

Book Reviews

Kelly Pemberton: *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010, 233 pp.

This thoroughly researched book by Kelly Pemberton, currently associate professor of religion and women's studies at George Washington University, centers on the issue of women's ritual activities at Sufi shrines in India, with special attention to the question of female authority. The author's research interest stems from the gap she perceives between the assertions that people she met made – that women could not participate in Sufi rituals nor hold positions of authority because it was against Islam – and her observations that, in certain cases, they indeed did. This initial questioning was reinforced by the fact that it wasn't only men who were asserting the inappropriateness of women participating in Sufi rituals or holding positions of authority; the very women participating in rituals or exercising spiritual authority also mostly shared these views. Pemberton notes that this last point makes it difficult to interpret such practices as evidence of resistance.

Indeed, in line with the anthropologist Saba Mahmood, she rejects the approach that views Muslim women's religious practices in terms of oppression and resistance to an Islamic patriarchy. Aiming to move beyond simplistic binary oppositions of authority and challenge to

that authority, she draws on subaltern studies to show 'how women's participation in the world of Sufi shrines in North India challenges but also sustains prevalent ideals of Islamic womanhood' (p. xvi).

Pemberton concentrates on three Sufi families and their associated shrines: the Gudri Shah branch of the Chishti order, in Rajasthan, and the Bihar Sharif and the Maner branches of the Firdausi order, both located in Bihar. She integrates both historical and ethnographic data into her analysis, drawing on a vast and diverse body of sources to place her findings in a broader religious and historical context. This range of data gives her study an exceptional depth. Collecting her own data between 1996 and 2000, she spent a lot of time at the three shrines, thus adding participant observation as a method to formal interviews in order to be able to delve into the realm of women's lived experiences.

The book opens with a historical chapter where the author analyses the prevalent colonial-era discourses on religious practices at Sufi shrines in India. She concentrates on three groups of commentators: British civil servants, Orientalist scholars, and Muslim reformist thinkers, and shows how British civil servants and Orientalist scholars' mostly negative portrayals of Indian Islam as a degenerated form of Islam have influenced Indian Muslim's self-understanding. Pemberton shows that these ideas are still manifest in today's perception of

women's religion and activities in the shrine setting.

Pemberton comes to the heart of the matter in chapter 2, where she discusses the religious authority of women from the three Sufi families that she studied. The chapter starts with a taxonomy of the master-disciple relationship; from the formalized relationship found in institutionalized orders, all the way to looser and more informal associations between *pir* (spiritual guide) and clients. Pemberton shows that studies focusing on the official side of Sufism are bound to be men-centered, whereas attention to more informal relationships allows scholars to better grasp the roles that women can play as religious authorities. Pemberton goes on to demonstrate that even within the established Sufi orders, women can be recognized as 'de facto spiritual guides', albeit without official sanction. She substantiates her claims by presenting some ethnographic examples involving the women from the *pir* families; she shows how the scope of these women's actions depends on their capacity to position themselves as being wholly in conformity with Islamic prescriptions of womanhood and the ideal that women's authority is subordinate to that of men.

With its multilayered depiction of women as 'de facto *pirs*', this chapter represents a very important contribution to the existing literature, in which the spiritual authority of women inside the realm of the orders has often been overlooked.

Unfortunately, the link between the author's theorization and the parts where she presents her own data is not always straightforward. It remains unclear, for instance, where exactly the women of *pir* families fit in her taxonomy of the master-disciple relationship, especially since the three categories that form the typology seem to be defined differently at various places in the chapter. It is regrettable that the author did not devote more room to the description and analyses of her own data at this stage.

Women's participation in the Sufi musical assemblies and their activities as performers of *qawwali* (Indo-Pakistani Sufi music) are outlined in the next chapter. Pemberton has witnessed the participation of women and their performance as singers in mixed assemblies several times during her fieldwork, but the propriety of both practices is very much debated among the people interviewed in her study. Pemberton notes that contemporary discussions on women's participation in these events draw on different positions expressed in the foundational texts of Islam and classical Sufi literature. She explains the apparent contradiction outlined above by the fact that the notions of 'proper' versus 'improper' that can be found in these texts is open to interpretation, and she shows how the understanding of these concepts shifts according to the contexts, circumstances and genres of performance.

