

U F R E L I G I O N

NEWSLETTER



NEWS

- Alumnus **Dr. Ken Chitwood** is starting a new research project with **Dr. Kholoud Al-Ajarma** on "*The Global Landscapes of Muslim Lives: Latin American and Caribbean Intesections.*" See *Page 2* to learn more.
- **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** gave a talk on Angkor Temples at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. See *Page 3* to learn more.

EVENTS

- On **January 22nd**, **Dr. Rachel Gordan**, in collaboration with the UF History Department, will host a lunch talk with guest lecturer Dr. Kati Curtis, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of the South (Sewanee, TN). The talk will take place at **12:30 p.m.** in **Keene-Flint Hall, Room 005** with lunch provided. Dr. Curtis will speak to UF faculty and graduate students about Elizabeth "Baby Doe" Tabor, a notable figure from the American frontier who lived as a religious recluse and amassed a rich collection of artifacts. Drawing on these materials, Dr. Curtis examines how spirituality, gender, and capitalism shaped everyday life and storytelling in the United States during that period.

NEWS

- The German Research Foundation (DFG) and the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) are supporting a new German–British research project led by program alumnus **Dr. Ken Chitwood** of the University of Bayreuth, in collaboration with Dr. Kholoud Al-Ajarma of the University of Edinburgh. Titled “*The Global Landscapes of Muslim Lives: Latin American and Caribbean Intersections*,” the project examines Muslim life in Latin America, the Caribbean, and their diasporas—regions that have been largely overlooked in global Islamic studies, which have traditionally focused on the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. Beginning in January 2026, the project will ongoing for 36 months.



Dr. Ken Chitwood

Through extensive ethnographic research, including approximately 100 interviews and life histories, the project explores everyday practices, migration experiences, and social networks, as well as the interaction between local communities and global flows of people, ideas, capital, and technology. Comparative analysis across regions will result in 15–20 detailed community profiles that will support both scholarly and public-facing publications. In addition, the project strengthens this under-researched field through postdoctoral involvement, international collaboration, and wide dissemination of findings through conferences, digital resources, journal articles, and a monograph.

PRESENTATIONS

- On December 22nd, 2025, Professor **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** gave a talk on Angkor Temples titled “*Distinctive Iconography in Angkor Temples and Parallels in Indian Texts*” at the **Royal University of Fine Arts** in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This talk examined unusual temple carvings from the Angkorian period of the Khmer Empire that depart from familiar narratives of the Sanskrit epics and Puranas. Focusing on examples from the West Mebon, Prasat Kravan, and Angkor Wat, it highlighted the distinctive creativity and agency of Khmer artists in depicting stories and iconography not found in Indian temples. Through close analysis of unique representations of Vishnu and related mythological scenes, the talk explored lesser-known textual sources and influences that shaped the singular visual language of Khmer art.



Dr. Vasudha Narayanan and Professor Sophearith Siyonn at the start of the talk.



Dr. Narayanan with Professor Sophearith Siyonn enjoy a nice break during the lecture.

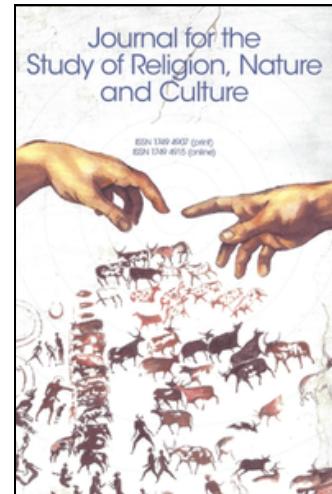


Lecture participants at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

PUBLICATIONS

- The *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture (JSRNC)* has published its newest edition, Volume 19.4. The issue includes studies on German Catholic youth and nature in the early 20th century, spiritual negotiation within sustainable European ecovillages, and environmental and religious themes in The Lord of the Rings in dialogue with Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*. Professor **Dr. Bron Taylor** founded the JSRNC in 2007 and has been releasing quarterly journals since its inception.
- Professor **Dr. Yaniv Feller** published a peer-reviewed article in a special issue of the *Material and Visual Cultures of Religion Journal* 9(2) titled "*Inaccessible Objects: Armin Loeb's Tallit Katan at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*"

In this article, Feller explores the biography of a religious garment donated to the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) some twenty years ago in order to analyze the intersection between archiving, conserving, and presenting religious objects in museums.



- Professor **Dr. Yaniv Feller** has published a chapter titled "*Covenant, Torah, and the Failed Promise of Jewish Museums*" in *Making Promises, Oaths, Treaties, and Covenants in Multi-jurisdictional and Multi-religious Societies* (University of Toronto Press, 2025), edited by Benjamin Berger, Pamela Klassen, and Monique Scheer (pp. 197–219).

The chapter presents a comparative study of the Jewish Museum London and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. By examining the Torah's multiple meanings as both a concept and a material object, Feller argues that Jewish museum curatorial practices face inherent limitations that ultimately cannot be fully resolved.

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If you have any information that you would like featured in the newsletter, please email **Ashley Tisher (a.tisher@ufl.edu)**.

We look forward to hearing from you!