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### The study of religion(s) in Western Europe (I): Prehistory and history until World War II

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## The study of religion(s) in Western Europe (I): Prehistory and history until World War II

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### Abstract

This essay discusses main features and developments of the study of religion(s) in Western Europe. It attempts a historical, geographical, and thematic synthesis. Part I sketches the general academic framework of the academic study of religion(s) in Western Europe and addresses the question of the (historical and conceptual) roots of this field of study. It then discusses some key dimensions of the academic institutionalization of the study of religion(s) from the 1870s to Fascism and National Socialism, addressing such issues as chairs, congresses, periodicals, textbooks and reviewing previous research. Parts II and III are to follow.

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Western Europe is home of the first chairs committed to the academic study of the history of religions. From a global perspective, Western Europe is still one of the strongholds of the (non-confessional/non-theological, historical, comparative, social-scientific) study of religion(s). While Western Europe may appear as a homogenous unit from an American or Asian perspective, in fact it is a rather inhomogeneous entity. The continent is still divided by linguistic barriers, powerful nation-states and national cum regional identities. There are several works that address the study of religion(s) in individual countries or at specific universities. The present article will

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make the audacious attempt to address the development of the history of the study of religion(s) in Western Europe as a whole.<sup>1</sup> We begin by noting some structural preconditions.

### *Linguistic diversity and increasing language barriers*

Linguistically, Western Europe is dominated by Germanic and Romance languages.<sup>2</sup> In part, this division also identifies different intellectual environments. Even in Switzerland and Belgium, where both Romance and Germanic languages enjoy official status, the linguistic areas have different academic traditions. These linguistic-territorial divisions, however, are hardly static. For example, the Scandinavian countries, and mostly also the Netherlands have in recent decades severed their ties to German academia and have reoriented themselves towards the English-speaking world. Nowadays, very few young Scandinavian scholars publish in or read German or French. Many European scholars mainly follow the international debates only to the extent that they are conducted in their native language and English (see also Antes, 2004, p. 44). Italian, French, and German are no longer considered equal to English, even within continental Europe. In Germany, for instance, in general very little Italian literature is read and vice versa. Scholars from Britain tend to ignore literature published in languages other than English. American scholars of religions are better-known and generally seem to enjoy greater respect than colleagues from neighboring countries.<sup>3</sup>

### *Different university systems*

The university systems of various Western European countries—most notably Britain, France, and Germany—traditionally function on very different premises both with respect to education and research. Germany, for instance, has a tradition of research-based teaching and individual research, whereas France has some key-institutions with dense research activities and little teaching. While the German system knows only the professor and his assistant(s), Britain and other countries have a more differentiated staff-structure (lecturer/reader/professor), assigning different teaching and research responsibilities to different staff-categories.

In recent years the European Union has attempted to internationalize the academic landscape. A common academic grading system is being introduced and inter-European exchange of students

<sup>1</sup> Pye (2000, p. 225) has noted that ‘there is as yet no satisfactory history of the subject which takes into account the linguistic and cultural diversity even of Europe’. The present paper is a modest attempt in that direction.

<sup>2</sup> Sami and Finnish belong to a different family of languages (Uralic).

<sup>3</sup> Gothóni (2005) is a case in point: the very rewarding volume which is based on a conference held in Helsinki in 2002 discusses three main approaches to comparison. Three North American scholars (D. Allen, D. Wiebe and R. Gross) were selected as protagonists for these approaches (and keynote-speakers at the conference) and their contributions are then discussed by several Finnish scholars. Apparently, no non-Finnish European scholars were active part of the conference, and European approaches to the study of comparison (and there are plenty!) were obviously not deemed to be as important as American scholarship. For some major European contributions to the issue of comparison, see, e.g. Platvoet (1982), Bøespflug and Dunand (1997), Klimkeit (1997), Haviv et al. (2004), and Burger and Calame (2005).

and teaching-staff is being funded. The European Union and other transnational institutions (such as NORFACE) are also funding large-scale research-projects.

### The limits of academic trans-nationalism

These development notwithstanding, in the humanities the bulk of research is still funded by the respective national research agencies, and while there by now is extensive short-term ‘mobility’ of students and scholars, with rather few exceptions<sup>4</sup> recruitment is almost exclusively done on a national basis (and occasionally within sub-continental areas like Scandinavia or Germany and its respective neighboring countries or within Britain as well as between Britain and the US). This is in marked contrast to the formative period of the field. In the late 19th Century the German Friedrich Max Müller propagated a new science of religion in Britain. In the early 20th Century Nathan Söderblom (a Swede) and Edvard Lehmann (a Dane) were appointed to newly established chairs in Germany (Leipzig and Berlin).<sup>5</sup> W. Brede Kristensen (a Norwegian) was appointed to one of the most prestigious chairs at the time (in Leiden).<sup>6</sup> The most famous academic migrant in our field was, of course, the Rumanian Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) who worked for many years in France prior to his emigration to the United States (in 1957).<sup>7</sup> The United States, in turn, has functioned as a sort of collecting pond for scholars of diverse European descent.

### Surveying the academic landscape

In different countries what is here referred to as the study of religion(s) is known under different names, emphasizing either predominantly historical, comparative or social-scientific approaches, if not opting for a general denominator (such as *religious studies*) which does not create any specific expectations with regard to subject areas and methodologies. There are some clearly recognizable national traditions. For example, Italy generally favors a name referring to history (*la storia delle religioni*—‘history of religions’, note the plural!). In many other countries, however, one finds several names used at different universities.

The study of religion(s) is nowadays taught at universities in more than a dozen countries of Western Europe. Nevertheless, there are still some marginal blind spots on the map: the study of religion(s) is not yet academically grounded in Ireland and Portugal. At present, the International Association for the History of Religion (IAHR) has affiliated member-organizations in the

<sup>4</sup> The most well-known from the previous generation were British scholar Michael Pye in Marburg (Germany), Dutch scholar Jacques Waardenburg in Lausanne (Switzerland), and German scholar Hans Kippenberg in Groningen (The Netherlands); in 1989 Kippenberg accepted a newly established chair in Bremen.

<sup>5</sup> When Söderblom left Leipzig, the faculty first called a Danish scholar (Vilhelm Grønbech), who, however, declined because his home university (Copenhagen) changed his lectureship into an extraordinary chair. Leipzig subsequently wished to appoint a Belgian scholar (Franz Cumont), but this was made impossible due to political events (Germany having recently invaded Belgium); see Prytz Johansen (1979, pp. 24–25, note 51).

<sup>6</sup> For some further instances of cross-national fertilization see Benavides (2005, pp. 10077-8).

<sup>7</sup> His eventual successor Ioan P. Culianu (1950–1991) likewise spent several years throughout Western Europe (Italy, France, the Netherlands) before migrating to the US.

following West European countries: Austria, Belgium/Luxemburg, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The IAHR was founded mainly by West European scholars in Amsterdam in 1950. All past presidents of the IAHR were Western European scholars. Also the present president (Rosalind Hackett), elected in 2005, was born in England (Birmingham) and obtained her education in England and Scotland. After obtaining her PhD from Aberdeen in 1986 she moved to the US.

A census of departments and programs in the study of religion similar to the one undertaken by the American Academy of Religion (AAR) or a review of current research similar to the Canadian Corporation for Studies of Religion's *State-of-the-Art Review* series (for a discussion see Warne (2004, pp. 15–23) has not yet been attempted for Europe. However, Peter Antes has recently published a country-by-country survey of the state of affairs in Europe in which he stresses the variety of contextual settings of the study of religion in various countries (Antes, 2004).

