Publications and Research   Kingsborough Community College

2017

Religious Studies Encyclopedism: A recent history

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Abstract

As academic reference librarians, we need to historically situate the reference sources we use within changing scholarly disciplines. Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, for example, is an important text in religious studies, but it is not a neutral text. Rather, it clearly reflects certain intellectual commitments and discursive strategies that need to be situated within histories of scholarship. Failure on the part of librarians to contextualize the perspectives of a reference source is problematic, as it leaves the assumptions of the text unchallenged. More constructively, librarians need to problematize the agendas of reference sources, and make salient their discursive positions.

Keywords: reference, encyclopedism, religious studies, Mircea Eliade

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Introduction

This paper arose out of a frustration with what I perceived to be a lack of sustained

humanities methodologies in the day-to-day reference work that I do as an academic librarian. I

felt a dissatisfaction and discomfort when talking about the authority of various reference

sources, and I felt that, as reference librarians, we could understand these texts better by

engaging with their histories, in order to situate them historically within scholarly discourses. I

became particularly interested in pursuing historical analyses of the texts of religious studies

reference librarianship.

To this end, this paper will examine the changing role of Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of

Religion* since its publication by Macmillan Library Reference in 1987. The *Encyclopedia* is a

text that has generated a great deal of scholarly commentary and debate. Since its publication,

important critiques of the *Encyclopedia*, and of Eliadean comparative religious studies more

generally, have raised concerns about the theoretical foundations of the text. Shifting theoretical

preoccupations within the discipline of religious studies have changed how scholars read this

work, and should likewise change how librarians use it in reference. Reading the history of the

study of religions into the *Encyclopedia* allows us to consider it from a more nuanced, historicizing perspective.

Just as we can situate the *Encyclopedia of Religion* within the history of the discipline of religious studies, we can also situate the text within the history of encyclopedism. Recent developments in encyclopedism, such as the move to digital formats, have had implications far beyond the study of religion. These developments are not neutral either, as the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is also politically and ideologically situated within the encyclopedic genre. Developments in encyclopedism have worked in concert with changes in religious studies to alter the role of Eliade's *Encyclopedia* within scholarship.

These histories are important to academic reference librarians because teaching our students to evaluate sources is an essential part of teaching information literacy. However, in part "[b]ecause information literacy practices intersect with variables of gender, class, religion, culture and ethnicity … it [information literacy] cannot be viewed as an autonomous, neutral framework" (Kapitzke, 2003, p. 60). What is needed is deeper criticism that encourages historically minded approaches to reference sources. This will nudge our students toward better scholarship and put them on the path toward deeper engagement with their disciplines. Historicizing will allow us to explore the implicit politics of a text. All too frequently, librarians and other readers neglect to historicize the sources they use, opting instead for other evaluative criteria. This is a major oversight, as it uncritically reifies the intellectual agendas of those particular reference sources within the discipline.

As might be expected, this paper examines religious studies encyclopedism with largely historical and political preoccupations. I concern myself with the recent histories of both

religious studies and encyclopedism. I emphasize how these histories construct knowledge in religious studies reference sources. I draw inspiration from Nathaniel Tkacz (2007), who applies Foucauldian theories and analysis to encyclopedic technologies. With a Foucauldian bent, I aim to historicize the recent discourses of religious studies encyclopedism. I go on to emphasize why these histories are important to librarians. I also draw upon the work Russell McCutcheon (McCutcheon, 1997; Arnal & McCutcheon, 2013), particularly his perspectives on the history of religious studies. His work takes strong positions on key issues in the field; I argue that it provides a useful theoretical handle with which to analyze the recent history of religious studies encyclopedism.

