

meanings). The good and the bad are construed as “life-giving” and “life-denying” beliefs and practices. Undertaken with generosity and care, likely few will disagree with his analysis and judgement. This is perhaps the most important function of Ferguson’s text: to remind us of the beneficent genius found in all of the great traditions, as well as their ethically and intellectually problematic and unsavoury aspects. Through the posing of questions at the end of each chapter the reader is encouraged to make their own assessment about what in each tradition is worth celebrating and even incorporating in the development of their own spiritual path, and what one might rightly jettison.

The introductory and concluding chapters explore “[t]he dimensions of a spiritual pathway for contemporary pilgrims.” (214) Therein the author enumerates notions and attitudes that one wishes all religious practitioners will champion, such as critically informed understandings of holy texts—intellectual honesty and credibility—and openness, and the cultivation of compassion and appreciation of other faith pathways. In the opening and concluding chapters Ferguson’s work particularly shines, providing points of entry for a fruitful consideration and discussion of religious/spiritual practice. While *Exploring the Spirituality of the World Religions* will not displace such celebrated classics as Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions* in the freshman classroom, it is nevertheless a clearly organized, astute, and appreciative introduction to the practice of spirituality in and through the great faith traditions. It could be particularly fitting in an adult education class that uses learning about the world’s religions as a springboard for further exploration of the development of spirituality today.

With Letters of Light. Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elijor

[Ekstasis, vol. 2]

Daphna V. Arbel and Andrei A. Orlov, eds. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011.

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Reviewed by Carla Sulzbach, North-West University

This volume is a well-deserved tribute consisting of nineteen studies by colleagues and former students to the wide-ranging scholarship of Rachel Elijor. Space prohibits a detailed survey of all the contributions, and therefore just a few of those that stand out in this reviewer’s opinion will be highlighted.

Some general remarks are in order about the volume itself. These are not the responsibility of either contributors or editors but have to do with the publisher and

format of the series. It should be noted that a complete bibliography of the honoree is lacking. In a Festschrift, such a listing should be expected. Further, the eclectic system of footnoting is needlessly complicated. It is hard on the reader to have to flip back and forth between footnotes or notes within the body of the text and the end bibliography, where full references are given. These should have been provided either in fuller footnotes, or each essay should have ended with its own individual bibliography. It is equally hard on students in need of a copy of a single essay, since in addition, they would need to request a copy of the entire bibliography, a whopping 64 pages (383–447)! Also lacking is an index of sources. Lastly, the volume is unfortunately riddled with an inordinate number of typographical errors. With a list price of almost \$ 200 one might have expected more care in proof reading.

Following the general introduction and words of appreciation to the honoree by Daphna Arbel, Andrei Orlov, and Frances Flannery, the volume divides the essays over three rather general rubrics: Exegesis, Ritual, and Transformation. It is clear from the character of the contributions that this leads to much overlap, since virtually all of them ultimately deal with one or more of these three aspects. I will, therefore, suggest a slightly different division in order to make clear in this short review how the essays correlate to Elijor's work. By grouping the essays in this way, it becomes clear how much her work provides other scholars with the tools and the platform for continuing research in these particular areas.

I. Sanctuary and City

This section sets the stage for the study of earthly sacred spaces and those who act in it, but at the same time these spaces provide a conduit to the heavenly counterparts and its players. Although there is evidence for the notion of a heavenly sanctuary, Verman shows that the concept of a heavenly Jerusalem may well have originated with Philo and Paul, independently of each other.

Silviu N. Bunta, "In Heaven or on Earth: A Misplaced Temple Question about Ezekiel's Visions";

James Davila, "Scriptural Exegesis in the Treatise of the Vessels, a Legendary Account of the Hiding of the Temple Treasures";

Mark Verman, "Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalem in Philo and Paul: A Tale of Two Cities";

Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "The Book of Watchers and the Cycle of New Year Festivals";

Jodi Magness, "The Impurity of Oil and Spit among the Qumran Sectarians".

II. Heavenly realms and angelic and human interactions

In addition to dealing with the traffic of humans, angels and 'demi-gods' between earthly and heavenly spaces, this section also deals with the very nature of the heavenly environment, the nature of its inhabitants, and the various forms of boundary crossings and transgressions between both realms. Orlov shows how in

the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Azazel, the leader of the fallen angels, transforms in a perfect mirror image of the Deity, by acquiring his exact attributes. He is, on the one hand, portrayed as a real contender for absolute power, but the dualistic character of the text, with each cosmic character ruling his own domain, seems to prevent that from happening. It is an eternal dance of good and evil around each other, thereby preserving the integrity of the cosmos.