The fourth chapter focuses on Sufism outside the established orders,

where, as this book demonstrates, most women wielding authority operate. The chapter starts with a long description of the author's encounter with a female ritual specialist, who practices petitioning on behalf of clients at an auxiliary shrine linked to the Bihar Sharif branch of the Firdausi order. Pemberton shows that such female ritual specialists meet with much contempt, especially from masculine figures of authority linked to the Sufi orders, as their activities take place outside the control of the formal orders. They are viewed as not conforming to prevailing social views about 'correct' behavior for women, and are deemed responsible for the dubious reputation of Sufism as favoring non-Islamic practices. Due to their belonging to lower social classes and the fact that their ritual practices do not fit prevailing social norms of propriety, such as sex segregation and female subordination to male authority, female ritual specialists are marginalized. Pemberton convincingly shows that it is precisely this outsider status that gives them more scope to act than the women of the *pir* families of much higher social status.

In her conclusion, Pemberton revisits her case studies and comes back to her initial question. She highlights the fundamental ambiguity of the overarching organizing framework, based on Islam's foundational symbols and the tradition of the order, that underlies the discourses of the people participating in the Indian shrine settings. This

ambiguity explains the gap outlined above between the discourse denying women access to authority and their effective participation as ritual specialists, and ultimately allows for women to hold authority in the Indian shrine setting.

Despite some descriptive sections on the participation of women in rituals, including a beautifully written passage on the author's encounter with the ritual specialist practicing petitioning, the book on the whole stays at a fairly abstract and theoretical level. After having read the last page, the reader is left with the feeling of not having really got to know these women from the *pir* families: who are they, how do they live their daily lives, what do they think? Relatively little ethnographic data is presented in Pemberton's discussion of female authority, too – as opposed to their participation in rituals, on which subject she seems to have more evidence. This is particularly frustrating since it is in its discussion of female authority in Sufism where the book's main contribution to the existing literature lies. The author's own recognition, in the conclusion, that 'the subject of women as spiritual authorities in their own right afforded few actual examples for observation' (p.170) comes as a disappointment in the light of the expectations she raised in the introduction by underscoring that her observations contradict the idea of women not being allowed to have authority in Sufism. Actually, I suspect that the author could have done more with the data she had at

her disposal, and could have delved into more detailed descriptions and analysis of the few examples she observed.

This lack of actually observed instances of women showing authority must however be linked to the difficulty of researching this subject. In the light of these hardships, the author has done an admirable job analyzing the various practises of women in the shrine setting, subtly showing how they can at the same time have internalized ideals of Islamic womanhood that would prevent them from holding authority, and still act in ways that contradict and ultimately can transform these ideals.

Lastly, a minor point relates to the formal structure of the book. There tends to be a lack of explicit transitions throughout the book, which makes the author's complex and rich reasoning sometimes hard to follow. Some important information also comes quite late in the book; essential background information on the families that form the core of the study, for instance, comes only on page 86. A map of the fieldwork sites and a chart representing the important *pirs* mentioned would also have been really helpful to allow the reader to situate them.

Despite these few points, *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India* is an important study and a real asset to the existing literature. To my knowledge, it is one of the first books published in English devoted entirely to the question of female authority in Sufism. The author explores this

issue convincingly and the book is a rich source of information on women's activities in the shrine setting in India. This book will be appreciated by scholars interested in religion in India, but also more generally in questions related to female religious practices and authority since its theoretical contribution reaches far beyond the geographical frame.

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Arkotong Longkumer: *Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India.* London: Continuum, 2010, 258 pp.

Group identity construction and boundary maintenance is a rich subject area, as indicated in this volume of the Continuum Advances in Religious Studies series. Arkotong Longkumer's research has resulted in an in-depth ethno-historical study of the Heraka movement among the Naga people in the North Cachar Hills of Assam in Northeast India. Longkumer interweaves the historical material with the Zeme Naga's own narratives, providing an insight into changes in a people's self-identity and practice linked to notions of reform. This study brings together many themes of interest in the study of religions and culture, not least the tensions between the universal and particular, reform and tradition, and national and ethnic identities. Longkumer connects Heraka identity formation, partly in response to European colonisation

and questions of what or who is 'Hindu' (p. 10), to narratives of difference. The Heraka movement find themselves negotiating boundaries with Hindus, Christians and Pau-paise, an ancestral tradition from which Heraka derived.

