures even before the creation of the world, and the look and sound of sacred texts brought it into being. Daoist ritual uses of scripture therefore aimed to engage a transcendent and primordial state of being.

The tendency of books to be ascribed agency like people and deities leads me, in the last chapter, to explore why that is. Books manifest interiority like people: we speak of both as material containers for immaterial ideas. Books also generate common out-of-body experiences, they can be reproduced in multiple copies, and encountering them often changes us. Books are therefore material artifacts whose common use generates analogies that reinforce widespread hopes for bodily transcendence, resurrection or reincarnation, and theophany.

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