In 2000, the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) was founded. To this day, its main activities consisted in sponsoring several electronic discussion lists—again subdivided by language!—and in arranging a series of annual conferences jointly with one of the respective member-associations. At the time of writing, conferences have taken place in Cambridge (2001), Paris (2002), Bergen (2003), Santander (2004), Turku/Åbo (2005), and Bucharest (2006), the latter being the first conference to take place in Eastern Europe (but still outside the Slavonic language area). The number of participants reached its peak at the Bucharest conference. It remains to be seen whether the EASR will create some sort of a European identity for the study of religion(s).

### Prehistory of the study of religion

Obviously, the study of religion(s) did not fall from heaven any more than the books of revelation it studies did. And just as in the case of the religions under study, its pundits have devised several competing accounts of its origins.

In his in many respects still unsurpassed history of the field, British historian of religions Eric Sharpe (1933–2000) who for a period worked in Sweden and later moved to Australia<sup>8</sup> uses a biomorphic metaphor in stating that the emergence of what he (British style) calls comparative religion 'represented the germination of seeds planted and watered over many centuries of Western history' (Sharpe, 1997, p. 1). Sharpe even goes so far as to suggest that 'the entire history of the study of religion in the Western world' is 'as an extended prelude' to modern comparative religion (Sharpe, 1986, p. 1). While that may seem like an illegitimate teleological reconstruction,<sup>9</sup> Sharpe is probably right when he reminds his readers that '[t]he antecedents of comparative religion were far more numerous, and far more diverse, than is commonly realised' (Sharpe, 1997, p. 1). He himself makes a case for 'tracing the origins of comparative religion back to classical antiquity' (Sharpe, 1997, p. 2). In his book, Sharpe provides an overview of the contributions of various

<sup>8</sup> On Sharpe, see Trompf (2005).

<sup>9</sup> In a later account, he leans more towards pluralistic views and emphasizes that the history of the study of religion(s) can be 'subdivided in too many ways' (Sharpe, 2005, p. 21), for instance with regard to geographical and cultural areas, key disciplines, subject matter, events in history, etc. This shift in emphasis may well correspond to the diversification of the field in the period between 1975 (when Sharpe's book was first published) and 2000 (when he wrote the chapter published in 2005).

epochs of Western intellectual history to the eventual emergence of the academic subject. According to him, this development culminated in theories of evolution as the ‘one single guiding principle of method which was at the same time also able to satisfy the demands of history and science’ (Sharpe, 1997, p. 26).

### *Searching for the roots*

Scholars have put forward rivaling claims identifying virtually every major epoch of Western history as the ‘real’ origin of the modern field.

In a recent book the Swiss historian of ancient religions, Borgeaud (b. 1946), has attempted to uncover the roots of the comparative study of religion in antiquity, stressing the double legacy of non-Christian intellectual history and Christian transformations and perceptions of ‘other’ religions (Borgeaud, 2004). At the same time he argues that the modern study of the history of religions could only take shape by an act of liberation from religion, i.e. by adopting an external (and laic) perspective; its main tools were the result of acts of distancing, both from the present and the past (Borgeaud, 2004, p. 207).

In a review of Borgeaud’s book the Israeli scholar, Guy Stroumsa, claims that contacts between Christians, Muslims, and Jews may have contributed to ‘the genesis of our modern categories for understanding religion’ (Stroumsa, 2006, p. 259). Given that the practice of the history of religions ‘is, by and large, a philological endeavor, chiefly concerned with editing, translating and interpreting texts’, Jonathan Z. Smith (2004, p. 364) suggests to ‘re-describe’ ‘our field ... as a child of the Renaissance’. Not atypically for his witty style of writing, this claim is put forward more like a thought experiment rather than expanded by a well-sustained argument—which is not to doubt the real impact of the Renaissance into widening historical and geographical horizons.

The late American scholar Samuel Preus has traced the roots of the naturalistic mode of inquiry (as distinct from a theological one) into the origin of religion as ‘a coherent intellectual tradition’ (Preus, 1996, p. xiii) to the 16th Century. Subsequently, he recast his argument and argued that the critical, comparative, and historical study of religion has to be seen in the context of the intellectual revolution of the 17th Century as it unfolded in Holland with Spinoza as a key-figure (Preus, 1998). Without reference to Preus, Stroumsa and the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann (b. 1938) also attempted to make the case for to the 17th Century as laying the foundations for a critical and impartial study of religion by pointing to the contributions of such antiquarian scholars as John Selden, Samuel Bochart, Athanasius Kircher, Pierre-Daniel Huet, Gerardus Joannes Vossius, Theophile Gale, and John Spencer. The contributions assembled by Assmann and Stroumsa in the 2001 special number of the *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* on ‘the 17th Century and the origins of the history of religions’ illustrate the impressive range of materials assembled by 17th Century scholars. Nevertheless, the study of religion(s) practiced by these learned scholars is confessional, often polemical, almost always explicitly religiously motivated, and deeply immersed in religious world-views and frames of reference. As Stroumsa’s own contribution amply shows, all this is clearly the case with Richard Simon, whom Stroumsa nevertheless celebrates as a pioneer of a ‘new science’ (Stroumsa, 2001, pp. 90, 106). While the 17th Century antiquarians and historians clearly promote an emerging field of study, Stroumsa in my view goes one step too far when he describes them as practitioners of a science, namely comparative religion. On the other hand, Stroumsa has an important point when he emphasizes the

wide range of intellectual currents that went into feeding the growing field of study (Stroumsa, 2001, p. 90).

The Enlightenment is a more traditional candidate for the intellectual origins of the academic study of religion(s). In his Haskell Lectures the German historian of religions, Kurt Rudolph (b. 1929),<sup>10</sup> summarily calls the history of religions ‘a child of the Enlightenment’,<sup>11</sup> referring to the combination of ‘scientific curiosity and religious tolerance’ (Rudolph, 1985, p. 23) as its main ingredients. The American scholar, Preus, credits David Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* (1757) with the ‘paradigm-shift from a religious to a naturalistic framework for the study of religion’ (Preus, 1996, p. 207; see also Segal, 1994). As in much historiography, this view of the historical grounding of the subject is itself grounded in a specific view of its identity and function. Thus, when Rudolph argues that the history of religions, ‘in order to preserve its present spirit and further its autonomy ... must also revive its religio-critical, or rather, its ideological-critical function’ (Rudolph, 1985, p. 74) he clearly advances an Enlightenment-type of project. Similarly, for Preus (1996, p. 205) the naturalistic mode of inquiry is the one that effectively sets off the study of religion from theology.

Roughly a century separates Hume’s *Natural History* from the onset of the academic institutionalization of the study of religion(s) (see below). This observation has led the German scholar of religion Hans Kippenberg (b. 1939) to challenge Rudolph’s thesis and to point to the Romantic critique of Enlightenment as the birth place of the scientific turn of the study of religion (Kippenberg, 1991, pp. 28–29). He credits Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799) with the decisive change in the understanding of religion. Although Schleiermacher does not deny the external (cognitive, moral, political, etc.) functions of religion—in short the Enlightenment heritage of theorizing religion—he does deny that the very existence of religion can be reduced to them. For Schleiermacher, religion is a separate domain, a competence related to intuition or feelings, based on a continuous revelation of the Indefinite. Thus, with Romanticism religion gains an expressive dimension (Kippenberg, 1991, p. 31).

