ACTIVITY SIX
Considering and Comparing Religious Practices

SUMMARY
This activity requires students to use the visualize feature of the Database of Religious History (DRH) to examine a single religious practice and how it is expressed in different regions and time frames. It is assumed that students are already familiar with the visualize feature, and have completed Activity Three: Visualizing Data and the Database of Religious History.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this activity is to consider how a single religious belief or practice presents in different religious groups through space and time. This will help students to consider the variety of ways that a certain type of practice might be expressed. At the same time, they will be manipulating queries and filters in the database, gaining additional experience working with digital tools. These skills are useful for not only future academic research, but are also transferrable to a number of different professional fields as well.

INSTRUCTIONS
(Note: if you forget how to complete certain steps, you may want to return to activity three for more detailed instructions)

Discuss the presence, distribution, and different expressions of a selected religious practice or belief. Be sure to highlight how this belief/practice is expressed in 3-5 different religious groups from separate regions and time periods. Use the following instructions and questions to prepare your discussion.

1. Begin by selecting a DRH query. Several examples have been provided below, but you can base your analysis on any query that interests you, or that your instructor suggests.
   a) Suggested queries:
      i. Non-human supernatural beings are present
      ii. Reincarnation in this world
      iii. Are there special treatments for adherents’ corpses
      iv. Are messianic beliefs present
2. Go to the “visualize” feature, and search for your query.
   a) You can now see the distribution of answers for this question over time and space. You can deselect the answers to get a better visual of the presence or absence of this practice/belief.
   b) Use the basic results of this search to answer question 1 below.

3. Deselect all answers except “yes”. Scroll down to the timeline. Use the sliders and toggles to see where this practice appears at certain times and in certain regions.
   a) Make a note of an early period when it is present.
      i. Filter your query to include only answers from this early time frame.
      ii. Go to the Table View to see the query comments. Pick an entry that has some good comments in their answer - if you don’t see a good one, expand the time frame until you do. Select the name of the religious group entry.
   b) Repeat this step, but find an entry related to a different time period or global region.
   c) Continue to repeat your search until you have a selection of entries – between 3-5 is recommended.
   d) Use the entries for these different religious groups to answer questions 2-5.

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**Questions for Consideration**

1. How widespread is this practice/belief?
   a. Consider the number of “yes” vs. “no” answers, the geographical distribution, and its presence throughout time. Do you notice any regional or temporal patterns?
   b. You may wish to include a screenshot of the map or timeline as a visual in your paper as well as the URL of your results (found at the top of your browser).

2. Once you have selected religious groups to compare, contrast the specifics of their practice/belief.
   a. Although the broad answer is the same, how similar are the specific approaches to this belief/practice? Did the experts interpret the question in different ways? Take into account any sub-queries that are visible in the individual entries.

3. Read through the rest of the entries more carefully.
   a. Based on what you read, does your selected belief/practice seem like a central preoccupation within the religion? Why or why not do you think this is the case? How is it affected by other aspects of the religion?
4. Continue to do some additional research on your question for your selected religious groups. You may wish to start with the sources provided within each entry. Does your additional research change any of your perceptions? Do you agree with the expert’s answer? What, if any, additional information would you add to the comment to better explain the answer?

5. Finally, reflect on your research process. Did you find that the Database was a useful resource for finding information about your query? How did the structure of the database, or the way that experts entered data affect your ability to complete the assignment?