

guiding tool to orientate the reader in this already vast scholarly discourse, that is, NRM Studies. Naturally, as a matter of differing taste, some entries could well have been added to the existing ones, while others would have perhaps been equally well placed in the glossary section instead. Overall, Chryssides and Zeller have done a superb job, putting together an invaluable introduction to the field. Bravo!

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CONTEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITIES IN ISRAEL. Edited by Shai Feraro and James R. Lewis. Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. xvii + 249. Hardback, \$139.99; E-Book, \$109.00.

Beginning with the early 1980s, Israel has become a bustling breeding ground for a highly diverse religious milieu, inspired to varying degrees by overseas spiritual imports. This anthology, edited by Shai Feraro (Oranim Academic College, Israel) and James R. Lewis (University of Tromsø, Norway), offers the first comprehensive study in English that highlights selected representatives from the spectrum of contemporary spiritual movements which have decisively enriched Israel's religious landscape in the past decades. A dozen Israeli scholars from various academic backgrounds, including religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and folklore studies, have contributed to the volume, thus reflecting a broad diversity of perspectives and approaches. Following the editors' introductory remarks to the volume's scope and contents, R. Werczberger examines the reinterpretation of the exodus narrative in terms of "New Age Judaism" (or "Jew Age"), indigenous nature worship, and universal spirituality as a counter draft to the ethno-national Zionist narrative. In chapter 2, T. Persico reviews Paul Heelas' notion of the "utilitarian self," the harnessing of inner potentials for the maximization of material advantages, in the context of two major Neo-Kabbalistic movements. Next, E. Ramon reflects on the teachings of the female mystic Yemima Avital (1929–1999) who drew from Hassidic ideas of mental power. A. Prashizky continues with a study on the individualization of Israeli wedding ceremonies, where secular elements are combined with orthodox practices. In chapter 5, N. Zaidman sheds light on the growing spiritual care movement and its integration within Israeli medical institutions. While D. Simchai's discussion of New Age festivals addresses the problem of identity construction and demarcation strategies vis-à-vis the dominant culture, M. Sagiv takes a critical look at governmental measures to control the activities of New Religious Movements (NRMs). Chapters 8–10 focus on how "classical" overseas spiritual currents took root in Israel, covering Theosophy and Anthroposophy (I. Lubelsky), eschatological messages by Israeli channelists (A. Klin-Oron), as well as the "re-enchantment" of menstruation through "Yoga for Women" courses (C. Rosen Even-Zohar). The last two chapters outline

the Israeli adoption of the Mabon Sabbat, a neo-pagan festival developed in the UK and the US (O. Salinas Mizrahi), and the establishment of new Christian communities following the waves of African labor migrants since the 1990s (G. Sabar). The classification of the volume's sections would have benefited from a deeper theoretical grounding and more systematic reflections on the terms "New Age," "NRM," and "fringe (religion)." For example, the subsumption of Sagiv's essay under the section "New Age Culture in Israel" is a rather unfortunate choice, since the generic term NRM may include both New Age movements as well as more close-knit religious communities that do not necessarily anchor in the New Age discourse. At the same time, while Klin-Oron's essay on channeling was explicitly framed within a New Age context, it was placed between Theosophy and yoga under the somewhat vague heading "Some Popular Currents." Although the anthology is restricted to scattered case studies and cannot claim to represent an exhaustive investigation of the field, its strength is in providing a valuable resource both as an introduction for interested readers as well as a starting point for deeper scholarly explorations. Its regional focus on Israel might serve as an example for the production of similar volumes focusing on other social, political, and cultural contexts.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI: PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERN YOGA.

By Anya P. Foxen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xx + 238. Hardback, \$99.00; paperback, \$19.95.

The *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) by Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) has been regarded as a gateway into yoga and is widely acclaimed as a spiritual classic of the twentieth century. Yogananda, a crucial popularizer in yoga's early American history, exemplifies the nexus between the mythical and superhuman narratives of the Indian traditions and the health-oriented, postural practice of contemporary yoga. However, only few have ventured to untangle the yogi's deep linkages to Western metaphysical currents. Anya P. Foxen, an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo and an avid *yogini* herself, fills this gap with her compelling contribution. At the backdrop of the ongoing controversy over whether yoga constitutes a case of Western cultural appropriation of an ancient Indian tradition, she offers her insights into the disputed origins of modern yoga. Diverging from the conventional narrative that presents today's popularized version of yoga as an Indian practice transformed through Euro-American reinterpretations, Foxen demonstrates why the metaphor of an intimate entanglement of two trees rooted in South Asia *and* in the West, respectively, renders a more adequate description. Despite what the title suggests—a punchy allusion to the name of Yogananda's bestseller—Foxen's monograph is not an actual biography in the classical sense. It rather tells the story of how

