The international conference „Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Rites of Passage: European and Extra-European Perspectives on the Early Modern Period“, sponsored by the Max Weber Foundation, took place in Frankfurt am Main on July 3-4 2014. Its topic reflected at least three aspects of recent research on Early Modern religious and social life: Firstly, the vivid discussion of coexistence and conflict in the historiography of the Early Modern denominational division. As the organizer CECILIA CRISTELLON (Frankfurt am Main) pointed out in her introduction, the conference’s aim was to go beyond a binary opposition between these two phenomena by looking both at the construction and crossing of confessional boundaries. Secondly, this attempt was undertaken through the lens of „rites of passage“, a subject of continued interest today – more than one hundred years after the original publication of Arnold van Gennep’s „Les rites de passage“ in 1909. Thirdly, as a brief look at the programme shows, the conference took into account European and Extra-European perspectives, trying to not just juxtapose them but attempt at a dialogue, searching for common or linked phenomena and processes of translation.

The first session on „European Perspectives“ was opened by a keynote lecture by SILVANA SEIDEL MENCHI (Pisa). She demonstrated how marriage rites of Philo-Protestant communities in sixteenth-century Italy took place in conditions of a surrounding dominant Catholic environment. The basic mode of relationship in these cases was rather one of repression than of peaceful coexistence, although these modes were not mutually exclusive even here. The large quantity of such pro-Reformation groups of various sizes is in itself remarkable, although it has to be noted that mostly their character can be reconstructed only indirectly from the trials of Church tribunals. According to Seidel Menchi, under these circumstances families and even conjugal couples often formed something like „private“ religious micro-communities whose members reinforced or even shaped each other’s subversive confessional identity.

The interplay between conflict and contact was also present in the paper delivered by CRISTINA SETTI (Pisa) on the everyday social customs of 17th-century Catholics and Greek Orthodox in the Venetian territories and the juridical intricacies surrounding religious rituals. The sources suggest a widespread interconfessional social proximity as exemplified by the interchange of services or mixed marriages. At the same time, these instances taking place in a situation of religious plurality were perceived as dangerous by parts of the ecclesiastical authorities. The rites of passages in particular were a topic of heated debate as they were perceived as ways of affirming one’s confessional identity. In the cases presented by Setti, they can illustrate both the creation and upholding of boundaries and their actual fragility. How rites of passage reaffirmed boundaries and even triggered violence was the topic of the presentation by IWO HRYNIEWICZ and DAWID MACHAJ (both Warsaw). Using examples of religious riots led by students of the Cracow University, they challenged any idealized vision of the Early Modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a state marked by toleration and the absence of confessional conflict. The role of students deserves particular attention in the often bloody eruptions of violence against Protestant funeral processions, weddings or simply churches. Their acts didn’t just demonstrate their belonging to a confession considered superior to that of their confessional other, but also participated in creating their social group identity. From this perspective, the violence surrounding rites of passage can be read as a transitional ritual in itself.
DANIELLE MCCORMACK (Poznań) presented a case study of marital conflict in the North of Ireland in the 1660s and analyzed it in the context of the general political and confessional development. In the political mindset of the dominant class of Protestant settlers, Irish Catholicism was perceived as a threat and associated with disloyalty towards the English authorities in favour of the Pope and foreign Catholic countries. Through the close analysis of a husband’s legal case against his own wife which he accused of „papism,” McCormack successfully demonstrated how high political discourse trickled down into daily life. It was used and adapted in a marital conflict, shaping the language used by the local actors and thereby in a way politicizing and confessionalizing personal drama. In the next presentation, JOSEF KADERÁBEK (Prague) turned to the denominational situation in Bohemia. As an example for the role of rites of passage and how they were subject to historical change he chose the multi-confessional royal town of Slany between 1559 and 1635. Especially after the Battle of White Mountain the non-Catholic communities in the city came under increasing pressure of Habsburg’s re-Catholicization efforts. While in previous periods Bohemia was – at least among zealous Catholics – notorious for blurred confessional boundaries, Kaderábek underlined how Catholic and non-Catholic rituals gradually underwent a stronger differentiation and served as confessional identity markers. Rites such as baptism and funerals were particularly important in this process since the main part of the population was concerned with the external, performative signs of distinction and not with abstract, theological differences.

