Lewis, James and Murphy Pizza, *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009); pp. 649. ISBN: 9789004163737.

Having read not only Markus Altena Davidsen's 'What is wrong with Pagan Studies?'[1] but also Melissa Harrington's self-reflexive response[2] and Ethan Doyle White's defensive stance,[3] I find myself faced with a quite debated volume more than ten years after its publication. Not an easy task, but I will nevertheless take a look, once more, at the *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism* itself. First, I will give a short summary of the *Handbook*; second, I will consider the decade since its publication, to conclude whether, and on what grounds, this book remains more than just a piece of historical evidence in the Study of Paganism.

Starting with the "Contents", it is a delight to see the chapter titles are not all "Contemporary Paganism this or that", which is sometimes a problem with handbooks. The chapters here, instead, are titled more informatively and it is easy to navigate to different topics. They are first categorized based on their perspective: historical and sociological; and then by subjects; ritual, goddess and theology, various traditions, family and popular culture, and finally racial-ethnic issues are addressed. Looking at the whole of the book, it seems like a versatile collection of chapters. Both qualitative and quantitative research are present; paganism is studied from the point of view of very close participant observations, and the historical and quantitative studies give a wider perspective.

At first, I am struck with how value-laden the language in the Introduction is. I am not used to reading about "some of the most innovative religious expressions, praxes, theologies, and communities" (p. 1). Don't get me wrong, I think academic writing often lacks colour and creative stances but, to me, a researcher should steer away from the

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[1] Markus Altena Davidson, 'What is wrong with Pagan Studies?', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2012), pp. 183-199.

[2] Melissa Harrington: 'A reflexive critique of Markus Davidsen's "What is wrong with Pagan Studies",' discussion paper at the AAR Conference, Contemporary Pagan Studies section, 2013. See also Melissa Harrington, 'Reflecting on Studying Wicca from Within the Academy and the Craft: An Autobiographical Perspective', *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, Vol. 17, nos 1-2 (2016), pp. 180-193.

[3] Ethan Doyle White, 'In Defense of Pagan Studies: A Response to Davidsen's Critique', *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*, vol. 14, No. 1 (2012), pp. 5-21.

evaluation of religions. The subject, contemporary paganism, is a very creative way of expressing one's religiosity. It is not an easy task to try to capture everything that is exclusively "paganism," but the introduction gives a relatively good idea of what kind of religiosity we are talking about – although it poorly relates paganism with other religious phenomena around it in the contemporary world. The "Introduction" reads to me as a critique of institutionalized religion, and sets paganism against a world that "seems to be growing more alienated, automated, and meaningless" (p. 3). Of course, this is a very opinionated view regarding the world, and hence my reading experience does not start with high hopes.

The book discusses different traditions from around the world, yet the Eastern European and Scandinavian perspectives are clearly missing. Even the Scandinavian tradition is addressed from the United Kingdom and United States perspectives. It is refreshing, however, to have an article on Australian pagans (Douglas Ezzy) since paganism is often very Europe and US centred and, considering the way pagan religions challenged the patriarchal and hierarchical societies, the perspectives on feminist spirituality (Carole M. Cusack and Jone Salomonsen) are to the point.

All in all, the topics are eclectic, no doubt: I am not entirely sure of the internal logic of the different chapters and their points of view into different aspects of paganism vary far and wide. Many of the articles are very descriptive of personal experiences on the field. I believe Davidsen did not appreciate the ratio of pagans studying paganism, which is a problematic view if applied into the whole field based on only this book, but I am left feeling the methodological discussion could have been more varied. Some of the writers present the researcher subjectivity on the field in a manner I find sufficient for the purposes, but some of the chapters are not much more than fieldwork diaries and analysis of personal relations, so maybe some more theoretical considerations could have been added. But I would not go as far as to claim that this a problem within the whole field of pagan studies. Of course, I am also an insider studying pagan religions, so I am not completely impartial or above the discussion myself.