Obviously, Kippenberg’s critique of Rudolph can in part be turned against him, for a substantial gap of three quarters of a century separates Schleiermacher’s speeches from the institutionalization of the study of religion. Hence, other relevant developments and stimuli need to be taken into account. These include a further influx of relevant materials attracting scholarly attention and requiring intellectual domestication; political, religious and cultural developments such as the increasing separation of state and religion and the right of freedom of religion; industrialization and urbanization; missionary activities and colonialism; groundbreaking achievements within the humanities such as the translation of hitherto unintelligible writings, the decipherment of hitherto undecipherable documents, the discovery of the affiliation of families of languages, the archeological and geological unraveling of a vast territory of prehistory beyond the reach of the Biblical frame of reference, the rise of a historical–critical approach to the Bible and scripture in general, the advancement of professional historiography, and last but not least, the formation of the theory of evolution (for some of these developments see Kippenberg, 1997, pp. 44–59).

<sup>10</sup> Apart from his contributions to the history, methodology and disciplinary status of the field Rudolph is mostly known for his studies of Gnosis and Mandaean religion.

<sup>11</sup> So also Hutter (2003, p. 3).

To various degrees and at different times these factors were relevant in different countries of Western Europe. We can also adduce other factors that would retard or stimulate the development of the study of religion(s) in specific countries. As a case in point, the Canadian scholar [Michael Despland](#) (1998, 1999) has discussed several intellectual, political, and literary parameters for the emergent study of religion in France during the July Monarchy (1830–1848), i.e. the period prior to the onset of the later institutionalization process.

*'Religion': the foundational concept*

The most obvious, crucial, and lasting impact of Western European history for the formation of the study of religion(s), however, is the genesis of the very concept, category, notion, or taxon 'religion'. In line with a reflexive turn in the humanities (in which scholarship itself increasingly becomes the object of its own critical scrutiny), recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a vast body of scholarly literature, most of it written by authors who ignore each others work, on the history and implications of 'religion' as a clear and distinct if not altogether autonomous and universal domain of human reality. Some major contributions to the challenge of that conceptual heritage are written by European authors from different countries and disciplinary backgrounds.<sup>12</sup>

In a programmatic essay (published in a German reference work) the Italian historian of religions [Dario Sabbatucci](#) (1923–2002) emphasized that there were no objective criteria for classifying facts as 'religious' in non-Western cultures, since the category of religion was valid and functional only in the Western cultural environment ([Sabbatucci](#), 1988, p. 46). Moreover, he argued that the history of the study of religion(s) has led to 'the dissolution of the religious object' ([Sabbatucci](#), 1988, pp. 55, 57), that is, a disintegration of the specifically religious within culture, society, or mentality.

Some years later (without reference to Sabbatucci), the British–American anthropologist [Talal Asad](#) (b. 1932), son of an Austrian–Jewish journalist ([Leopold Weiss](#) alias [Muhammad Asad](#) [1900–1992]) who had converted to Islam, challenged in a widely quoted work the ways in which dominant theoretical understandings of the category of religion imply its conceptual division 'from the domain of power' ([Asad](#), 1993, p. 29).

Without any apparent reference to Asad, in a book-length discussion of the category, the French anthropologist [Daniel Dubuisson](#) (b. 1950) has argued that the category of religion as referring to a separate domain is a Western construct that has helped the formation of Western systems of values and representation. Therefore, in his view, it is inadequate for modern anthropological theorizing. In order to avoid epistemological deformations he suggests replacing 'religion' by the notion 'cosmographic formations' ([Dubuisson](#), 1998, p. 276).<sup>13</sup>

Neither Asad nor Dubuisson, however, seemed to be aware of the large-scale research-project that the German Catholic theologian, [Ernst Feil](#), had started since the 1980s at the University of

<sup>12</sup> Earlier North American contributions to that unfolding debate include [Smith](#) (1963) and [Despland](#) (1979).

<sup>13</sup> For an extensive discussion of Dubuisson's book see the special issue of *Religion* 36/3 (2006): 119–178 (contributions by [Steven Engler](#), [Aaron W. Hughes](#), [Robert A. Segal](#), [Ann Taves](#), [Wilhelm Dupre](#), [Forrest L. Vance](#), and [Russell T. McCutcheon](#) as well as a response by [Daniel Dubuisson](#)). The international debate about his thesis started after the publication of an English translation of his book (in 2003).



Munich. While Feil's project is fundamentally theological, his ambitious project, as those of the other scholars, pursues the agenda of problematizing the taken-for-granted character and validity of the category. His detailed reconstruction of the Western history of the concept from early Christianity to the Enlightenment (Feil, 1986, 1997, 2001) further evidences the important epistemological transformation that occurred in the formation of modernity.

From a post-modern background, Timothy Fitzgerald (2000), an expert of Buddhism and Japanese religions, has extended the critique of the intercultural usefulness and validity of the category 'religion', especially when applied to India and Japan, to explicitly challenging the very basis and fabric of religious studies as an academic discipline. This is a further attempt at revoking the broadening of the concept which in the early 19th Century had contributed to constitute our field of study. In Fitzgerald's study in vain one looks for a discussion of the studies mentioned above.

Although there is now a widespread awareness of the Eurocentric bias of the category and the resulting inherent problems in its application among European scholars, few if any, it seems, are prepared to actually give up the concept (be it to safeguard the institutional survival and autonomy of their very academic subject or because they subscribe to certain theories of religion, or because they simply want to avoid the genetic fallacy by discrediting a concept because of defects in its origin). Nevertheless, several European scholars (mainly from Britain, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Denmark, and Italy) were in the 1990s involved in a lively ongoing debate on the concept of religion both on a national and international scale (see, e.g. Bianchi, 1994; Platvoet and Molendijk, 1999; Feil, 2000). Moreover, Haußig (1999) has published a substantial comparative study on concepts of religion in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam.<sup>14</sup>

### *The sacred and the holy*

Some founder-figures of the study of religion(s) approached religion by employing the concepts of 'the sacred', usually in contrast with 'the profane'.<sup>15</sup> In 1906, reviewing their own previous work on sacrifice in an essay entitled 'Introduction to the analysis of some religious phenomena' Émile Durkheim's (1858–1917) students and colleagues Henri Hubert (1872–1927) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) proposed a definition of sacrifice as 'a means for the profane to communicate with the sacred by the intermediary of a victim' (Mauss, 1968, p. 16).<sup>16</sup> They then point at the complex nature of the sacred which they regard as the *idée force* around which rites and myths gravitate, as 'the central phenomenon among all the religious phenomena' (Mauss, 1968, p. 17). In a similar sense the category also appears in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) where religion is defined as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., things set apart and forbidden' (Durkheim, 1960, p. 65). The French scholars had, as they themselves freely admitted, been inspired by Scottish Professor of Arabic William Robertson Smith (1846–1894) who's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) they widely exploited. However, while Smith had used the adjective *sacred* (to qualify acts, beliefs, institutions, species,

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of the notion of 'religion' in Mesoamerican languages see now Pharo (2007). Schmitz (1996) provides a much wider range of examples, but is at the same time more superficial and methodologically slightly naive.

<sup>15</sup> For the distant Latin roots of the pair and its transformations see Borgeaud (1994); see Bremmer (1998) for the history of the terms in earlier scholarship.

<sup>16</sup> For the intellectual context of that theory see Strenski (2003).

tradition, usages, etc.), he had also put forward the general claim that '[t]he distinction between what is *holy* and what is *common* is one of the most important things in ancient religion' (Smith, 1894, p. 140).<sup>17</sup> When Hubert and Mauss criticized Smith's notion of the holy (Mauss, 1968, pp. 16–17), they naturally translated it as *le sacré* (the English double vocabulary of 'sacred' and 'holy' not being available in French, German, Italian and most other European languages).