The following two presentations concluded the session on European perspectives and extended them chronologically to the 18th century and thematically by including Early Modern Jewish believers. ELLINOR FORSTER (Innsbruck) discussed rites of passage from Austrian Silesia exemplified by cases of the baptism of Jewish children on the one hand, and mixed marriages between and Catholics and Protestants on the other. The latter were officially tolerated under Habsburg rule, although their situation grew increasingly difficult after part of Silesia was conquered by Prussia in 1742 and the remaining Austrian Protestants constituted an even smaller minority under Catholic rulers. Forster argued that the rulers’ attitude towards cross-confessional marriages was shaped by the hope for population growth and for eventual conversion of the non-Catholic spouse, a topic present in similar cases in other contexts as well. The education of the children born in such marriages often was the most debated issue. For Jewish child converts to Catholicism, Forster offered source material proving their insecure and contested status after undergoing the conversion. The debate on legitimacy and authority regarding these status changes involved the central and local both civil and ecclesiastical administration.

Conversion also played a key role in Cecilia Cristellon’s presentation on the Catholic Church authorities’ attitudes on „Jewish marriages”. She started with the case study of Borach Levi, a recent convert to Catholicism, who wanted to marry a Catholic wife. Both the responsible episcopal and the Parlement of Paris denied this request and insisted on the indissoluble character of Levi’s first pre-conversion marriage with a Jewish woman. Through the integration of documents from Roman archives, namely from the Congregation of the Holy Office (Inquisition) and the Congregation of the Council, Cristellon added important dimensions to this and similar cases. She showed how neophytes who didn’t want to live in adultery with their new Catholic spouses or wanted to remain unmarried regularly sought the dissolution of their previous marriages. While there were intransigent positions that insisted on the validity of the first marriages there were also other opinions within the Curia. As Cristellon could show, these discussions transcended the specific cases as issues of papal authority over local affairs were at stake and revealed the strong interference of the Catholic Church in the realm of Jewish marriages, which resulted in the prohibition of divorce documents, the validation of marriages that had been dissolved by Jewish rite. Additionally, the attitudes of the Church to European neophytes were intertwined with those towards such
matters in the “New World,” a connection that was explored further in the section part of the conference.

The “Extra-European perspectives” were opened by a key lecture by KEITH LURIA (Raleigh) on baptisms and marriages in the context of the early modern Jesuit missions in Annam (in today’s Vietnam). Through the eyes of European sources written by the missionaries, he analyzed the construction of a Catholic community through conversion in 17th century-Annam. He structured his findings according to Arnold Van Gennep’s three phases of the rites de passage: separation, transition or liminality, and incorporation. Interestingly, the first phase of separation from the local (Buddhist) community involved not just denouncing old beliefs but had important social aspects as well: The disruption of existing patronage networks and family strategies, the latter especially in the case of women’s celibacy, which Luria described as a possible way of avoiding concubinage. The conversion was followed by a state of „in-betweenness” characterized by residual local customs which were often read in terms of Catholic theology (e.g. the local pythonesses interpreted in the language of demonology). What Luria described as the third phase is the attempted incorporation of the Annamese converts into the narrative of universal Catholicism, clearly distinguished from Annamese religion. It is this strategy that is the driving motive behind the missionary accounts written largely for a European audience, creating a sense of communality. Apart from generally offering fascinating material regarding a topic little known to many European scholars, Luria also re-examined Van Gennep’s stage model of rites de passage.

A very different region of contact between religious groups was discussed by CESARE SANTUS (Pisa/Paris), namely the Levant and regions in which Roman Catholics lived alongside the pre-existing non-Catholic Eastern Christian Churches under Muslim rule. In the centre of his presentation stood the problem of „communicatio in sacris,” the participation of Catholics in the liturgical celebrations and sacraments performed by these Eastern Christians. While the latter had their own bishops in the Ottoman Empire and were under protection of the authorities, there was a heated debate in the Catholic Church regarding their status as „schismatics” and the possibilities of cooperation with them. In this context, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide carried out an inquiry (1718-23), asking Catholics living in the East to respond to its questions. From the surviving material, Santus could draw a rich and complex picture both of the various local situations and arguments used by respondents and the Roman answer. The Curia acknowledged the variety of circumstances to a certain extent and received the local informational input (for instances on the necessity of a common celebration of the Eucharistic in places where Catholic practice was legally forbidden). Still, the situation should only be resolved by a changed Ottoman policy in the 19th century.

