



Creating Links and Innovative Overviews for a New History Research Agenda  
for the Citizens of a Growing Europe

THEMATIC WORK GROUP 3

# Religious and Philosophical Concepts

I

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# Religion, Ritual and Mythology

Aspects of Identity Formation  
in Europe

*edited by*

*Joaquim Carvalho*

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# Preface

We are very pleased to present *Religion, Ritual and Mythology. Aspects of Identity Formation in Europe* to the academic and research community as well as to the general reader. It is the third of seven volumes in the first publication cycle of our pan-European Network of Excellence, CLIOHRES.net ([www.cliohres.net](http://www.cliohres.net)). With this book, the Network's Thematic Work Group 3, on "Religious and Philosophical Concepts", launches its five year research plan.

The aim of the work group is to examine how religious ideas, organizations and practices – as well as general visions of the world and how it works – intertwine with other aspects of European history. In this first volume, the Group explores, or maps, the terrain. No one would doubt the power of belief in motivating human beings in their actions and moulding the way they organise their lives. But certainly, the effects and consequences of religious ideas and practices are even more varied and complex than appears on the surface.

In his lucid and wide-ranging Introduction Joaquim Carvalho locates and contextualises the general theme and explains how the Group has decided to define and approach their daunting task. This first 'mapping' volume provides a fascinating entrée into a world that emphasises ideas, beliefs and symbols, but without considering them to be separate from other aspects of human endeavour. The Group emphasises the 'faire' rather than the 'dire', and shows how historians investigate the many concrete, identifiable and even measurable ways in which 'Religious and Philosophical Concepts' affect the 'hic et nunc' and how they have been studied in the past as well as at present.

On the one hand, we find contributions on consolidated but not static traditions of religious history. Several chapters illustrate, catalogue or exemplify lines of study centring on particular religious manifestations, orders, missions and movements. Others look at the role of secularisation and its complex and contradictory effects. The obstacles to research on certain phenomena, personalities or movements because of political pressure or downright censorship are not forgotten. The subtitle of the volume speaks of identity, itself a complex and problematic concept. The choice is the result of the awareness that religion and religious practices are indeed one of the most obvious factors in forming and reinforcing collective identities and world views.

The challenge before the group is to carry out its part of the overall CLIOHRES.net agenda of rethinking current research practices and strategies in European history, by placing them in a broad analytical and comparative context, and using this juxtaposition to achieve a new level of critical understanding, necessary for an informed citizenship.

History is often thought of as remote and unconnected with daily life. It is usually absorbed in the form of general 'knowledge', and often assumes the form of generally shared convictions, orientations and prejudices which have their roots in national narratives.

These narratives took form everywhere in specific political and cultural contexts, but very few are aware of how and why they have taken the shapes they have. Our Network of Excellence is based on observations made over a number of years on the power of history in forming social and political attitudes, and in moulding our perceptions of ourselves and of others. Received ideas about the past influence each of us in our interaction with society and with other individuals, and in our decisions regarding actions to be taken and values to be observed or enforced. Such ideas form the foundation for the division of the world into ethnic or social groups, whose historical construction and maintenance serve as the basis for virtually all claims of national and other collective identities.

CLIOHRES.net began its work in June 2005, thanks to a five year research contract with the European Commission through the Sixth Framework Programme of its Directorate General for Research, under Priority 7, dealing with “Citizenship”. As a matter of fact, CLIOHRES.net is an important result of the long term cooperation among a large number of European universities. Collaboration originally began with the ECTS History Network, which grew out of a pilot project launched at the end of the 1980s. Then the History Subject Area Group of the pilot project assumed the task of testing and developing methods of credit transfer and transparent rules for assessing performance in order to facilitate student mobility and recognition throughout Europe. At the outset, the ECTS History Network counted fifteen universities in eleven member states of the European Union; when the project ended in 1995, the Network had expanded to include 26 institutions in 16 EU and EFTA countries. In the following years, the partners developed two Socrates Curriculum development projects, the second of which, CLIOH (“Refounding Europe: Creating Links, Insights and Overviews for a new History agenda”) was privileged to be able to include members from central and eastern Europe for the first time. CLIOH grew into CLIOHnet, the Erasmus Thematic Network for History ([www.clioh.net](http://www.clioh.net)), which at present has 80 partner institutions in 35 European countries, as well as a large number of associate partners. CLIOHnet has promoted inclusion and reciprocal knowledge and has extended its membership as fast as possible to partners from newly eligible countries and from various kinds of institutions. It is a sister Network, specialising in issues of higher education, and an essential complement to our research Network of Excellence.

CLIOHnet and CLIOHRES.net are intertwined with the remarkable social and political transformations which have taken place in Europe during the last twenty years, with the integration, consolidation and expansion of the European Union and the formation of a unique polity. The Networks correspond to a vision of what Europe is and should be. In this context, “excellence” does not mean a closed club of a few institutions of recognised prestige. “Excellence” means taking advantage of unique opportunities of cooperating across and beyond the European Union. It means finding ways for motivated and open-minded academics and researchers from many of the excellent universities and centres in Europe to collaborate, creating new knowledge and insights thanks to their very different points of view. Doing so means developing innovative teaching and research programmes, and requires that the two be tightly linked.