One year later after Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*, the Paris-educated Swedish religious historian and theologian Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), at the time teaching in Leipzig (Germany), asserted that 'Holiness is the great word in religion; it is even more essential than the notion of God' (Söderblom, 1913, p. 731). Whereas Söderblom explicitly rejected Durkheim's 'notion of the "sacred" ... merely [as] a kind of objectifying and idealizing of the community as a power mysteriously superior to the individual' (Söderblom, 1913, p. 732), he approvingly refers to Schleiermacher's *On Religion* which the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) had re-edited some years earlier. Following that path, in his bestseller *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917 [1958<sup>30</sup>]; translations in all major languages),<sup>18</sup> an 'almost unclassifiable', 'introverted, fragmentary' text (Raphael, 1997, pp. 5, 3), Otto argued that holiness/the holy 'is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion' (Otto, 1958, p. 5). However, he felt that this notion was necessarily conflated with an ethical dimension. In order to get at an "'extra" in the meaning of "holy" above and beyond the meaning of goodness' (Otto, 1958, p. 6), he therefore invented a special term: the numinous, referring to a specific 'state of mind' which is 'perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other' and which can only be invoked, but not been taught (Otto, 1958, p. 7). Consequently, Otto (1958, p. 8) invites his reader 'to direct his mind to a moment of deeply felt religious experience' and asks the reader incapable of such a recollection 'to read no farther'. Religious experience here becomes the basic premise and privileged data for the study of religion.<sup>19</sup>

The notions of the sacred and the holy remained corner-stones of the vocabulary of religious studies throughout much of the 20th Century (see Colpe, 1977). Major theoreticians included Roger Caillois (1913–1978) and, of course, Eliade. In a number of publications Julien Ries (b. 1920), who taught history of religion at the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) from 1968 to 1991, has continued the kind of inquiry set off by Eliade, but given it a historical-comparative turn. He attempted to identify the ways in which the sacred has found its expressions in the religious history of mankind (see his large-scale [ca. 1100 pp.] trilogy: Ries (1978–1986) and the

<sup>17</sup> Bremmer (1998, p. 31) tries to contextualize the terminological genealogy: 'France was the first country in Europe where the state had so fiercely attacked the Church ... It was only here that one could observe a proper separation of the sacred and the profane, and, not surprisingly, only here that the dichotomy really took off.' As attractive as this explanation may appear, it fails to account for Smith's terminological distinction. However, Jan Bremmer pointed out to me by email: Smith does 'not yet introduce the category of "the holy", which happens only in France, to start with.'

<sup>18</sup> The English translation appeared under the strangely modified title *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* in 1923.

<sup>19</sup> On Otto see Alles (2005), on his concept of holiness Raphael (1997). Among his later works, note the book *West-östliche Mystik* (1926; English as *Mysticism East and West*, 1932), a comparative study of two key-figures of, respectively, Indian (Āchārya Śāṅkara) and Western (Meister Eckhardt) mysticism, which merits methodological attention since it discusses conformity as well as differences between both thinkers. At the same time, however, the comparison is apologetic in that it culminates in illustrating the superior achievements of the Christian mystic resulting from his Christian basis.

textbook from 1985 [Italian 1981], both accounts culminating in Christianity; Ries emphasizes the ‘originality’ of Christianity with regard to all other religions [Ries, 1985, p. 9].<sup>20</sup>

While a majority of scholars nowadays (partly for epistemological and partly for ideological reasons) rejects the notions of the holy and the sacred as key-concepts of the study of religion, one also finds some attempts to rethink them (Colpe, 1990), for example by grounding them in hermeneutics (Gantke, 1998) or cognitive linguistics (Anttonen, 1996).

## The emergence and ongoing institutionalization of the study of religion(s): 1870s to World War II

By the second half of the 19th Century, at the very latest, religion had become the subject area of a wide range of scholarly enterprises in Britain, France, Germany and some other countries. The increasing influx of empirical knowledge necessitated efforts to classify, categorize, critique, and interpret the ‘raw data’. This development is part and parcel of the general process described as the ‘scientification’ of learning in which scholarship acquired new functions and structures. In the form of methodical and partly mechanical empirical research, scholarship turns into a dynamic and open process focusing on questions rather than on answers (see Schnädelbach, 1983, pp. 88–117). This also entails processes of professionalization, specialization, and diversification along with the formation of a canon of academic scientific disciplines operating with a specific set of legitimate methods (Schnädelbach, 1983, pp. 96–97).

This article adopts a rather narrow (‘tribal’) perspective by focusing on the establishment of the study of religion(s) as a specialized, ‘compartmentalized’ and ‘departmentalized’ academic subject, if not a discipline in its own right.<sup>21</sup> As unsatisfying as that is from an epistemological point of view, the common denominator is that we are dealing with a scholarly enterprise (a) primarily focusing on religion and (b) distinct from academic theology. The relation with theology can be regarded as complementary or competing in principle, and harmonious or contentious in practice.<sup>22</sup> Since the 19th Century religion(s) have been studied by a variety of other humanistic and social sciences that were gaining shape and recognition at the time. Besides theology, these include philosophy, diverse branches of philology and classical studies, Oriental and Islamic studies, ethnology, sociology, and psychology, to name but the major ones. Many scholars from these disciplines made a far more lasting impact on the study of religion(s) than those holding chairs in comparative religion or the history of religions. The works of most of the early scholars from within the study of religion(s) in a narrow sense are nowadays mainly read for historical purposes,

<sup>20</sup> One of the main fields of Ries’ expertise is Manichaeism, for which he provided a history of its study (Ries, 1988). As far as I know, just one of his many books has been translated into English: Ries, 1994 [German translation of the same book 1993]. Ries is one of the most prolific editors of books within the field.

<sup>21</sup> The question whether the study/history of religions is a separate discipline or a field of study (a question with important political implications!) is disputed since its very beginning, see Molendijk (1998, pp. 14–16). Among authors opting in favor of a field see Whaling (1984, pp. 23–25), Sharpe (1986, p. 317), and Krech (2006, pp. 98–99); for defenses of the disciplinary status of religious studies see Rudolph (1992, pp. 3–80), Bianchi (1994, pp. 919–921), Segal (2006). Borgeaud (1999) is an example for an ambivalent position: On the one hand he repeatedly refers to the ‘discipline’ of the history of religions (e.g., 67, 68, 71, 72), while on the other hand stressing its ‘interdisciplinary’ (67) or ‘transdisciplinary’ character (69).

<sup>22</sup> More on that to follow in part II.

if at all. While many of the questions they were concerned with are still relevant, and largely unresolved, the answers provided by most early professional scholars of religion are nowadays generally deemed irrelevant, in marked contrast to many other by now ‘classical’ theorists or historians like Müller, Tylor, Durkheim, Mauss, Weber, and Warburg who never held an academic appointment in the study of religion(s) (whatever its name).