the role of the “Yogi” was played out in front of a Western early twentieth-century audience in the case of Yogananda. To this end, she juxtaposes the representations of the yogi in their Indian and Western contexts, and outlines the development of scientific concepts involving a universal subtle medium (most notably *ākāśa*, *prāṇa*, ether, and energy)—the rationale behind the extraordinary powers allegedly obtainable through yogic practice. On this basis, she moves on to discuss Yogananda’s life, teachings, and *Autobiography* in light of his American audience’s Orientalist expectations as well as the metaphysical interests shaped by Mesmerism, Theosophy, Christian Science, and New Thought. The monograph is carefully edited, includes an index, and offers a thorough introduction. Scholars of modern yoga, metaphysical religion, and therapeutic spirituality will find Foxen’s study to be a valuable resource for further research.

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“CULT WARS” IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: NEW AND MINORITY RELIGIONS. Edited by Eugene V. Gallagher. Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements. London: Routledge, 2017. Pp. x + 178. Hardback, \$160.00; e-book, \$57.95.

Gallagher (b. 1950), the Rosemary Park Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Connecticut College, belongs to a pool of pioneering scholars in NRM (New Religious Movement) Studies. The volume (with one exception) brings together selected contributions from INFORM’s 25th Anniversary Conference in 2014, titled “Minority Religions: Contemplating the Past and Anticipating the Future.” Next to a brief editor’s introduction, the volume is divided into two parts. Part 1 comprises of scattered short contributions by NRM scholars; Part 2 includes insider perspectives on recent developments in four well-known NRMs. INFORM’s foundress and Honorary Acting Director, Eileen Barker, reviews the history and the context of the tense relationship between NRM Studies and the cult-awareness movement (CAM). Next, Massimo Introvigne provides an autobiographically informed history of his Turin-based *Centro studi sulle nuove religioni* (Center for Studies on New Religions or, in short, CESNUR). Timothy Miller traces highlights of the “cult conflicts” of the 1970s–1990s, concluding that “the conflict seems to have died down somewhat, but it is still with us, and certainly no one can so far claim victory.” George D. Chryssides outlines the history of NRM Studies, while Benjamin Zeller looks specifically at the (institutional) history and current situation of the discipline in the United States. James T. Richardson offers a “descriptive presentation of developing patterns of jurisprudence in Europe and America.” Finally, Dinka Marinović Jerolimov and Ankica Marinović, in a case study, explore the emergence of CAM groups in Croatia. The following contributions give instructive emic accounts focusing on 1) the transformation of The Family International (TFI, formerly Children of God), penned

by a former TFI spokesperson as well as a former TFI director of international public affairs; 2) the more recent corroding developments within the Unification Movement penned by a former British rank and file member and long-time missionary; 3) the CAM-ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) relationship penned by the ISKCON minister of communications; and 4) the evolution of (Scientology) Freezone and the perceived “success story” of mainline Scientology, penned by a key actor of the Freezone community and the current president of the Union of the Churches of Scientology in France, respectively.

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UFOS, CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE NEW AGE: MILLENNIAL CONSPIRACISM. By David G. Robertson. Bloomsbury Advances in Religious Studies. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp. viii+250. Hardback, \$120.00; Paperback, \$42.95; E-Book, \$35.95.

David G. Robertson (b. 1975) is a Lecturer in Religious Studies at the Open University, UK, and the co-editor (alongside Asbjørn Dyrendal and Egil Asprem) of the “Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion” (Brill, 2018). The book is based on his doctoral thesis entitled “Conspiracism: UFOs as Discursive Unit between Millennial and Conspiracist Fields” (2014), supervised by Steven Sutcliffe and submitted at Edinburgh University’s Department of Religious Studies. The book’s subject is “millennial conspiracism,” which he defines as an amalgamation of “conspiracy narratives concerning the machinations of hidden agencies” and “popular millennial [i.e., New Age] discourses concerning imminent global transformation.” Robertson argues that the UFO narrative serves as a unifying thread between the two areas, which being fused together would provide to believers a “theodicy of the dispossessed,” that is, a *raison d’être* for the socio-economic and spiritual captivation of most of humanity. Drawing upon discourse analysis as well as ethnographic research, three case studies are subsequently marshaled—Whitley Strieber (b. 1945) and his abductee narrative, David Icke (1952) and his reptilian thesis, and David Wilcock (b. 1973) and his 2012 millennial vision. Robertson convincingly shows how they employ various “counter-epistemic strategies”—namely, tradition, science, experience, synthesis, channeling—which produce “epistemic capital,” creating discursive authority within the millennial conspiracist community. Ultimately, he posits, it is the possession of knowledge of truth held back by malevolent forces, gained through the epistemic capital that renders the millennial conspiracist community a veritable “counter-elite.” This fascinating book is an important contribution and a delight to read.

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