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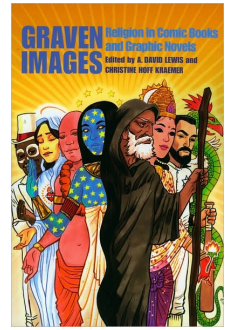
Book Reviews

Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books and Graphic Novels, edited by A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer



New York: Continuum, 2010 | 384 pages | ISBN: 978-1-4411-5847-5 (hardback) £50.00 | ISBN: 978-0-8264-3026-7 (softback) $34.95

The most succinct, media-specific argument I've seen for comics as a praiseworthy scholarly subject, relevant to the study and understanding of religion, comes in the first three pages of *Graven Images*. There, in the foreword, graphic novelist and theorist Douglas Rushkoff suggests that it is in the "space between the panels"—known in the profession as "the gutter"—that "the magic of comics appears." In that blank crack separating one frame from the next, everything can change, anything might emerge; it is a place of unknowing, as connection and distance, absence and presence, are intertwined. Rushkoff opines, "It's the closest thing in comics to transubstantiation" (ix). This formal structure "makes human beings who are trapped within panels aware of the gutter beyond—even for just a fleeting moment, in the obscure shadows of inference" (xii). With that, *Graven Images* is off to a great start.

Edited by A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer, and growing out of a conference held at Boston University in 2008, this volume will become a benchmark for future research into the relation of comics and religion. There are other, more narrowly focused works out there, mostly from Christian theological and Jewish perspectives, but *Graven Images* provides a framework for a *religious studies* view. The volume is infused with solid scholarly objective standpoints, while, owing to the nature of the subject, the personal interests come through. The personal dimensions are given a boost by the fact that a number of comic book creators are included in the collection.

There are twenty-one essays, each of ten to fifteen pages, grouped in three general headings: "New Interpretations," "Response and Rebellion," and "Postmodern Religiosity." Since it would not be possible to review each contribution individually, my review makes some general comments about the volume in relation to the general study of religion and popular culture, using a few of the essays as examples.

One of the most important contributions the volume makes is an emphasis on the medium itself. Unlike so many studies of, say, "religion and

film" that continue to treat the audio-visual medium as if it were a type of literature, the contributors here take the comics medium seriously, juxtaposing analyses of words, frames, pages, and images, and pointing toward comics as a whole. Helpful images of comic panels and pages are reproduced throughout, and authors use the images as part of their argument. Several essays pay careful attention to the comic frames, commenting critically on reproductions within the essay. Julia Round's "The Apocalypse of Adolescence," for instance, has a nice analysis of two pages of the comic *Chosen*, paying attention to aesthetic aspects of repetition, close ups, and the necessity of brevity in characters' conversations. Other contributors, perhaps more *literary* minded, stick to overarching narratives, verbal stories, and/or use reproductions merely as illustration with no real comment.

Among other issues Rushkoff's foreword sets off for the contributors to the volume is the essential relation between word and image found in comics. That the narrative structure is inescapably *visual* is key. What happens in the frame (or, more narrowly, in the word bubbles) is not the only thing that counts. Rather, attention is drawn to how the frames are put together from page to page, and what happens in the interstices. The mind of the comic consumer must operate on (at least) two levels simultaneously, sustaining a verbal narrative arc in one corner of the mind, and a series of flashed images in another corner, while entire pages reveal elements of the story that overlay the shorter sequences. The whole experience is made up of semi-separable chunks of text and image, a co-mix of words, contours, shapes, symbols. So, Graham St. John Stott's look at the retelling of the *Book of Mormon* found in Michael Allred's graphic novel *The Golden Plates*, indicates ways in which visual representations tell slightly different stories than the text alone. There is a process of translation that occurs, which is not to say simplification, but a retelling that challenges the heart of scriptural authorities.

Within such translations, retellings, and transmutations, there exists a predilection for transgression and blasphemy, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not. Some of the contributors in the second section take on the more deliberate mis-tellings. Mike Grimshaw notes the death of God in the series *Preacher* (by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon), only here God is hunted down and killed in Western film style. And Clay Kinchen Smith charts a relation between underground comics and perversions of Christian theology, seen succinctly in the homophonic title God Nose, in which artist Jack Jackson creates a parody of an iconic "old man/white bearded" God. Grimshaw and Smith are both clear that these artistic heresies are not for the sake of

heresy alone, but they encourage human response, encouraging questions of received religious doctrine, and the seeking of new theodicies.

Such possible responses on the parts of the readers open another dimension. Rushkoff tells how the comic characters who are "trapped within panels" might fleetingly become aware of something beyond their world. Yet, this can occur in the space between reader and page as well, allowing the reader to imagine other worlds, and many a teenage boy story is told about dreaming of leaving his dull existence, these weak powers, behind and becoming Batman. If only for a moment. Unfortunately there is too little in the volume that dwells on this facet, on the gutter between reader and comic, and this is missed from time to time since that too is where the magic is, the potentials for transubstantiation, not *within* the pages, but *with* the pages.

Yet, viewing comics in the ways these authors do enables an ongoing reception history of sacred myths, texts, and symbols. Since so many comics creators were part of this project, we find ways that religious histories have influenced, provoked, and upset artists, with that response spilling out into their work. Other scholars trace the personal influence of religion on the creators, like Steve Jungkeit's analysis of the marvelous memoir *Blankets* by Craig Thompson. In the graphic novel, Thompson relates his young life growing up in a conservative evangelical home, ultimately exploring dimensions of his sexuality that take him away from his past. Jungkeit smartly demonstrates the visual representations of Thompson's early life as indicative of a latent *eros*, with symbolic markers turned into new meanings.

No volume can be complete, and the missing dimensions of *Graven Images* only show how much more there can be done in this vibrant field of comics and religion. I personally was hoping for more on *Amar Chitra Katha*, more on *manga*, something on Naif Al-Mutawa's *The 99*, and at least a note on Kerry James Marshall's West African-inspired *Rythm Mastr*. Granted, Karline McLain's 2009 study *India's Immortal Comic Books* is quite thorough on the former. And the editors acknowledge regret for not including something on Osamu Tezuka's *The Buddha*, while Jolyon Baraka Thomas's forthcoming *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan* helps take care of the second. Perhaps *The 99* was still too new to include in this collection, and Marshall gets overlooked because he's more firmly in the visual art world and not taken seriously as a comic artist. But such strong and popular works that are rooted in such different religious and cultural traditions would help flesh out and expand the theories given here. The volume's title of course reflects the ancient Hebrew commandment, which is tradition-

ally taken up in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and many of the theoretical elements of the volume spend some time trying to find their way around that injunction. But beginning from a West African, or Japanese, or South Asian perspective would entail wholly different starting points, if not wholly other ends.

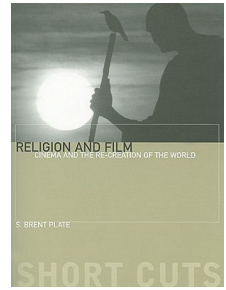
What is still needed is an evolutionary religious history of comics, showing the modern medium's connections to ritualized performances of South Asian *kavad* (story box), of Japanese *emaki*, of Christian European stained glass, of Egyptian hieroglyphs. These are not equivalences, and they are all different media, but there is something in the word-image conjunction that makes the co-mix useful and productive for religious traditions and graphic novels alike. Comics as a medium are relatively new, meanwhile containing quite ancient roots. By charting such a rhizomatic history we would find the religious roots of contemporary pop culture, but also bring forth a challenge to scholars of religion to rethink histories of myths, rituals, and symbols—to get out of the logo-centrism still inherent in the field and realize that myths have always been visual, rituals sonic, and symbols tactile. The religious study of pop culture should not be an end in and of itself, but should provoke a rereading of religious history as a whole.

I realize I'm asking for something beyond the resources of the conference and a single volume, and I raise it simply to say this is a vast and important field. Just recently, major works in the United States like Craig Thompson's *Habibi*, and the first volume of the three-part *Graphic Canon*, have been published. These will continue, and hopefully the academic interest will as well.

Graven Images establishes comics as a vital subject matter, and provides an array of strong essays that display various ways the comic-religion relation can be seen. In paying careful attention to the medium of comics, the volume provides a needed argument for the importance of popular culture in understanding religion in general, and sets the stage for many studies to come.

S. Brent Plate
Hamilton College

Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World, by S. Brent Plate



Short Cuts | London: Wallflower Press [now Columbia University Press], 2009 | x + 112 pages | ISBN: 978-1-905674-69-5 (softback) $22.00

With *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*, Brent Plate breaks new ground in the field of religion and film studies, and makes an invaluable contribution to the study of religion's reception. In this monograph, Plate utilizes analogy to argue that religion and film are like one another, and that they construct their narratives in similar ways. He employs anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of religion, and although the definition is contested in other contexts for its emphasis on meaning-making, for the specific purposes of Plate's comparative analysis such a definition is a valuable tool. For film, Plate samples from across the stylistic continuum of cinema—Hollywood blockbusters, independents, international "art house" and experimental film—demonstrating the broad application of his thesis. This book complements John C. Lyden's *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (2003) which makes the case for film itself as a religious practice. While both Plate and Lyden engage with myth in cinematic narrative and the ritual of filmgoing itself, Plate moves beyond Lyden's foundational work. Through the analysis of the formal elements of film—cinematography, editing, sound, and mise-en-scéne (what is in front of the camera, i.e., props, setting, characters, costumes, lighting)—he argues for the similarities in the construction of religious and cinematic narratives.

With a preface, introduction, and four chapters, this monograph runs only 112 pages so Plate's work is not a comprehensive study; instead it serves as a catalyst for further analysis. Each chapter can be considered a launch point for a classroom discussion as it establishes the theoretical framework in an accessible manner, applies it cogently to case studies, and inspires additional investigation.

Drawing from film theorists like Sergei Eisenstein and religion theorists like Wendy Doniger, Plate argues that religion and film are like one another as they share in how they draw from the same cultural well, and construct narratives with similar purpose. As sociologist of religion Peter Berger argues in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), humans create ordered worlds that provide

a sense of stability, security, and meaning. Both religion and film engage in this process of "worldmaking." They both "function by recreating the known world and then presenting that alternate version of the world to their viewers/worshippers" (2).

Drawing on Berger, Goodman and Paden, Plate compares the world-making of religion to that of film. For both religion and film, their alternative worlds can inspire and caution, and offer "prescriptions for a better life and imaginative tools for reviewing the world as it is" (2). Religion frames and focuses its narrative through myths, rituals, and symbols. Film uses formal elements like cinematography, editing, set and costume design to achieve similar results.

An important strength of the book is that Plate acknowledges that world-making carries ideological implications. So with each chapter, he indicates how narratives can reinforce oppressive social structures. For example, embedded in the mythic narrative of *The Matrix* (1999) is Hollywood's re-inscribing of heterosexual attractive white male supremacy with Neo (Keanu Reeves) as savior.

As Plate demonstrates the similarity between religion and film in each chapter, he also argues how, given that similarity, the study of cinematic construction can shed light on religion and vice-versa. In chapter 1, "Visual Mythologizing," Plate acknowledges the prior studies done on the power of myth in film. However, while these studies focus on narrative tropes, like the Hero's Journey, *Religion and Film* goes further to demonstrate how myth is communicated in non-narrative and non-verbal ways. Plate uncovers how cinematography and mise-en-scéne communicate the myth. The visual experience of film reminds us that myth is not only a cerebral exercise but also one to be experienced through the senses, just as religion communicates in non-verbal ways like the ordered tranquility of the Japanese Zen garden.

For the film student, understanding the power of myth and how it shapes lives will give them greater insight into the cinematic narrative like the mythic world of *Star Wars* that opens by visually establishing "a galaxy far, far away" threatened by chaos. At the same time, the student of religion encounters the pastiche of *The Matrix* (1999) with its blend of Christian, Buddhist, and postmodern symbols informing its world, and can come to a better understanding of how Christianity has practiced syncretism from its inception. For example, the Jewish Passover transforms into Holy Communion.

In chapter 2, "Ritualizing Film in Space and Time," Plate affirms the importance of ritual via anthropologist Bobby Alexander's understanding of

the practice as a performance that "opens up ordinary life to ultimate reality … to tap its power" (40). Given the vital nature of ritual, Plate turns to critically acclaimed independent films to examine how film employs ritual and what aesthetic impulses lie behind the practice. Plate connects ritual to film through an analysis of the use of movement through space and time.

Spatial relations are integral to religious ritual—the Jewish synagogue oriented toward Jerusalem, or the Muslim facing toward Mecca five times a day. In film, the placement of the camera establishes spatial relationships between objects. Shots and scenes then reveal "metonymically something about the larger narratives of the films" (39). *Blue Velvet* (1986) brings the viewer into a cosmos where the vertical camera movement establishes an apparent idyllic world from the blue sky and white picket fence to the chaos that lives below ground. In *Antonia's Line* (1995) the verticality represents the male hierarchy of the church and horizontal lines create an egalitarian community facilitated by women. For the students of religion and film, examining how ritual movement functions in either vertically or horizontally, in either a hierarchical or an egalitarian manner, reveals that "spatial dimensions can often be ideologically charged" in their display of gender roles and other identities (57).

Plate closes this chapter with a look at the power of editing in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Ron Fricke's *Baraka* (1992). In these films, the collapsing of space and time allows for a unique perspective that uncovers the sacredness of the ordinary and the interconnectedness of all things.

Chapter 3, "Religious Cinematics," may be Plate's most ambitious and at the same time the least accessible, given that his primary case studies are with experimental film, a genre little viewed, and for many an acquired taste. He turns to these films because more often than not they represent reality as other, challenging the viewer to a new understanding, similar to how religious ritual re-creates the world. Plate's focus here shifts to the sensual reception of the embodied viewer. He makes two important comparisons. First, how the audience member's physical reaction to the ritualized aspects of film is similar to that of the participant in a religious ritual. While rituals act upon bodies through speech, music, and performance, they are also acted out by bodies. For the film viewer, cinema stirs the body whether reacting to fear or sadness, happiness or humor.

Second, Plate compares the epistemological experience of the worshipper to the filmgoer. Shifting away from Cartesian objectivity, he appeals to

Merleau-Ponty and a knowing that is rooted in feeling, and therefore open to doubt. For film theorist Christian Metz, film viewers are aware that the film is fictional, yet, even as they suspend their disbelief, a part of them believes in the truth of the story. Plate finds an analogous phenomenon in the religious worshipper who may not believe in the ancient stories of the sacred texts but still has a sense of their truth, and then physically reacts to that truth through the ritual.

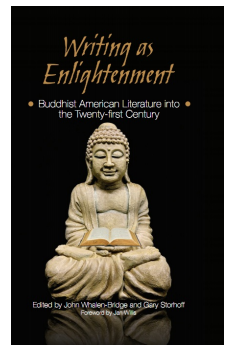
With experimental film, Plate finds a cinematic experience that can shatter an audience's preconceptions, making way for a mystical experience that is religious. In *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971), Stan Brakhage's camera literally records the peeling back of the layers of a real human corpse (not a Hollywood fabrication). This disconcerting crossing of boundaries between life and death, the pure and impure, enables the viewer to transgress social norms, seeing the world differently. Ultimately, Plate's claim that experimental film offers an alternative to Hollywood's hegemony that allows for the possibility of "aesthetic, ethical and religious renewal" may be accurate but is an alternative that many of us may not choose to pursue (69). However, his basic premise that film can physically move us in ways that break down barriers, and allow new insights, need not be constrained to the experimental.

In the final chapter, "The Footprints of Film," Plate draws attention to the new ways in which media transmits religion. Film merges into religion and vice versa as television, and video games inform audiences about ideas of good and evil. Meanwhile, evangelicals use film and video directly in their services, and more mainstream churches utilize film in their religious education. As media alters ritual, it raises the question: do religious rituals need rethinking? "Filmed characters and scenarios have come down off the screen" and entered the contemporary religious landscape (79). Theme weddings and Bar Mitzvahs draw on motifs from hit television series and blockbuster films with participants dressing up as characters from *Star Trek* (1966–1969), *The Matrix* (1999), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Teen spirituality and identity today are informed by popular shows and movies like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the Harry Potter franchise. A new generation finds spiritual expression in the ritual attendance of the cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and the philosophy of *Star Wars* has inspired a Jedi religious movement. This final chapter acts as a clarion call for further research. What does this blurring of religion and media mean for the future of both, and the ongoing transmission of religious values?

Throughout the book Plate demonstrates an impressive knowledge of both film and religious studies, making his insights into the intimate dialogue between religion and cinema quite compelling. His style is engaging and accessible, suitable for undergraduates and graduates. Both students of religion and film will find this monograph a persuasive engagement with their disciplines. *Religion and Film* is an excellent addition to Wallflower's Short Cuts series of introductions to film studies.

