

Robert A. Yelle, University of Memphis



Robert A. Yelle is assistant professor in the department of history at the University of Memphis. He grew up in Andover, Massachusetts, where he graduated from Phillips Andover Academy (1984) and Harvard College (BA in philosophy, 1988). He received a JD from the University of California, Berkeley (1993), and a PhD in history of religions from the University of Chicago (2002). He taught at Southern Illinois University, the University of Toronto, and the University of Illinois prior to arriving in Memphis. A former Guggenheim Fellow, Yelle is the author of Explaining Mantras: Ritual, Rhetoric, and the Dream of a Natural Language in Hindu Tantra (Routledge, 2003);

The Language of Disenchantment: Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India (Oxford University Press, 2013); and

Semiotics of Religion: Signs of the Sacred in History (Bloomsbury, 2013). He coedited

After Secular Law

(Stanford University Press, 2011) with Winnifred Sullivan and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo.

RSN: What is the role of an academic series editor? Why would one want to publish in a book series such as Religion, Culture, and History?

Yelle: All of the series editors work closely with Oxford University Press to identify, promote, and publish books that meet the highest standards of scholarship. In many cases, because of being embedded in the field as a practicing scholar, a series editor may be the first and best point of contact for an author who wants advice on publishing a book manuscript. When a project appears strong and well-suited to the profile of a book series, a series editor serves as an advocate to the press on behalf of the author. A series editor also provides suggestions for how to revise a manuscript both before and after formal submission to the press.

RSN: What are your goals for the Religion, Culture, and History book series?

Yelle: Fortunately, the series is in excellent shape. Jacob Kinnard, the outgoing editor, has left the series on a solid footing. My goal is to build on the momentum that the series has now. Of course, I am interested in publishing the best new work in religious studies. I would like the Religion, Culture, and History series to become a destination of choice for scholars of religion

who situate religion in concrete historical, social, and cultural contexts by combining the study of particular religious texts or phenomena with sophisticated, critical readings of such data.

RSN: What kind of submissions will you be seeking and what are important topics for future volumes?

Yelle: One of the virtues of the Religion, Culture, and History series is that it has a broad mandate to publish on a range of topics in the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon. I have already received interesting proposals on a number of topics. There is no formula for what makes a proposal successful. However, the best work will challenge the boundaries that segregate religious studies from other disciplines and bring innovative methodologies and theoretical perspectives to bear in such a way as to challenge received assumptions about religion. I would like to see more volumes that deliberately place religious studies in conversation with scholarly discourses in other fields. A high priority is seeking manuscripts that deploy the critical insights derived from such newer disciplines as postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and gender and sexuality studies to explore neglected topics and recover underrepresented voices. Ideally, a proposal should do more than provide an interesting interpretation of a religious text, practice, or other phenomenon. The most successful proposals will perform a critical intervention that changes the ways in which we look at religion beyond the immediate case at hand.

That said, I would especially invite proposals for books that:

- Pursue genealogical approaches to religion by tracing the historical formation of discourses about religion and the application of these discourses in specific cases
- Are explicitly comparative in terms of the data they address
- Challenge the division between religion and popular culture
- Engage religion with cultural studies of law, politics, and economics
- Problematize the dichotomy between religion and secularism

I would also like to see more studies move beyond the text to examine other modes of religious expression and experience, such as images and embodied practices. Proposals for edited volumes should demonstrate, in addition to the above, a cohesive conversation across the disciplines.

For more information about this series and our other book series, visit the AAR website at <http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Books>

. AAR book series are published by Oxford University Press.