Race and ethnicity have been considered in more than one article and has its own section too, which is good. To my experience, it was not common in the 2000s for pagan studies to talk about fascist and racist appropriation of pagan symbols, since writers were too busy explaining it away from paganism entirely. I would like to see more research on the subject in the future. Although important, the chapter on racism and

ethnicity (by Ann-Marie Gallagher) seems to be very concerned about creating "proper paganism," and even though I understand the goal from an insider's perspective, I find it rather puzzling how the writer addresses the issue as "our" goal. I am left to wonder whether this "us" is pagans, researchers, or both. I would hope both, but it seems that the article is talking about "pagan ethic" and thus addresses pagans more than academic researchers. Since this is an academic book, the connotation seems strange. Another chapter on racism (by Mattias Gardell) brings up a chillingly timely discussion on how racists have used Ásatrú/Odinism to build their agenda under the Freedom of Religion Act in the United States. Today, this section would hopefully discuss the ethnic pagan movements in Europe, and perhaps address the questions of Freedom of and Freedom from religion, but also the culturalization of certain religious expressions.

Especially the self-reflection on this collection of chapters, and how the *Handbook* is positioned within the study of religions in a wider perspective, could have been a fruitful topic of discussion in the introductory chapter(s). I find this collection a valuable overview of contemporary paganism, and this seems a milestone within the relatively small field of research. Since the book is from 2009 with fieldwork stretching back decades into the 1900s, there could be an opening for another *Handbook* on the subject, incorporating the methodological contemplations sought by Davidsen and recognizing the subject-related blind spots I have mentioned above. I have yet to read *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West* edited by Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White (Palgrave 2019), but it doesn't include as varied an assortment of chapters as the Brill *Handbook*. I also failed to find any such attempt from after 2009, so it must be said this is probably the one and only attempt at a handbook on contemporary paganism and pagan studies so far, which makes it an interesting phenomenon and a window into different kinds of angles ad scholarship on paganism or paganisms. The *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism* manages to give a good basic introduction into paganism but is a somewhat eclectic an overview, and is deficient in certain areas of paganism (Eastern and Northern European), and the authors for the most part neglect to situate themselves within the wider context of the Study of Religion.

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Patrick Drazen, *Holy Anime: Japan's View of Christianity* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth, UK: Hamilton Books, 2017); vii, 195 pp.; ISBN: 978-0-7618-6907-8.

The term "cultural appropriation" has become something of a buzzword in recent years, being used to describe phenomena from dreadlocks to fusion cuisine. The vast majority of discourse around the term concerns Westerners adopting elements of non-Western cultures for entertainment or fashion, often without fully acknowledging the contextual traditions associated.

While Patrick Drazen never uses this term explicitly in *Holy Anime*, the book is ultimately an exploration of culture appropriated by a group aside from the usual Western culprits; that is, Christian themes and iconography as displayed in Japanese popular culture, specifically anime and manga. Although Christianity was first introduced to Japan in the sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries, it has remained a minority religion for over four centuries and is still seen as an "outsider" faith by the nation as a whole. This can partially be attributed to a hostility towards the religion that resulted from an attempted coup against the Shogunate by Christian rebels in 1638. Besides some underground practice, Japan remarkably did not interact with Christianity again until 1853, when the nation ceased its policy of isolation. The newly open borders did not go unnoticed by missionaries, who began to enter Japan to preach Christianity again. However, they found themselves competing with both Buddhist missionaries and the native tradition of Shinto and thus did not find the success they had hoped for; today, around one per cent of the Japanese population identifies as Christian, with Roman Catholicism being the most popular denomination within the small group.

Despite the unimpressive presence of actual Christian practice in Japan, exchange with the culturally Christian West has caused much of its iconography and themes to be casually recognised by the Japanese population. *Holy Anime* explores this aspect of cultural intersection, with each chapter identifying particular motifs common in Japanese popular culture and dissecting various examples of each to demonstrate not only Japanese understandings of these phenomena, but also foundational elements perhaps taken by granted within their original Western contexts. Many of the examples used by Drazen will naturally be unfamiliar to readers who do not have a deep familiarity with anime and manga. To this

point, he makes an effort to summarise the important elements of each, although the limits of space and depth may leave some baffled with the more esoteric specimens.