Daniel S. Cutrara
Arizona State University

Writing as Enlightenment: Buddhist American Literature into the Twenty-first Century, edited by John Whalen-Bridge and Gary Storhoff



SUNY Series in Buddhism and American Culture | Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011 | xiii + 193 pages | ISBN: 978-1-4384-3919-8 (hardback) $75.00 | ISBN 978-1-4384-3920-4 (softback) $29.95 | ISBN 978-1-4384-3921-1 (e-book) $29.95

This book, the third in a series on Buddhism and American Culture, follows on from earlier volumes that traced the emergence of Buddhism as a persistent influence in the recent history of American literature and society, and brings the narrative of American Buddhism into the present.

With the exception of Jan Willis, who wrote the foreword (and who is herself a subject of discussion in one of the articles), all the contributors are professionally active in English Studies. And as we shall see, some of the contributions are technical treatises that contribute primarily to that field. Yet the book as a whole transcends its disciplinary origin. If it does not quite manage to unite the humanities and social sciences, at least it makes contributions to areas of each.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first, "Widening the Stream: Literature as Transmission," we first find an essay by Jane Falk on Shaku Soen and Okakura Kakuzo, two of the earliest transmitters of *buddhadharma* to the USA. On the face of it, this is well-trodden ground, but here it is presented through the lens of their writing rather than as straightforward

Religionsgeschichte. This immediately lends it a richness that has been lacking in the often-told narrative of how the swans came to the lake.

The next essay, by Linda Furgerson Selzer, makes such an important contribution to the study of Western Buddhism that it would justify the price of the book all by itself. The generally accepted paradigm in Western Buddhist studies is that there are two kinds of Western Buddhism: an immigrant Asian Buddhism and a convert white Buddhism. Selzer overthrows this paradigm by displaying the existence and significance of an African American Buddhism, significant perhaps not in absolute numbers (but then the same could be said about white Buddhists!), but in having its own tensions, its own inner dynamics, its own conflicted narratives of race, religion, and heritage. For the reader whose primary interest is in contemporary history of religions rather than literature, this will be the highlight of the book and a resource of enormous value.

Part 2, "The New Lamp: Buddhism and Contemporary Writers," contains three essays that are more specifically aimed at practitioners of the literary disciplines. These chapters by Allan Johnston, Jonathan Stalling, and Gary Storhoff deal with the works of, respectively, Gary Snyder, Jackson Mac Low, and Don DeLillo and explore the influence of Buddhism on their work, and, in a way, the influence of their work on contemporary Buddhism.

In the third part, "Speaking as Enlightenment: Interviews with Buddhist Writers," we find a series of interviews with Buddhist authors. Here the book moves away from a classical scholarly exposition on a topic and becomes a repository of primary documentation that will surely become a rich resource for future researchers on the interplay between Buddhism and twenty-first century America.

There are two long interviews, one in which Julia Martin interviews Gary Snyder and another in which John Whalen-Bridge speaks with Charles Johnson and Maxine Hong Kingston. This is followed by a third chapter, also by Whalen-Bridge, that contains a series of shorter interviews with a variety of poets and authors at Naropa University.

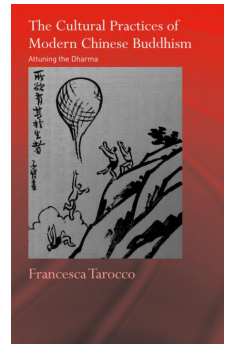
In all these interviews, the distinction between interviewer and interviewee tends to blur in a fittingly non-dualist fashion. Is Martin interviewing Snyder or is Snyder interviewing Martin? Does it matter?

Writing as Enlightenment is not a book that pretends to have the answers to all the questions it raises. Instead, every contribution invites us to dig deeper, to go back to the original writings and discover the interplay of Buddhism and American culture for ourselves. By way of example, I'll admit

that I am not an admirer of Don DeLillo's work. Yet Storhoff's essay in this book has convinced me that I should really make the effort to revisit that author's work. I may or may not end up a DeLillo fan, but this book has at least created the possibility of that happening. Can any author or editor ask for more?

Michel Clasquin-Johnson
University of South Africa

The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma, by Francesca Tarocco



London: Routledge, 2007 | xii+183 pages | ISBN: 978-0-415-37503-0 (hardback) £95.00 | ISBN 978-0-415-37503-0 (softback) £26.00

In *The Cultural Practices of Modern Buddhism*, Francesca Tarocco examines how Buddhism and Buddhists in Mainland China (and in particular Shanghai) have attempted to utilize new forms of media and technology that emerged at various stages during the hundred years since the mid- to late nineteenth century. This book presents a survey, or an introduction to, rather than a comprehensive study of, the topic indicated by the title. The strength of the book is that it can provide emerging scholars who have similar interests with a starting point in a number of fields.

The book itself is divided into an Introductory section, which provides the theoretical background for her study, and two main parts. Part 1 deals mainly with print media, but also with Buddhist Societies, vegetarianism, and the ways in which Buddhism has been used to promote morality in prisons and for other political purposes. Part 2 focuses on music creation and new forms of distribution of music media.

The overarching theoretical premise behind Tarocco's study is her assertion that the interaction between China's ancient traditions and modernity allowed Buddhism to retain a pivotal role at the heart of Chinese religion, spirituality, ethics, culture, and even nationhood (3). Tarocco challenges the commonly accepted notion that Buddhism goes through periods of decline

and revival (3). Instead, she claims that if we examine any specific period of supposed decline we find Buddhism remaining widespread, but perhaps appearing in different forms. That is to say, the non-institutional forms of Buddhism persist, and even dominate, despite a decline in the monastic order. The main cultural practices she examines include the wide-scale printing of Buddhist materials, the formation of Buddhist "modern societies," various ways Buddhist ideas were used in attempts to establish values for a new modern China and potentially for the world (15), and in the creation and distribution of music media (12).

The introductory chapter establishes her argument that Buddhism in China is a significant influence on cultural practices and in particular art and literature (12). It is a very credible claim, and Tarocco documents how in the past century or so Buddhism has engaged with rather than opposed new media and technology. Tarocco claims there was no decline of Buddhism from the late nineteenth century through to the 1950s, or in the post-Mao era, and points to the use of modern technological media. She notes that while these periods are often considered to be periods of decline, there was a high degree of growth of Buddhism in these forms of cultural expression.

Tarocco argues that the established narrative of the decline and revival of Buddhism in China dating back as far as 700 CE is a fallacy. She claims that through this entire period Buddhism, Buddhist ideas, and even members of the Buddhist clergy have always had a major influence on the nation's institutions and culture. Several factors have perpetuated the myth of decline and revival, including the fact that Buddhism possesses its own narrative of decline and revival. In addition, the idea has been embedded in Western studies of Buddhism from the time of the earliest Orientalist studies and there have been varying degrees of support for, and attacks on, Buddhism and Buddhist institutions in China over the centuries. Notwithstanding all of this, Tarocco claims that Buddhism has retained its influence on the Chinese people and even the Chinese political system over this entire period. While the twenty pages of this chapter do not force a reevaluation of Chinese Buddhist history, her argument should provoke further research.

Yet a theory of how cultural practices constitute "Buddhism" is lacking in Tarocco's argument. The claim that "Buddhist-inspired practices" flourished at times when monastic institutions are in decline does not necessarily mean that there was no overall decline in Buddhism during these periods. Therefore Tarocco needed to do more to demonstrate how these cultural practices were infused by Buddhism, and how they constitute Buddhism. Perhaps

an argument like Yang's theory of red, black, and grey markets of religion[1] would help contextualize "Buddhist-inspired practices" as a living form of Buddhism that continues to exist during periods when the monastic institutions have come under restrictions.

In part 1, Tarocco claims that a range of "Buddhist-inspired activities" demonstrates that Buddhism retained a pivotal role from the beginning of the Taiping period in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, ending after World War Two and pre-Communist China (although she does occasionally discuss events post-1949), a period in which, she claims, Buddhism is usually said to be in decline (25). The argument, as mentioned above, is that in times of Buddhist persecution, activity continues, but perhaps in less orthodox forms. She claims that during this period although religious institutions were banned at various times, the international spread of Buddhist scholars and utilisation of new mass media can hardly be described as a decline. One example of this was the inclusion of Buddhist practices and lectures in the prison system (26).

Tarocco argues that the widespread popularity of vegetarian restaurants in Shanghai stretching back to the 1920s indicates a Buddhist influence on the city. It is not uncommon for people to believe there to be both health as well as spiritual benefits of eating vegetarian food. This is because in China vegetarianism is strongly linked to Buddhism (31–34).

I found section 1.2, Vegetarian Identities, to be thematically problematic. Despite Tarocco's concise and interesting parallel between Buddhists and vegetarianism in China, her discussion of Luo Jiajang and the Bodhi Societyis less concise. It is odd to tie them together under the same heading. Firstly, despite noting their interests in vegetarianism, Tarocco does little more to tie them in with the promotion of vegetarianism in Shanghai. And although they promoted Buddhism to a wider audience, they did not appear to do anything specifically in regards to vegetarianism. Tarocco notes that Luo Jiajang (1864–1941) was a "munificent benefactor of Buddhism," who gave "full financial support" for reprints of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. The Bodhi Society consisted of a group of individuals involved in both "educational and philanthropic" Buddhist goals. The main link between vegetarianism and different groups was that vegetarian restaurants were a place where the Bodhi Society and other Buddhist religious and political groups met (32). These in-

[1] Fenggang Yang, "Red, Black, and Grey Markets for Religion in China", *Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2006): 93–122.

cluded publishing Buddhist and academic writings; Tarocco emphasizes their role in promoting morality in modern China. However much of this content does not relate to the title of this subsection.

The section on Taixu (1890–1947) is also problematic, as it fails to portray the importance of this figure. Taixu played an important part in the modernization of Buddhism in Shanghai, yet his significance for Taiwanese new Buddhist movements, most notably Ciji, Foguang Shan, and Fagushan, was largely overlooked. However Tarocco does link Taixu to the Foguang Shan later when discussing music (134). She also notes Taixu's contribution to *renjian fojiao*, a core belief of these movements in Taiwan (81). However, it would have been useful for Tarocco to have dedicated an entire section to the discussion of this important figure; instead references to Tiaxu are spread throughout the book. Therefore reading the section which is explicitly on Taixu, one could easily miss the importance of this influential figure.

Tarocco describes how publishers and certain figures were involved in a publishing boom, including the reprinting of old sutras and various Buddhist canons, and also "new books by contemporary authors" (59). The era not only focused on publishing for a Chinese audience, but also in the dissemination of Buddhism to a wider international sphere (53–59). Different protagonists from, or living in, Shanghai were responsible for promoting Buddhism as a "force of civilization" (64).

Part 2 of the book focuses on the role of music during a similar, but slightly later period. Tarocco traces links to both (1) Western sources, such as western classical music, music used by Christian missionaries, and contemporary music, some of which had also arrived in China via Japan (116–23); and (2) Chinese sources, including specific Buddhist practices and other Chinese traditional musical practices (123–28). Tarocco shows how the increased appreciation for Western Classical music also accompanied a similar growth in Chinese Classical music—perhaps uncovering a theme that while learning new ideas from the West was important, the Chinese continued to see the importance and equal standing of their own traditions. Therefore, in terms of music, modernization and the introduction of Western ideas/technologies also led to increased appreciation for China's own counterparts. Despite Buddhist music and Buddhist themes in poetry and other forms of literature stretching back over a millennium, the use of Western ideas resulted in a "less lofty" or more mass consumable "genre" (128).

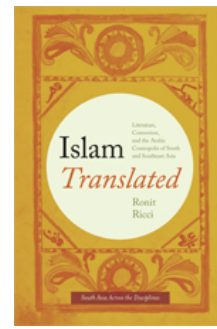
Tarocco jumps from the 1930s to the 1980s in her discussion on the digital age (130–38). In this section the primary location for the production of

digital Buddhist music is not Shanghai but rather Taiwan. The link that does remain is Xingyun, the founder of the Foguang Shan Buddhist movement, and his connection with Taixu and Shanghai prior to moving to Taiwan in 1949 (134). In this section she focuses on the Foguang Shan movement as a specific group that has set out to utilize music for the teaching and spread of Buddhism, and also discusses the creation of karaoke recordings of Buddhist songs. However music created in Taiwan, often by Foguang Shan, has become ubiquitous in China. Once again these sections are interesting but she does not delve deeply into any of the topics.

Overall this book is a survey, rather than a detailed account, of the various cultural practices of Buddhism in China. Such a comprehensive account would require far more than 183 pages. I also found two of the subsections in the first part of the book ("The Cultural Practices of Buddhist Modernity") confusing in relation to their subtitles. However Tarocco has provided scholars with a good starting point for more in-depth and specific studies. The strongest section is part 2 ("The Sound of Modern Buddhism"); here Tarocco presented a more comprehensive approach. Perhaps most interesting is Tarocco's account of how popular practices, such as vegetarianism, and the use of contemporary media to present Buddhist ideas, have been instrumental in shaping modern China.

Tenzin Mullin
University of Otago

Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia, by Ronit Ricci



South Asia Across the Disciplines | Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011 | xxii + 313 pages | ISBN 978-0-226-71088-4 (hardback) $45.00

In her trail-blazing, multi-faceted, and illuminating work, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, Ronit Ricci documents the diverse forms of an important Islamic didactic text, the *Book of One Thousand Questions*, in South and Southeast Asia. Specifically, Ricci focuses on

the Tamil linguistic region of Southeast India, Sumatra, and Java, with reference to other areas of the Indonesian-Malay archipelago, as well as to Sri Lanka; she looks at the historical connections between these areas, and explores the processes of transmission of the text in the pre-modern era. Dominant "tellings" (21, following Ramanujan) present "one thousand questions" posed by the wise Jewish leader Abdullah Ibnu Salam to the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's replies to the questions, and Ibnu Salam's subsequent conversion to Islam. The text is thus important for its Islamic-informational content as well as for its depiction of the Prophet and the model of conversion of the "Other" that it presents.

Ricci documents the story's background, including its roots in the Qur'an, *hadith*, and early *sīrā* literature, its first mention as an independent Arabic text in the tenth century CE (35), and subsequent Latin (12th c.), European, and Persian translations. The focus of Ricci's study is on more recent Tamil, Javanese, and Malay translations of the text. Drawing on the South Asianist and Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock's notion of the Sanskrit "cosmopolis" and the Southeast Asianist and linguist A. L. Becker's notion of "prior text," Ricci asserts the crucial role of the *One Thousand Questions* text in historical conversions to Islam in South and Southeast Asia, and in the formation of an Arabic/Islamic cosmopolis in this global region. She proposes the utility of the notion of "literary networks," comprised of shared texts, and all those who participate in their generation and reception, for understanding of historical processes of Islamization.

Following the introduction (chapter 1), the book is organized into two main parts: in part 1, "Translation," Ricci first addresses theoretical issues related to translation, and discusses the historical background of the *Book of One Thousand Questions* (chapter 2). The next three chapters discuss the Javanese, Tamil, and Malaysian versions of the text, respectively. In part 2, "Conversion," Ricci first discusses Arabic in its various manifestations and functions in Javanese, Tamil, and Malay societies (chapter 6). In chapter 7, she discusses conversion as represented in *One Thousand Questions* tellings and from a comparative literary perspective, drawing on other South and Southeast Asian Islamic materials. In chapter 8, Ricci tackles the intriguing question of how the image of "the Jew" functions in South and Southeast Asian societies, and examines the images of Abdullah Ibnu Salam and the Prophet in Tamil, Javanese, and Malaysian *One Thousand Questions* tellings. Finally, in chapter 9, Ricci ties together themes of translation, literary networks, and the Arabic cosmopolis.

Ricci's presentation is ambitious in scope and extraordinarily rich in descriptive detail and nuanced historical and theoretical considerations. Much of the historical and descriptive material is completely new, and it alone makes a valuable contribution to comparative literary, religious/Islamic studies and South and Southeast Asian studies fields. A brief review cannot hope to do justice to a work of this scope and complexity, or to Ricci's prodigious effort. The following remarks address larger issues and themes of the content of the study, and one very basic issue of scholarly ethics.

Ricci affirms that the focus of her study is on the role of Arabic in the Islamization of the South and Southeast Asian region. She looks closely at very specific ways in which the Arabic language and script are deployed in these cultures—from the micro-level of writing systems and scripts to the macro-levels of normative discursive traditions and political rule—and argues that Arabicization is fundamentally transformative for these cultures. The discussion is enlightening, but a few critical remarks are in order.