The final two presentation of the conference by BENEDETTA ALBANI and OTTO DANWERTH (both Frankfurt am Main) turned to the 16th/17th-century Spanish world and the links between the „Old” and the „New” World. Albani started with reflections on the historiography of this relationship, often framed in a simplified opposition of European norms and non-European deviant practices. Current research on the other hand tries to look at the ways in which normative orders were appropriated in different local contexts. In Albani’s presentation, this approach was exercised in the field of norms and practices regarding marriages rites of indigenous so-called Cristianos Nuevos of New Spain. The predominantly missionary sources, as in the case of the Southeast Asian missions discussed above, allow valuable insights not only into the reality of indigenous life but also (perhaps even more) into the perception and representation of local phenomena through European eyes. Albani for instance offered fascinating examples of visual and written accounts literally misunderstanding the indigenous marriage rituals by fitting them into the known, European framework. In certain cases, this framing also operated in a different way: Indigenous used and adapted Christian tradition to keep traditional customs, e.g. the system of polygamy by marrying only one wife in a Christian rite and interpreting their other wives as merely concubines, a concept not un-
usual in the European world of the 16th century.

Otto Danwerth dealt with “New Christians” as well, but focused on funeral rites of Moriscos in Spain and of indigenous people in Peru during the 16th and early 17th centuries. The attitudes towards death in both of these groups (even though they cannot be seen as unitary blocks) underwent significant changes in their contact with the powerful Christian structures embodied in ecclesiastical and political authorities, especially in the post-Tridentine era. To mention just one example highlighted by Danwerth, recent studies show a certain thanatological “Hispanization” of Morisco as well as of Inca elites in urban contexts. For both groups it holds true, however, that there was a rich grey spectrum between assimilation and rejection of Christian rites, reflected in sources like wills, chronicles, councils and synods. In a comparative perspective, Danwerth argued, it is important to examine the treatment of New Christian death in both the “Old” and “New World” and analyse both experiences as indicators of religious contacts and conflicts. The confrontation with Morisco rituals could thus be read as an often neglected background for European ways of perceiving indigenous rites of passage outside of Europe.

In his concluding remarks, Keith Luria suggested overall umbrella phrases linking the various topics of the conference. He particularly emphasized the “manipulation” that users and authorities carried out in their handling of rites of passage. These rituals represent an important aspect of religion as a whole, linking a plurality of religious practices.

In conclusion, one can only agree with this emphasis on rites of passage from the viewpoint of Early Modern religion. It serves to illustrate the overall fruitfulness of all three leading threads which the conference followed: Rites of passage, the relationship between conflict and contact and the combination of European and Extra-European perspectives. The study of religious harmony in Early Modern Europe may only be starting to catch up with work on religious violence but including both from the very start was certainly a sensible choice of the organizer. That some phenomena of violence and conflict as well as accommodation and coexistence were dispersed in a transnational, potentially global way became apparent in the overall highly interesting build-up of presentations at the conference.

Conference Overview:

Introduction
Cecilia Cristellon, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

European Perspectives
Chair: Heide Wunder, University of Kassel
Keynote lecture
Silvana Seidel Menchi, University of Pisa
Searching for a Bride of the Same Faith: The Experiences of Philo-Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century Italy
Chair: Magnus Ressel, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main
Cristina Setti, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa
Religious Contacts and Conflicts between the Catholics and the Greek Orthodox in the Venetian Territories in the Seventeenth Century
Iwo Hryniewicz, Dawid Machaj, University of Warsaw
Violent Disruptions of the Rites of Passage in Early Modern Cracow
Chair: Kerstin Weiand, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main
Danielle McCormack, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Religious Conflicts as a Means of Understanding Personal Drama in Early Modern Ireland: A Case of Marital Breakdown in 1660s Fermanagh
Josef Kadeřábek, Charles University, Prague
Changes in the Rites of Passage in the Multi-Confessional Milieu of a Bohemian Town in the Seventeenth Century
Chair: Keith Luria
Ellinor Forster, University of Innsbruck
Forced Baptisms, Mixed Marriages and Confessional Conflicts in the Recently Parted Territory of
Silesia against the Background of Austrian Political Strategies in the Eighteenth Century
Cecilia Cristellon, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main
Borach Levi, the Roman Inquisition and Jurisdiction over Jewish Marriages in the Eighteenth Century
Extra-European Perspectives
Chair: Silvana Seidel Menchi, University of Pisa

Keynote lecture
Keith Luria, North Carolina State University
Baptisms and Marriages in Constructing a Catholic Community in Seventeenth-Century Annam
Chair: Benjamin Steiner, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

Cesare Santus, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa / Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris
Necessary Transgressions: the Problem of Communicatio in Sacris in the East in a General Inquiry of the Propaganda Fide
Benedetta Albani, Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, Frankfurt am Main
The Marriage of the Cristianos Nuevos in Mexico (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)
Chair: Heide Wunder, University of Kassel

Otto Danwerth, Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, Frankfurt am Main
Funeral Rituals in Spain and Peru as an Indicator of Religious Contacts and Conflicts (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)

Concluding remarks
Keith Luria, North Carolina State University
Final discussion