Neither the "academic study of religion" nor the "encyclopedia" is a concept that is free of controversy. The furor in the academy over Wikipedia as a pedagogical tool gives some indication of the ongoing crisis surrounding encyclopedism (Snyder, 2013; Colón-Aguirre & Fleming-May, 2012; Chandler & Gregory, 2010; Nix, 2010; Rand, 2010; Lim, 2009). Smaller in scale, but no less intense, is the debate over what is "religion" and "religious studies" in many religious studies departments (Dubuisson, 2003, p. 50; McCutcheon, 1997, p. 1769; Wiebe, 1995; McMullin, 1989). While I will reference these debates, it is not my intention to document them comprehensively here. I will draw upon these controversies in so far as they inform my analysis of the role of Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* in religious studies reference.

In this paper, I also speak of the "authority" of religious studies encyclopedias. The term "authority" also requires critical consideration. To be clear, I am not claiming that authority in this context is a measure of some type of truthiness. Instead, I am drawing on a Foucauldian notion of discourses as elaborations of power. "Authority" rests on changeable, negotiated

judgments. It is my position that claims of authority are rhetorical and negotiated, and that as a result, authority is very much political.

In older scholarship, some authors addressed the question of "authority" in reference texts (Wilson, 1983; Lewis, 1974), while largely failing to grasp the politics of their claims. For example, in his 1983 study of authority, Patrick Wilson argued that the authority of reference sources (including encyclopedias) lies in their ability to answer questions where the debate has been deemed closed (184). To be fair, Wilson does not support the problematic assumption a "closed" debate, but nor does he denounce it; rather, he suggests that it is librarians who construct the "authority" of reference sources. In some respects, Wilson is on the right track, as librarians frequently do act as arbitrators of the "authority" of research sources, but he misses some key considerations. We need to go further, by questioning the politics of the "authority" that, as librarians, we are supporting with our reference work. There are political implications to our work that are (often problematically) implicit when we recommend sources based on uncontextualized, undefended authority arguments.

To situate these arguments in a scholarly context, I will look specifically at the history of Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987). This text is a high-water mark in the influence of a certain tradition religious studies scholarship, as well as a high-water mark for the print subject encyclopedia genre. To make these arguments, I will consider Eliade's *Encyclopedia* in the context of the recent history of religious studies, and in the recent history of encyclopedism.

My hope is that this analysis will be useful to subject specialist librarians. The history of Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* in librarianship has only partially been written. While the *Encyclopedia* has unquestionably generated a well-elaborated scholarly literature within the

discipline of religious studies, scholarly analysis of the *Encyclopedia* in reference librarianship is almost entirely absent. Since Eliade's text is a critical document in religious studies, the scholarly literature of librarianship would certainly benefit from an evaluation of its role in our reference work. This paper aims to address that need.

Eliade, the *Encyclopedia of Religion,* and Religious Studies

Eliade was a formative voice in the discipline of religious studies. Leaving aside long-standing theology programs, the academic study of "world" religions was largely a nascent discipline in American universities during Eliade's lifetime (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 37). This academic, comparative study of religions in the academy had its roots in the late 19th century European academy. From those origins, scholarship on religion broadened substantially beyond Christian-inflected theology, a trend that continues today. Eliade's extensive work contributed to this movement in important ways. In the mid-20th century "comparative religion" grew and gained traction as a field of study in the North American academy, as new religion courses and departments were added in many universities. Eliade's body of work, which promoted the comparativist perspectives that underpinned this expansion, contributed substantially to the creation of the discipline.

Religious studies encyclopedism mirrors, in many ways, this development of the discipline as a whole. Eliade's *Encyclopedia* demonstrates a substantial shift in method and content from previous encyclopedias of religion. For example, James Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, published between 1908 and 1926, which was the most notable English-language incumbent when Eliade's *Encyclopedia* was released (Iricinschi, 2004, p. 365), evinces substantially different preoccupations. The differences between these two sources are

representative of changes in the academic study of religion over the course of the mid-twentieth

century. Eliade's *Encyclopedia*, while partly overcoming some of the problems with Hastings