First, while *One Thousand Questions* texts go back to Arabic original sources, the earliest independent text of the story Ricci has uncovered is in Arabic, and numerous extant texts are apparently based on Arabic originals, still, two of the three South/Southeast Asian *One Thousand Questions* texts Ricci selects for close study and discussion in Chapters 3–5 are, by her account, based on Persian originals. Ricci is not actually looking at Arabic influence in these cases that are central to her study. Given longstanding independent Persianate civilizational traditions and historical distinctions between Arabic- and Persian-centered Islamic traditions (and the plausibility of a "Persian cosmopolis" concept), the logic of the analysis is problematic. Additional theorizing of the relationship between Arabic and Persian texts, literary networks, and civilizational traditions would strengthen the analysis.

Second, Ricci's presentation of Islamic perceptions of Arabic glosses over distinctions between Qur'anic Arabic and more mundane uses of the language. It is true that Arabic is regarded differently in lands distant from the Arabic-speaking homeland of Islam than it is in lands where one "does the shopping," so to speak, in Arabic; in South and Southeast Asia it is exotic for many, and authoritative for all; it is an identity-marker, and as a religious language it is understood as sacred even beyond the Qur'anic context. Still, Ricci's move from, "For Muslims worldwide Arabic possesses a unique status among languages. It is considered the perfect tongue, in which God's divine decrees were communicated to His Prophet" to "Consequently, at least ideally, it [Arabic] is considered untranslatable," (14) is problematic. This

shift enables what becomes a kind of mechanical understanding of the role of Arabic in historical transformation of the region in Ricci's larger analysis. But language use is a human phenomenon, and Arabic is, in many ways, a language like any other. Here, as elsewhere in the volume, a focus on humans and human agency, and an empirical, social scientific perspective would temper text- and language-focused observations of an abstract, theoretical nature. This is more a shift in emphasis and perspective than anything else, but would be a salutary corrective.

Third, and on a related issue, in framing her study, Ricci carefully avoids the pitfall of assuming that a purely textual analysis suffices to explain the literary legacy or to explain Islamization in the region: "overlap and interaction between written and oral forms of production mean that any discussion of cultural or religious transmission in South and Southeast Asia must remain keenly aware of its non-inscribed aspects. My own focus here, however, is on the circulation of written works." (2) Despite this nuanced view, this reader's sense is that Ricci's study, with its focus on texts and, generally, the production-side of literary networks, tends to operate at such a level of abstraction from human realities and agency, as well as from audiences and receptive contexts, that analysis of both the *One Thousand Questions* texts and their historical impact, and the broader phenomenon of "Islamization" are handicapped, or partial at best. Of course, one must also acknowledge and make allowances for the difficulty of documenting histories of performance and reception for the time periods and regions of Ricci's study. This is an arena in which contemporary local Islamic traditions of scholarship on their own literary traditions offer little or no assistance.

Fourth, Ricci makes ambitious claims for the role of Arabic language and literature in historical processes of conversion and Islamization, which begs the question of their impact relative to other factors—many of which have been discussed extensively in extant scholarship. This writer would suggest that "Islamization" is a broader cultural process than Ricci's theory of Arabicization (or any necessarily "elites down" linguistic and literary theory of historical process), alone, can explain. On the positive side, Ricci's analysis focusing on text, translation and literary networks reminds modern readers who might tend to take literacy, literary production and basic religious texts for granted, to appreciate the enormity of this cultural project and the sustained effort it entails—especially on civilizational and linguistic frontiers, and especially in the premodern era.

Fifth, Becker's notion of "prior text" is an interesting choice of theoretical perspective, and seems to be a step in the right direction, in terms of understanding the history of the *One Thousand Questions* text in the South and Southeast Asian region as well as in contributing to understandings of processes of Islamization and conversion in the region. The strength of the analytical framework Ricci adopts is that it is processual, it aims to provide a key to understanding the dynamics of cultural and religious change over time, and, as in educational/cognitive development theory, it recognizes the importance of prior ways of knowing for the creation of new knowledge and social memory. The disadvantage of Becker's theory (as Ricci presents it) is its assumption that "text" and discursive knowledge encompass all knowing, and can fully explain social memory. Ricci avoids this pitfall, in her most focused statements regarding her project's aims and limitations. At other times, she seems to fall in with Becker's assumptions about the universal applicability of "text" and its historical instrumentality and explanatory power; in any case, she does not critique the model he proposes. This is curious, since scholarly critique of the preoccupation with "text"—both as artifact and as metaphor—in religious studies scholarship has been around for some time and has made important contributions to our understanding of human religious experience.[2] Becker's theory of the importance of "prior texts" for individual and socio-cultural processes of knowing, as Ricci presents it, is not adequate as an holistic explanation of Islamization since it does not take non-discursive, non-representational, non-symbolic ways of knowing into account. (This goes beyond acknowledgement of the importance of performative contexts, of oral and aural aspects of texts, and of contexts of reception and audience response to texts.) For powerful new advances in the study of "Islamization" in this world region and beyond, this writer's sense is that what is needed is a theory that can integrate textual, symbolic, discursive and non-textual, bodily, and ritual/performative aspects of social memory. Absent such a theory, the combined contributions of literary, historical, and social scientific modes of research and analysis is no doubt greater than the individual contributions of any single theoretical perspective.

This is an ambitious project, and Ricci's grasp of the variety of languages and knowledge of the diverse cultural realms involved in the study is ex-

[2] An influential essay by Lawrence E. Sullivan comes to mind ("Seeking an End to the Primary Text or Putting an End to the Text as Primary", in *Beyond the Classics: Essays in Religious Studies and Liberal Education*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Sheryl Burkhalter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 41–59).

traordinary. It is worth noting, however, that Ricci presents translations of selected passages, only, of the *One Thousand Questions* texts she considers and it is not evident that she has read or translated the primary works in their entirety. This is perhaps understandable, given the overall scope, difficulty, and aims of her project. Nonetheless, more direct translation would be welcome, especially given what Ricci reveals of the fascinating, often Sufism-oriented content of what otherwise might be assumed to be straightforward didactic works. (This didactic literature is very different from today's "pamphlet Islam", to use Omid Safi's expression.[3])

Given the relative lack of Western scholarship on the Tamil and Southeast Asian Islamic literary traditions (in comparison to North Indian Urdu linguistic and cultural traditions, for example), the ambitious nature of Ricci's project, and, in the Tamil case, at least, the extensive work by Tamil Muslim scholars on Islamic Tamil literary traditions, exploration of and reference to local scholarly work is not only understandable, but important—in fact, for this writer, essential. Furthermore, post-colonial, cross-cultural, scholarly ethics demand total transparency regarding reference to and use of local scholarly sources and resources, as well as truly collaborative work across international, cultural (and economic) lines. Such transparency might well serve to inject a spirit of sanity and realistic expectations into the scholarly enterprise, as well.

Ricci has clearly worked intensively with the Tamil original text, and she acknowledges her debt to Takkalai M.S. Basheer, a scholar of Tamil literature in Chennai ("Madras," xiii), for discussing Tamil texts with her, for example. But significant aspects of her chapter on the Tamil *One Thousand Questions* text, the *Āyira Macalā*, evidently rely, without citation, on an important Tamil secondary source, M. M. Uwise and P. M. Ajmal Khan's *Islāmiyat Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu* ("Islamic Tamil Literary History"),[4] in the sense of summarizing parts of the chapter on the *Āyira Macalā* (vol.1, ch.4) and, apparently, using it as a guide to important themes and a pointer to important passages in the primary *One Thousand Questions* text. Ricci does refer to another volume of the work with regard to other Tamil literary works, and the four-volume work as a whole does appear in the bibliography, but she does not cite Uwise and Ajmal Khan's chapter on the *Āyira Macalā* anywhere

[3] Omid Safi, "Introduction: The Times They Are A Changin'—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality and Pluralism", in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (New York: Oneworld, 2003), 22ff.

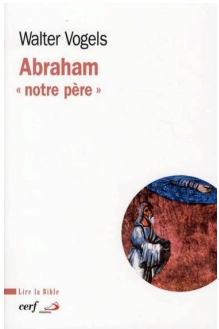
[4] 4 vols. Maturai: Kāmarācar Palkalai Kaḻakam, 1986–1997.

in her chapter on the Tamil *One Thousand Questions* text. The lack of citation may be a simple oversight which would be understandable in a work of this scope, but it is a significant omission, which one hopes will be corrected in future printings of the book. On a related point, the statement that M. M. Uwise's *Tamiḻilakkiya Aṟapuccol Akarāti* is "the best study of Muslim Tamil literature to date" (59n70), is incorrect and possibly misleading. The *Tamiḻilakkiya Aṟapuccol Akarāti* is simply an Arabic-Tamil dictionary. The best study of Islamic Tamil literature to date is the four-volume *Islāmiyat Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Varalāṟu* ("Islamic Tamil Literary History") mentioned above, co-authored by Professors Uwise and Ajmal Khan. Both the dictionary and the literary survey will be useful to scholars who wish to pursue research in the Islamic Tamil Studies field.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, Ricci's work invites appreciation and development on many fronts and from many disciplinary perspectives. Ricci's documentation of the breadth of dispersion of *One Thousand Questions* tellings, from the UK to the Moluccas, is impressive—one imagines that additional evidence of the textual corpus and its legacy will be found in East and West Africa, Central Asia, and China. Perhaps scholars focusing on these world regions will assist in filling out the global history of this important Islamic text. More work on the *One Thousand Questions* tellings themselves, including more direct translation, would be valuable. The Persian history of the *One Thousand Questions* text deserves attention. Various facets of Tamil, Malaysian, and Indonesian Islamic realms invite further study, and Ricci has provided important guideposts for such study. As far as conversion and Islamization are concerned, Ricci's study gives a certain purchase on the roles of Arabic language, literature and literary cultures, and networks in the process. One might try to apply her theoretical insights and the "Arabic cosmopolis" concept retrospectively, to the Arab-Islamic-Persian cultural encounter, as well as to new Islamic frontier zones—emerging Muslim worlds in the United States, Europe and Australia, for example. As Michael Muhammad Knight's novel (2004) and film (2010), *The Taqwacores*, brilliantly demonstrate for the US context, one might expect to see both the relevance and applicability of the "Arabic cosmopolis" historical-linguistic concept, as well as its limitations, in terms of explaining processes of "Islamization."

Susan Schomburg
Lewiston, Maine

Abraham "notre père", by Walter Vogels



Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010 | 170 pages | ISBN: 978-2-204-09021-6 (paperback) €16.00

This simply and attractively written book provides a nice introduction to the figure and story of Abraham as it is found in Genesis and developed in the later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The book is aimed at a readership that knows little about the topic and presents only a small selection of the material available, as the author often reminds the reader. The author is primarily a biblical scholar and also a Roman Catholic priest.

Chapter 1, "Abraham dans la récit biblique," presents the account of Abraham as a man of faith as found in Gen 12–25, noting the various interconnections within the text and stressing God's promise of blessing, posterity and land.

Chapter 2, "Abraham dans la tradition juive," discusses Abraham as he appears in the later parts of the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha and other writings of late BCE and early CE centuries, but with relatively little use of the rabbinic midrash and later writings. The author sees this material as stressing the obedience of Abraham. Among the additions to the story noted are Abraham's attack on his father's idols, the claim that Abraham obeyed the Mosaic law before its time and a more active part for Isaac in the account of the Aqedah (the "binding" of Isaac, Gen 22). The challenge presented by the Holocaust to the traditional interpretation of the Aqedah is mentioned. The version in which Isaac actually dies, discussed by Shalom Spiegel in *The Last Trial*, is not mentioned.

Chapter 3, "Abraham dans la tradition chrétienne," presents Christian views of Abraham as found in the New Testament, later apocryphal writings, and the Church Fathers. Much of the New Testament continues the earlier Jewish views of Abraham, but Paul breaks with the tradition by insisting that Abraham was justified by faith, not works. Later ideas make the promise to Abraham apply to Christians rather than Jews, claim that Abraham was saved by Christ, often make Abraham's three visitors the Trinity, and see the sacrifice of Isaac (Aqedah in Jewish usage) as prefiguring that of Christ. If some Jewish writings present Abraham as an observant Jews before Moses, many Christian writings present him as a Christian before Christ.

Chapter 4, "Abraham dans la tradition musulmane," first presents a biography of Abraham (Ibrahim in Muslim usage but the author uses the form "Abraham") as it can be derived from the relevant passages in the Qurʾan, which does not give a continuous account. The Qurʾan stresses Abraham's struggle with idolatry, mentioned in some later Jewish sources but not in the Bible, and states that his religion was Islam, to which he was returning. The hadith and other Muslim writings (the author relies mainly on al-Tabari's *History*) develop the Qurʾanic picture with details about his birth and his attack on idols, the expulsion of Ishmael (Ismaʾil) and rebuilding of the Kaʿba. The Qurʾan does not say which was the son to be sacrificed. For a long time the tradition was divided between Isaac and Ishmael and the author gives two versions of the story, one featuring Isaac and the other Ishmael. (Although justified historically, I think most Muslims today would object to this "balanced" treatment.) The author makes no mention of the important "Stories of the Prophets" genre of literature (admittedly this does overlap considerably in contents with other genres). Comparably with the Jewish and Christian cases, Muslims see Abraham as the perfect Muslim before Muhammad.

Chapter 5, "Abraham dans l'art," turns to a different and very significant sort of material. After a brief discussion of the significance of art and iconography, the author catalogues and briefly describes a large number of works of art, mainly paintings but also sculptures and bas-reliefs. Most of these are modern Western Christian works, but some earlier Christian work is included as is material from early synagogues and modern Jewish artists. A couple of modern films are also discussed. Unfortunately, there are no illustrations and the comments are hardly adequate without them, but at least the reader is made aware of these works and can research them if he or she chooses.

The author leaves until chapter 6, "Abraham et l'histoire," his discussion of modern biblical criticism and its implications. Given the subject and nature of the book, I think this is the appropriate place for it. The author introduces Wellhausen's documentary hypotheses (but only describes the "J" document!) but underlines the strength of memory in the pre-literary period of transmission. He then turns to archaeology and quotes W. F. Albright to the effect that the biblical accounts of the patriarchs accurately depict the culture of their time and thus have a historical basis. He summarizes the later objections to this view but does not accept them. He argues that if the stories had originated close to the time of the final editing of the biblical texts, as many critics conclude, the patriarchs would be pictured as obeying the Law

as found in the Bible, but they are not so depicted (he refers to R. W. L. Moberly in connection with this argument). He concludes, as did Albright, that Abraham was a historical figure although not all the stories about him are true. Finally, he divides the stories into three categories: those that may be accepted as historical, those that cannot be so accepted, and those that are at the level of faith and not susceptible of proof (e.g., that God called Abraham to leave his country). The last are the most important and speak to the faith of the reader. This chapter will undoubtedly seem to many overly sketchy, but there is hardly space for a longer treatment. It will also seem to many, and to me, as too conservative. I do not find the argument summarized above convincing. Those who edited the Biblical texts presumably accepted the biblical view that the Law came to Moses, and so could have produced stories of patriarchs who did not follow the Law. Also, according to the critics, the biblical Law reached its final form only with the final editing of the texts, so that not long before that there were presumably Israelites who did not know or did not accept this Law.

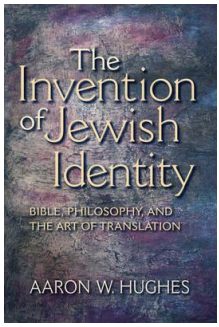
The last chapter, "Abraham dans la dialogue interreligieuse," begins by discussing the Pope's visit to the Holy Land in 2000 and his comments to various religious leaders (here I think is the one point where the author shows his Catholic colors). He then discusses ways in which Abraham as depicted in Genesis can be a model for contemporary dialogue, especially in his tolerance of people of other religious beliefs and his avoidance of violence. While interesting, this chapter does not deal with what the title suggests (at least to me). Apart from the Pope's visit there is no mention of the contemporary movement for dialogue. Muslims would presumably object to the author's choosing the Abraham of Genesis as the model for dialogue, which he does, apparently unreflectively, on the grounds that all other versions are based on it. For Muslims the Qur'an is the basic version, of which others are either corruptions or interpretations.