The origins of the Heraka in the late colonial period are touched upon and how its efforts at reform are reflected in ritual practice, such as the gradual end to animal sacrifice. It began when a charismatic leader, Jadonang, emerged as a prophet among the Rongmei Naga, eventually hanged for murder by the British in 1931. His younger cousin Ranima Gaidinliu, although imprisoned in 1932 for 18 years, continued to lead the movement until her death in 1993. The movement was known generally by the names of these two prominent leaders until 1974, when they adopted the name 'Heraka', which is stated as meaning 'not impure', but perhaps more literally means 'avoid small gods', in reference to the sacrifices to lesser gods prohibited within the Heraka movement (p. 8). Of interest is that they have started to promote themselves as an indigenous tradition reformed by Jadonang (p. 41), 'using history as a tool to indigenize the past and make certain claims' (p. 48), in order to compete with 'foreign' Christianity.

The chapters are arranged thematically, though with many overlapping areas, such as community construction. After the introduction, chapter two recounts the historical pilgrimage to the Bhuban cave,

viewed as the starting point of the Heraka movement, and a practice revived in contemporary times. The cave and the Bhuban Hill itself are significant to other traditions, too, which is often the case with such landmarks as hills, and in sharing the ritual space distinctions are drawn and disputes over practice arise (p. 39). Chapter three is on the early beginnings of the movement and the impact of colonialism that helped shape it, as well as the reforming and millenarian proclivities of the movement. Chapter four explores the cosmological dimensions of the Heraka, while chapter five focuses on positionality and boundaries vis-à-vis Hindus and Christians and on its relationship to Naga nationalism. Chapter six focuses on the Heraka conception of a 'free community' (*heguangram*) and the ways it is encapsulated in narratives, as well as some gender aspects, such as the claims of divine lineage by the second leader, Ranima Gaidinliu, who saw herself as empowered by the goddess Durga (p. 181).

One of the arguments put forward by Longkumer, explored in chapter three, is how colonial misunderstandings of local agrarian practices allowed another group to settle on land used for crops, contributing to food shortages, and thus creating the conditions for a radical movement to arise. The Heraka transformed local social and economic structures, promoting one God while diminishing costly animal sacrifices, as did Christian movements, with whom they com-

peted – a rivalry that continues today. The Heraka's relationship with Hinduism, though, is highly complex; at times the Heraka emphasise difference, and at other times draw associations with the god Vishnu (as the founder Jadonang himself did, p. 49).

The author's personal encounters and fieldwork experiences enliven this greatly textured study, especially his account of the pilgrimage to the Bhuban cave in chapter two where he witnessed a dispute between a Heraka elder and another local group's priest over offerings on the altar. Occasionally the references to theoretical sources (such as the Turners' work on pilgrimage and *communitas*, p. 44) appear only as overlays that are briefly explored, which are useful for setting the data within wider socio-historical and anthropological debates. The book also includes a useful glossary of terms.

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Eller, Jack David: *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence across Culture and History*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010, 490 pp.

Though in the last decades inter- and cross-disciplinary research overstepping the purported boundary between humanities and social sciences is becoming more common, there are still way too few books in religious studies (as humanities *par excellence*) the authors of which would venture into fields of the

social sciences. This, however, is precisely what Jack David Eller does in his *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence across Culture and History*.

The book starts with two theoretical chapters, each concerned with one of the two major keywords of the book – 'violence' and 'religion'. The first, on violence, is a well-done exposé of what should and what should not necessarily count as violence. Eller goes to lengths in providing a comprehensive overview of the causes and consequences as well as the contents of violence in generic terms, with arguments drawn from the social sciences. The second chapter focuses on the concept of 'religion', which the author argues to be much more complex than is generally perceived. The two introductory chapters not only skillfully problematize the issue of 'religious violence', understood by author as violence by humans which is 'directed toward religious objects and goals or related to religious groups and beliefs and causes' (p. 52), but also lay a solid ground for the following thematic chapters, which pretty much cover the variety of historically found religion-inspired violence, ranging from violence administered to self (self-injury, Ch. 4) to that addressed toward other humans (sacrifice, Ch. 3; persecution, Ch. 5; ethnoreligious conflict, Ch. 6; war, Ch. 7; and even homicide and abuse, Ch. 8). However, one aspect of religious (religion-induced) violence is conspicuously absent from the volume – that of

legal punishments, like the Islamic *hudud*, which tend to be corporal (and thus, violent). Inclusion of a chapter on religion-sanctioned legal punishments would have made the picture complete.