(such as a lack of perspective on non-Christian religions), nonetheless is beset with its own

problems, as enumerated by McMullin (1989) among others. However, despite being

problematic in its own right, Eliade's *Encyclopedia* does move religious studies encyclopedism

toward an increasingly "world" religions focus (Iricinschi, 2004, p. 372).[1]

This shift in focus is ideological. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* can be intellectually

situated within what has been called the Chicago school of religious studies. With its *sui generis*[2]

perspective on religion and strongly anti-reductionist leanings, this approach was very influential

in the academic study of religion in the second half of the 20th century, and remains influential to

this day. Eliade has been strongly identified with the Chicago school, and his *Encyclopedia*

frames religious studies largely in the light of those intellectual commitments (McMullin, 1989,

p. 80-81). It is not particularly controversial to suggest that at the time of the *Encyclopedia*'s

creation, Chicago school perspectives were particularly ascendant in the academic study of

religion.

The ways in which the *Encyclopedia* demonstrates these perspectives are sometimes

subtle. Eliade, as editor in chief, was the foremost voice determining the editorial direction of the

Encyclopedia. However, given its substantial scale, the content of the *Encyclopedia* was almost

entirely written by other scholars. The huge scope of the project, along with Eliade's limited time

and advancing years, necessitated that his involvement with the details of the project was limited

in some respects. He selected contributors (Iricinschi, 2004, p. 368), but it is fair to say that

multiple voices and interests sometimes cacophonously contribute to the perspectives we find in

the *Encyclopedia*. Although Eliade very clearly did not control of all of the content in the

Encyclopedia, I will show below how we can nonetheless say that the *Encyclopedia*

demonstrates a strongly Eliadean perspective.

Sometimes Eliadean influence is more obvious. For example, Lindsay Jones, editor in

chief of the second edition of Eliade's *Encyclopedia*, makes some revealing comments about the

Encyclopedia:

> Such an encyclopedia requires, in one respect, a large measure of consensus among
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> contributors as to what religion is and what academic students of religion ought to and
>
> ought not to circumscribe within their view. But in another respect, it is a scholarly
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> consensus of a very broad and pliant sort. (2005, p. xi)

This claim may be intended to show the breadth of opinion of the *Encyclopedia*, but ironically, it

is more remarkable for the implication that the encyclopedic "consensus" can also exclude

certain perspectives. Jones' claim implies that there are ideological boundaries to the project

while entirely failing to address the criteria that are used when enforcing these boundaries. We

need to interrogate what this consensus is, and where it situates the *Encyclopedia* ideologically

within the discipline.

I suggest that Jones' consensus is a surprisingly frank reference to the influence of certain

dominant perspectives in religious studies scholarship at the time the *Encyclopedia* was being

assembled. For Eliade's encyclopedic project, the "consensus" serves to define the study of

religion; it designates some knowledge about religion as "encyclopedic" to the exclusion of other

knowledge. In turn, it establishes what "religion" is for the editors, contributors and readers. As

a result, we need to look at the *Encyclopedia* as it is ideologically situated according the

assumptions of this consensus. As a discursive agenda, this consensus propagates a certain

prevailing approach to the study of religion. We quickly realize that the *Encyclopedia* is not a neutral text.

This discursive contribution of the *Encyclopedia* to the discipline can be theorized in light of Thomas Kuhn's concept of a "paradigm" (Kuhn, [1962] 1970). For Kuhn, the limits of scholarly knowledge are strongly socially defined, and their legitimacy deeply tied to their moment in scholarship. Following Kuhn, I argue that Eliade's *Encyclopedia* is strongly redolent of a particular epistemic moment in religious studies. If we are to regard the study of religion as Kuhnian "normal science," Eliade's *Encyclopedia* is characteristic of a (temporarily) dominant discourse, which was, at its time, paradigmatic in Kuhn's sense.[3] Although it is almost a platitude today, Kuhn's novel work in the 1960's advanced the idea that paradigms change only when unforeseen criticisms challenge the governing model. With a Kuhnian perspective, we can see criticisms of Eliadean religious studies, growing in number after Eliade's death, eventually causing a crisis of confidence in usefulness of the Eliadean model in religious studies.