Ideally, the history of the study of religion(s) should more broadly address this entire field. Two scholars have attempted this for two periods in two separate countries. In his already-mentioned book on the study of religion in France during the July Monarchy (1830–1848) Despland (1999) attempts to account for the totality of the scholarly production on ‘religion’ by different groups of scholars working on different topics.<sup>23</sup> The German scholar Volkhard Krech (b. 1962) has published a survey of the study of religion(s) in Germany in the period from 1871 to 1933 (Krech, 2002). Apart from an account of the main disciplines involved in the study of religion, Krech surveys the ways the subject matter was envisioned as well as major methodological options and paradigms, such as historicism, evolutionism, functionalism, and existentialism (Krech, 2002, pp. 9–83). Similar to Kippenberg (1997), who has repeatedly argued that scholars around the year 1900 ‘suspected religion to be a lasting power in the modern world’ and that ‘[m]odern humankind can be trapped in religious traditions, unable to escape from them’ (Kippenberg, 2004, p. 64),<sup>24</sup> Krech (2002, p. 316) suggests that religion became a ‘problem’ in the context of processes of modernization and that the study of religion belongs to scientific modes of reflection on modernity and its roots. In his view, this is the reason why the study of religion around the turn of the 19th/20th Centuries showed such a strong interest in the relationship between religion and other sub-systems of a functionally differentiated (=modern) society. These sub-systems (whose relations with religion were regarded as problematic) include science, morality, and the arts. Furthermore, then as now, several scholars of religion have made attempts at diagnosing the religious situation of the time (Krech, 2002, pp. 163–249). Issues that stimulated the development of the study of religion(s) include perceived radical socio-cultural change and the apparent fragility of social cohesion and the role played by religion in these contexts. Moreover, the perceived decline in the significance of ‘objective’ (institutional) religion and the increasing importance of subjective religiosities called for scholarly attention (see also Krech, 2000).

For the Weimar period (1918–1933) Manfred Bauschulte has recently drawn an interesting and rich picture. In his dense book Bauschulte (2007) surveys contemporary analyses of the changing religious situation of the period (including Paul Tillich’s articles on the idea of *kairos*, published between 1922 and 1926). Moreover, he introduces major religious groups and circles such as Count Keyserling’s School of wisdom (Schule der Weisheit). Finally, he analyses some main topics of religious studies during the Weimar period, viz. religion and power (Scheler, Otto, Frick, Bultmann, Barth, Hauer), salvation and gnosis (Troeltsch, Schaefer, Peterson, Jonas, Heidegger), and the return of the suppressed (Freud, Schmidt, Reik). As the names of the main scholars involved in these debates illustrate, the tone was set by intellectuals very few of whom were institutionally affiliated with departments of the (non-theological) study of

<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the massive (600 pp.) volume has no indices and the author is reluctant in summarizing and drawing conclusions.

<sup>24</sup> Kippenberg (e.g. 2004, p. 56) holds that the rivaling paradigms of phenomenology and functionalism both had the same effect of suppressing that kind of historicism.

religion(s). According to Bauschulte, religious studies in the Weimar period were dominated by outsiders who were deeply involved in the confessional and existential as well as political conflicts raging at the time (Bauschulte, 2007, p. 23). He points to the impact of the traumatic experience of World War I and the ongoing religious experimentation on the debate about religion and religious issues (Bauschulte, 2007, p. 17). Bauschulte concludes that, on the one hand, religion was seen as consolidating a status quo ante of modern civilization with regard to the disruptive experiences of the present age. On the other hand, a critical discourse about religion pointed to religion as a contentious issue and matter of conflict in the development of modern culture (Bauschulte, 2007, p. 315).<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, there are no comparative studies of the development of the study of religion(s) on a meta-national, European, scale. Apart from transnational networks of scholars and scholarly discussions, as Borgeaud (1999, p. 75) has pointed out, the establishment of the field in different countries is to a large extent the result of national, or even local, developments including changes in the religious situation in the respective countries.

#### *Dimensions and places of emerging institutionalization*

The emerging institutionalization of a separate academic subject involves the establishment of courses, professorships and departments, professional associations, museums,<sup>26</sup> lectures, conferences, reference works, textbooks, introductory books, collections of primary source materials,<sup>27</sup> bibliographies, and journals exclusively devoted to the non-confessional study of religion. Only some of these aspects can be dealt with in this article.

In many parts of central Europe the formative period of the study of religion(s) extended into the 1920s. Histories of the study of religion had already begun to appear around the turn of the century (e.g., Hardy, 1901; Jordan, 1905, 1915; Réville, 1909; Pettazzoni, 1924; Schmidt, 1930), indicating that the field regarded its own formative period as being completed. The most comprehensive survey was *L'étude comparée des religions* by the Jesuit Henry Pinard de la Boullaye (1874–1958) who taught the history of religions at the Institut Catholique (Paris). Volume 1 makes an extensive (515 pages!) survey of the history of the study of religion(s) in the West all the way from antiquity to recent developments (Pinard de la Boullaye, 1922 [1929<sup>5</sup>]). Volume 2 is devoted to methodological questions (Pinard de la Boullaye, 1925).

The first professorships were established in Geneva (1873),<sup>28</sup> Leiden and Amsterdam (1877), Paris—at the Collège de France in 1880 and at the newly created 5th Section of the École Pratique

<sup>25</sup> Bauschulte and Krech are currently engaged in a project on the history of the study of religion(s) in post World War II Germany.

<sup>26</sup> The Musée Guimet (founded in Lyon in 1879, transferred to Paris in 1889) with its collections of Egyptian and Asiatic arts stimulated interest in the history of religions, see Despland (2001, p. 6). There are two specific museums for the history of religions in Western Europe: the Religionskundliche Sammlung in Marburg/Germany (opened in 1927 on the initiative of Rudolf Otto) and the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow/Scotland (opened in 1993). See Bräunlein (2004) for general discussion on the representation of religion in museums.

<sup>27</sup> Max Müller's large scale project of *The Sacred Books of the East* (50 vols., 1879–1910) is the main landmark helping at the same time to establish and to popularize the discipline; on this project see Girardot (2002).

<sup>28</sup> On the (pre-)history of that chair to the present see Borgeaud (2006).

des Hautes Études (EPHE) in 1886—and in Brussels (at the French-speaking Université Libre) in 1884/1896.<sup>29</sup> The formation of the 5th Section of the EPHE was a particularly significant step. With its initial 10 chairs it was started as a sort of faculty for the study of religion(s). Half of the chairs were devoted to the study of Christianity and one each to the religions of India, Egypt, Greece/Rome, the Far East, and the Western Semites. In 1888, a chair for the religions of the ‘non-civilized peoples’ was added. In 1910 the total number of chairs had increased to 16, in 1940 to 19, and in 1960 to 29 (see the diagram by H. Puisieux in Baubérot et al., 1987). The 5th Section of the EPHE remains today the largest single academic institution in the field in Europe. It currently has some 15 research centers and groups and some 60 teaching positions, albeit not all on a permanent basis. At least viewed from the outside, however, the 5th Section gives the impression of an assembly of specialists and regional specializations rather than an institution rigorously pursuing the agenda of strengthening the general and comparative study of religion.

In the Netherlands and France (and subsequently also in Britain) the establishment of the chairs went along with important changes in the University systems. In the Netherlands, a law was passed in 1876 that resulted in the elimination of ‘confessional’ theology from the Faculties of Theology. This opened the doors for the introduction of the general study of religion into these very same faculties (Molendijk, 2005, pp. 71–79). In France, institutional changes resulted from the political program of laicization, and the 5th Section of the EPHE was erected on the ruins of the Faculty of (Catholic) Theology at the Sorbonne (disbanded in 1885).<sup>30</sup> However, the project of introducing the study of religion(s) into ordinary university faculties and in the public schools failed (for possible reasons see Despland, 2001).<sup>31</sup> In Italy, the faculties of theology at state-run universities had already been abolished somewhat earlier

<sup>29</sup> In 1884 the liberal politician and well-known Mason count Eugène Goblet d’Alviella (1846–1925) started to teach a ‘free’ course in the history of religions at the Faculty of Letters. As his main intellectual inspirations for this project he later pointed to Tylor, A. Réville, and Tiele (Goblet d’Alviella, 1911, p. vi). Since he had no formal qualification for holding such a position at this Faculty, he was awarded a doctorate *honoris causa* for a comparative study of the contemporary development of religion in Britain, the United States, and India (published in 1884). However, this was not regarded as sufficient to qualify as a professor. Therefore, the free course could not be made permanent. Eventually, however, a solution was found to overcome these hurdles and the course was made optional. In 1892, the course was made compulsory for all who took a doctorate in the faculty; see Goblet d’Alviella (1911, p. vi) (where he also complains that people would not give him any academic credit in the early years). In 1893, Goblet d’Alviella was appointed as extraordinary professor. In 1896, he was made ordinary professor, a position he held until 1914, when he became a minister of state. In 1916, he became a member of the government in exile. In 1919, he was made honorary professor and became a permanent member of the governing body of the university. From 1896 to 1898 he served as vice-chancellor of the university. For his university career see Despy-Meyer (1995). For other aspects of his life and academic as well as non-academic work see Dierkens (1995). Some of Goblet d’Alviella’s publications have recently been reprinted in English. His successor on the chair at the ULB, Richard Kreglinger (1885–1928), was also a political activist. From 1926 to his premature death he was a liberal representative for Antwerp. Kreglinger is mostly known for a book on the religious evolution of humanity (1926, German translation 1930).