It should be noted that even as the book discusses inaccuracies and liberties taken with representations of Christianity, it is at no point admonishing or condescending towards Japanese works. In his afterword, Drazen remarks upon the safety offered by popular culture within which potentially threatening circumstances can be explored. Christianity has historically not been a neutral power to Japan — from the superiority of the Jesuits, to the attempted coup, to the sudden influx and fervour of missionaries following the nineteenth century, it is no wonder that the nation continues to hold the tide of Christianity with some hostility. Integrating the iconography and themes of this culture into their own familiar methods of art allows for consideration without forced commitment. This does, however, inevitably lead to that original question of cultural appropriation. The elements in question are after all removed from their original context and transformed to fit the comforts of another group. Does this lead to the same issues of power and exploitation as are so often associated with the term in the West? Perhaps not, for the simple detail that these elements are not used to oppress. Pieces of Christianity sit alongside Buddhism and Shinto in their representations in anime and manga, frequently associated with mysticism that is generally neutral in the worlds created by popular culture. Drazen's work is highly significant to discussions of cultural exchange that do not necessarily take the West as a centre. *Holy Anime* discusses cultural appropriation without invoking contemporary connotations of the word, and through this framing its investigation ultimately benefits.

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Paolo Euron, *Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); pp. 237; ISBN 978-90-04-39367-7.

On the cover of *Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work* there is an image of a contemporary Eve who could not resist taking single bites out of several apples. She is lying nude in the grass, surrounded by white masks and origami cranes, adding to the enigmatic nature of the scene. Certainly, the image is meant to create curiosity in the reader, leading to further investigation of the book's contents. The image also seems to be an invitation to the reader to begin interpreting the literary-inspired art even before acquiring the tools for analyzing it provided in the chapters.

As readers proceed with the book, the connection of the image on the cover with the content becomes clearer. Like the apples that Eve tasted, readers will inevitably be attracted to the various theories and ideas from Western history offered within. The various masks could represent how art and literature are viewed from different perspectives depending upon which theories are applied to what is seen and read. Further, the symbol of the paper cranes suggests the way readers construct their own ideas and interpretations of art and literature as an integral part of aesthetic experiences.

Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work focuses on essential concepts and authors of aesthetics and theories of literary work. A variety of concepts, both timeless and more current, are covered, including beauty, nature, intuition, the sublime, truth, gender, feminism, and post-colonialism. In our postmodern world where frequent references to the past and to historical artworks and texts appear, this book provides the necessary background and context for comprehending literature and art. The theories in the book provide the framework for readers to interpret visual and literary works with a deeper understanding.

The writing is well-organized into chapters that focus on specific periods in Western history. This makes sense as the book is created on the premise that in order to truly understand and appreciate literature and works of art, one must be cognizant of historical traditions and theoretical backgrounds. The book opens with pivotal philosophies from the Ancient world, then continues with ideas developed during the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic periods and finally concentrates on the Modern and Postmodern eras. The chronological order provides a

timeline for the reader to understand the progressive development of theories related to art and literature throughout Western history. The focus of many of the chapters is on specific theories from seminal Western thinkers, including those from Plato, Aristotle, Horace, and Plotinus, as well as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. More recent theories derive from Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Eco. In addition, excerpts from crucial texts on aesthetics and related theories are presented to assist the reader in comprehending historical and more contemporary ideas. While the book is an excellent primer, the author takes into account that some readers will want to dig deeper. Subsequently, an extensive reference list has been included with most of the sources being in English and a few in German and Italian.

While reading the book, is it evident that the author is well-versed on the subject matter of the book. Paolo Euron, the author, is Italian and for much of his life was surrounded by history. Having earned his PhD in Aesthetics at the University of Bologna, the oldest university in Europe, and having taught at the University of Turin, he is well-aware of the traditions of which he is explaining in the book. More recently, however, the author has moved to Bangkok where he teaches at Chulalongkorn University. Despite this fact, it is not clear in the writing how living in Thailand has informed the author's views or interests. However, bearing in mind the approachability of the writing, it is obvious that he has taken into consideration that some of the readers might be more familiar with non-Western traditions.

Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work is a valuable resource for students, scholars, and readers who want to know more about theories concerning art and literature in the Western tradition. The writing is accessible and appropriate for those relatively new to disciplines within the humanities. However, there is enough depth for those engaged in more advanced study. The book would make a convenient companion in courses related to art history and aesthetics, as well as in literary disciplines, including poetry. In addition, it is also a useful reference book that would be a splendid addition to any library. Above all, it is a tool that will help readers unlock what lies within and behind a work of art or literary piece and will undoubtably prove to enhance the reader's aesthetic experiences.

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Lloyd Strickland, *Proofs of God in Early Modern Europe: An Anthology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018). Pp. xxvi + 299. ISBN 978-1-4813-0931-8.