While Eliade's *Encyclopedia* can be read as discipline-making in Kuhn's model, following Tkacz (2007), we can push further and argue that Eliade's *Encyclopedia* is disciplinary in Foucault's sense too. However, it is not a new argument to claim that academic undertakings are Foucauldian disciplines. Instead I argue, with Tkacz, that the disciplinary character of the encyclopedia is built into its production as well. As Tkacz says, "the encyclopedia is a genre with well-defined and naturalized conventions which, even if not formally outlined, nonetheless work to produce a limited set of author positions" (2007, p. 15). Tkacz draws the conclusion that the encyclopedia is "political technology" in Foucault's sense (Tkacz, 2007, p. 16). In this light, Eliade's *Encyclopedia* enables the elaboration of a particular "authority" within the academic

study of religion. For the academic study of religion in the 1980's, the *Encyclopedia* implicitly reinforces dominant Eliadean positions.

Thus, keeping in mind Kuhn, Foucault and Tkacz, we can see Eliade's encyclopedia as a codification of the discipline of religious studies according to a certain discursive technologies. This codification is not neutral, but furthers the perennialist, *sui generis* religionist agenda of Eliade and many of his contemporaries. Encyclopedism provided them with a rhetorical tool that could be leveraged to their advantage. Indeed, subject-based encyclopedism may not have been merely incidental to the development of the academic study of religion, but in fact contributed to the rise, partly engineered by Eliade, of comparativist religious studies as a discourse. In this light, Eliade's *Encyclopedia* can be seen as a rhetorical text, advancing a *sui generis* approach to religious studies, and structuring the discipline on specifically comparativist axes.

Mark Bay has demonstrated discipline-defining character of subject encyclopedias in the field of psychology. As he says, "The advent of comprehensive encyclopedias of psychology is a relatively recent, and came about from the parallel development of psychology as a discipline" (2002, p. 73). As I have demonstrated, we can see similar developments in religious studies. Viewed from this perspective, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* substantially codified the boundaries of the academic study of religion.

Despite his influence, Eliade's approach is not without detractors (Dubuisson, 2003; McCutcheon, 1997; McCutcheon, 1993; McMullin, 1989). Critical perspectives on Eliadean approaches have grown in the years since his death. As Kuhn's model would have us expect, the Eliadean "paradigm" for religious studies eventually fractured. This was even evident even from some of the early reviews of the *Encyclopedia*. As Iricinschi puts it:

> Some reviewers of [Eliade's *Encyclopedia*] even made clear a certain disappointment or
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> frustration caused by the monopolization of the discourse by the Chicago school in the
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> history of religion, and the transformation of the Encyclopedia into a manifesto for the
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> phenomenological method in the study of religion at the precise time when scholars in the
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> United States, Great Britain, France and Italy already had begun to question its viability.
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> (2004, p. 384)

Iricinschi points out that in recent years, scholars of religion have questioned some of

foundational assumptions of Chicago school religious studies. In scholarly circles since the

1980s, the category of "religion" itself has come into question (Arnal & McCutcheon, 2013, p.

102; Dubuisson, 2003; McCutcheon, 1997; Smith, 1982), in a way that would be unthinkable for

Eliade and many other comparativist scholars of his generation. Scholars, including McCutcheon

(1997), have begun to question the Eliadean underpinnings of a "religion" encyclopedia.

McCutcheon argues that the comparativist perspectives that stitch together the "consensus" of

the *Encyclopedia* have in many ways failed to deal with theoretical developments within the

discipline that followed. For McCutcheon, the Eliadean "consensus" does not hold the sway it

once did. He accuses the theoretical apparatus of *sui generis* religious studies of lacking

sufficient rigor (1997, p. 3339-3351). What he sees as undefended assumptions by many scholars

of religion lead him to argue that the entire project of *sui generis* religious studies should be

abandoned, and replaced with a more interdisciplinary, what he calls "naturalistic," theoretically

reflexive study of religion (1997, p. 3439-3471).