<sup>30</sup> For the dispute surrounding the establishment of the 5th Section, see Despland (2001, pp. 6–7).

<sup>31</sup> Currently, outside Paris the study of religion(s) is to be found at the Universities of Strasbourg, Angers, Lille, and Lyon (information kindly provided by Charles Guittard).

than in the Netherlands and France, respectively.<sup>32</sup> However, the law passed in 1873 did not lead to a lasting institutionalization of the non-confessional study of religion(s) at Italian universities. For one academic term in 1886 Baldassare Labanca (1846–1913) taught a course on the history of religions at the University of Rome, but already the following year, upon Labanca's request, the subject was changed to history of Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

In France and the Netherlands the occupants of the first chairs in the study of religion(s) were persons who did not belong to the religious mainstream of their respective societies.<sup>34</sup> In Paris, the 'strategic chairs' at the 5th Section were initially occupied by Protestants, most prominently Albert Réville (1826–1906) and his son and successor Jean (1854–1908). Initially, just one confessing Catholic held a chair, namely the chair of canon law (Despland, 2001, p.13).<sup>35</sup> Positivism and the historical–critical methods were new scholarly approaches. Leading French scholars were also quite receptive to the intellectual impulses coming from the Netherlands (see Cabanel, 1994). As French historian Patrick Cabanel has shown, the Protestant model of the study of religion and the accompanying model of a laic religiosity were successfully challenged around the turn of the century by Durkheim and his circle, who acquired the positions of power within French academia (although they never completely dominated the institutions of knowledge); the future institutional development pointed towards the sociology instead of the psychology of religion (Cabanel, 1994, pp. 61–67). With the entry of the Durkheim school, the Jewish–Christian tradition lost its place as the ultimate point of reference for the study of religion.

As in 19th Century Britain, magic and sacrifice continued to be core-issues of the emerging study of religion. Strenski (2002, 2003) has pointed to the political and religious constraints and implications of the scholarly discourse on sacrifice in France. While unmasking the conspiracies and deceptions as well as the rivalries and games of power involved in the theoretical debate about sacrifice, against American post-modernists and theologians alike Strenski (2003, pp.

<sup>32</sup> Since most catholic bishops had barred their seminarists from attending courses at the state-run faculties of theology the number of students had declined to such an extent that there were more professors than students. For a study of the process leading to the passing of the law and the different voices and opinions in the parliament, see Siniscalco (2006). As Siniscalco has shown, there was an overwhelming consensus to abolish the faculties of theology, but there was quite some disagreement with regard to the second part of the law, i.e. what to do with the chairs. The law, as it was eventually passed, stipulated that those subjects that were of general interest for the historical, philological, and philosophical culture of the country could be transferred to faculties of arts, see Siniscalco (2006, p. 17).

<sup>33</sup> On Labanca see Siniscalco (1994, pp. 155–158). Internationally, Labanca is best known for his collaboration with Henry Jordan on the book *The Study of Religion in the Italian Universities* (Jordan and Labanca, 1909).

<sup>34</sup> To some extent the same holds true for some other countries. An extreme case is the anti-clerical and anti-Catholic Mason Goblet d'Alviella in Belgium (whose ideas on religious evolution apparently to some extent converged with his deist convictions); he also had sympathies for the new liberal Protestant church in Brussels, see Boudin (1995). Other examples include people who were not religiously inclined at all like Pettazzoni in Italy or religious liberals such as Söderblom in Sweden. Söderblom's appointment as Archbishop of Uppsala in 1914 has to be seen in the context of a change in government; Söderblom was initially listed third, far behind the two front-runners. His appointment came as a surprise and '[r]eactions in Sweden varied from disbelief to anger at the government's seeming irresponsibility', Sharpe (1990, p. 146). Sharpe (2005, p. 38) speaks of comparative religion as 'something of a playground for liberal eccentrics' until the post World War II years. Lehmann, in Denmark, was a friend of Söderblom, but, it seems, more mainstream in religious terms. Both scholars seemed to share an apologetic understanding of their scholarly task. In Söderblom's case this was more explicit and his entire program for the history of religions was to a large extent devised as (Protestant) apologetics; see Hultgård (2002).

<sup>35</sup> For the counter-project of a Catholic history of religions see Despland (2001, p. 13).

229–237) holds that theorizing amounts to more than mere struggles for power. He even claims that ‘the Durkheimian arguments against the liberal Protestants over sacrifice from an epistemological angle may provide an excellent basis for a thoroughgoing critique of the theologizing of the study of religion presented by the work of [Catholic theologian] Milgram and other Christian theologians’ (Strenski, 2003, p. 238).

Apart from ideological and theoretical disagreements, however, the Durkheim school and their sociological method radically departed from the prevailing liberal Protestant parameters of the study of religion(s). When developments in the Netherlands and France are presented alongside each other, this should therefore not be read as a retrospective teleological history of a presumed uniform discipline.

### *International congresses*

Paris is a capital on the map on the early history of the study of religion(s) also because it hosted the first truly professional and international conference on the history of religions which took place in connection with the Great Exhibition of 1900. Subsequent international congresses took place at Basel (1904), Oxford (1908), and Leiden (1912). After World War I, it took more than a decade for further international congresses to be held, in Lund (1929) and Brussels (1935) respectively. These congresses usually had one section where general issues were discussed, followed by a number of sessions dedicated to studies of single religious traditions.

The first conferences after World War II were arranged at Amsterdam (1950) and Rome (1955). Unlike the previous ones, the congresses now had a common theme. The first in the series of international conferences to take place outside Europe was an extraordinary one in Tokyo in 1958. The following congresses were held in Marburg (1960), Claremont/USA (1965), Stockholm (1970), and Lancaster (1975). From 1980 onwards, the cycle of conferences has shifted its centers of gravity outside the boundaries of the old world. Out of the six main conferences arranged by the IAHR between 1980 and 2005, only one was held within Europe (Rome 1990). The next one is scheduled to take place in Canada. This development illustrates the ongoing de-Europeanization of the study of religion(s).

### *Lecture series in Britain*

Great Britain produced several high-caliber advocates of the new science but it lagged somewhat behind in the creation of chairs and departments. The first chair was established at Manchester in 1904. However, the great public lecture series established by the Hibbert trustees and Lord Gifford from 1878/1888 onwards created unparalleled public forums for the emerging science (see Kippenberg, 1997, pp. 63–64). The lectures were occasions for some of the most prominent scholars in the humanities to spell out their views on religion. The lectures were an ingenious mixture of research and popularization unknown in other countries.

