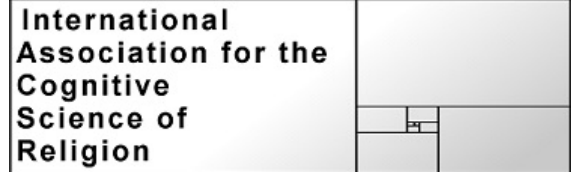


IACSR Year in Review: 2015

Dimitris Xygalatas: Secretary General, IACSR



Dear IACSR Members, affiliates, and friends,

2015 has been a great year for the Cognitive Science of Religion, with many important publications, new jobs prestigious awards, and research grants for our members, as well as plenty of events. The accomplishments of our members are far too many to list here (and hard to keep up with!), but I would like to share with you some of the highlights for CSR in 2015, hoping that 2016 will be even more productive.

Publications

Since the IACSR was founded, publications in the field are steadily increasing. Most importantly, the time when work in CSR was only published in Religious Studies journals and read by a small circle of friends is now a thing of the past. Work on religion and cognition now features in the world's most prestigious scientific journals and attracts global attention. The articles and books highlighted below are just a tiny sample of last year's 5,000 publications on the topic.

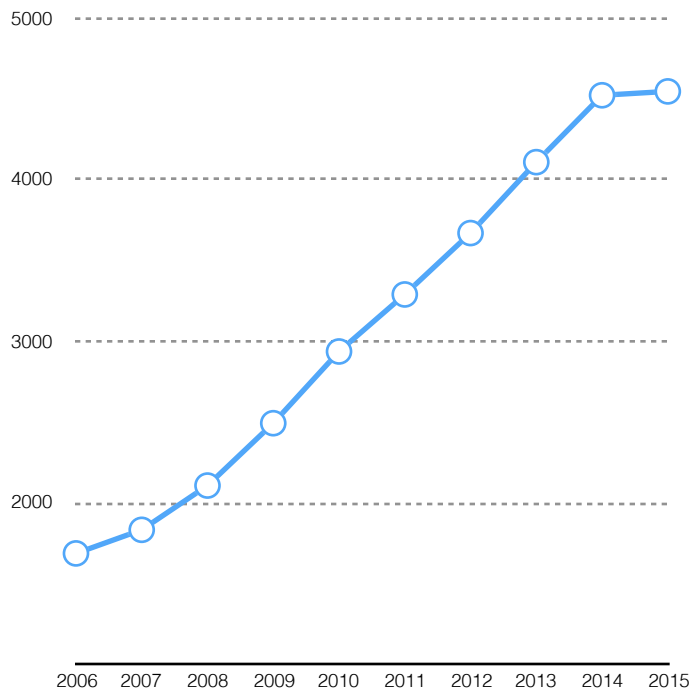


Figure: articles on religion and cognition listed in Scopus since 2006. Note that publications for 2015 are expected to be much higher than depicted, as the last issues of that year have not yet been listed. The search terms were relig* and cognit*, searching in all fields and all subject areas for document type "article or review" (retrieved from www.scopus.com on 16/2/2016).

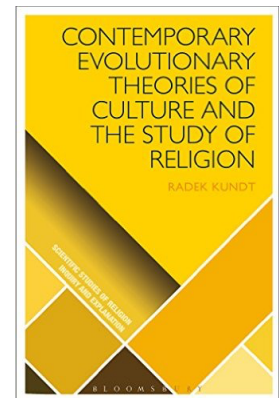
Books

Evolution continues to be a hot topic, and 2015 saw the publication of monographs by CSR scholars that are dedicated to that topic. A few of those books are highlighted below.