While McCutcheon may adopt a particularly polemical approach to this issue, his

criticisms cut to the heart of the conceptual model that underpins the *Encyclopedia of Religion.*

McCutcheon is not alone in this critique. The central argument of his book *Manufacturing*

Religion (1997) – that *sui generis* religious studies has largely failed – is supported by the work of other prominent scholars, including well known early critics of Eliade such as Smith (1982) and Smart (1978), as well as later scholars, including Dubuisson (2003), Arnal and McCutcheon (2013) and McMullin (1989). McCutcheon suggests that practicing *sui generis* religious studies, as Eliade does, is "to dabble in what C. Geertz has termed the religious perspective" (1997, p. 2623). Unsurprisingly, this is a controversial claim. Indeed, the rawness of the recent controversy surrounding *sui generis* religious studies may be because, as Wiebe (1995) argues, the academic study of religion has still not completely succeeded at disentangling itself from its theological origins.

Thus it is possible, when reading McCutcheon, to come to the conclusion that the *sui generis* methodology of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* has a covertly confessional perspective. However, McCutcheon himself immediately cautions against this perspective. If we criticize Eliade for being "religious," he argues, we still lean heavily on an uncritical use of the category of "religion" (1997, p. 2661). The debate thickens. However, It is not my intention to document this controversy systematically. Rather, I'd like to point out that in the process of tracing these arguments, we have arrived at some of the implicit theoretical agendas of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. This inquiry, which began with somewhat benign questions about the "authority" of the *Encyclopedia*, has led us to critical questions about what is "religion" and what is "religious studies." We see that the discursive positions of the *Encyclopedia* cut to the heart of important debates in the academic study of religion.

Moreover, the discipline is changing. Ideologically, in some quarters, the study of religion has moved on from an Eliadean perspective. As early as 1988, Ninian Smart said "[we are at the] end of the Eliadean era and ready to move on to 'new questions and themes'" (as cited

in Rennie, 1996, p. ix). Leaving aside apologetic ripostes of later Eliadeans (Rennie, 1996; Girardot, 2011), the preoccupations of scholars of religious studies have, in many cases, moved on to post-Eliadean concerns. This strongly affects how Eliade's *Encyclopedia* is read, used and evaluated. Religious studies librarians need to be aware of this.

The point is that the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is not neutral, but rather that sits in a discursive context. It is deeply tied to the agendas of those scholars of religion who produced it. Eliade's *Encyclopedia* is woven tightly into the context of a changing discipline. Of course, the discipline is uneven, contested and multifaceted. Unsurprisingly then, the "authority" of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is likewise contextual, discursive and rhetorical. Its "authority" as a reference text is linked to its historical moment and to the discursive agendas of the scholars who produced it. Situating the *Encyclopedia* in this history is an important step toward understanding its significance in religious studies reference.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* and Encyclopedism

Up to this point, we have discussed developments in the discipline of religious studies. Yet we would be remiss if we neglected simultaneous developments in the history of encyclopedism. To take an important step forward with the other foot, we need to situate Eliade's *Encyclopedia* in the history of encyclopedism. Encyclopedism has a very long history, which we cannot delve into fully here. Instead, I concern myself with developments since Eliade's encyclopedia was published in the late 1980's. The thirty years since the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* have seen intense re-negotiation of the place of encyclopedias within the reference collection. These changes impact the ways in which Eliade's *Encyclopedia*

is used today. So I now leave aside the history of the study of religions, and instead turn to the history of the encyclopedia.

