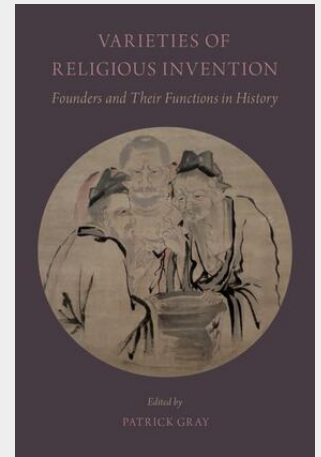


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VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS INVENTI

Religious controversies frequently center on origins, and at the origins of the major religious traditions one typically finds a seminal figure. Names such as Jesus, Muhammad, Confucius, and Moses are well known, yet their status as "founders" has not gone uncontested. Does Paul deserve the credit for founding Christianity? Is Laozi the father of Daoism, or should that title belong to Zhuangzi? What is at stake, if anything, in debates about "the historical Buddha"? What assumptions are implicit in the claim that Hinduism is a religion without a founder? The essays in *Varieties of Religious Invention* do not attempt to settle these perennial arguments once and for all. Rather, they aim to consider the subtexts of such debates as an exercise in comparative religion: Who engages in them? To whom do they matter, and when? When is "development" in a religious tradition perceived as "deviation" from its roots? To what extent are origins thought to define the "essence" of a religion? In what ways do arguments about founders serve as a proxy for broader cultural, theological, political, or ideological questions? What do they reveal about the ways in which the past is remembered and authority negotiated? As the contributors survey the landscape shaped by these questions within each tradition, they provide insights and novel perspectives about the religions individually, and about the study of world religions as a whole.



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