

Editorial note

In an essay entitled *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins* Jorge Luis Borges (1966: 108) cites an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia that classifies animals into the following groups:

- a) Those that belong to the Emperor
- b) Embalmed ones
- c) Those that are trained
- d) Sucking pigs
- e) Mermaids
- f) Fabulous ones
- g) Stray dogs
- h) Those that are included in this classification
- i) Those that tremble as if they were mad
- j) Innumerable ones
- k) Those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush
- l) Others
- m) Those that have just broken a flower vase
- n) Those that resemble flies from a distance

This list is often quoted as an example of the difficulty and arbitrariness of classification, but given the many scholars who have taken such an obvious fiction to be genuine, it perhaps also exemplifies the Western fascination with the category of the bizarre oriental who is incapable of rational thought.

Recently in several Nordic countries it seems academia has been placed in a similar category. At Copenhagen University, the largest in Denmark, government imposed austerity measures have axed 500 jobs, forcing several so-called smaller subjects such as Ancient Greek and Indology not to accept any new students this year, while other subjects like Tibetan Studies have been discontinued altogether. Similarly, at Helsinki University, 570 employees will have to go before the end of next year. Perhaps even more disturbingly, the government responsible for these cuts has evinced a blatant disregard and even contempt for academic learning.

Against such a bleak backdrop it is apposite that the four articles in this issue of *Temenos* are all written by scholars from Denmark and Finland – and that these articles are of such a high scholarly quality. First, Simon Nygaard of Aarhus University, in his article on sacral rulers in pre-Christian Scandinavian religions, takes us back in time in terms of both material and concepts.

However, instead of using the concept of sacral kingship rules in a kind of arbitrary comparison in the style of Sir James Frazer, he applies Robert N. Bellah's theory of cultural evolution to it, resulting in several interesting insights that will be useful for the comparative study of religions in general.

In their fascinating study of a novel about a Laestadian family Finnish scholars Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo and Sanna Valkonen take us closer to the present day, as they approach religious belonging as a state of embodiment in which some types of corporeality strengthen the cohesion of religious communities, while others threaten or weaken them. The issue here is, of course, the power relations, structures, and dynamics of change that are at play with religious groups, and the authors make a good case for the importance of an understanding of belonging to make sense of it.

Dietrich Jung from the University of Southern Denmark then lands us squarely in the present moment with his article on the multiple voices of Islamic modernities. He argues that the polysemic nature of contemporary interpretations of Islamic religious tradition mirrors in some way the increasing functional differentiation of modern society. In illustrating his argument with the institution of Jihad, he not only offers us more information concerning a very topical subject, but contributes to the debate on multiple modernities in general.

Finally, Ville Husgafvel from Helsinki University takes an exciting new look at the mindfulness trend that is currently so popular and so hotly debated in academic circles, by arguing that previous scholarship has overstated the links between the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) of Jon Kabat-Zinn and Theravada Buddhism. Doubtless correctly, Husgafvel argues that this leads not only to an oversimplified picture of Buddhist doctrine and practice (similar to the very problematic 'world religion' classification) but also to distortions in the comparisons made with secular forms of mindfulness. Instead, Husgafvel argues for a lineage-based approach.

In addition to the regular articles this issue also features the Temenos lecture delivered on 9th December 2015 at Åbo Akademi University, Finland, by Professor Christopher Partridge of Lancaster University, entitled 'Popular Music, the Sacred and the Profane: Reflections on why Popular Music Matters'. The Temenos lectures, which are sponsored by the Finnish Association for the Study of Religions, are annual lectures by noted international scholars of religion. Christopher Partridge's lecture is an example of such lectures at their best: informative, thought-provoking, and eminently entertaining.

On a more sombre note this issue of Temenos ends with an obituary of Professor Emerita Anna-Leena Siikala, a member of the advisory board of

Temenos and a Finnish scholar who refused to be trapped by the categories of Borges or anyone else. We pay tribute to her memory in the hope of living up to her standard of academic excellence.

Måns Broo