In the late 1980's, subject encyclopedias were proliferating across many academic disciplines. East has argued that the prominence of the print subject encyclopedia peaked in 1986 (2010, p. 163). At the time, the subject encyclopedia was "the Rolls Royce of the library reference collection," as Bill Katz memorably put it (as cited in East, 2010, p. 162). These blue-chip "authoritative" titles appealed to many acquisitions librarians across the academy. Likewise, there was strong incentive for publishers to produce and sell these usually expensive titles. This era saw a convergence of librarians' interests with those of academic publishers, which led to a burgeoning of the subject encyclopedia genre.

In the 1980's, the drastic reconfiguration of specialist publications that began with the introduction of CD-ROMs, and continued even more forcefully with the growth of the internet, was still a few years away. When Eliade's *Encyclopedia* was being planned in the mid 1980's, the project fit conveniently with his contemporaries' enthusiasm for encyclopedias. Iricinschi points out that Eliade was not the only one in the field of religious studies rushing to fill this need. Around the same time, publishers from Macmillan approached prominent scholar of religion Ninian Smart about editing a very similar encyclopedic project (2004, p. 365), although this project was ultimately abandoned. Subject encyclopedias were *du moment*, and the ability of Eliade's publishers to marshal the resources for such a large-scale project was certainly in part dependent on the reference priorities of the religious studies librarians of the 1980's.

However, encyclopedism was beginning a period of rapid change. Beginning in the 1990s, the promotion of new digital technologies – by some librarians and publishers – threw the

economics of the subject encyclopedia into flux. Libraries began to adopt new electronic

formats. Perceived technological imperatives created turmoil in collection development. This in

turn led to tangible changes in the production of encyclopedias. Rhetoric about new encyclopedic

formats, from CD-ROMS to Wikipedia, directly affected the writing, the publishing, and the

reading of encyclopedias.

Were these new formats unprecedented? Certainly there were new elements to these

encyclopedic technologies. For example, Tkacz points to new "visibilities" brought about by

technologies like Wikipedia (2007, p. 14). But there were also profound continuities between

new encyclopedic technologies and older encyclopedic forms. Loveland and Reagle (2013) argue

that much of the recent upheaval in encyclopedism is mirrored by earlier crises, and that

encyclopedism has a long tradition of tumultuousness. They contextualize the recent history of

Wikipedia in a longer historical frame. In the extremely long history of the encyclopedic genre,

they argue that encyclopedists have continually adapted to challenges in creative ways. Loveland

and Reagle encourage us to look at the crises faced by encyclopedists in the 1990's and early

2000's with broader historical perspective. Looking at older encyclopedic controversies (for

example, those addressed by Einbinder in his analysis of *Encyclopedia Britannica* from 1964),

we can see that recent crises – such as questions of "authority" – in some ways closely parallel

very similar crises that were faced by previous generations of encyclopedists.

Nonetheless, the questioning of encyclopedic forms that began with the advent of digital

encyclopedias has been severe enough to upend the economic and intellectual models that

produced subject encyclopedias with such enthusiasm in the 1980s. Print subject encyclopedias

in religious studies continue to be published, such as those edited by Wendy Doniger in 1999 and

2006, yet the impact of these later encyclopedias on the discipline of religious studies have not

rivaled the influence of Eliade's *Encyclopedia.*[4] Moreover, in the 21st century, subject

encyclopedias have begun to target increasingly narrow specializations. This reflects both

changing marketing tactics by publishers, as well as a general retreat of the encyclopedic genre

from the center stage of the reference collection, into the more niche corners of specialists. I will

forgo speculating on whether these trends will continue. But it is clear that, for now, the heyday

of the print subject encyclopedia has passed.

Underlying the supposed inevitabilities of economic and technological change in

encyclopedism are competing discursive agendas. Encyclopedism has been defined and

redefined by contested economic, technological and intellectual histories. Librarians are not

sitting on the sidelines. We stake discursive claims when we use encyclopedias at the reference

desk. Whether our reference work endorses or problematizes the "authority" of a certain source,

we should be cognizant of our discursive positions. If we fail to read the broader politics that

produced these texts, we make an important elision. Encyclopedias are not *just* sources; they are

discursive tools. Our reference work is more thorough when we contextualize our sources. We

need to bring humanistic methods to bear on sources that may not always receive the sustained

critical attention that they should.

