

Editorial note

In an important study (*Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, University of South Carolina Press 1993) historian of religion Guy Beck argued that the Western preoccupation with the visual side of Hinduism has obscured what he held to be its most important feature: its emphasis on sound. Considering both the occasionally overwhelming impression the visual side of Hinduism can create in its observers and the departure from a 19th century preoccupation with texts, it is easy to see why such a preoccupation should have arisen. In Hindu cosmogony sound (*śabda*) is held to be the first of the subtle elements (*tanmātra*), which arise before the gross elements (*mahābhūta*) of earth, fire, and so on – though specific sounds may also be considered transcendental to matter altogether. However, the question remains: is sound material enough for scholars working with the material side of religion, compared to the visual and tactile world of experience?

In this issue of *Temenos* we are delighted to feature two important articles dealing with religion and sound, especially music, which show how music can function as an instigator of religious change. In the first Ruth Illman argues that because music comprises elements central to contemporary religiosity in general, such as participation, embodiment, experience, emotions, and creativity, it plays a central role as a driving force for religious change. In her theoretically exciting article Illman approaches her topic through an ethnographic case study of progressive Jews in London who wish to combine a radically liberal theology with increasingly traditional practice. Her analysis of this material supports the view that the relationship between bodies and beliefs, and places and perceptions are key to understanding contemporary religious change.

The theme of music and contemporary religious change is continued by Hanna Rijken, Martin J.M. Hoondert, and Marcel Barnard. In their ethnographically rich article they tackle the question of religious change in today's Netherlands from a surprising angle: by looking at choir dress at popular evensong events. They argue that in wearing Anglican dress, choirs indicate that they belong to the high-quality sound group of English cathedral choirs, and choir members criticise the traditional reformed emphasis on the spoken word. At the same time, by changing the Anglican dress code, choirs emphasise their unicity and individuality, independent of church traditions. Lastly, choir members refer to unarticulated transcendental experiences by wearing ritual liturgical dress.

Rijken and her colleagues argue that the popularity of these evensongs

reflects a longing for different forms of worship with a focus on ceremonies and ritualised behaviour, but they also note that the practice of evensong in the Netherlands today mixes concert practices and Anglican-like rituals. Choirs wearing Anglican-like robes but decoupled from the Anglican church thus illustrate a longing for non-institutional transcendental experiences, which they find in the ritual form and high musical quality of choral evensong.

From simultaneous transcendence and immanence in sound and music, Jonas Svensson leads us to a considerably less harmonious topic: the desecration of the *Qur'an*. He argues that while it may seem simple to understand the mechanics of desecration (humiliation, defilement, destruction, and so on), the psychological infrastructure of desecration has been given little thought. In this thought-provoking and stimulating article Svensson suggests that previously suggested schemata of desecration may be substituted for a single one – one which also explains non-hostile practices directed at the scripture – that is, understanding the scripture as a valued person. It follows from this that inappropriate and appropriate behaviour are inferred from general schemata for interpersonal relations, ethics, and etiquette in the social domain which can be independently assessed.

Finally, Stefan Olsson takes us back in time and to a less contentuous topic: peace agreements in the Viking age. Referring to examples from England and Iceland and utilising a wealth of textual, iconographical, archaeological, and toponymical data, Olsson argues that ritual activities such as giving and receiving hostages, fosterages and intermarriages were crucial for peacemaking during the Viking Age. He discusses such ritual activities in relation to a proposed conflict and consensus model on the macro and micro levels, presenting us with a three-step analytical tool for understanding peace agreements.

As this issue of *Temenos* sees the light of day, Finland celebrates its 100th anniversary as an independent nation. In popular recapitulations of this century of Finnish history much emphasis has been placed on the years of war (1917 and 1939–44), underlining their importance to the self-perception of the Finnish nation. Nevertheless, there have been 93 years without war, and at *Temenos* we join the celebrations hoping for many more such years: years of peace, prosperity, and independence of thought and research.

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