In the middle chapters, 3 through 8, Eller combines the research methods of history and religious studies; and overall, the book might be regarded as a history of religions, albeit from one specific perspective, that of religion-related violence. The list of religions dealt with is indeed impressive. In addition to the usual suspects – Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism – Eller provides ample examples from several dozen ‘local’ (as opposed to ‘world’) religions, as well a number of historical (extinct) religions, such as those of the Romans and Aztecs.

However, though he admits the distinction between religions of global reach and community-limited religions, Eller hardly employs it as an analytical tool in his analysis, and tends to treat them as equal, without emphasizing that the latter are not only ‘local’ but also almost extinct and struggling for survival (thus they can be spoken of primarily from a historical perspective), while the former (‘world’ religions) are not only alive and kicking but indeed expanding (often at the expense of those ‘local’ religions), and thus should be analyzed from a social and even political perspective as currently valid social (even global) actors. The third type are those religions which in their prime time might have been powerful (with a

mass following living in the vast territory of an empire in which that religion was supreme), but now exist no more – such as the Aztec, Roman and suchlike religions.

To cover such a vast variety of religions as Eller does must be a challenge; to cover them from an informed position is even harder – it is impossible for any single person to have first-hand professional knowledge about such an array of religions (and their cultural and linguistic milieu). One is compelled to use secondary sources, and to rely heavily on other scholars’ findings. That Eller is only shallowly familiar with Islam, for instance, is evident from a number of factual mistakes, such as identifying Ali ibn Abi Talib as Muhammad’s descendent (p. 75), when in fact he was his cousin; Shia imams are called ‘rightly guided prophets’ (p. 128), and Druzes regarded as a Muslim sect (p. 232), though neither they nor mainstream Muslims consider themselves Muslim.

Another major issue is the realization of a distinction between religious normativism (the normative level in religion, the legalist dimension), on the one hand, and actual daily religiosity (and religious justification or lack thereof for actions and activities, including violent ones) on the other. For it is a truism that what people do, even when they claim to be doing so for religious reasons, might be contrary to what their religious scriptures and authorities preach and promote. For instance, much domestic violence is seen as culturally offensive and forbidden

by religious hierarchs of many, if not most religions. Or consider the abuse (especially, sexual abuse) of juveniles – although some Catholic priests may at times convince themselves that they do this in good faith, and their victims might also see no harm in what is being done to them, yet it in no way legitimizes (or even worse, legitimately institutionalizes) such practices in the Catholic Church. Likewise, atrocities perpetrated in Iraq by various militant groups in the aftermath of its occupation (or liberation, if one prefers this term) by the Americans and their allies, though claimed to be carried out in the name of religion, have hardly been endorsed by either supreme Sunni or Shia authorities, inside or outside the country. Eller in his book appears to have overlooked this crucial aspect.

One might argue that a differentiation between anti-systemic millenarian groups and doomsday cults (collectively referred to in the academic literature as 'New Religious Movements'), few of which survive beyond the time of their founders' generation, on the one hand, and established religious traditions with a life-span of hundreds or thousands of years, on the other hand, would be meaningful for analytical purposes as much as a differentiation between 'local' (pre-modern) and 'world' religions. Because of their essential differences (ideological, structural, institutional, operational and other), such faith-communities as, for instance, Branch Davidians (a typical NRM) and Catholics call for dif-

ferent analytical approaches in the study of their sanctioned and perpetrated violence. In other words, the nature of and justification for violence engaged in by the groups representing these two different types might (and indeed does) differ cardinally. This distinction in the book, however, is blurred time and again.

The book ends with a chapter on 'nonviolence'. Unlike the previous chapters, which tend to be scholarly 'sober', this one is in its nature a normative one. Here Eller argues in favor of religious non-violence, at times even preaching to unidentified religious authorities as to how they should behave. The section on 'the religious contribution to nonviolence' borders on a programmatic outline of how and where religions could (should?) contribute to the global spread of nonviolence. Eller's recipe includes greater secularization and even syncretization. Compared to the theoretical and historical chapters, this last polemical chapter reads as if it were an autonomous text of a very different nature.