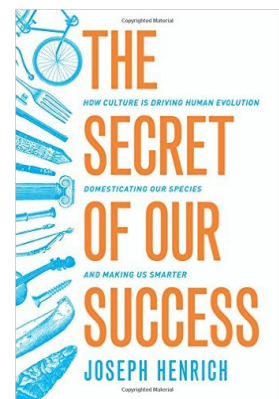
Dominic Johnson's *God is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human* (Oxford University Press, 2015) draws on new research from anthropology, evolutionary biology, experimental psychology, and neuroscience to present a new theory of supernatural punishment that offers fresh insight into the origins and evolution of not only religion, but also human cooperation and society. It argues that belief in supernatural reward and punishment is no quirk of western or Christian culture, but a ubiquitous part of human nature that spans geographical regions, cultures, and human history.



Radek Kundt's *Contemporary Evolutionary Theories of Culture and the Study of Religion* (Bloomsbury, 2015) surveys the historical background of cultural evolution as used in the study of religion, pinpointing major objections to classical nineteenth-century theories. It introduces an alternative evolutionary approach to the study of culture, which provides a deeply enriching line of enquiry that incorporates both biological evolutionary history as shaping cultural change and culture as a force acting on the gene.



Joseph Henrich's *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* (Princeton University Press, 2015) shows how cultural inventions and institutions, including religion and ritual, have altered –and continue to alter– our motivations and perceptions. Henrich shows how our genetics and biology are inextricably interwoven with cultural evolution, and how culture-gene interactions launched our species on an extraordinary evolutionary trajectory.



Articles

Many high-impact articles were published in 2015 (just a small selection here)...

Lang, M., J. Krátký, J. Shaver, D. Jerotijević & D. Xygalatas (2015). Effects of Anxiety on Spontaneous Ritualized Behavior, *Current Biology*. [Click to read](#)

Norenzayan, A., Shariff, A., Willard, A., Slingerland, E., Gervais, W., McNamara, R. & Henrich, J. (2015). The Cultural Evolution of Prosocial Religions. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* [Click to read](#)

McKay, Ryan and Harvey Whitehouse (2015). Religion and Morality. *Psychological Bulletin*. [Click to read](#)

Shariff, A.F., Willard, A.K., Andersen, T., & Norenzayan, A., (2015). Religious Priming: A Meta-analysis with a Focus on Prosociality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. [Click to read](#)

Watson-Jones, Rachel E., Harvey Whitehouse, and Cristine H. Legare (2015). In-group ostracism increases high fidelity imitation in early childhood. *Psychological Science*. [Click to read](#)

Watts, J., Greenhill, S. J., Atkinson, Q. D., Currie, T. E., Bulbulia, J., and Gray, R. D. (2015). Broad supernatural punishment but not moralizing high gods pre-cede the evolution of political complexity in Austronesia. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences*. [Click to read](#)

...and the trend continues in 2016

Purzycki, B., A. Norenzayan, C. Apicella, Q. Atkinson, E. Cohen, R. McNamara, A. Willard, D. Xygalatas, & J. Henrich (2016). Moralistic Gods, Supernatural Punishment and the Expansion of Human Sociality, *Nature*. [Click to read](#)

Awards

Cristine Legare (photo) received the Janet Taylor Spence Award from the Association for Psychological Science, in recognition of transformative early career contributions to psychological science. Award winners reflect the best of the many new and cutting edge ideas coming out of the most creative and promising investigators who embody the future of psychological science.



Will Gervais and **Azim Shariff** each received a 2015 APS Rising Stars Award. The Rising Star designation recognizes outstanding psychological scientists in the earliest stages of their research career post-PhD whose innovative work has already advanced the field and signals great potential for their continued contributions.

Emma Cohen's research received support by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship and a John Fell Fund award. This has allowed her to focus on developing new projects with her DPhil students and colleagues in the UK, Germany, and the US.

Richard Sosis has been awarded a James Barnett Professorship in Humanistic Anthropology at the University of Connecticut. The James Barnett Professorship in Humanistic Anthropology was endowed in 2006 by Professor Dennison Nash for the purpose of supporting "a nationally recognized researcher, scholar, and teacher" who "will have made significant contributions to the field of anthropology." The position is stipulated as a joint appointment between the Department of Anthropology and the Humanities Institute at UConn.