As mentioned above, this is an introductory treatment, valuable mainly for those who know little or nothing about the topic. I think that most readers of this review will find chapters 1 and, especially, 6 too sketchy for their needs but may profit from the other chapters. The author rightly limits the material he presents although I would like to have seen a little more modern material in chapters 2 to 4 (e.g., at least a passing reference to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*). The author is clearly at his weakest in dealing with Islamic matters, not only in terms of knowledge (not surprising since he is a biblical scholar) but also in terms of the ability to appreciate Muslim con-

cerns. It is to be hoped that this book will find a translator since there are many in the English-speaking world, not necessarily scholars, who would profit from it.

William Shepard
University of Canterbury

The Invention of Jewish Identity: Bible, Philosophy, and the Art of Translation, by Aaron W. Hughes



Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011 | xiii + 247 pages | ISBN: 978-1-4422-0516-1 (hardback) $49.95

In a debate over translation which seems to be polarised between meaning-based and formalist, this book is a welcome contribution and I see it as an important supplement (in the non-Derridean kind of way) to Naomi Seidman's book *Faithful Renderings* (2006). While Seidman's book dealt with the Jewish relationship to Christianity (note the subtitle *Jewish-Christian Difference and The Politics of Translation*), Hughes's book remains—mostly—within the Jewish realm, which made me aware, more forcefully than *Faithful Renderings*, how different Jewish translation theory actually is, due to the roles of diasporic identity and its relationship to the Hebrew language. This is what *The Invention of Jewish Identity* is about. Given my own background in Protestant theology and its very static and simplified image of Judaism, being flung into discussions of Moses ibn Ezra and Maimonides on translating into silence, for example, proved to be a bit of an intellectual challenge. So while I didn't find it an easy read, I mostly enjoyed myself, with a few exceptions, such as the last chapter, to which I will return.

The book consists of six chapters and some concluding remarks. The first chapter provides the interpretive contexts and theoretical background for the discussions in the following five. Hughes outlines his view of translation as "a complex web tapestry of practical, historical, philosophical, and aesthetic processes" (5). Furthermore, he recaps various views on translation such as Friedrich Schleiermacher's and Walter Benjamin's, which provide him with the two necessary guides, namely the quotidian and the utopian, an en-

counter, which translation seeks to bridge along with the past and the present, and the Hebraic and the non-Hebraic, while threatening to undermine the points of contact. Finally he defines a common ground for the individual Jewish translators under investigation in the book: namely that they all see something, silent traces, behind the language used in the Torah, and want to "unleash the eternal features of the Torah's nonlanguage that may have become embedded in the quotidian nature of human language" (16). While I am less interested in Hughes's own reflections on translation, I find his analyses of the Jewish thinkers and their theoretical reflections fascinating and substantial.

The second chapter, on the forgetting of history and the memory of translation, is an analysis of Saadya Gaon (Egypt, 882–942) and Franz Rosenzweig (Germany, 1886–1929), who also function as the bookends of the study. While the chapters all include the various encounters (past/present; quotidian/divine; Hebraic/non-Hebraic), this one focuses on the encounter of past and present as well as the particularities of linguistics and aesthetics. Both Saadya and Rosenzweig sought to renew Hebrew through their present languages: Arabic and German in order to retrieve the past and shape the future. The means of doing so were quite different. While Rosenzweig wanted to unfamiliarise Hebrew and German, Saadya emphasised the similarities between Hebrew and Arabic. This pattern of juxtaposing thinkers to bring out their similarities and differences is one Hughes follows throughout the book, and which works really well.

Chapter 3 is entitled "The translation of silence and the silence of translation: The fabric of metaphor" and focuses on two Andalusian Jewish thinkers, Moses ibn Ezra (ca. 1055–1138) and Moses Maimonides (1138–1204). The catchphrase for this chapter is the Talmudic dictum, "Torah speaks in the language of humans," which is used to discuss the encounter between the quotidian and the utopian as well as the nature of human textuality (such as, e.g., metaphors) and the eternal, the initial silence. That was my favourite chapter, perhaps because it tapped into thoughts related to my present work on text and body, but also because it connected with one of my favourite novels, Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, in which silence plays a major role.

The fourth chapter on the apologetics of translation deals with the superiority of Judaism and of the Torah through the construction of an ideal past. Jewish translation mobilises the effort to "claim" the intellectual and literary innovations of the world, which belonged to the Jews by virtue of possessing all wisdom through the gift of the Torah. This originally Jewish

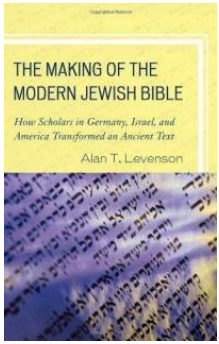
wisdom was subsequently stolen by the gentiles [ancient Greece, Muslim Spain, the Renaissance, the Weimar Republic], but could be re-absorbed through translation. This chapter deals primarily with Judah ben Yehiel Messer Leon (1425–1495), who sought the "glimmer glowing from the veins of the Renaissance culture" in the Bible, and Martin Buber (1878–1965), who was determined to break the connection between Judaism and the German context to emphasise Jewish difference. In fact, Buber's insistence on the Bible's non-rational and emotive order seems almost fashionable given the current interest in the emotions as object of historical research.

The fifth chapter, "Translation and Its Discontents," looks at the translations of Maimonides and Buber/Rosenzweig and the controversies arising from their efforts. Both translations attempted, in their own ways, to establish an authentic Jewish reading: Maimonides by restoring the language towards its prelapsarian state, and Buber/Rosenzweig by taking the Bible back to a purer linguistic (oral) moment. Both translations were criticised for creating an idolatrous (Maimonides) or artificial (Buber/Rosenzweig) text.

And then the final chapter: "Translation and Issues of Identity and Temporality." This is where I feel the book drags on a bit, and introduces new things towards the very end, which at this point I wasn't up for after all the new and fascinating stuff in the previous chapters. As far as the identity issues go, he recaps how the various individuals examined in the book relate to such issues, which is fine. But then he goes on to discussing the issue of temporality—and as a way of introducing his own take on the relationship between translation and temporality brings in Heidegger on the last five pages of the book. This seems to me like a last-minute brilliant idea he came up with in the shower. Furthermore, Naomi Seidman is relegated to these last pages as well. It just seems to be a last-minute add on, which is a shame. Personally, I would have preferred it if the book finished with the fifth chapter, and was then followed up with an article or another book, which deals with these things in a more substantial manner. Because presenting your own views on translation, utopia, and temporality after having dealt with the likes of Maimonides and Walter Benjamin makes it difficult not to disappoint your reader. But as far as those central four chapters go, I am all ears.

Christina Petterson
Humboldt-Universität

The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text, by Alan T. Levenson



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Alan T. Levenson's *The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text* provides—through a synthesis of cultural history, biblical scholarship, and modern Jewish history—an examination of how the meaning of the Hebrew Bible has been socially constructed, thereby offering not only a descriptive history of Jewish Bible scholarship but also a presentation of how Jews in the last four centuries have both related to and hence reconstructed the Bible and its place within their lives. In this way, his is something of a Jewish studies reorientation of Jonathan Sheehan's 2005 *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, an examination of Protestant translators and scholars from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and their transformation of the Bible from a book justified by theology, to a book justified by culture. Where the scope of Levenson's presentation differs from Sheehan's is in its wider historical focus, examining as it does scholarship ranging from the (Jewish) Enlightenment until the present day. Moreover Sheehan, as a cultural historian, is not interested in his presentation of how the biblical narrative might have been reconceived from a postmodern perspective: this is where Levenson's study comes into its own. The author's programme is obviously related to recent "reader-response" approaches to Biblical criticism (in which the biblical meaning determined by the contemporary reader is privileged over traditional historical-critical concerns), and indeed, Levenson himself notes that his is a presentation which might better be considered under the rubric of a "postmodern" analysis than that of the "modern" which his title might otherwise suggest (6).

The first chapter essentially attempts to reclaim Baruch Spinoza for Judaism in general, and as a Jewish Bible critic in particular: thus in Levenson's presentation, Spinoza becomes the methodological precursor of the various techniques which were to become inherent to modern historical-critical biblical scholarship, and so to the scholars assessed in the following pages

(15–16). After this brief excursus, the presentation begins proper and so Levenson moves confidently through three centuries and three continents of scholarship. Part 1 looks at the German Jewish thinkers of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment: the author examines the German-language Bible translations of Moses Mendelssohn (Ch. 2), Samson Raphael Hirsch (ch. 3), Benno Jacob (ch. 4), and the Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig collaboration (ch. 5), thereby interacting with aspects of Jewish tradition encompassing Reform and Orthodox perspectives. Indeed, despite the denominational diversity which informed each of these translation projects, nevertheless Levenson is able to provide an encompassing conclusion: each translation was ultimately underpinned by a religious humanism typical of the German-Jewish experience—the striving to be fully modern, both German and Jew—and that this was the governing factor which provoked the *Haskalah* thinkers to produce these first attempts at a modern Jewish Bible.

Part 2 moves from Germany to the Israel of the early Zionists, exploring the scholarship of Ahad Haam (ch. 6), David Ben-Gurion (ch. 7), and Nehama Leibowitz (ch. 8). Once again, though affirming the diversity of the various approaches utilized by these scholars, Levenson is even so able to determine the operative intent of all this scholarly ferment: to make a Bible *for* a modern nation; and to make a modern nation *from* the Bible. Throughout, then, Levenson is conscious of the ideological assumptions and biases which may have informed the subjects of his study in their attempt to read the Bible as a document central to Israeli statehood. Finally in part 3 Levenson reaches America in the programmatically entitled "The Flowering of Jewish Bible Studies in North America": the author sees in this recent scholarship the conclusion of a programme first begun with Spinoza, and so the creation of a fully Jewish biblical scholarship. Beginning in 1966 with Nahum Sarna's *Understanding Genesis*, the author thus affirms this work to be the turning-point in the creation of a modern Jewish Bible; this (along with the work of Robert Alter) is treated in chapter 9 before moving in chapter 10 to the modern American congregational *chumah*: Torah and commentaries in which Levenson believes we see the full articulation of a completely Jewish biblical scholarship, phenomena which—through Levenson's diachronic presentation—are, then, the culmination of all these scholarly efforts.

The methodological incongruity in Levenson's presentation—treating as it does Bible translations when considering the scholarly contributions of German Jewry, before moving to Bible scholarship in a more general sense when reviewing that of Israel and America—is somewhat mitigated by Leven-

son's masterful handling of his sources, of which throughout the author seems confidently in control. Indeed, the book is essentially a synthesis of and heavily indebted to other works of scholarship: there is little which is new in his presentation. Thus his argument that Spinoza must be reclaimed as the first modern Jewish Bible critic strongly resembles the similar siren call of Seth L. Sanders in the first chapter of his 2009 monograph *The Invention of Hebrew*, and which sets up a comparable observation. Sanders argues that Spinoza—along with Thomas Hobbes—in treating the Bible as a historically relativized product of its own time thereby opened it up to subsequent historical-critical attempts (13–35). Moreover, Keith W. Whitelam provided already in 1996 an attempt to map the subjective influence of contemporary politics in shaping a biblical exegete's construction of the Israelite past (*The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*). Indeed, the general assumption of the treatment—that Jewish Bible scholarship must be examined as a creative response to the needs of Western culture and Jewish nationalism—seems an observation analogous to that which has informed the writings of the Modern Hebrew literary critic Alan Mintz, who has characterized Jewish literary ferment as essentially *Responsa* to shifts in traditional modes of perception. Thus, in *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (1996), Mintz makes the claim that Jewish society

> has had many massive national catastrophes visited upon it and still survived; and in each case the reconstruction was undertaken in significant measure by the exertions of the Hebrew literary imagination, as expressed in prophecy, liturgy, exegesis, and poetry. (x)

Nevertheless, this debt to previous scholarship is something which Levenson readily acknowledges: "this book is *not* an original piece of scholarship: I have merely tried to translate the findings of the academy for a wider audience" (5)—and what is indeed unique about this work is its clear presentation of the academic output of groups of Jewish Bible scholars who have never before been examined together. Such a synthesis provides new opportunities to trace scholarly continuities between academic trends (so the debt of Israeli scholarship to that of the German *Haskalah* is here made explicit), and ultimately serves to situate the American academia which Levenson determines to be the fullest articulation of Jewish biblical scholarship not only within antecedent Jewish scholasticism, but also within the larger trends of

the Academy as a whole (thereby Alter is treated in relation to the Copenhagen and Sheffield Schools of biblical minimalism).

Contextualizing these Jewish approaches to larger scholarly trends is a valuable consideration, however it should be noted that the author's crucial aim here is to ask what is distinctively "Jewish" about them. His central premise is that Jews speak in a shared idiom about the Bible and that this can be traced in modern biblical scholarship, starting with Spinoza and concluding in contemporary America. Thus he sums up in his concluding chapter the four commonalities which underpin the modern Jewish Bible: 1) polemic and apologetic; 2) inclusion of rabbinic interpretation in its exegetics; 3) always affirming the pre-eminence of the Hebrew text; and, despite these common features, 4) ultimately pluriform in nature. This seems a somewhat tidy solution to the particularities of the vast literature which Levenson surveys, spanning as this does three centuries and across three continents. The author approaches this mass of materials in such an (arguably reductionist) way in order to develop a clear chronology of the scholarship from which to posit his hypothesis concerning the diachronic development of Jewish approaches to the biblical data, thus he plots a trajectory which concludes in contemporary America. Certainly this provides a compelling and highly readable narrative. The book is clearly written and, though certainly aimed a scholarly audience, the organisation of the presentation and clarity of prose means that this work is nevertheless accessible also to the interested lay-person. (Indeed, in my close reading of the text, I only noticed one minor typographical error: Levenson systematically refers to the "Scheffield School" when discussing the "Sheffield School" of biblical minimalism–which demonstrates a lack of familiarity with scholarship from the University of Sheffield behind his claim that there is "anti-Israel sentiment" at "Scheffield" [*sic*; 202]). However, in providing such a cogent outline, at times the author's central premise—that of the essential "Jewishness" of all these scholarly approaches—is somewhat obscured. Levenson begins his study by noting that

> when it comes to Bible study, purely disciplinary considerations (Is one a source critic? A form critic? A rhetorical critic? A canonical critic?) or ideological considerations (Is one a feminist? A secularist? A liberation theologian?) prove to be the controlling factors. (4)

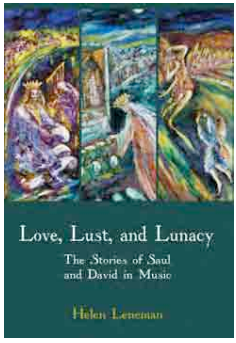
Yet what can be especially "Jewish" about any of these governing methodological decisions (as opposed to critics who practice their art utilizing the same

tools but beginning from the position of another ideology, such as scholars who come from Protestant or secular backgrounds) is not returned to. The four criteria with which he characterizes modern Jewish Bible scholarship may very well refer to biblical scholarship in a wider sense, and not in any explicitly "Jewish" crystallization. Resulting avenues of research which may follow from Levenson prolegomenon must attempt to address what, if at all, is essentially "Jewish" about Levenson's Northern American "Modern Jewish Bible"; and if, indeed, this may be seen as an exclusively American phenomenon.

If his conclusions may be criticised for being a bit too "tidy," this is nevertheless a symptom of a presentation which is ultimately precise in organization and in style: Levenson should be congratulated for providing an access to modern Jewish approaches to the Bible; his synthesis of the scholarship and contextualization of this within temporal and locative boundaries will no doubt become essential reading for those attempting to get to grips with Jewish biblical scholarship.

Laura Elizabeth Quick
University of Durham

Love, Lust, and Lunacy: The Stories of Saul and David in Music, by Helen Leneman



Bible in the Modern World 29 | Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010 | xii + 399 pages | ISBN: 978-1-907534-06-5 (hardback) £65.00

In *Love, Lust, and Lunacy: The Stories of Saul and David in Music*, Helen Leneman shares with us a reception history of music, specifically operas, oratorios, and librettos based on the books of Samuel. Her contention is that the three emotional or mental states—love, lust, and lunacy—are "Leitmotifs" that run through the books of Samuel and her aim is thus to "illustrate how librettos and music can alter or enhance our response to Michal's, Jonathan's, David's, and possibly Abigail's love, David's (and in some cases, Bathsheba's) lust, and Saul's lunacy" (1).

Leneman draws attention to the unique ways composers choose to understand the stories and especially how they "fill in the gaps" to fit their own imaginations. As Leneman states, "the most imaginative retellings are usually based on the most ambiguous parts of the biblical text" (1). The text, she asserts in the introduction, does not anchor a composer, but serves as a sketch for the composer to speculate about and fill the gaps. She states clearly that her book does not address historical-critical issues, or social history, but only "how the biblical portraits of these characters are altered by the librettos and music from how they appear in the original narrative" (2).