After reading the book one is left wondering how come there is so little in it about Islam; for is it not Islam that today is so often associated with religious violence? For instance, the annual commemoration of al-Hussein's death, with self-flagellation processions on the day of Ashura (which incidentally becomes 'Asura' in the book) by hundreds of thousands of Shias around the world, often themselves facing

violence from the Sunnis, deserves more than a couple of paragraphs. And the notion of Islamic martyrdom – *shahada* – is much more complex than Eller enables one to grasp in the few paragraphs he devotes to it.

Quoting from religious scriptures sometimes becomes problematic, especially if one does not know the language of the original and has to rely on translations. So, for instance on page 268, the Quran is quoted as ‘commanding’ the making of war, though in Arabic the word used is *qital* – ‘fighting’. And not all (any) fighting is war. *Fitna* on the same page is translated as ‘persecution’, though once again, its original meanings are ‘disorder, turmoil, disarray, confusion’.

The book is an impressively successful attempt at an archaeology of violence in religion, and should make a good textbook for students of the history of religions. Those studying the relationship between religion and politics should find the book also useful. Psychologists of religion would also be advised to familiarize themselves with the findings and arguments of the book.

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Kristina Myrvold (ed.): *The Death of Sacred Texts: Ritual Disposal and Renovation of Texts in World Religions*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, 172 pp.

When Hurricane Katrina crossed Florida in August 2005, not only did it demolish people’s homes, but it also destroyed seven Torah scrolls belonging to the New Orleans Orthodox Jewish community. The following year, the community gathered in a ceremony for the burial of these scrolls. The rabbi who provided the service compared these scrolls to Jewish men and women who also need to be buried when they die. This incident, described by Marianne Schleicher in *The Death of Sacred Texts*, edited by Kristina Myrvold, nicely illustrates the care that religious communities take of their sacred texts. In so doing, they accord these sacred texts equivalent respectful treatment as they do to humans.

In all of the world religions, there comes a time when sacred texts used for religious worship and ritual procedures are too old and damaged to be handled any more. What do people do with these texts? How are texts which are considered to be sacred disposed of? Sacred texts constitute an elementary component in religious rituals, but what are the rituals used for their disposal? This collection of articles on the disposal and renovation of sacred texts offers answers to these questions, and an exceptional and much needed contribution to the study of world religions.

Myrvold's book fills the obvious gap in the study of world religions by exploring historical and contemporary attitudes towards and practices of text disposal within seven religious traditions, of which three originated in the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and four in India (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism). In addition to these seven articles, the volume opens with Myrvold's introduction and ends with James W. Watts' concluding reflections for further study. This is a well-conceived and structured collection of articles, and offers inspiring and thought-provoking reading, not only for teachers who year after year need to unravel the secrets of world religions to their students, but also for anyone interested in knowing about aspects of beliefs and rituals that she or he most likely won't find in ordinary textbooks of world religions.

The first question one needs to ask when studying different world religions naturally concerns the definition of 'sacred texts'. What makes a text 'sacred' and what is the 'sacredness' attached to a particular text? The bottom line in answering these questions no doubt lies in the meaning of the word 'text'. In her introduction, Myrvold briefly touches upon these issues. She refers to Miriam Levering's definition of a sacred text as 'authoritative oral or written texts that are canonical and normative, often believed to be of divine origin, and treated as sacred and powerful', and mentions an important development in research

steering away from a dichotomy between oral and written texts to a more holistic view of their co-existence and complex interaction. Moreover, she refers to a process entitled 'entextualization', whereby a text is made into a unit and detached from its temporal and cultural contexts and thereby 'frozen' and 'treated as a coherent and separate entity or object with a specific identity, form and boundaries'. In religious language, these texts are often attributed to superhuman authors and ascribed supernatural presence and powers when ritually displayed. Whatever the case may be, the sacredness of a religious text can be seen to reside in a different, contested contextual status, encompassing the content or material form of the text, status of the author, the words themselves or even the surface where these words are inscribed. Hence, sacredness of a text can be a very complicated issue.