### *Early reference works*

Most 19th and early 20th Century reference works were basically theological in orientation, with some openings towards the history of religions. The *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses*



in five volumes edited by the French Protestant theologian Frédéric Lichtenberger from 1877 to 1882, i.e. during the founding years of French science of religion, explicitly aimed at going beyond the theological canon of knowledge. It nevertheless had a clear Protestant frame (see [Reymond, 1977](#)) and is now almost forgotten. But the benchmark-setting *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (ERE) in 12 volumes (an index volume appeared some years later) edited by the Scottish Free Church Minister James Hastings (1852–1922) was much in use throughout the 20th Century.<sup>36</sup>

Another important reference work was the German *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG) in five volumes, first published from 1909 to 1913. The RGG, unlike the ERE, was several times updated throughout the 20th Century. The second edition was published from 1927 to 1931. Its key entries were dominated by the phenomenological approach to the study of religion (see the entries on mana and power by Söderblom). It featured a variety of approaches to the study of religion and also contained critical discussions or sympathetic presentations of current developments ([Bauschulte, 2007](#), p. 230).<sup>37</sup> The third edition was published after World War II (1957–1965). It increased to six volumes, but was much tamer in outlook. The fourth edition was published around the turn of the millennium (1998–2006). It increased to eight volumes and is currently published in an English translation under the title *Religion Past and Present* (RPP; 2006ff). A closer study of its several editions would reveal much about the changing vocabulary and ideologies of religious studies throughout the 20th Century.

#### *Early Dutch textbooks and their European careers*

The Dutch ‘founding fathers’ of the study of religion(s), Cornelis Petrus Tiele (1830–1902) and Pierre-Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920),<sup>38</sup> produced several influential textbooks. Being translated into several European languages and revised by scholars from other countries these works would set international benchmarks for the understanding of what the study of religion(s) had to offer.

Chantepie is mainly known for his *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (2 vols. 1887–1889). In this work one finds a section on the phenomenology of religion, which he devised as ‘the first more comprehensive attempt to arrange the principal groups of religious conceptions in such a way that the most important sides and aspects should appear conspicuously from out the other material’,<sup>39</sup> or as an attempt of ‘classifying the most important ethnographic and historical material connected with the phenomena of religion’,<sup>40</sup> being an intermediary approach between history of religions on the one hand and philosophy of religion on the other.<sup>41</sup> The first volume of the *Lehrbuch* was published in a revised version in English (translated by Beatrice S. Colyer-Fergusson, née Max Müller) under

<sup>36</sup> The ERE once again illustrates the point that major contributions to the study of religion did not necessarily come from professional academics active within the field.

<sup>37</sup> Consider Richard Wilhelm’s entry on Keyserling and his school of wisdom [Schule der Weisheit] and Otto’s entry on his Religious league of humanity [religiöser Menschheitsbund].

<sup>38</sup> On both scholars see [Molendijk \(2005, pp. 83–122\)](#); on the philosophical bases of their respective projects see [Ryba \(2001\)](#).

<sup>39</sup> Chantepie de la Saussaye (1891, p. vi).

<sup>40</sup> Chantepie de la Saussaye (1891, p. 67).

<sup>41</sup> Chantepie is usually regarded as the inventor of the term ‘phenomenology of religion’ (see, e.g., [Cox, 2006, p. 105](#)), but [Graulich \(1995, pp. 68–69\)](#) argues that Chantepie was inspired by Goblet d’Alviella and A. Réville.

the slightly different title *Manual of the Science of Religion* (1891).<sup>42</sup> The book went through four heavily revised editions until 1925. From the second edition (1897) onwards, the *Lehrbuch* was turned into a collective work.<sup>43</sup> The first volume of the second edition was published in a French translation by Henri Hubert and Isidore Lévy in 1904.

A final, posthumous edition (1925) was edited and revised by the Swiss Old Testament scholar and historian of religions Alfred Bertholet (1868–1951) who had a chair in Göttingen (later in Berlin)<sup>44</sup> jointly with the Danish scholar Edvard Lehmann (1862–1930), who himself had published a brief survey-work in 1920. Both scholars had already been cooperating with Chantepie on the earlier editions. Lehmann, a friend of Chantepie, was the first scholar who, in 1900 (in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen), was appointed to teach the history of religions in Denmark.<sup>45</sup> In 1910 he accepted the newly created chair at the University of Berlin, but he then moved on to Lund (Sweden) in 1913.<sup>46</sup> Bertholet and Lehmann were key-figures on the international scene and instrumental in arranging two of the international conferences (in Basel [1904] and Lund [1929], respectively).

In 1886, Tiele gave the Gifford-lectures. They were published as *Elements of the Science of Religion* in two parts in 1896/1898.<sup>47</sup> More successful, however, was his earlier work *Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of the Universal Religions* (1877, translated from the Dutch [1876], also translated into Danish, French, German, and Swedish). From its third edition (1903) onwards, the German translation was updated by the Swedish historian of religions Nathan Söderblom, who also single-handedly published a survey-work in Swedish in 1912. The sixth and final edition of Tiele's continuously revised work, published in 1931, remained influential until around World War II.

<sup>42</sup> Graulich (1995, p. 68) has remarked that the section on phenomenology is missing in the translations.

<sup>43</sup> Several such collective works will be presented in part II of the present article.

<sup>44</sup> Bertholet is mainly known for his posthumously published *Wörterbuch der Religionen* (1952), subsequently revised by Goldammer (1985<sup>4</sup>); Italian translation 1964 (several later editions).

<sup>45</sup> As Birgitte Scheperlen Johansen pointed out to me, the official birth hour was when funds were made available for Lehmann's teaching. This happened by passing a change in the financial law. There was hardly any debate about the allocation of funds in the Parliament at the time. Initially, the subject was known as History of Religion(s) (*religions-historie*), but in the annual report of the University for 1899–1900 it was referred to as Comparative Study of Folk-religions (*det sammenlignende studium af folkereligioner*), maybe in order not to stir controversy with the theologians.

<sup>46</sup> Lehmann first put his name on the map as an expert on Zoroastrianism, but later wrote on various issues; see Asmussen (2005) (=1987), who also points to 'a weak point in Lehmann's scholarship: his profound attachment to the ideals of Protestantism and his conviction of its superiority' (Asmussen, 2005, p. 5405; see also Prytz Johansen, 1979, pp. 11, 15). Sørensen (2001, p. 34) remarks upon the Christian-theologian tenor under which he subsumed empirical data. Geertz (2001, p. 45) is more explicit when he talks about prejudices and points to Lehmann's enthusiasm for the project, apparently launched by a German philosopher, to introduce the teaching of religion in high-schools/grammar schools in order for the students to realize the superiority of Christianity. According to Lehmann that was both a natural and necessary task.

<sup>47</sup> The title of the Dutch version (published 1896/98; second revised edition 1900) reads *Inleiding tot de godsdienstwetenschap* (*Introduction to the science of religion*). The English version of the book was reviewed by Mauss for the *Année sociologique* 2 and 3 (1899–1900). From his critical discussion he concludes that the work was lacking a scientific method and that it was essentially theological and philosophical in nature (see Mauss, 1968, pp. 539–548).

*Early periodicals*

Probably the most important early journal was the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (RHR). It was started in 1880, in the same year when the chair was established at the Collège de France. Maurice Vernes, the first editor of the RHR, was also the French translator Tiele's two main works. A Catholic imitation and counter-project of the RHR, the *Revue des Religions*, was started in 1889(–1896) (see Cabanel, 1994, pp. 69–70). In Germany, the *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* was founded in 1886(–1939), the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* (ARW) in 1898(–1941/42) and the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* in 1911(–1937; 1950–). From all these journals, only the RHR has been published without interruption up to the present.