Leneman suggests that music is a form of midrash or retelling of the biblical text. Music she claims, adds a dimension that moves beyond the text in its ability to delineate emotion. "Music, I will show throughout this book, is a far more effective tool for arousing feelings and emotions than language is. Opera and oratorio are still more powerful tools, because they combine music and language. In the case of opera, the theatrical element creates additional drama" (3). She also discusses various basic musical concepts such as keys, tempos, and chords, how they can evoke emotion, and how voice type influences the listener, noting the voice casting that characters have historically received. Readers would do well to be familiar with the librettos, oratorios, and operas that Leneman reviews as well as 1 and 2 Samuel and the characters in both books. The short description of voice casting is helpful, yet is so quick that a reader not familiar with musical concepts might get lost as Leneman provides lists of voice casting, operas, and composers without going into any depth of explanation concerning voice casting.

In chapter 1, Leneman sets out three questions to be addressed in the course of her analysis:

> *Ambiguities:* Do the libretto and music draw our attention to particular textual inconsistencies or ambiguities, and if so, how are these resolved?
>
> *Gaps:* Do the libretto and music highlight a specific aspect of the story or fill a gap in the original narrative?
>
> *Message:* Can we determine what message a particular composer wanted to convey? (5)

Leneman concludes Chapter 1 with a description of the three attributes that guide her book and the influence that love, lust, and lunacy have on the various biblical characters.

Chapter 2 is an explanatory prelude, listing and summarising music and composers who address the books of Samuel and whom she will discuss in more detail in the remainder of the book. Leneman includes only one eighteenth-century piece, Georg Friedrich Handel's oratorio, *Saul* (1738), focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In all, she lists sixteen works, discussing briefly first the composer and then the overall focus of the composition. This chapter provides a helpful overview of the pieces, preparing the reader for the more detailed descriptions that will occur in chapters 3–10. At the end of chapter 2, Leneman returns briefly to her initial themes of love, lust and lunacy. This three-part theme, however, was not integral throughout chapter 2 and we are left without a feeling of coherence. If these themes are woven throughout, the reader wonders why and where and is left to sort out those questions for themselves.

Each of chapters 3–10 follow the same format, providing a summary of the relevant biblical chapters, a commentary on those chapters, and a discussion of the musical works (in chronological order) that set these biblical chapters to music. These chapters are divided between select stories contained in the books of Samuel, each chapter summarizing the stories and offering examples of how composers adapted these stories to their compositions. In chapter 3, for example, Leneman summarizes 1 Samuel 8–15 verse by verse, and then offers a brief commentary. Following the commentary, Leneman discusses works that address these chapters. Chapter 10 also concludes with a very short summary.

While Leneman sets out with a noble intent of tracing how music alters our responses to love, lust, or lunacy, this intended approach gets lost in Leneman's discussion of the music and in her commentary on the text. The three themes are not so much focused on as mentioned in passing. For example, in the conclusion for chapter 3, not one of these Leitmotifs is mentioned. The conclusion in chapter 4 briefly mentions love, but again a thematic thread is not made clear.

As a musician, the musical descriptions were interesting and easy to follow. However, those with little to no musical training, despite Leneman description of basic musical concepts in the beginning, will find it difficult to see the significance in a "cantabile duet in 3/4 time" (124), "octave jumps" (127), "6/8 time" (127), or "two successive groups of thirds sung in two different octaves" (183). Musicians, however, might find Leneman's detailed descriptions of the musical retellings of biblical narratives fascinating. Her attention to detail enables the reader to hear the text, hear the music, and

brings a new element to biblical interpretation. In addition, her analysis of the relationship between composers, their works, and the biblical texts offers a contribution to the reception history of those texts. In so doing, Leneman shows how music encompasses more than a retelling of the text, but involves the whole person, including both intellect and emotion. Biblical reception history has often dealt with art and Bible or retellings and Bible, but a still much-neglected area of research is the role of music in reception. Leneman remedies this by providing us with a depth of knowledge that at times seems inexhaustible.

It is the details though that do not permit a concise order to her information. Leneman discusses the questions of ambiguity, gaps, and message in the commentary section of each chapter and also in the section where she discusses the music. However, these questions get lost in the paragraphs; a reader has to search for comments on how composers dealt with these gaps. The reader's attention could have been brought to more focus by a different arrangement of the materials treated. Her comments on the various ways in which composers added to the story and invented scenes are indeed fascinating, but this information is lost in the larger commentary. For a reader not thoroughly familiar with the story and with the operatic works, it is all too easy to get lost in the maze of wonderful information.

Leneman's new book thus suffers from a similar disadvantage of her previous work, *The Performed Bible: The Story of Ruth in Opera and Oratorio*. In Deborah Rooke's review of Leneman's first work she states, "The book covers a lot of ground, and in the musical analysis of the chosen works there are some interesting and perceptive comments, demonstrating how music does indeed add its own dimensions to the narratives being retold. The book does, however, suffer from some problems of 'digestion': it has the sense of being both too compressed and somewhat unfocused, in that the overall purpose for the gathering of data is unclear, especially in the 'statistical analysis' chapter, and there is potential for more meaningful analysis of the material."[5] This analysis holds true with this, Leneman's second book. In the book's conclusion, Leneman states, "The powerful medium of music gives voices to the biblical characters in the books of Samuel. These voices suggest their conflicting emotions—their love, lust, or lunacy; their fear, hope, joy, or grief; and a myriad of other feelings." Yet rather than unify the book, love, lust, and lunacy get lost in the pages and reception history risks becoming a com-

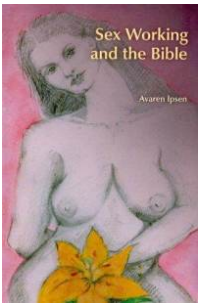
[5] *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 5 (2008): 11.

pilation or listing of instances of reception rather than a sustained theoretical reflection on certain patterns of reception so as to cast light on the precursor and subsequent texts.

This weakness, however, is not enough to distract from the richness that the book does offer: a musical analysis that highlights gaps and questions in a unique and creative way giving biblical scholars yet another way into the text. The appendix sections, "Charting the Musical Settings," an annotated music bibliography of works not included in Leneman's discussions, and "Literary Afterlives" hold enough value alone to have this book on your shelf.

Karen Langton
Brite Divinity School
Texas Christian University

Sex Working and the Bible, by Avaren Ipsen



BibleWorld | Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010 | x + 237 pages | ISBN: 978-1-84553-332-8 (hardback) £60.00 | ISBN: 978-1-84553-333-5 (softback) £19.99

Avaren Ipsen's revision of her PhD dissertation, *Sex Working and the Bible*, is an eclectic mix of biblical stories pitched into modern day interpretations by sex worker rights activists from SWOP-USA (Sex Worker Outreach Project, USA). Ipsen herself is a supporter of the decriminalisation of sex work, and has served as the vice-chair of the Berkeley Commission on the Status of Women.

It is an engaging read, examining four biblical stories featuring prostitutes: Rahab's deal with the two Israelite spies, Solomon and the two prostitutes, the woman who anointed Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and the Whore of Babylon. This book is, perhaps, unique, as it is usually non-sex workers who describe, and assume, the reality for sex workers, typically in pitying tones. As sex workers' voices are often muted at the best of times, it is enlightening to have these strong articulate voices come through as they analyse the biblical stories in Ipsen's book.

One example is the sex workers' discussion of Solomon and the two prostitutes. In presenting this discussion, Ipsen foregrounds the manner in which

contemporary sex workers who are seeking to deal with the criminal justice system come before it as "criminals" and "unfit mothers" who "are commonly seen as 'getting what they deserve' when they are assaulted, raped, murdered, coerced or blackmailed" (97). The SWOP activists discussing this biblical story did not interpret it as a story of Solomon demonstrating his wisdom so much as "a negative depiction of justice for prostitutes or mothers in general, because Solomon uses the threat of violence to dispense justice." Scarlot comments, "Yeah, it was a bluff. It's still abusive, and it's still sick… in a story that really should be focused on this violence.… I still say that the overriding situation in this is that it is ridiculous this king is going to cut the baby in half!" (98). Scarlot's comments reflect other sex workers' opinions that as mothers they are vulnerable to encountering bad experiences with the judicial system. As Ipsen also observes, the sex workers view the story as unrealistic insofar as it presents violence occurring between two *prostitutes*, but as realistic in respect of its depiction of "violent abusive treatment by the legal establishment."

In discussing the Whore of Babylon in Revelation, some of the sex workers perceive that the story reflects the idea of the feared power of the 'whore' and some also believe that there is a repressed goddess within the image. However, most of the sex workers point to the text as being the divine sanctioning of violence against them. Ipsen, discussing the close connection of the image of the whore with violence against women, summarises: "The whore metaphor is just all around bad news to prostitutes" (170).

Many of the sex workers identify with Mary Magdalene, and view her as a reason for religious people to support them, holding the relationship Jesus had with her as an example of justice towards a sex worker. The story of the anointing woman—often assumed to be Mary Magdalene, but named as Mary of Bethany the sister of Lazarus only in the version in John—sparks the strongest reaction. While some scholars have held her up as a symbol of forgiveness, these sex workers are appalled that Jesus would consider prostitution a sin, patronizingly meting "out his forgiveness to the poor person that is all like, at his feet." Kimberlee thus likens Jesus to that of "a dominating prick," and Scarlot summarises that Jesus's behaviour "is really nasty" (147).

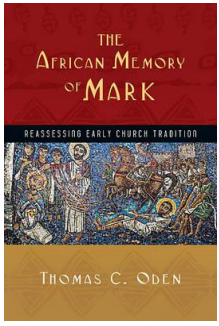
Unlike their counterparts in New Zealand, where sex work has been decriminalised and sex workers experience the protection of the law, sex workers in America in large part work in a criminalised environment and have no obvious pathway to seek justice. They are very often victims of law enforcement, and see the police and the state as their persecutor, rather than

as their ally in protecting them. Even in the decriminalised New Zealand context, stigma still attaches to sex workers, and so it is possible they, too, would read these passages in a similar way. Custody battles, violence, and neighbourhood antagonisms, betrayal and rejection can still be played out to the detriment of the sex worker. As Ipsen points out, one step in addressing these legal and social injustices is by examining their biblical and other religious foundations (2).

Ipsen's thinking is often at odds with what many people would have been taught in Church and Sunday School, bringing a fresh perspective to old stories and traditional thinking. As she summarises, the reports of her discussions with SWOP readers "have brought rich interpretive insights to … passages of biblical prostitution" (207), and these thoughtful perspectives should challenge our thinking of those biblical passages and of prostitution itself.

Catherine Healy
The New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective

The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition, by Thomas C. Oden



Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011 | 279 pages | ISBN: 978-0-8308-3933-9 (softback) $22.00

As director of the Center for Early African Christianity at Eastern University, Thomas C. Oden offers a fascinating exploration of the traditions about Mark as the founding figure of the African Church. In his preface Oden dedicates his study to African scholars and affirms the importance of the story of Saint Mark as remembered by Christians in Africa across denominational lines, a story unfamiliar to many Western laypersons and scholars alike. After touching upon John Mark's African roots in chapter 1, Oden asks western readers to suspend their critical suspicions and adopt a "second naiveté" in order to give this story a fair hearing (23). He frequently repeats this sharp contrast between long-established African memories of a saint and modern western historical scepticism regarding hagiography.

The first part of the book introduces the distinctly African memory of Mark. In chapter 2, an event is classified under "African memory" if it is

remembered throughout the African continent, in the same or similar ways, with common consent without coercion, over several generations, and in the many indigenous languages of Africa (27–28). Although some scholars take their cue from Acts 12:12 on John Mark's origins in Jerusalem, chapter 3 narrates the African account of Mark's birth in Cyrene in the Libyan Pentapolis to a wealthy Jewish family including his father Aristopolus (Aristobulus), his mother Mary and his uncle Barnabas before they emigrated to Palestine. Moreover, Mark shares a familial bond to Peter through the apostle's marriage to the cousin of Aristobulus. Chapter 4 covers the literary sources: the liturgical synaxaries of saints and martyrs, *The Martyrdom of Mark* (*Martyrium Marci*), the tenth-century compilation of traditions under the direction of Sawirus ibn Al-Muqaffa, and the work of the current patriarch of the See of St Mark Anba Shenouda III.

Part 2 interprets the New Testament from an African hermeneutical lens. Chapter 5 constructs a portrait of Mark as a Levite, based on the description of Barnabas in Acts 4:36–37 and an interpretation of Mark's nickname "stump-fingered" (*kolobodaktylos*) as a reference to his self-mutilation to avoid the priesthood. Mark often visited Peter's house in Capernaum in his youth and was a participant in the gospel narrative, found in the self-effacing description of himself as the naked young man who took flight in Gethsemane (Mark 14:51–52) and possibly the young man in white at the empty tomb (16:5–7). Chapter 6 identifies the house of Mark and his mother Mary as the location of the Last Supper with Mark as the one carrying the water jug, the gathering place of the post-Easter church when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, and the safe house where Peter hid from Herod (cf. Mark 14:13–15; Luke 22:10–12; Acts 1:13; 12:12). Oden even supports the identification of the site with St. Mark's Monastery. According to chapter 7, Mark had a much more active role in the early church than one might deduce from the first brief reference to him in Acts 12:12. Before travelling with Paul or Barnabas (cf. Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37–39), Mark also safely escorted Peter to "another place" (Acts 12:17) and Oden makes the case that this was not Rome but Babylon of Egypt (later Old Cairo; cf. 1 Pet 5:13).

Part 3 continues past the New Testament and early patristic witnesses to the traditions of Mark's ministry in Africa. Chapter 8 recounts Mark's call to Africa, his reunion with Peter in Rome where he wrote the gospel, his successful ministry in the Pentapolis, his initial planting of the seeds of apostolic Christianity in Alexandria and appointment of Anianus as his successor in the episcopal chair of Alexandria before he escaped back to the Pentapolis,

and his final torture and martyrdom in Alexandria. Chapter 9 lists the various archaeological sites that correspond with key events of Mark's ministry and Mark's tomb which was venerated as early as the last martyr of Egypt, Peter of Alexandria, before the peace of Constantine. He also points to the succession of ten bishops between Mark and Demetrius (62–189 CE). Other records failed to survive the passing of time and onslaught of persecution, but Oden is adamant that the consensual memory of these locations and names could not be an invention and that, "Apostolic validation is more than a cultural fantasy or social legitimation" (171).

A single chapter in part 4 is dedicated to substantiating the historical reliability of the African tradition. Chapter 10 turns the attention towards the patristic sources. Particularly pertinent is the discovery by Morton Smith of the letter of Clement of Alexandria to Theodore that may supply the missing link as it confirms Mark's presence in Alexandria and how he entrusted the Alexandrian church with safeguarding his writings in their archives before his death. The tradition of Mark as the founder of the Alexandrian church is firmly in place by the time of Eusebius of Caesarea. Finally, part 5 ties up some loose ends. Chapter 11 adduces three lines of circumstantial evidence supporting the overall case: the reference to "my son Mark" in 1 Peter 5:13, Peter's decision to go to Mary's house after his miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12, and the information supplied about Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:29–32. Chapter 12 reiterates the dichotomy between Western historicism as exemplified by Bultmann and the form critics versus an appreciation of consensual church tradition, though he concedes, "My conviction is that the truth lies in some position in between the Western and African views" (233). Chapter 13 highlights Mark's impact on the catechetical school of Alexandria and on African iconography, liturgy and theology and the conclusion warns that to dismiss it as a myth of origins is to harm the self-esteem of African Christians, to neglect their contribution to global Christianity and to intensify their estrangement from the rest of the world.

As a study of reception history, Oden's valuable contribution should be read alongside other excellent studies such as C. Clifton Black's *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (1995) or Brenda Deen Schildgen's *Power and Prejudice: The Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (1999). I am less persuaded by his argument for the historicity of the tradition. It may be unfair to imply that criticism is rooted in "silent cultural conceits and prejudicial assumptions" or "cultural egocentrism and nativism" (137), since there are most probably other common beliefs or practices in Africa that Oden has not incorporated

into his own worldview. Instead, his case might have been strengthened if he engaged with recent anthropological studies of oral transmission or psychological research on memory. At times he relies explicitly on theological presuppositions that a scholar must adopt before she or he can begin to entertain the argument as, for example, the statement, "The same Spirit is at work in both the consensual exegesis of Scripture and its subsequent doctrinal expressions, as remembered ecumenically by the tradition of believers in Africa as well as in Europe and in the Near East" (55–56).