When studying the 'death of sacred texts', Myrvold makes an important observation: religious texts are not only used as a source of doctrine and ethics, but are also treated as artifacts that in themselves are sacred and hence can yield power merely as physical objects. In other words, it is not only the content of the sacred texts that matter but their physical form as well. Consequently, sacred texts are not only vessels of communication between the Divine and the human, but also objects of respect and veneration. From this point of view, they constitute an important part of religions' material culture. Moreover, this fact

shows how closely materiality and spirituality can be connected in people's minds, as noted by Nalini Balbir in relation to Jainism. Truly, the academic study of religions has paid too little attention to this side of religious texts. In his article on Islam, Jonas Svensson could be right in saying that one reason for this lies in the inherited Protestant bias with a rather restricted view of religion mainly as a set of beliefs, a message and ethics. A similar observation is also made by Dorina Miller Parmenter, who reflects on the hegemony of Protestant Christianity in religious studies and in modern colonialism. Myrvold, nonetheless, is hopeful in maintaining that religious studies and anthropology have started to pay attention also to the practical and contextual factors pertaining to sacred texts, and hence to the different uses that are made of these texts in various cultural contexts. The relationship between texts, practices and contexts is very complex indeed.

This move away from a purely textual approach is also accompanied by another important change of focus in research that Myrvold's book highlights: it helps us to widen the scope of research on the range of users of the sacred texts, from the religious elite to religious practitioners in general. A textual approach directs our attention to the religious specialists, who have the authority to compile and interpret the sacred texts. However, sacred texts are also used by religious adherents who do not necessarily understand or

care for the content of the texts so much as for their qualities as sacred objects. In the popular imagination, sacred texts may be seen as social actors, even on the same scale as deities or saints, however much such beliefs would be frowned upon by the religious elite. As an example, one can refer to Jonas Svensson's observation about contemporary Muslim reformists who, for the most part, focus on the content of the Qurán, and dismiss popular piety's attitude towards it as a sacred object as some sort of superstition (p. 32). Examining sacred texts as physical objects thus avoids the much criticized elitist bias in the study of world religions, and instead reveals different beliefs and practices of popular and everyday religiosity that otherwise would go unnoticed. Studying popular religiosity is of special importance where people have a low level of literacy and therefore cannot themselves read their religious texts.

One could easily assume that the way sacred texts are envisaged in a religious tradition will affect the means of disposal of those texts too old and damaged to be used in rituals. Thus, it comes as a surprise that many religious traditions seem to lack any authorized formal customs and prescriptions for the disposal of sacred texts. This perspective is also reflected in the articles, which focus mainly on the perception of the sacred texts within a religious tradition and only to a lesser degree on the disposal of these texts. A clear exception to this, however, is

Myrvold's own article on Sikhism, which has created specific cremation rituals for 'aged' texts of Guru Granth Sahib. Burial is another ritual of text disposal which is used, to varying degrees, in Judaism (Schleicher), Christianity (Miller Parmenter), Islam (Svensson) and Buddhism (Moerman). Deleting a text with immersion to water is practiced, for instance, in Hinduism (Broo) and in Jainism (Balbir). What James W. Watts concludes is that these rituals regularly take the form of funerals, and in so doing point to an analogy between texts and humans. These rituals, moreover, often involve practices related to purity and pollution, which, as Watts notes, 'remain undertheorized in religious studies'.

To sum up, the aim of Myrvold's book is to offer a 'preliminary survey' on the study of ritualized methods of disposing of sacred texts from an 'empirical and comparative' point of view. The description as a preliminary survey is apt; the articles published in this book show that there is much empirical research yet to be done on this issue. The lack of research also explains the difficulty of making comprehensive comparisons between rituals of text disposal in different world religions, but Myrvold's thoughtful introduction is a step towards that end. The discussion in these articles, moreover, inescapably raises an important question as to how the new means of reproducing sacred texts, such as digitization, are changing the ways they are perceived, used

and disposed of. The Internet is an abundant source of sacred texts; computers, e-readers and mobile phones are new vessels of their distribution. The new information technology democratizes the availability and use of sacred texts, as of many other things, but there is as yet very little research on its impacts on the world religions at large.

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Mikko Heimola: *Religious Rituals and Social Norms in the Making of Adaptive Systems: Empirical and Theoretical Synthesis of Revivals in 19th Century Finland*. Department of World Cultures, Helsinki University, 2012, 273 pp.