Jobs

2015 has been a great year for CSR in the job market. **Joseph Henrich** accepted a new position at Harvard. **John Shaver** (top photo) got a permanent position at the University of Otago. **Pieter Francois** has taken up a full-time lectureship at the University of Hertfordshire. **Jonathan Jong** has taken up a permanent position as Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Brain, Belief and Behaviour theme at the Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement at Coventry University. **John McGraw** has been appointed Assistant Professor at California State University, Northridge. And Aarhus University has experienced a hiring spree, with **Uffe Schoedt** and **Kristoffer Nielbo** being appointed as Associate Professors and **Panos Mitkidis** as Assistant Professor. Last but not least, **Jason Slone** (bottom photo) has become Professor and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Georgia Southern University!



Research and funding

The Modeling Religion Project (PI Wesley Wildman, Co-PIs LeRon Shults and Saikou Diallo) began in 2015 at the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion in Boston and the Boston VA Research Institute, with close relationships to the Virginia Modeling, Analysis, and Simulation Center in Virginia. **Funded for 2.4m USD, the lion's share from the John Templeton Foundation** (2.1m USD), the project aims to build both computer simulations of religious cognitive and social processes and an open-source web-based software program that will allow people in the scientific study of religion to develop simulations without any programming skills using an attractive and intuitive user interface. The **Modeling Religion in Norway Project** has also received 1.5m USD by the Research Council of Norway.

Did you know...

In 2015 the journal of the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion, Religion, Brain & Behavior (RBB), published by Taylor & Francis, expanded to four issues per year. In issue 5/4, RBB editors issued a call to identify Hilbert Problems in the study of religion. Suitable contributions will be published in a forthcoming issue.

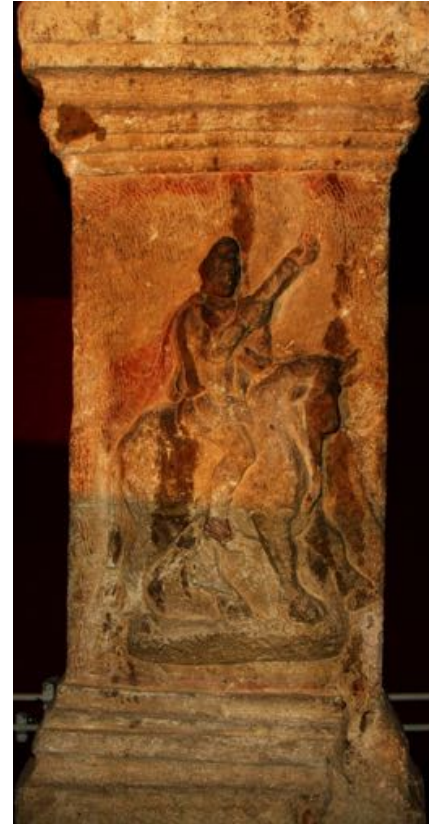
In 2015 the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion also received **1.7m USD in funding from the John Templeton Foundation** to begin the third year of work on the Neuroscience and Religious Cognition project (PI Patrick McNamara, Co-PI Wesley Wildman). The focus has been on analyzing masses of data from neuroimaging studies, surveys, and priming experiments and producing publications to document the discoveries made during the course of the project.

The **Cognitive Approaches to Ancient Religious Experience** research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK, was awarded to Esther Eidinow in collaboration with Armin Geertz to establish a collaboration among classical philologists, historians, and cognitive science of religion researchers on ancient Greek and Roman evidence for religious experience.

The **GEHIR - Generative Historiography of Religion Project** is an interdisciplinary research project at Masaryk University, which applies innovative methods used in the study of the dynamics of complex systems (mathematical and computational modelling, network science) to the historiography of ancient Graeco-Roman religions. Through four focused case studies this project envisions an enrichment of the research into several religious domains of the ancient Mediterranean.