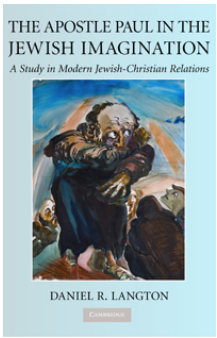
As it is, Oden provides no criteria to sift between older traditions and later developments. For instance, the much earlier testimony of Papias explains Mark's lack of *taxis* (order) on the grounds that he was neither a hearer nor follower of the Lord but only of Peter (cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.15), but Oden infers that Papias was just unaware of the widespread conviction in Egypt of Mark as a personal eyewitness of Jesus (191). Clement of Alexandria, and possibly Papias before him, seems to have interpreted "Babylon" in 1 Peter 5:13 (cf. Rev 17–18) as a euphemism for Rome (cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.15.2; Clement, *Adumbrationes ad I Pet. 5:13*). Oden accepts the modern academic consensus on Markan priority (22, 75), but this runs against the nearly unanimous patristic support for Matthean priority and especially the judgment of the African theologian Augustine on Mark as the abbreviator of Matthew (*De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.2.4). If a critic is not quite convinced about the late traditions of Mark in Alexandria, this is no different than the critical questioning of whether Thomas travelled to India, that Paul fulfilled his intent to go to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28; cf. *1 Clem* 5:7), or even, notably by the late Michael Goulder ("Did Peter Ever Go to Rome?" 2004), that Peter was the first bishop of Rome. If its historicity cannot be verified by the usual historical-critical methods, this need not detract from the theological richness of a narrative that has "shaped the spirit of African Christianity" (238).

There is also the question of the ideological function of securing a stable line of apostolic succession in Alexandria through Mark's connection to Peter and Rome. Oden opposes this line of thought yet is similarly dismissive of "the non-consensual followers," who attempt the same strategy for Marcion or the Alexandrian Basilides or Valentinus (cf. Clement, *Str* 7.106) (174), although this also may read back the ultimate victory of proto-orthodox (or centrist) Christianity over its rivals back into second-century Alexandria. However, there may be a false dichotomy between acceptance of the tradition or accusations of conscious deception. Another option, depending upon

whether or not one judges the controversial letter to Theodore to be authentic, is that Clement of Alexandria and his opponents sincerely believed they had an alternate version of Mark's gospel which the evangelist left in Alexandria and the story may have grown from there. Regardless if one is sceptical about a historical core behind it, this reader is grateful to Oden for retelling the theologically profound African story of Mark and opening scholars to a neglected aspect of the reception history the Gospel of Mark.

Michael Kok
University of Sheffield

The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations, by Daniel R. Langton



Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 | viii + 311 pages | ISBN: 978-0-521-51740-9 (hardback) $100.00

Daniel Langton, Professor of the History of Jewish-Christian Relations at the University of Manchester, has followed up his biography of Claude Montefiore, the founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism (2002), and *Children of Zion: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land* (2008), with a project that combines both Jewish cultural studies and the study of Jewish-Christian relations. His latest book examines multiple Jewish views on the apostle Paul from the realms of religion, art, literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. What emerges is a fascinating mosaic of a growing and diffuse Jewish interest in Paul during the modern period (thus from the eighteenth century onwards). Paul is normally perceived as a person traditionally shunned by Judaism for having betrayed his faith. Yet it is precisely this notion of a traditional Jewish antipathy to Paul that Langton sets out to question. What is even more interesting about Langton's analysis is that modern Jewish treatments of the apostle Paul actually reflect deeper underlying concerns within the community about the nature of Jewish authenticity amidst growing self-assurance, acceptance, and emancipation in European Christian societies.

The book consists of eight chapters, divided into four parts, along with an introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end. The first part (ch.

1) explores how Paul has figured in popular Jewish imagination and reaches the conclusion that Jewish treatments of Paul only really began to emerge following the crisis of confidence among post-Enlightenment Jews, brought on by the demise of the authority of religious communal memory, and the desire to reassess the Jewish relationship with Christian history and culture. This then sets the stage for the book's second part, which examines how Paul has been used in modern Jewish articulations of religious identity. Three chapters make up this part, each looking at a different Jewish construction of Paul—in interfaith relations, in intra-Jewish debate, and finally as a dialogical partner.

Thus, in the second chapter, Langton argues that the Jewish construction of Paul that emerges in the field of Pauline studies, an area mostly dominated by Christian scholars, is best understood as falling under the ideological strategies available to modern Jews in relating to the Christian 'other.' This argument goes against the trend to discern a "paradigm shift" from Jewish anti-Christian polemic in the nineteenth century towards a warmer Jewish appreciation for Paul after the Second World War. Langton's own overview carefully unearths the diversity of approaches taken to Paul among the Jewish scholars (from Heinrich Graetz to Mark Nanos), and suggests that their ideology and worldview plays into each scholar's choice in portraying Paul as either a bridge or barrier between Judaism and Christianity. In that sense there has not really been a Jewish reclamation of Paul, since both antipathy towards, and appreciation for, Paul continues to exist in contemporary Jewish treatments of Paul.

This ideological insight is taken even further in chapter 3, when Langton examines how the apostle is made to function in the authenticity debate among various Jewish movements. One rightly expects the opinions here to be extremely divided and so the reader is taken through the many Jewish movements that employ Paul in this way. Thus one is informed of older British and North American progressive perspectives, Zionist perspectives, even a 'Protestant' Jewish perspective (Hans Joachim Schoeps, while born of Jewish parents, was in fact intellectually influenced by the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth), a possible Orthodox Jewish critique of Progressive Judaism (David Flusser), followed upon by modern North American Progressive perspectives, gender perspectives, and finally, Hebrew Christian and Messianic Jewish perspectives. The inclusion of this last group might surprise some, since the majority of the Jewish community dismisses them simply as Christians in Jewish garb. However, it is to Langton's credit that he consistently extends

the descriptive approach even to this, admittedly anomalous, group (even going to the lengths of respecting the distinction between Hebrew Christian and Messianic Jewish). Thus it is their own definition of themselves as Jewish, rather than their perception by the rest of the community, which renders them eligible for consideration alongside other Jewish perspectives, and prevents Langton from having to impose essentialist categories of "who is a Jew?" onto any group. What then emerges from this chapter is that the apostle Paul finds a place in the debate concerning Jewish authenticity because of his traditional symbolism as a personification of a break with the Law. This sentiment resonates among progressive movements within Judaism because of their own critiques on the Law, their corresponding emphasis on Jewish diversity, and their tendency to support a universalist understanding of Judaism.

In chapter 4, the third construction of Paul that emerges in modern Jewish articulations of religious identity is somewhat similar to the preceding chapter, except that now Langton takes a closer look at individual authors' treatments of Paul and discerns how the apostle has been made a part of their transformative approaches to Jewish self-understanding. These authors are the Anglo-Jewish Bible scholar and broadcaster, Hugh Schonfield (1901–1988), the anti-establishment theologian, Richard Rubenstein (b. 1924), the Reconstructionist Rabbi, Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer (b. 1952), and the professor of Talmudic culture, Daniel Boyarin (b. 1946). Whether casting Paul as a fellow existentialist or cultural critic, what unites each of these different approaches is that they all consider Paul to be a misunderstood figure within the Jewish community and display no hesitation about incorporating him into their explorations of Jewish religious identity.

The third part of the book takes us further afield into artistic and literary depictions of the apostle Paul, which Langton situates more broadly within a Jewish interest in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Langton is of course aware that the idea of a seamless Judeo-Christian heritage may be problematic to those who view it as an artificial construct and so, before launching the reader into the two chapters that form this part of the book, he draws attention both to the origin of the idea and its critiques. Langton explains that the construction of a shared body of Western attitudes and values clearly indicates the nature of the exchange taking place between Jews and Christians in post-Enlightenment European culture.

Chapter 5 then proceeds to examine three artistic examples from German-speaking figures of Jewish heritage, the *Saint Paul* oratorio (1836) by Felix

Mendelssohn, the painting of "Paul's Sermon" (1919) by Ludwig Meidner, which can in fact be seen on the book's jacket cover, and the play *Paul among the Jews: A Tragedy* (1926) by Franz Werfel. Langton readily admits that these three artistic treatments are unrepresentative of Paul's place within the wider Jewish cultural imagination, and that in these instances Paul has in fact been used as a mirror of each artist's own personal and sociocultural backgrounds. What is interesting to notice from this, however, is that the three artists' emphasis on the commonalities, rather than differences, between Judaism and Christianity, is in itself reflective of the assimilation of Christian culture into their own Jewish backgrounds. Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) was the Christian grandson of the Jewish Enlightenment philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786); Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966) was the son of assimilated Jewish parents, and himself left Judaism in his youth only to return to it later in life; Franz Werfel (1890–1945) also came from a culturally assimilated Jewish family and, while always maintaining his Jewishness, espoused a worldview that allowed him to see his faith as both Jewish and Christian. In this way, all three artists exemplify how their portrayals of a shared Judeo-Christian heritage in the person of Paul had roots in the internal negotiation and reconciliation of the two traditions within their persons.

Chapter 6 takes a look at literary works on Paul that appeared on the North American Jewish scene, represented by the novels of Shalom Asch (1880–1957) and Samuel Sandmel (1911–1979). Asch's sympathetic portrayal of Paul in his novel, *The Apostle* (1943), was received with deep suspicion by the Jewish community, particularly since it appeared at a time when Jews in Europe were being murdered and persecuted. As a result, Asch never succeeded in convincing his fellow Jews of his vision of the common Jewish-Christian spirit that he believed Paul exemplified. By contrast, Sandmel's historical novel, *The Apostle Paul*, remained unpublished and undated, despite being more intellectually rigorous than Ash's novel, given Sandmel's expertise in first-century Judaism. Sandmel had already conducted his own historical study of Paul in *The Genius of Paul* (1958), which Langton had already argued should be understood within the context of the intra-Jewish debate on what constitutes authentic Judaism. A work of fiction, though, allowed Sandmel to speculate on how complex Paul's identity would have been. The art of storytelling provided Sandmel the opportunity to humanise a person he had already studied academically. At the same time, Sandmel's Paul reflected the challenges that North American Jewry was facing in the 1960s: assimilation, alienation from institutional religion and traditional mores, and the desire

to experiment and innovate. Unfortunately, Sandmel's novel never found a publisher. Assessing both treatments of Paul, then, Langton shows how Asch's work used the strategy of emphasising the commonalities between Judaism and Christianity, whereas Sandmel chose not to cover up the differences between them, but rather to demonstrate how these particularities were ultimately non-threatening. Both, however, acted out of the desire to improve relations between Jews and Christians.

The fourth, and final, part of the book takes us to the outer limits of Jewish cultural imagination on Paul. Here Langton examines examples of the so-called "non-Jewish Jew" (a term coined by Isaac Deutscher in 1968) who no longer feels bound by nationalism or religion. Chapter 7 takes us through the philosophical writings of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Lev Shestov (1866–1938), and Jacob Taubes (1923–1987), each representing a different philosophical programme: rationalism, antirationalism, and messianic apocalypticism. Langton argues that Spinoza's positive portrayal of Paul in the *Theological-Political Treatise* should more likely be seen as a strategy by a seventeenth-century marginal Jew to place his own philosophical ideas on rationality in the mouth of Paul the apostle in order to make them more palatable to his Christian audience. By contrast, Shestov regarded Paul as part of a long-term Judeo-Christian critique of Western rationality. While Paul was not that integral to his philosophical programme, Shestov recognised, as Spinoza did, Paul's usefulness as a common frame of reference within wider Christian society. But, unlike Spinoza, Shestov saw Paul's abrogation of the Law as a critique on reason, which thus made him diametrically opposite to Paul's place in Spinoza's philosophical programme. Another instance of Paul emerges in Taubes's *Political Theology of Paul*, which was published posthumously (1993). As a post-Holocaust Jew, Taubes reflected the distrust towards the foundations of political authority and its theological legitimation in history. For Taubes, then, Paul's advocacy of liberation from the law was understood as signifying freedom from political authority.

In chapter 8, Langton surveys the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Hanns Sachs (1881–1947). Freud's attitude to Paul was ambiguous. On the one hand, Freud used him as a powerful tool in support of his psychoanalysis; he understood Paul, in his *Moses and Monotheism* (1937), as having released people from the collective guilt of murdering the Primal Father, God (but also an amalgamation of Moses and Jesus). On the other hand, Paul's role in inventing Christianity contributed to Western civilisation continuing to live in the grip of illusion, namely religion,

which thus made Paul into an arch-opponent. In turning to the psychoanalysis of Sachs and his chapter on Paul in *Masks of Love and Life* (published posthumously in 1948), Langton discerns a different understanding of Paul's role, namely his role in liberating people from the anxiety of death. Though arriving at different psychoanalyses of Paul, Langton nonetheless sees both Freud and Sachs as subverting traditional Protestant understandings of Paul's position on sin and faith with their own unorthodox readings of the psychodynamics of the father-son relationship (Freud) and the liberating power of love (Sachs). More importantly, Langton surmises that both these thinkers latched on to Paul because they saw reflected in him their own marginal existence on the borderlands between Jewish and Gentile communities.

Coming from Pauline studies, I must confess that it was difficult to engage with several parts of the book until I relinquished my own occupational desire to understand the historical Paul better. That is ultimately not the purpose of the book. Readers wanting to know more about Paul himself or trying to make sense of the newer approaches to Paul within Pauline studies would be better served by consulting a book like Magnus Zetterholm's *Approaches to Paul* (2009). Similarly, an edition like *Paul's Jewish Matrix* (2011) indirectly attests to the current climate of Jewish-Christian relations through managing to bring together in one volume contributions from Jewish and Christian scholars who wish to understand Paul within his first-century Jewish context better, without any hint of confessional triumphalism. By contrast, Langton's book, as a work in cultural studies, is more accurately understood as a reception history of Paul, admittedly a specific kind of reception history, but a very pertinent one, since Langton helps us to see how different groups of Jewish individuals in the modern period have each contributed to a different construction of Paul. While some individual chapters of the book may sometimes strike one as eclectic, the book's introduction and conclusion neatly frame the book's guiding methodology and findings.

I must also admit that I was already familiar with Langton's 2005 *JSNT* articles on the myth of the traditional Jewish view of Paul and how modern Jewish identity interfaced with Paul, both of which prepared me for their inclusion in more complete form in the present book where I could now also appreciate the wider framework of which they form a part. I also found two other books helpful in contextualising Langton's book as a cultural study of Jewish-Christian relations in the modern period. Elisheva Carlebach's historical analysis of German-speaking converts from Judaism to Christianity in the early modern period, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany*

1500–1750 (2001), has a chapter on how Jewish converts based their narratives on Paul's conversion when writing their own convert biographies. This chapter was helpful for me to go along with Langton's suggestion to view the various Jewish treatments of Paul as strategies used by individuals on the margins seeking admittance to, or staking a claim to greater acceptance by, the wider (usually Christian) collective. Likewise, Susannah Heschel's study of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (1998) indicated how the Jewish reclamation of Jesus initiated by Geiger should more accurately be understood as an instance of "reversing the gaze," an early example of postcolonialist writing meant to subvert the status quo. Many of the individuals studied by Langton in their portrayals of Paul would seem to fit this category equally well.

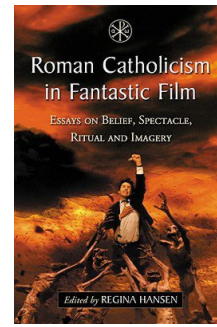
Because the canvas on which Langton has chosen to display the many constructions of Paul is so vast—he really does seem to have taken us from the inner to the outer reaches of the Jewish cultural imagination by the time he ends with analyses of the psyche—it goes without saying that Langton is unable to give an in-depth treatment of every construction that he discusses, even though he manages the task very thoroughly and admirably all the same. Just to give one example of what I mean: my research colleague spent four years on his PhD just studying the implications of the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" for contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue. In the end, his dissertation amounted to no less than 364 pages, considerably more than the forty pages that Langton devotes to the study of Paul and interfaith relations in chapter 2 of his book. But there is an immediate advantage to condensing such a discussion in the way that Langton has: it answers directly to the puzzlement that some Christian New Testament scholars experience when faced with Jewish scholars' simultaneous uncovering of Paul's authentic Jewishness and continued rejection of his theology. That is because such Christian scholars are not sufficiently aware that what they consider to be the so-called "Jewish reclamation of Paul" is actually only part of a wider series of continuing Jewish constructions of Paul, not all of them in harmony with one another. Christian scholars could stand to learn from this for, although the key proponents of the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" (Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders, and James Dunn) called attention to the "Lutheran" construction of Paul, New Testament scholars still seem to nourish the optimistic view that their own studies of Paul are untouched by any such constructivist tendencies.