Kelley Coblenz Bautch, “Peter and the Patriarch: A Confluence of Traditions?”;

Annette Yoshiko Reed, “From ‘Pre-Emptive Exegesis’ to ‘Pre-Emptive Speculation’? Ma‘aseh Bereshit in Genesis Rabbah and Pirquei deRabbi Eliezer”;

Andrei Orlov, “‘The Likeness of Heaven’: The Kavod of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham”;

Pieter van der Horst, “Mystical Motifs in a Greek Synagogal Prayer?”;

Naomi Janowitz, “‘You Are Gods’: Multiple Divine Beings in Late Antique Jewish Theology”.

III. Visionary experiences

The essays under this heading deal with a number of techniques that are thought to produce visions. This is done through the analysis of vision accounts as well as the increasing insight gained from medical and neurological science. For the latter, see especially Segal.

Dan Merkur, “Cultivating Visions through Exegetical Meditations”;

April DeConick, “Jesus Revealed: The Dynamics of Early Christian Mysticism”;

Alan Segal, “Transcribing Experience”.

IV. Role of women

In the literature of the Second Temple period, Late Antiquity as well as in later Rabbinic exegetical texts it can be observed how characters and events that are mentioned just briefly within short biblical passages grow into full narratives of their own. The papers in this group each treat an aspect of some such singular passages that are of interest to feminist interpretation. Whereas a negative or submissive portrayal of women is the rule, especially Arbel’s and Deutsch’s contributions show that this is not always so. Minov focuses on the perceived fatal connection between Eve and the serpent. This understanding originates in the linguistic proximity of the name Eve and the word for serpent in all Aramaic dialects. Harari explains that while the ancient rabbinic elite was not as averse to legitimate magic as previously thought, women remained in the domain of practitioners of illegitimate witchcraft. Lesses extends this to the domain of knowledge. The message conveyed is that in a patriarchal society this view of women keeps the cosmic order as it is: patriarchal.

Sergey Minov, “‘Serpentine’ Eve in Syriac Christian Literature of Late Antiquity”;

Daphna Arbel, “‘A Chariot of Light Borne by Four Bright Eagles’: Eve’s Vision of the Chariot in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve”;

Yuval Harari, “A Different Spirituality or ‘Other’ Agents?: On the Study of Magic in Rabbinic Literature”;

Rebecca Lesses, “‘They Revealed Secrets to Their Wives’: The Transmission of Magical Knowledge in 1 Enoch”;

Celia Deutsch, “Aseneth: Ascetical Practice, Vision, and Transformation”.

Lastly, Joseph Dan’s “Messianic Movements in the Period of the Crusades” is the sole representative of yet another of Elior’s areas of interest, messianism.

Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Laos Religious Culture

John Clifford Holt. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009.

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Reviewed by Chipamong Chowdhry, University of Toronto

Recently, Cambodia and Laos have become the most appealing areas for historians of religion in Buddhist studies.¹ In Laotian Buddhist culture, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the rituals involving local spirits (*phi*) and cult of *khwan* are common religious belief and cultural values. The religious culture in Laos could be called ‘trans-localized-Buddhism’ in which Hinduism and indigenous beliefs are combined with Buddhism. A veteran specialist on Sri Lankan Buddhist religious culture and its related issues, Holt, in this recent book: *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Laos Religious Culture*, offers another innovative insightful study of an important period of religious culture and political history of Buddhism in modern Laos.

The book consists of five loosely interwoven and thematic chapters followed by two appendixes. Holt’s argument is that normative interpretation of Laotian Theravāda Buddhism within the context of religious is placed within the framework of political history. With theoretical questions such as: What is the status of Buddhist practice in the everyday religious life of Laos? How can one relate the discrepancies between Buddhism and popular cultic practice in contemporary Laotian religious culture? How should one interpret the non-Buddhist elements that exist in Lao religious life? Holt tries to uncover the principle of the place of

1. Ian Harris. *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005 and Justin McDaniel. *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.