Conclusion

Encyclopedias of religion may often serve an introductory function in the academic study

of religion, but as we have seen, they nonetheless also cut to the heart of some of the theoretical

debates that are shaping the discipline. The reference tools that we have at our disposal today are

largely the result of disciplinary and technological histories, and situating these sources within

discursive positions sets those sources in theoretical and historical relief. Examining these

histories allows the discipline to come into sharper focus as contested and political. Closer analysis of this historical texture will hopefully contribute to our understanding of these texts. This analysis is essential to our critical reference work.

To do this we need to move beyond thinking about "authoritative" sources. "Authority," for reasons I have described above, is no longer a defensible concept at the reference desk. Of course, most reference librarians probably agree that we need to recognize and communicate the strengths and weaknesses of various sources. Moreover, we want our students to learn how to effectively evaluate sources themselves. Yet there are compelling reasons for librarians to avoid "authority" arguments. Foremost among these is that we need to be aware that texts are not neutral, but are politically and historically situated.

When we do this, a number of avenues of inquiry open up to us. The contested history of religious studies encyclopedism, which we have traced here, suggests further hypotheses on the histories of publishing, scholarship and librarianship. For the most part, I will forgo broader speculation and remain closely committed to the focused history of Eliade's text that I have traced above. Even within this limited purview, there is, of course, much more to say about the context in which his work was written and received, and other scholars are doing this important work. For example: Irincinshi's (2004) study of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* provides an examination of the logistical machinations of a large-scale encyclopedic project in the 1980s. Pursuing another tack, McCutcheon's "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar" (1993) delves into Eliade's politics in much more detail, and the impact this has had on his scholarship. Certainly explorations like these are productive. While I make no claims to comprehensiveness in the above study of the *Encyclopedia*, my concern here has been to demonstrate the importance of the historicizing the text in religious studies reference librarianship. I have attempted to show how

even small-scale histories like this one point to important theoretical and political insights. When we look closely at the histories of our reference texts, important theoretical considerations become evident.

Lastly, on a historiographical note, Masuzawa points out that our historical analysis of reference sources should not rest sanguinely on a "comforting belief" (2005, p. 328) in the power of our own historical analyses. A historicizing methodology does not implicitly raise our criticism to some place above discursive conflict. As Robert Brandom suggests, "there is no bird's eye view above the fray of competing claims" (as cited in Rouse 2003, p. 116). Rather than affect a dispassionate conceit, my recommendation is that we follow Foucault and Kuhn's lead in identifying discourses, situating them in their historical and rhetorical frames, and explaining these contexts to our students. I suspect we may find that the histories of our academic reference works, contextualized in this way, are an essential part of the larger histories of our disciplines and technologies.

Notes

1. It has more recently been argued that the study of "world" or "comparative" religions relies on questionable, orientalist assumptions (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 21). However, during Eliade's lifetime, such criticisms were only just beginning to appear.

2. McCutcheon explains that *sui generis* religious studies centers on "the claim that religious data are … understood as meaning distinct, unique, and self-caused … Eliade's texts are one, but not the only, example of this type of approach" (1997, p. 386).

3. For a critique of an attempt to apply Kuhnian paradigms to the history of the study of religions, see Dubuisson (2003, p. 158).

4. For example, despite Doniger's prominence in the field and her controversial reputation, her more recent encyclopedias did not draw the amount of scholarly commentary that Eliade's *Encyclopedia* did in 1987. This can be roughly discerned by looking at the number of scholarly articles reviewing or discussing Eliade's *Encyclopedia* versus those discussing Doniger's encyclopedias in major humanities journal databases. Although it is certainly not a perfect measure, the difference in quantity of scholarship is striking.

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