My general assessment of the book is that it rewards multiple readings and would serve well as a textbook for the teaching of courses in Jewish-

Christian relations, particularly of the modern era. If I am allowed to end on a personal note, I missed the opportunity to meet Daniel in person at a conference on Paul and Jewish-Christian relations I helped to organize in 2009. However, the pleasure of reading and reviewing his book has helped make up for our missed encounter in the flesh. I believe the book is a worthy testimony to the author's calibre as a scholar and another strong affirmation of the publisher's sound choice in accepting this monograph into its fold.

Emmanuel Nathan
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

***Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*, edited by Regina Hansen**



Jefferson: McFarland, 2011 | x + 294 pages | ISBN: 978-0-7864-6474-6 (softback) $45.00 | ISBN: 978-0-7864-8724-0 (e-book) $45.00

Regina Hansen's collection of essays about Roman Catholicism and popular film is one of the latest in a long line of related offerings, such as: *Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies* (Lester and Barbara Keyser, 1984), *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933–1970* (James M. Skinner, 1993), *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Gregory D. Black, 1994), *The Word Made Flesh: Catholicism and Conflict in the Films of Martin Scorsese* (Michael Bliss, 1995), *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (Frank Walsh, 1996), *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975* (Gregory D. Black, 1998), *Afterimage: The Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers* (Richard A. Blake, 2000), *Through a Catholic Lens: Religious Perspectives of Nineteen Film Directors from Around the World* (Peter Malone, 2007), *Catholics in the Movies* (Colleen McDannell, 2008), *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Anthony B. Smith, 2010), and *Hollywood and Catholic Women: Virgins, Whores, Mothers, and Other Images* (2nd ed., Kathryn Schleich, 2012).

Structure-wise, the collection consists of Hansen's introductory overview and twenty-one critical essays categorized under three main sections (with associated academic apparatus): *Section One: Marvelous Catholicism*: 1. "'When the Saints Go Marching In': Saints, Money and the Global Marketplace in Danny Boyle's *Millions*" (John Regan), 2. "Blasphemy in the Name of Fantasy: The Films of Terry Gilliam in a Catholic Context" (Christopher McKittrick), 3. "Sacramentality Between Catholicism and the New Age in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Em McAvan), 4. "'The Devil Made Me Do It': Catholicism, Verisimilitude and the Reception of Horror Films" (Rick Pieto), 5. "'The Power of Christ Compels You': Moral Spectacle and *The Exorcist* Universe" (Alexandra Heller-Nicholas), 6. "Our Lady of Fátima and Marian Myth in Portuguese Cinema" (Paulo Cunha and Daniel Ribas); *Section Two: Uncanny Catholicism*: 7. "Music That Sucks and Bloody Liturgy: Catholicism in Vampire Movies" (Isabella van Elferen), 8. "'The Blood Is the Life': Roman Catholic Imagery in American Vampire Films of the 1930s" (Ann Kordas), 9. "House of Horrors: *Brideshead Revisited* at the Movies" (Kathleen E. Urda), 10. "Drying Blood: De-sexualization and Style in Paul Schrader's *Cat People*" (Marco Grosoli), 11. "Something in the Dark: Race, Faith, Horror and the Other" (Ralph Beliveau); *Section Three: Ridiculous and Monstrous Catholicism*: 12. "Reversing the Gospel of Jesus: How the Zombie Theme Satirizes the Resurrection of the Body and the Eucharist" (Jana Toppe), 13. "*Kin Dza Dza!*: Christianity and Its Transformations Across Space" (Margarita Georgieva), 14. "Murder Mystery Meets Sacred Mystery: The Catholic Sacramental in Hitchcock's *I Confess*" (Barry C. Knowlton and Eloise R. Knowlton), 15. "Catholic Moral Teaching as a Fantastic Element in *Gone Baby Gone*" (Brett Gaul), 16. "The 'Fantastic' Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema" (Victoria Surliuga), 17. "The Satanic Saint in Maurice Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan*" (Christa Jones), 18."Dark Imperative: Kant, Sade and Catholicism in Jess Franco's *Exorcism*" (David Annandale), 19. "Killer Priests: The Last Taboo?" (Shelley F. O'Brien), 20. "Mad Drunken Exorcists: The Decline of the Hero Priest" (Regina Hansen), 21. "Otherness in *The Others*: Haunting the Catholic Other, Humanizing the Self" (Anabel Altemir Giral and Ismael Ibáñez Rosales).

The volume's contribution to "the Catholic fantastic" (4) is unique but its title "*in Fantastic Film*" is misleading because in addition to "the 'fantastical' genres of horror, fantasy, science fiction and the supernatural" (1), it transverses the crime thriller (e.g., *Don't Torture a Duckling*, *The Bloodstained Shadow*), tragic-romantic drama (e.g., *Brideshead Revisited*), detective stories

(e.g., *Gone Baby Gone*, *Mystic River*), priest tales (e.g., *I Confess*, *The Boys of St. Vincent*, *Sous le soleil de Satan*) and hagiographies (e.g., *Fátima*, *The Call of Fátima*). Elsewhere Hansen muddies the issue by referring to *sub*genres within the nominated fantastic genres, and also non-fantastic genres with questionable hints of the fantastic, namely: "Contributors will explore the fantastic subgenres of horror, fantasy, ghost story, and science fiction as well as … the fantastic element in otherwise realistic film" (11), "so-called realistic films" (2). Tzvetan Todorov's categories of the "uncanny" and the "marvellous" fused with Sigmund Freud's concept of "*unheimlich*" (3) are used to justify the film diversity and tripartite book structure. However, few authors actually refer to these categories and why a book title more reflective of the actual genre diversity was *not* chosen is puzzling.

Equally puzzling, many essays burst their own stated parameters. For example, Cunha and Ribas's "Portuguese Cinema" explicated the 1952 "North American production of Warner Bros. Pictures" (86), *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fátima* (85–86). Kordas's "American Vampire Films of the 1930s" explicated the 1943 *Son of Dracula* (120). Van Elferen's "Catholicism in Vampire Movies" discussed Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* (100) rather than Neil Jordan's film adaptation, whilst Heller-Nicholas's "The Power of Christ Compels You" explored the Turkish film Şeytan (72–74). This was a trashy imitation of *The Exorcist* that de-Catholicised the original novel-cum-film by replacing the exorcising priests with a secular psychologist and a Muslim exorcist who repeatedly called upon the name of Allah to expel the possessing demon. Furthermore, a Jinn-headed paper knife replaced the Catholic crucifix in the original masturbating/raping scene, and at film's end the saved girl, Gul, visited a mosque and met an Imam holding a book (Qur'an?), both of which she lovingly touched. Temporarily overlooking its non-Catholic nature, Turkish audiences understood the narrative trajectory against reception theory's expectation that viewers from vastly different cultural and personal experiences will vary greatly in their reading of the film.

Some authors focused upon Protestant, but not Catholic, film directors, such as McKittrick who explored "Catholic views of sin, redemption, and free will" (29) in the films of Terry Gilliam who was "raised a Protestant" (40; see also 29, 30, 35–36) and who quoted from the "King James Bible" (35), thus turning him into a Claytons Catholic with "undeniably Catholic sensibilities" (40) although "it would be grossly inaccurate to label Terry Gilliam a 'Catholic' filmmaker" (39). Van Elferen's "Catholicism in Vampire Movies" focused extensively upon Protestantism (99, 101–105,

109, 110, 111), whilst "Paul Schrader's *Cat People*" by Grosoli acknowledged that "Schrader has been a Calvinist Protestant throughout his childhood and youth. So the rigid traits of his scriptwriting in *Cat People* should be regarded … as the Protestant counterpart." (151).

Despite Hansen's claimed focus upon "Catholicism and the filmic art form" (14), particularly "Catholicism and fantastic film" (14), some authors devoted *more* space to novels rather than to their film adaptations. For example, McAvan's *The Lord of the Rings* essay dwelt primarily upon J. R. R. Tolkien's life and novels that itself "largely eschews explicit reference to Catholicism" (48), rather than upon Peter Jackson's film trilogy, that itself was an imprecise "New Age series of films" (48). Urda's "*Brideshead Revisited*" focused upon Evelyn Waugh's book and the history of Gothic novels more than Julian Jarrold's 2008 movie that itself was "quite literally, another story" (126). Kordas quoted Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* to justify a point not made in Tod Browning's 1931 film *Dracula* (119); yet, both texts are sui generis and not necessarily interchangeable.

Pieto's social-scientific study on "the relevance that Catholicism had on their [interviewees'] experience of possession films" (52) is an acceptable reception theory attempt to gauge viewer's reaction to a genre of films, but it suffered methodologically from an insufficient and biased sample size (four females from six mixed gender interviewees [63]), and more worryingly, three quarters of the interviewees were *not* matched or were *weak/lapsed* Catholics! The religious status of Ashley was "none" (63), Karen was "other" and specified "pagan" although she was raised Catholic" (63), Audrey "was raised Catholic and is currently undecided" (63), and only Linda was "Catholic and … still active in the Catholic Church" (63). Furthermore, Pieto confuses "horror films" (52), "possession films" (52), "satanic films" (55), "slasher films" (57), "other possession and religious subgenres of horror" (58), "the supernatural" (59), and "the monsters of the classic horror films" (61) as if unproblematic equivalents; yet, neither Norman Bates, Freddy Krueger nor Hannibal Lecter (60–61) from *Psycho*, *Halloween* and *The Silence of the Lambs* are possession films *per se*. Regrettably, Pieto did not specify exactly what possession films were utilised, apart from reporting that on several occasions the participants "had to leave the theater or stop watching the tape or DVD" (54); all of which seriously compromises the value of his study.

Production-wise, the book is marred by numerous and exasperating errors, such as: inconsistent, incomplete and incorrect film titles (e.g., "*Kin Dza Dza!*" [186] versus "*Kin-Dza-Dza!*" [186], "*Twelve Monkeys*" [40]

versus "*12 Monkeys*" [34], "*Don't Torture a Duckling*" [257] versus "*Don't Torture the Duckling*" [292], "*The Bloodstained Shadow*" [257] versus "*The Blood Stained Shadow*" [291], "*13th Day*" [294] instead of "*The 13th Day*" [92], "*Dracula's Son*" [125] instead of "*Son of Dracula*" [120], "*Boys' Town*" [196] instead of "*Boys Town*" [291]); printing and spelling errors (e.g., "*S , eytan*" [68] and "*Seytan*" [294] instead of "*Şeytan*" [73], "control is [*sic*; "his"] pedophilic urges" [271]); missing details (e.g., *Halloween* [64] in Works Cited omitted from the essay, "Geoffrey Cubitt" [236] and "McDannell" [269] in their essays are omitted from their Works Cited [and Notes]); misplaced references (e.g., "Reider," "Denby," "Walters" [3x, 27], "Tony Fawl," "Ryan Ward" [2x, 194] within Notes but not Works Cited); incomplete information (e.g., "Horkheimer" [248] not "Horkheimer … and … Adorno" [254], absent performer details from *Exorcism* [254] and *The Sadist of Notre Dame* [255]).

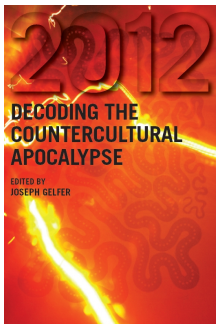
Furthermore, the book contains conflicting release dates (e.g., *Zombie* "1978" [170] versus "1979" [182], *Dawn of the Dead* remake "2007" [173] versus "2004" [181], *House of Mortal Sin* "1975" [256] versus "1976" [266]); a wrong header (e.g., "Bibliography" [93] not Works Cited); missing author attributions in Works Cited (e.g., "Balbo, Lucas, et al." [254]); an inconsistent reference format (e.g., "ed." (40, 125) versus "(Ed.)" [151]); incomplete book titles (e.g., "*Hollywood and the Catholic Church*" [208] instead of "*Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies*" [79]); missing films from Works Cited (e.g., *Apocalypse Now* [19], *The Exorcist III* [68], *Pilgrimage to Fátima* [92], *Cat People* [140], *Rosemary's Baby* [171]); missing Index items (e.g., book and film versions of *Interview with the Vampire* [100], *The Da Vinci Code* [137]), and phantom Index-nominated films (e.g., "*Song of Bernadette*" [294] supposedly on page 21 does not exist there). Disappointingly for a cinema textbook, there are no film stills to savor beyond the enticing cover image from the dramatic fantasy *Constantine*, which itself was *not* central to any essay therein and was only mentioned briefly in passing (270). Given multiple author favoring of *The Exorcist*, maybe a cover image from it would have been more relevant.

Overall, Hansen's book is the proverbial diamond in the rough and despite the many annoying imperfections and boundary issues, there is still much more to admire than decry. The actual gamut of topics, the diversity of filmic exemplars, and the durability of the themes explored therein make it an interesting and thought-provoking addition to any celluloid religion or Catholic Studies collection, whether personal or professional, faith or film-

focused. Upon a close reading of the collection, readers will find many kinds of meanings and pleasures buried within that might inspire their own scholarly explorations into the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion and film. Hopefully, Hansen's future books will be just as exciting and eclectic but better proof-read.

Anton Karl Kozlovic
Flinders University

2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse, edited by Joseph Gelfer



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By the middle of 2011, readers interested in an academic perspective on the veracity of popular beliefs in the apocalypse that the Mayans allegedly predicted to happen in 2012 had already in their disposal two concise and accessible accounts published by scholars of Maya culture who convincingly argue against such claims.[6] I remember in fact to have handed out, last January, in my class on Elements of Japanese Occult Thought, a copy of a newspaper article that appeared in the *Washington Post* (and republished in the *Japan Times*) in which Matthew Restall and Amara Solari repeat their argument that the ancient Maya predicted no apocalypse and that the global 2012 doomsday industry, or "2012ology" as they call it, feeds on popular fascination with "ancient wisdom" and on the apocalyptic beliefs which remain central to Western religious traditions. On hearing, therefore, that a new book on the 2012 phenomenon was to be edited by a researcher in religious studies, I looked forward to an analysis from a scholarly perspective that (understandably) had not been the central focus of the previous, Maya culture-centered publications. However, with a few notable exceptions, *2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse* was to me a disappointment, which, I believe, is due to the editor's relatively superficial perspective

[6] Matthew Restall and Amara Solari, *2012 and the End of the World: The Western Roots of the Maya Apocalypse* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011) and David Stuart, *The Order of Days: The Maya World and the Truth about 2012* (New York: Harmony Books, 2011).

on the 2012 phenomenon as "a complex mosaic of interrelated elements—a historical legacy here, a conversation there—which often come together via synchronicities that many see themselves as evidence of the prophetic nature of 2012" (3). I think that such an idea which de-emphasizes the common themes running through "2012ology" has lead to a collection of papers, very uneven in content and style, whose target readership becomes rather impossible to identify.

The book is composed of a preface, ten chapters, the first of which is just a seven-page introduction (with the unimaginative title "Introduction"), followed by a section of notes to every chapter, and an index. I usually see no reason for not gathering all lists of references at the end of a book (rather than keeping them separated at the end of every chapter like in this case), but this may be a personal preference for a structure that allows an easier comparison of the sources used by the different authors. There is, however, a more serious editorial issue in chapter 3 which is partly based on an analysis of fairly complex paintings (particularly those on page 27) that are, unfortunately, printed so small that the author's discussion of them is very hard to follow.

The preface is written by Michael D. Coe, who, we learn is believed by "some Internet sites" (viii) to have started the whole 2012 phenomenon by writing in 1966 about the Mayan calendar and its divisions according to eras composed of 13 bakhtuns (or 13 periods of 5,200 years). In his analysis, Coe suggested that at the end of the thirteenth bakhtun of our era which the Mayas placed on 24 December 2011 (later revealed to have been Coe's miscalculation; the correct day being 21 December 2012), the "Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all creation" (cited on page viii). Although slightly apologetic ("I probably was out to scare my readers" [viii]), Coe's short description of how researchers had arrived at the correct date and his vague conclusion in which he does not refute his earlier argument but still criticizes creationists, "New Age portents and all other nonsense served up by Hollywood" for their "appetite for bogus revelation" (xi) does not really say much about what to expect from this collection of essays or about the reason why Coe was chosen to write the preface. He clearly does not believe that his writings lay at the origin of the 2012 phenomenon and counter-culturalism (mentioned in the subtitle of the book) does not seem to be his specialty.

Moving on to the short introductory chapter 1 by the editor, Joseph Gelfer, the reader is presented with a detailed chapter outline preceded by the author's account of the personal choices that led him to edit this book.

