

Authenticity

Abstracts & Readings

Terje Stordalen (UiO)

Authenticity: An Introduction

“Authenticity” is associated with sincerity honesty, and truth – but also with self-fulfillment as well as with representativity. Authenticity implies value, and it has the potential to secure (or loose) monetary, social, and moral capital for those who do (or do not) have access to it.

The concept itself is multivalent. In daily language people intuitively perceive that the question of the authenticity of a manuscript is evaluated differently from the question of whether a local ethnic restaurant serves authentic food. None of these are like the evaluation of whether a person is authentic. And yet, in academic work different “types” of authenticity easily spill over into each other. If, for instance, a manuscript is historically authenticated as belonging to a certain time or group, it is often presumed that it must also be representative for that time and space. Or, conversely, if it is not historically authentic, it cannot authentically represent anything. Similarly, if a person commonly seen as authentic makes an utterance, it is easily understood that the words express some authentic sense of life.

This brief introduction will chart main concepts of authenticity and provide examples that academic validation may slide unnoticed from exchanging one type of authenticity for another.

Required reading

TBA

Årstein Justnes (UiA)

Authenticity, Provenance, and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The forgery of more than 80 so-called post-2002 Dead Sea Scrolls-like fragments, and the subsequent publishing of a majority of these, disclosed a crisis in the field of Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran studies. The fragments were promoted by leading scholars and published by some of the most reputable experts in the field, in leading journals or by major publishers. Many of the fragments also passed advanced physical testing and were authenticated by renowned manuscript experts. As a result, the fragments became—and in many ways still are—part of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls dataset, even though they are undocumented, unprovenanced, and forged.

This session will focus on the following questions: What exactly is a Dead Sea scroll in the twenty-first century? What are the scholarly and intellectual implications that most of the Dead Sea scrolls and fragments are unprovenanced? Is there a way to restore the authenticity and provenance of looted manuscripts and fragments? Can physical testing, paleographical analysis, textual or text-critical analysis, etc., alone or in combination, make unprovenanced and looted fragments “great” again?

Required reading

TBA

Trygve Wyller (UiO)

Authenticity and Ethics

There is always an ethical dimension when discussing authenticity. The obvious ethical issue concerns, of course, the relation between the scholar and the manuscript/text/source. Is the scholar convinced that the manuscript/text/source is authentic, i.e. historically reliable and dating back to the time for which it claims to have its origin? Is the public convinced that the scholar is authentic, in the sense of being trustworthy?

Issues of authenticity become more complex, however, when the role of the scholar moves from being a neutral observer to an active participant in the scholar/text relation. In this perspective, questions concerning the otherness of the text and the ethical relation between something known and something foreign pops up. Is there an ethics of authenticity to pursue in such contexts? Is such an ethic more connected to the relationality in play than to the strict role of observing otherness?

This session will present positions of authenticity from Heidegger, via Taylor to contemporary phenomenology and some perspectives from studies on materiality in the humanities. Short reflection on some issues of self-experienced in-authenticity will also be added.

Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

Raha Rafii (Exeter)

When Is a Manuscript Not a Manuscript?

The expansion of digital humanities in the last decade has led to a widespread increase in manuscript digitization projects by libraries, universities, and other organizations. But what does it mean to digitally manipulate a manuscript, and how does digitization predetermine how a manuscript is accessed and analyzed? Using the example of US/Europe-based university projects digitizing Islamic manuscripts in Southwest Asia, we will discuss how questions of authenticity regarding objects circumvent larger questions of colonialism, inequitable resource distribution, and the rights of origin communities.

Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

Morten Beckmann (UiA)

Bible Translation as Authentication of Protestant Orthodoxy

The early Christians identified truth with origin, purity, and essence. For both Irenaeus and Tertullian, the essential truth was given by Jesus to the apostles. The apostles, in turn, passed on the truth (“the rule of faith”) to their successors, the bishops. The essential truth of orthodox origins was encapsulated in the rule of faith, which guaranteed its purity through apostolic succession (King 2003: 36). All who rejected or denied this notion were heretics.

The unbroken chain of male apostolic succession authenticated and preserved orthodoxy. This strategy to define orthodoxy and heresy are alive and well today, especially in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, which still rely on this genealogical understanding to affirm the authentic truth of their Church. Due to their different ecclesiological understanding, most Protestant churches have a rather different way of authenticating orthodoxy. To them, the Bible is the final authority for orthodoxy. This lecture will focus on the way in which Bible translations function as authentications of Protestant Orthodoxy, and how they serve as a means of illustrating the true, authentic version of Christianity. The lecture will take the Bible translation *Bibel 2011* (Norwegian Bible Society) as a point of departure and will focus on a media debate that took place between 2017–2020. It analyzes how *Bibel 2011* became embedded in the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, and how the publishers reinscribed and reproduced the ancient discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, albeit in a modified Protestant fashion.

Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

Nils H. Korsvoll (UiA)

Authenticity All the Way: What Does Authenticity Mean at the Many Stages from Origin to Scholar?

New philology and the material turn have taught us to also take a manuscript's material features and history into account when we study historical sources. As philological scholars we have certain notions and criteria for assessing a source's authenticity, but what about the various agents and offices involved in bringing the manuscript to our desks and microscopes? This session discusses what authenticity means in archaeology, antiquities trading, national and international law, criminal networks and police agencies – all disciplines or arenas that direct the selection and flow of historical manuscripts from their various origins to the attention of scholars.

Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

Josephine Munch Rasmussen (NIKU)

Making a Case for the Authenticity of Forgeries

Any research on ancient objects and manuscripts must deal with the provenance of its sources. Sometimes the provenance is clear and documented, but for some researchers, complex provenance issues disrupt their research agenda. Illicitly sourced, disputed, dubious, or forged objects represent serious challenge to scholarship, but also provide a fertile context for discussions of authenticity, validity, and integrity.

My contribution to this PhD seminar is based on experiences of doing research and academic work across disciplines that put different, competing, and sometimes mutually exclusive values on material and textual heritage.

In this session, we will be leaning into possible value of forgeries in research. The methodological (and ethical) implications of potential forgeries in scholarly datasets are used to address a fundamental issue: What is the authenticity of our data?

Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University)

Politics of Authentication

Authenticity has a value that should not be taken at face-value in scholarly research. Rather than allowing themselves to be summoned into authenticating certain people, things, or performances on the basis of scientific authority, scholars are to take a step back and pay detailed attention to unfolding politics of authentication, and the projects of identity and belonging to which they speak. Our contemporary world is characterized by a dynamic of repetition, reproduction and imitation which fuels the quest for authenticity. Against this backdrop, it is important to grasp how authenticity is produced as a value that can be mobilized against the spectre of “fake” and in favour of exclusivist identity politics. The point here is not a mere deconstruction that reveals how what is taken as authentic, is actually made up, but a deeper understanding of the quest behind the striving for authenticity – the presumed congruence of appearance and essence – in our contemporary world. I will exemplify these points by drawing examples from recent research on cultural heritage and religion, which both form privileged fields for the cultural production of the real framed as authentic.

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Required reading

TBA

Recommended reading

TBA

[Reading items marked with an asterisk (*) are available from the ATTR administration.]