The CLIOHRES Network of Excellence builds on the experience gained to develop the field of historical and related research in an innovative way. Its name stands for “Creating

Links and Innovative Overviews for a New History Research Agenda for the Citizens of a Growing Europe". The Network is a consortium of 45 universities and research institutions in 31 countries. Each institution is represented by two senior researchers and two doctoral students, coming from various academic fields – primarily from history, but also from art history, sociology, archaeology, architecture, philology, political science, literary studies and geography. Thus the network serves as a platform for dialogue and debate, comparisons and cooperation across national, generational and disciplinary boundaries. The 180 researchers in the network are divided into six thematic work groups, each of which deals with a broadly designated research area – ‘states, institutions and legislation’, ‘power and culture’, ‘religious and philosophical concepts’, ‘work, gender and society’; ‘frontiers and identities’ and, finally, ‘Europe and the world’. Furthermore, the Network as a whole addresses ‘transversal themes’ of which one is emphasised each year. These are ‘citizenship’, ‘identity’, ‘migration’, ‘gender’, ‘discrimination’ and ‘tolerance’. Each of the thematic work groups addresses these transversal themes from its specific point of view. During the first year, the theme addressed was ‘citizenship’, which is the topic of another volume included in the same publication cycle.

As a network of excellence, CLIOHRES is not an ordinary research project. It does not focus on a narrowly defined research question or on a set of specific questions. Rather it is conceived as a forum where researchers representing various national and regional traditions can meet and elaborate their work in new ways thanks to structured interaction with their colleagues. The objective is not only to transcend the national boundaries that still largely define historical research agendas, opening new avenues for research, but also to use those very national differences to become critically aware of how current research agendas have evolved.

In order to create a meaningful context for dialogue, the people engaged in it need to recognize both the similarities and marked differences between the various historical traditions in Europe. For this reason, the first phase of the project has been devoted to ‘mapping’, to exploring how the questions perceived as important for each thematic area appear in different national historiographies. In future years, further mapping will take place, while the groups proceed through the further stages of identifying research themes that can be of interest for all historiographies, comparing methodologies and sources, demonstrating how problems defined in one historiographical tradition can be developed in new contexts. In this way, in its five years of activity, the Network intends to create novel paradigms for European historical research.

In order to present the discussions and debates that take place in the Network to the wider public, CLIOHRES.net plans five publication cycles. Every year, the work groups will present at least one volume each, and the Network as a whole will treat one of the ‘transversal’ themes. This year’s volumes vary in nature, but may be considered collections of working papers, documenting progress, rather than claiming to be the last word on the subject they deal with. They bring together scholars from very different stages in their professional careers. Some of the authors are doctoral students, while others are established professors with long experience of academic work. They also represent various discursive traditions, which is only appropriate, as history is perhaps the most heterogeneous scientific field that exists. CLIOHRES aims to facilitate dialogue between traditions and to open paths towards new critical understanding, but not to homogenize historical research in Europe. Diversity is

intended and desired. History can be and is studied and narrated in many different ways – these ways in themselves being products of history, and worthy of investigation.

As the first year of this project comes to a close, we express our gratitude to the European Commission and its Directorate General for Research which has supported our Network generously through the Priority 7 of the Sixth Framework Programme. The grant awarded has given the Network the financial means to carry out its ambitious programme. Even more importantly, it is a recognition of the important role that history can play in shaping a better future for European citizens. We thank our project officers, Giulia Amaducci and Ioannis Kampolis. Their careful and knowledgeable support and advice has been of great importance.

Our thanks also go to the University of Pisa and to its Rector, Marco Pasquali. The University of Pisa supports the Network very generously in addition to giving great moral support. Without the understanding and backing of the coordinating institution, it would be impossible to carry out a programme of this kind. We thank the director of the central administration of the University, Dr Riccardo Grasso, for accepting the responsibilities connected with the management of the Network; Miriana Donati and Elisa Cascio for their special help; the Pisa team, Laura Burgisano, Adrian Marinescu and Pasquale Cuomo for their total immersion; and our student helpers Ileana Buzic, Lorenzo Gatti, Andreas Verdigi, Nicoletta Scapparone and Marina Cappelli, for their assistance in various different phases of the project.

Above all we are grateful to all members of the Network for a stimulating, challenging and productive year. We express our appreciation to the members of Thematic Work Group 3. The group has given an important contribution by writing the chapters in the present volume and participating in the debates and dialogues which have shaped it. Four of its members, Elena Brambilla, Joaquim Carvalho, Smiljana Gartner and Ivan Ilchev have made particularly significant contributions to the joint volume on the general or ‘transversal’ theme of “Citizenship”.

Our special thanks go to the group’s leader, Joaquim Ramos de Carvalho of the University of Coimbra, who is also the editor of this book, and to the other members of the Coimbra team. Joaquim Carvalho has kept motivation at a high level in TWG 3, thanks to his good humour and good organisation. Luisa Trindade and Ana Isabel Ribeiro not only have contributed significant studies to this volume, but have also helped very effectively to smooth the complexities of publishing a scientific work written by scholars from many countries, accustomed to varying discursive and typographical conventions. Roumen L. Genov of the St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia is the reference person for TWG 3 in the CLIOHRES.net Management Group. We are grateful for his help.

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