Gelfer admits to have in the past "made a few dollars writing popular articles about themes intersecting with 2012" attacking thus, in a sense, what he calls "the myth of academic objectivity." Hence, he warns us that he has not sought to present a single view of the phenomenon, and that there are "internal contradictions" (3). And he concludes, by noting that "even if none of the predicted world-changing events take place, 2012 will forever be a classic example of the constantly evolving nature of the 'new' age, and no doubt prove to be an integral element of its manifestations" (7). While being reflexive and aware of one's positionality is the recommended approach to academic research, I strongly disagree here with Gelfer about academic objectivity being a myth. For me, such arguments are used to cover up the researcher's inability to put aside personal beliefs during his or her fieldwork. Being aware of one's position does not mean accepting one's 'inevitably' subjective analysis of primary data, but refers to one's understanding that one's analysis constantly needs corroboration and verification in order to produce 'reflexive knowledge.'[7] If academic objectivity is a myth, perhaps the editor would have at least followed some elementary academic rules of structure, by noting, for example, what the objectives of this collection of papers are and what the framework of analysis consists of. If the book is supposed to fit within the ill-defined field of New Age studies, as the concluding sentence of the introductory chapter suggests, perhaps a substantial analysis of what the editor terms "the nature of the new age" would have made a good start point for a discussion on 2012 as an undoubtedly significant belief among New Age circles around the world.

Fortunately for the reader, the next chapter by Robert K. Sitler, although an updated reprint of a paper published in 2006 in *Nova Religio*, provides an good summary of what the 2012 phenomenon entails. The author introduces the key figures behind the popularization of the belief that the winter solstice in 2012 will mark a fundamental transformation of humanity; the most famous being José Argüelles, "arguably the originator of the 2012 phenomenon" (9), who in August 1987 became famous in New Age circles for organizing the Harmonic Convergence, the world's first synchronized meditation. As Sitler notes, the event accompanied Argüelles's best known book, *The Maya Factor*, in which the spiritual teacher claims that he had come to feel the spiritual presence of the Maya and that 1987 marked "a shift point

[7] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 6th ed. (London: Pearson Education, 2007), 179.

of the galactic beam" that was to shift again in 2012 and lead to humanity's enlightenment. We learn that later Argüelles created his own version of the Maya calendar "which may be even more widely known outside of the Maya world that the actual ritual calendar" (10). The particular value of Sitler's paper lies, however, in his analysis of the impact the phenomenon has had on the Maya today. New Age teachers of Maya ancestry (or claiming so), such as Hunbatz Men and Alejandro Cirilo Pérez Oxlaj, have used their "authority" as Maya to make extraordinary claims about their peoples (Men, for example, claimed that the Maya had lived in other parts of the world [12]) and, sometimes cooperating with personalities such as Argüelles, seem to be participating in a "Maya cultural revitalization movement attempting to resuscitate key components of their heritage" (21). Sitler shows that beliefs about a coming apocalypse and/or renewal appeal to local Maya who contextualize such ideas with their own experience of, for example, ongoing deforestation, the Guatemalan civil war, the 1976 Guatemala earthquake, the teachings of Christian missionaries, or even the recent Guatemalan presidential elections. "New Age tourism, globalization, and Maya immigration to the United States" (20) are also mentioned as factors contributing to the popularization of the 2012 phenomenon among today's Maya population.

The next chapter by Mark Van Stone, a Mayanist scholar, makes a far less enjoyable read. The author goes into a very technical and authoritative-in-tone argument that can be summarized in two sentences: "we have too little fabric left to stitch together a coherent story" (35) and Maya seem to have manipulated dates and historical time-intervals "for optimum numerological and augural significance" (33). I can imagine someone interested in the most up-to-date findings about the Maya calendars being thrilled on reading this chapter, but the same explanations can be found in earlier publications in a much simpler tone. The 'debunking' character of this paper suffers, I believe, from a lack of depth in regards to, for example, what the vagueness of the Maya scriptures can tell us about their appropriateness as 'prophetic sources' for today's counterculture. The author mentions at some point the similarity between Mayan prophecies and Nostradamus's prophecies, but does not go further in his comparison. Van Stone seems more concerned with convincing the reader that the New Agers are wrong (a scientific fact that could have been stated in an introductory chapter) than engaged with the countercultural 'value' of the Maya sources.

The fourth chapter, "Mayanism Comes of (New) Age," is even more critical in tone and often repeats the same often-heard (but nevertheless accurate)

observation: "unlike science, which seeks to optimize provisional explanations for empirically observed material phenomena, those working in the esoteric tradition are preoccupied with discovering and asserting ancient truths" (43). I wish that this introductory part would have been shorter, because the central focus of Hoopes's paper is rather fascinating, and begs for more comparative research with other New Age beliefs that, like "2012ology," may seem new, but actually trace their roots to much older esoteric ideas. In this instance, the author argues that the "history of Mayanism can be traced through Spiritualism, Freemasonry, and Christian eschatology" (45) and presents several early examples of speculative theories about the Mayas. The most significant of these are three books published in the late nineteenth century by August Le Plongeon, a 33rd-degree Mason who claimed that "both ancient Egyptian culture and Freemasonry were derived from the Maya by way of the lost continent of Atlantis and that Jesus's last words on the Cross were spoken in Yucatec" (49). Hoopes repeats a well-known argument in the study of modern esotericism that ideas about an "Aryan supersociety" like those found in Le Plongeon's writings and in the more well-known work *The Coming Race* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, were fundamental to the development of Helena Blavatsky's theosophical worldview, to Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical movement, and to the more recent theories of New Agers such as Argüelles. Yet, Hoopes does not go further in his analysis. He, instead, chooses to offer a critique of both Coe's book, which he claims "crystallized Cold War anxieties" (53), and John Major Jenkins's work (which, surprisingly, reappears as the final chapter of this collection; hence I shall discuss it later in this review). I believe that criticism of these key figures of the 2012 phenomenon could have been placed elsewhere (most suitably just after their arguments in the preface and chapter 10 respectively), leaving space for more discussion on the early roots of the phenomenon.

The next chapter consisting of Pete Lentini's paper is probably, in academic terms, the weakest contribution to this collection. The problem lies in its self-referential research question: "this chapter addresses a main question of whether various actors have created a '2012 Milieu' that has been syncretized from multiple sources of stigmatized knowledge" (62). The reader interested in religious studies would have already recognized here Lentini's reliance on Joseph Campbell's notion of "cultic milieu" and on Michael Barkun's categories of "stigmatized knowledge," which the author spends half of the chapter re-introducing to the audience, before moving on to an analysis of YouTube videos on the subject of "2012." The reason that a book such as

this exists, with chapters from such a variety of perspectives, is a proof in itself that there is a "2012 milieu," and, furthermore, 2012 figured already in Barkun's study of conspiracy theories, where it is introduced as an example of the "improvisational millenialism" of David Icke.[8] Lentini's question does, hence, not really need any verification, but should rather form the basis for further exploration of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, the analysis of the YouTube videos does not achieve that, not only because of the ensuing lack of space for an appropriately developed argument, but also because the author does not reveal anything new that excellent general studies of the YouTube culture[9] have not yet already demonstrated, particularly in relation to the "diverse and often intersecting currents of thought" (77) that amateur online videos allow and to the "sensationalism and profit-orientation" (77) that they are subjected to.

In chapter 6, as its title "Chichén Itzá and Chicken Little" suggests, we return to the critical, 'debunking' tone of chapter 3, but here author Kristine Larsen goes straight into a clear and concise scientific account that, while decoding and negating one by one the apocalyptic scenarios that 20120logists adhere to, laments the public's lack of general knowledge and the "cosmophobia" (104) that the 2012 "frenzy" demonstrates. Rather than an argument-based paper, Larsen's section reads, hence, like a scientific report, which, nevertheless enjoyably, shows how confirmation biases function to support pseudoscientific beliefs that are then used by the media, and particularly by sensationalist documentaries of such otherwise respected channels as the History Channel and Discovery Channel, to raise their audience rates. Larsen, however, convincingly argues, for example that a sudden magnetic polarity switch is not going to occur in 2012, because "geological evidence strongly suggests that such an event takes thousands of years to complete" (90); and an unknown planet X is not going to collide with our planet in 2012, because if such a body existed it could not be now as close to Earth as to affect it by 2012 (95). By the end of the chapter, the reader will thus feel satisfied with the clear scientific explanations offered by the author, but she or he may already wonder to whom would she or he recommend this book. Indeed, as I argued in the beginning of this review, despite the editor's warn-

[8] David Icke is another popular figure of New Age and conspiracy theories. See Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 173–74.

[9] See, for example, Micheal Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

ing that he has chosen to present various views on the 2012 phenomenon, making of this book not just a study of the phenomenon but also one of its components (3), the tone and style of each chapter differs so much from the rest that it is impossible to identify a target audience. While, for example, chapters 2 and 3 are of an academic level that is accessible to only informed readers in the respective disciplines of the authors (Sitler, for example, never explains the meaning and significance of the "Pleiades" in the New Age, and Van Stone's analysis assumes a basic knowledge about mesoamerican civilizations), chapters 4 and 5 are of an introductory, undergraduate level, and chapter 6 could have been part of a popular scientific magazine.

This variability in tone and content continues for the rest of the book. Chapter 7, for example, could be described as a movie review written by a scholar-fan of Roland Emmerich's 2009 film *2012*. Andrea Austin knows undoubtedly a lot about the genre of end-of-the-world films and argues that "Emmerich builds luck, fate, and deity simultaneously into the same narrative twists and poignant tableaux, allowing for both secular and non-secular perspectives on the film's events, and yet in the process stirring a conversation that strikes deep to the philosophical heart of each" (115). The author's argument is that both the film and the 2012 phenomenon share the same apophthegm: "live every day as if it were your last; take every chance" (121) and that is why they appeal to popular imagination. Emmerich is famous for disaster movies, such as *Independence Day* (1996), *Godzilla* (1998), or *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), which are usually appreciated more for special effects than the depth of the stories or the development of the characters, but Austin claims the opposite. She says, for example, that 2012 somehow "repairs" America's image as isolationist and xenophobic by emphasizing the international cooperation in the face of disaster (112). The author also argues that the film offers a more complex, "realistic" scenario around the survivors who represent a moral dilemma, because most of them escape the catastrophe thanks to the tickets they were able to buy in secret from the rest of the population and which allowed them to board the giant ships/Arks (116). The problem with such analysis is that Austin does not convince us of anything else than the fact that the film could also be watched from the perspective she describes. Yet, we can perfectly imagine that some people may not have seen the same "philosophical depth." A look at the dedicated forum on the Internet Movie Database website[10] shows, for example, that viewers

[10] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1190080/board/threads/ (accessed on 29 March 2012).

despised Emmerich's blatant message of "political correctness" which Austin applauds, but which a comment in the forum identifies as "racist" in the sense that the obvious attempt to include characters from all ethnicities excludes, as the message poster puts it, "Nordic" looking people.[11] In any case, Austin's paper would have been much more useful in really "decoding" 2012, if comments by those involved in the making of the film or at least of viewers had been taken into account in her analysis.

Graham St John's paper (chapter 8) on the significance of the 2012 phenomenon in psytrance culture is one of the better papers in this collection. The author argues that we need to look more into the objectives of those who appropriate such millenarian beliefs and convincingly demonstrates that rather than the Maya culture or the scenarios about the end of the world, in psytrance music, which is "an electronic dance music culture (EDMC)" (124), "2012 offers a system of meaning and hopeful event horizon for the redress of personal and cultural crises" (139). I would maybe not go as far as calling "spiritual activism," like St John does, words posted on a psytrance forum, such as "2012 is just code for get your shit together people, we need to change gears and change direction on this planet." However, there is no doubt that despite this edited book's focus on the apocalyptism of the 2012 phenomenon, New Agers (at least in my country of specialization, Japan) have been rather talking about a 2012 "Ascension," a more positive belief in humanity's alleged access to the "next stage on a spiritual level," to what is hoped will be a more equal, peaceful and green world. Although it may be argued that such optimistic interpretations stem from the non-Christian based culture in which they have become popular, they are not absent from European circles of New Agers, as, for example, a November 2009 post on a Greek webpage suggests. In any case, St John's paper is the only contribution that considers the non-apocalyptic aspect of the 2012 beliefs, a domain that certainly needs more study as it may be reflecting geographical and cultural divergences in the way the 2012 phenomenon manifests itself in non-American parts of the world.

In this sense, Gelfer's own study of 2012 beliefs in Australasia (chapter 9) provides a welcome comparative analysis of the phenomenon from a region where, we learn, Argüelles has a firm base (149). New Zealand's "clean green" image (156), together with a romanticisation of the land as "a new frontier"

[11] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1190080/board/thread/195502665?d=196753724&p=1#196753724 (accessed 29 March 2012).

and of the aboriginal culture (152), have led to Australasia being perceived as holding a privileged role within the 2012 phenomenon (153). Gelfer observes, for example, that Maori creation myths have been re-interpreted to fit some 2012 catastrophe prophecies (147) and Argüelles has now moved from the United States to New Zealand because its position near the south pole will allow him to "prepare for the transition" (156). Gelfer concludes that "it is difficult to imagine a uniquely Australasian element to the 2012 drama that is not at some level 'indigenous' " (157) and, by this statement, the author opens, I believe, the road to unexplored areas of research on the different ways 2012 engages in acts of cultural appropriation both within the Western world (2012 in Greece, for example, has been linked to another local New Age belief in the existence of a generation of people with hidden capabilities called the "the Children of 1983") and outside of it (in Japan, as I earlier argued, people talk rather of a "2012 Ascension" that some link with a Shinto-inspired environmentalism).

This collection of papers could have ended (albeit, temporarily) the debate here. I would have still pointed out the variability in tone and content of the papers and lamented over the lack of engagement with 'ordinary' people's opinions about 2012, and with the cultural and regional variations pointed out by the last two chapters, but my appreciation of the book would have been higher than what it is now. The editor, however, decided for, I guess, what he perceives to be "objectivity's sake" or what he calls "a bridge between the academic and the non-academic communities" (7) to finish the collection with a section written by a known figure of the 2012 phenomenon, independent scholar John Major Jenkins. Sitler had already observed that "even if lacking in scientifically convincing evidence, Jenkins's 2012 theories bolster the beliefs of many New Agers who are generally uninformed regarding astronomy and Maya culture" (15). And Hoopes furthers the criticism by arguing that inspired by Blavatsky (54), Jenkins claims that "ancient Maya beliefs were part of a 'Primordial Tradition' … [and] reworks 'the story of 2012' and its 'truth' into justification for a self-help, motivational enterprise with great promise of commercial success" (55). Asking Jenkins to reply to these criticisms would have been an excellent idea, but Gelfer confesses to have not done so (6), and seems to have not even warned the author about the targeted readership, a constant issue in this collection. As a result, we end up with a paper of which most is an attack on the academic community against which Jenkins expresses feelings of bitterness and rejection. The author claims, for example, to "have consistently found that scholars are not

well apprised of one or more disciplines that are necessary for understanding the interdisciplinary synthesis I have offered" (171). He also complains that his "comments are frequently assailed by multiple critics who nitpick over semantics and evade addressing the main points and evidence I offer" (170). Finishing with a detailed analysis—which is almost impossible for the uninformed reader to follow–of a monument that seems to be at the center of the polemic between Maya scholars who consider it too eroded to study (see, for example, Van Stone on page 32 of this volume) and Jenkins who thinks the opposite, the final chapter of this book has clearly been used as a platform for Jenkins to attempt to convince scholars of Maya culture of his worth, and nothing else. It is unclear what we are meant to learn from this diatribe other than wishing that Jenkins had enrolled on a doctoral program and solved his issues of calendrical calculations within the community of researchers specializing on the subject. For the rest of us who are more interested in the impact and reception of the 2012 phenomenon, chapter 10 would have better served the collection as a concluding section which could have, for example, pointed out the significance of the phenomenon in the study of contemporary millenarianism and suggested further paths of research on the glocalization of stigmatized beliefs.

In conclusion, for the scholar or student in the broad field of religious studies, *2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse* fills a gap in the study of the 2012 phenomenon, albeit clumsily. As pointed out in this review, the target readership is difficult to identify with some chapters written in an academic tone and others much too simple in their analysis to entice the interest of postgraduate researchers. For readers of *Relegere* who are aware of Sitler's paper in its first edition, I would suggest that they start reading the book from chapters 4, 8, and 9. For the rest of those who think about reading this collection, know that, as the only inter-disciplinary study of the 2012 phenomenon published to this day, you have nothing to lose.

Ioannis Gaitanidis
White Rose East Asia Center and Kokugakuin University