In Italy, a *Rivista di scienze delle religioni* was started in 1916, mainly upon the initiative of the 'modernist' theologian, philosopher and historian of Christianity Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881–1946). Already after the appearance of the second issue a decree was passed by the Vatican condemning the journal and suspending the writings of the four main collaborators who all happened to be Catholic priests (Siniscalco, 2006, pp. 20–21; Severino, 2006, p. 46). In the years 1919–1921 a new journal was launched under the title *Religio*, but that project was equally short-lived (Siniscalco, 2006, p. 22; Severino, 2006, p. 47). In 1925, two years after he obtained the new chair in Rome,<sup>48</sup> Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959) founded the school-forming *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* (SMSR), which, with some disruptions, has also survived to the present.<sup>49</sup> Pettazzoni had already been part of the group around the earlier *Rivista* and had entertained the idea of founding a new one when the *Rivista* was condemned. His new journal was beyond the control of the Vatican.<sup>50</sup>

*Subsequent institutionalization throughout Europe to the present*<sup>51</sup>

Sharpe's already-mentioned history remains the only account addressing the institutional development of the study of religion(s) on a wider scale (Sharpe, 1997, pp. 119–143). The remaining literature focuses on single countries (Denmark: Tybjerg, 2000; England: Cunningham, 1990; Byrne, 1998; France: Pulman, 1985; Cabanel, 1994; Baubérot et al., 1987; Baubérot, 2002; Norway: Ruud, 1998; Scotland: Walls, 1990; Cox and Sutcliffe, 2006; Wales: Williams, 1990) or even single departments (e.g. Rudolph, 1962, 1992, pp. 323–380; Prytz Johansen, 1979; Sharpe, 1980). In the Netherlands the history of the field has in recent years developed into a fruitful branch of scholarship in its own right. Arie L. Molendijk (b. 1957), professor of history of Christianity, has recently published important essays on different aspects of the emergence of the science of religion in the Netherlands (Molendijk, 2005; see Waardenburg, 2006). Jan G. Platvoet (b. 1935) has

<sup>48</sup> See above on earlier developments in Italy.

<sup>49</sup> For this journal see Carozzi (1979) and Piccaluga (1979); on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of its foundation the journal had a special issue (=72 [n.s. 30/1]) with several articles on the history of the journal (by Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, Giulia Piccaluga, Leonardo Sacco, Fabio Scialpi, Valerio Salvatore Severino, and Paolo Siniscalco); see also Sacco (2006).

<sup>50</sup> See Severino, 2006, for the lasting rivalries between Pettazzoni and Buonaiuti.

<sup>51</sup> Further developments will be discussed in part II of this series.

attempted a ‘social history’ of Dutch science of religion (Platvoet, 2002). Lourens van den Bosch (2002) has published an authoritative biography of Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900). Serious biographic research (in contrast to pseudo-hagiography, superficial accounts, or celebratory publications) is otherwise rare, the main exceptions being Eric Sharpe’s biography of Söderblom (Sharpe, 1990) and the ongoing series of massive biographic essays covering every minute detail of the life of Pettazzoni by Mario Gandini (for a summary see Gandini, 2005).<sup>52</sup> The study of scholars of religion during Fascism and National Socialism, however, has in recent years led to an increase in biographical studies.

### *Fascism and National Socialism*

The establishment of Pettazzoni’s chair at the University of Rome in 1923 coincided with the establishment of Mussolini’s rule (in 1922), and it was in Fascist Italy that the field underwent a first phase of lasting institutionalization. Although Pettazzoni displayed a certain degree of commitment to the apparatus of the Fascist regime (see Stausberg, 2007), his scholarly approach to the study of religion(s) was unsympathetic to the sorts of non-rational, irrational, or antirational tendencies which were not uncommon in the study of the religion at that time, especially in Germany. The impact of various Fascist ideologies and National Socialism on the study of religion has in recent years attracted a greater amount of scholarly attention, most of all mythologies and with regard to Eliade and the French scholar of Indo-European mythologies and religions Georges Dumézil (1898–1986). Apart from political and moral considerations, fresh original research based on primary archival sources undertaken by American (Alles, 2002) and German scholars (Heinrich, 2002; Junginger, 1999) has unveiled complex relationships.<sup>53</sup>

When assessing the situation, one has to take into account several factors including different generations of scholars; shared ideological premises—shared, that is, by people belonging to entirely different political camps; differences and overlapping between anti-Semitism, nationalism, and National Socialism; various strategies of adaptation, assimilation, or distancing and alienation; different forms of commitment; political, institutional, administrative, religious, and personal dimensions.

At Bonn, Carl Clemen (1865–1940), who obtained the first chair of *Religionswissenschaft* located outside a Faculty of Theology at a German university, is an example of a scholar whose philosophical and source-critical approach even led him to challenge the pseudo-scientific character of the Germanic ideology as propagated by the Nazis (Heinrich, 2002, pp. 267–268; Vollmer, 2001). From early on, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leipzig was disturbed by the German-Christian sympathies of the regional church in Saxony. This is the context for the

<sup>52</sup> Other works are more devoted to scholarly achievements than to biography; see, for example, Prytz Johansen (1987) on his own multitalented pre-predecessor Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948) who is mostly known for his early work on Germanic religion; on Grønbech’s construction of ‘primitive religion’ see also Rothstein (1996). Some of Grønbech’s later works strike me as basically religious in nature. His popular book on Jesus, for example, unequivocally speaks a religious idiom; in vain one looks for any historical or comparative analyses; see Grønbech (1935) [1944<sup>4</sup>; several popular reprints until the 1970s; Swedish and German translations].

<sup>53</sup> Junginger (2007) (to be published shortly after this essay was submitted) now is the most relevant work. The massive volume contains chapters by and on authors from several countries.

appointment of Walter Baetke (1884–1974) in 1935 following the death of Hans Haas (1868–1934), Söderblom's successor, an expert in Japanese Buddhism and former missionary to Japan. Baetke was a specialist in the field of Germanic religion. By unmasking the empirical, methodological, and theoretical flaws of Germanizing (pseudo-)scholarship Baetke, who was committed to the Confessing Church, courageously opposed the neo-pagan reconstructions (Heinrich, 2002, pp. 272–287). After the war, he continued to work at Leipzig, now under the German Democratic Republic (Rudolph and Heinrich, 2001). In the same year when Baetke was appointed, Joachim Wach, a Christian of Jewish ancestry, lost his *venia legendi* at the Philosophical Faculty at the University of Leipzig. Following an invitation from Brown University, Wach immigrated to the US.

Baetke's appointment was opposed by the Tübingen Indologist and religious historian Jakob Hauer (1882–1963) who (quite rightly) regarded this appointment as part of an ecclesiastical plot against the Third Reich (Heinrich, 2002, p. 274). Hauer himself was actively involved in propagating the German Faith Movement as the new religion of the state. In order to give it a scholarly fundament he redesigned the study of religion into a 'völkisch' subject (Junginger, 1999). Hauer was dismissed after the war.

Gustav Mensching (1901–1978), who joined the NSDAP already in 1934, was appointed as Clemen's successor in Bonn, despite some resistance among the Faculty. A former pupil of Rudolf Otto, Mensching went a long way in assimilating the profile of the study of religion to ideological premises of the Nazi (see Heinrich, 2002, pp. 329–337). After the war, however, he carefully cleansed re-editions of his writings from Nazi undertones and he was rehabilitated in 1948.<sup>54</sup> That brings us to post World War II developments. These will be dealt within part II of this series.

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<sup>54</sup> On Mensching see Gantke et al. (2003).

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