MPI - LEVYNA collaboration. The Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History supports a series of experiments on the emotional mechanisms at play in the cultural adaptation of religions. The Institute specializes in the study of culture and religion using phylogenetic trees – a statistical technique developed in biology for mapping changes in species' characteristics over time. This line of research translates into an interest in all “big questions” on religion. LEVYNA's members concentrate on the experimental component of these “big questions”, but also collaborate on the phylogenetic project.

Oxford University's Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology has become a partner in the **Aligned, Quality-centric Software and Data Engineering** research consortium funded by Horizon 2020. ALIGNED develops models and tools to convert Big Data sources into high-quality, structured knowledge, using the Linked Data approach. ICEA contributes to this exciting research by applying the ALIGNED models and tools on the data gathering process and workflows of the Seshat Global History Databank.



New website



The New Science of Religion (<http://newscienceofreligion.com>) is a new multimedia series launched by the Centre for Human Evolution, Cognition, and Culture at the University of British Columbia & Simon Fraser University, Canada. It explores the latest advances in understanding religion from the perspective of evolutionary science. [Click here to see the introductory video.](#)

The **Pulotu Database of Austronesian Supernatural Beliefs and Practices**, led by Russell Gray, is supported by funding from the Templeton Foundation and the Marsden Grant of the Royal Society of New Zealand. Pulotu is a cross-cultural database containing quantitative variables on 116 Austronesian speaking cultures. This project is a collaboration between the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, the Australian National University, and New Zealand's Auckland and Victoria universities.



Infrastructures

An impressive new laboratory has been built at Masaryk university. The HUME lab - Experimental Humanities laboratory is a unique and innovative facility with cutting edge equipment aimed at increasing our understanding of human interaction and addressing key theoretical issues central to the study of social cognition through experimental approaches. This facility provides state-of-the-art equipment for experimental research focused on a variety of aspects of the human condition as seen from the perspective of different disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities (anthropology, archaeology, economics, education, history, linguistics, psychology, and religious studies).



Events

As every year, the IACSR organized various events and workshops in 2015, both on our own and in collaboration with our affiliates. We had a strong presence at IAHR and AAR meetings, while our members have given talks at APS, SPSP, AAA, and various other conferences. Notably, the world's leading primatologist, Frans de Waal, was the keynote speaker in a panel on his book, *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, which included insightful responses by Edward Slingerland, Azim Sharif, Sarah Brosnan, and Robert McCauley.



2016 conference in Vancouver

Our 2016 conference will take place in Vancouver, one of the most beautiful cities in North America!



Sponsored by the Centre for Human Evolution, Cognition, and Culture (HECC),
and the Cultural Evolution of Religion Research Consortium (CERC),
funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Joseph Henrich, Harvard University
Cristine Legare, The University of Texas at Austin

FEATURED PANEL

Hacking the mind: Using computer models to study religious minds in silicon
sponsored by the Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion

STUDENT AWARDS

The IACSR will sponsor two student awards. The best paper and the best poster submitted by a student will each receive free registration and accommodation at the Sheraton Wall Centre

SUBMISSIONS

To submit a proposal for a paper, panel, or poster, please email our Secretary General, Dimitris Xygalatas (xygalatas@uconn.edu) with your full affiliation and an abstract of *no more* than 250 words. All submissions will be peer-reviewed. The deadline for submissions is March 31, 2016

The Cognitive Science of Religion is an interdisciplinary research area. We therefore encourage empirical and theoretical papers representing the current state-of-the-art research on religion and cognition from all areas of the humanities, social, and natural sciences

ACCOMMODATION

The conference will take place at the Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre Hotel, 1088 Burrard St. To get the special rates reserved for attendees, go to www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/HECC