In this dissertation the author discusses the rituals and social norms of the Finnish revival movements as seen against earlier research. There has been a considerable amount of research into the Finnish revival movements by church historians, historians and sociologists. The author agrees with earlier research that the revivals at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century arose as a response to the major social changes that were taking place, especially the agricultural reforms (collectively held land was divided into separate plots) and rapid population growth.

The author uses Costly Signaling theory to explore if this theory gives a better understanding of the revival

movements than earlier approaches. He suggests that the ecstatic phenomena, in particular, which in the beginning characterized most revivals, can be explained with the help of this theory.

The author takes three revivals for a more in-depth examination: the Jumping revival in Satakunta, the Kuortane revival in southern Ostrobothnia and the Ostrobothnian *Skört* (*körttiläisyys*) or Old Pietistic revival in Ostrobothnia and Savonia. The only one of these that has survived is the *Skört* revival. The author does not examine more closely the Laestadian revival or the Evangelical movement that broke off as a schismatic movement from the *Skört* revival, which have both been prominent in earlier research.

The author takes as his starting point the costly rituals that were created in act and meaning to separate the Awakened from non-believers. These 'costly signals' included strong expressions of emotion, distinctive praying postures, prayer meetings, distinctive clothing, the prohibition of smoking and alcohol, and sexual restraint. These 'costly signals' included strong expressions of emotion, distinctive praying postures, prayer meetings, distinctive clothing, the prohibition of smoking and alcohol, and sexual restraint. On occasion, even stricter demands could sometimes be imposed, but on the other hand the Awakened could sometimes be given liberties that were not universally imposed (sex, alcohol). This collective deviant behavior resulted in court cases, which

further stigmatized the movements' followers.

The resulting court proceedings provide information about the social background of the revival population. Peasants and craftsmen constituted the central force in the revivals; both were groups that were strongly affected by the official regulations and reforms. The poorest population were not part of the revivals. The author asks why economic dissatisfaction created religious movements, and suggests that the Awakened felt that they were watched over by God who cared for their livelihood. At the same time they lived in a constant state of insecurity about their eternal fate. Here one can find a parallel to the analysis by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber argues that the first-generation Protestants were tormented by constant insecurity about their eternal fate, because they took the doctrine of predestination in earnest. The 'costly' rituals, the prayer meetings and the ecstasy were experienced in the presence of a watching God. The State Church was seen hypocritically defending the old order, and the purpose of ecstasy was to distinguish the Awakened from the ungodly, and to measure the earnestness in the believers' engagement. Advocates for the cognitive theory emphasize that people cannot bluff with their emotional expressions, but rather these can be used as an entrance ticket to the new community. Once the new group has established itself, it can encounter the official social exclu-

sion with new social norms which give support to the in-group in preference over the out-group (e.g. in commercial transactions). Weber argues that Protestants looked for signs of belonging to the Elect from their success in their work.

Using Costly Signaling theory, the author quite convincingly describes how religious group formation takes place and how boundaries are drawn against those who remain outside. Durkheim saw religion as a creator of social cohesion. The results of Heimola's study show that the community is created with and by contrast to the 'others' on the outside. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to see when the 'costly' demands result in a functioning group formation, and the deviating group becomes accepted as the rightful holder of the 'keys to heaven', or when on the other hand external or internal demands result in catastrophe. Heimola is familiar with the way that expressions of emotion have been institutionalized within the Laestadian movement, but his explanation for the difference from the *Skört* movement, as a result of the long distances and the poverty in Lapland (where the Laestadian movement emerged), falters somewhat. As Heimola points out, more research into the leadership is needed. How did the men take over the leadership from the women, and to what extent did ordained clergy contribute to making the *Skört* movement an influential movement within the established Church?

On the whole Heimola's dissertation is a well-written and balanced analysis. The discussion of 'Costly Signaling' links the study of revival movements to an international debate to which Richard Sosis, among others, has contributed. The Finnish material shows perhaps more clearly than earlier research that 'costly' rituals need to be seen in relation to controversy between people. The rituals do not *per se* create social cohesion, but rather the sense of togetherness is an outcome of conflict. Religion can be seen – as in the writings of Émile Durkheim – as a factor creating social cohesion, but also as a creator of conflicts, a feature which was not emphasised by Durkheim.

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