Proofs of God in Early Modern Europe: An Anthology aims to bring to light the "richness and variety of the proofs [of God] that early modern thinkers developed" (p. xi); it collects several essays on God's existence that most scholars and laypersons are unaware of, from Early Modern Europe, as new or revised English translations, and provides comments on them via headnotes. The twenty-two texts are for the most part alterative versions of older arguments, well known to philosophers of religion, such as cosmological arguments, teleological arguments, and ontological arguments. As someone who immerses themselves in the best arguments for and against God's existence on an almost daily basis, I found nothing in these obscure essays that was particularly interesting; perhaps this is why most people are unaware of them. I did note, however, that Baruch Spinoza's view of the divine is much different to that of theists, seeing as he was a pantheist, and could not figure out why Lloyd Strickland would not use that term to describe him in his commentary.

Strickland's headnotes provide brief descriptions of the authors (including Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, and Isaac Newton), and generally summarise the 'proofs'. These headnotes are usually 1-2 pages in length and do not provide anything close to a critique of the essayists' arguments. An extra page per essay would have substantially increased the value of this book. It is an easy read and provides some handy information about the authors. However, I suspect most readers want to know how good these arguments actually are, and whether they can have any bearing on the debate about God's existence. Given its limited scope, it is difficult to give a proper account of the usefulness of this book. Most will find it pointless. But if you happen to be interested in Early Modern Europe's lesser known arguments for theism, at a time when even the better-known – and contemporary – arguments have been thoroughly refuted, and don't mind the lack of critique from the anthologist, this book will serve quite well.

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Joseph (Fr Yuhanna) Azize, *An Introduction to the Maronite Faith* (Redland Bay: Connor Court, 2017); pp. 448 ISBN 978-1-925501-56-8.

Maronite Catholics are in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church but remain a group about which little is known outside the heartlands of Lebanon and Syria, and their diaspora communities around the world. The name is taken from St Maroun of Syria, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries and was both priest and monastic. Christianity in Australia is by definition an immigrant faith, but the great diversity of non-Anglo-Celtic churches is generally neglected in discussions of Australia as a multi-faith society. This is inexplicable, because the recent prominence of non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam is in spite of the comparatively small number of members of these religions (8.2% of the population in the 2016 Census). The combined impact of "ethnic" churches (Greek, Russian, Macedonian and all the other Orthodox communities, the Assyrian Church of the East, Maronites, Melkites, the Copts and many others) makes up a similar percentage of the 52.1% of Australians who put their religion as Christian on the Census forms.

This book is directed at the Maronite faithful, in that it is a catechism divided into twenty-five "lessons" that address classic Christian theological issues (the first six cover the Trinity, Jesus as Saviour, faith and belief, and "God, the Individual, and the Church" [pp. 15-31]), topics that are specifically of interest to Maronites, including Maronite saints, sacred books, and liturgical specifics, and a the final lesson on "Contemporary Issues in Ethics" (pp. 413-436). The lessons contain questions for pondering or discussion, and there is an "Appendix" containing prayers. The seventh lesson, "The Catholic Church", shifts attention from the nature of God and Christian soteriology to human institutions (the Church, holy texts and so on), and ideals of virtue and conduct, such as the Virgin Mary and the saints.

Lesson 12, "Sacred History and Typology," is of special interest because it offers a theoretical or intellectual framing for Azize's exposition of Maronite history. This is clearly intentional: he writes "It can be seen that the logic of types includes within itself a sort of philosophy of history. It also relates to *revelation* because through the types we are shown the workings and the nature of God in a way which a mere lecture never could" (p. 190). The subsequent discussion of the Sermon on the Mount and the

Ten Commandments, the Eucharist, the Mass, and the liturgical calendar are all suffused with typological thinking, though not to the extent that lay readers would find off-putting. Lesson 20, "The Sacrament of Marriage (Crowning)," opens a section on the sacraments that also covers Holy Orders, the anointing of the sick and funeral rites. Lesson 23 "Maronite 'Village' Spirituality" and Lesson 24 "The Maronite Saints" are focused on devotional conduct including pilgrimages and the veneration of local holy people, and the latter tells the stories of some prominent figures; including St Maroun, St Rafqa, St Charbel Makhlouf, and St Na'amtallah Al-Hardini. Azize writes clearly and with great enthusiasm for his subject, and is concerned to provide a useful resource for Maronites in the modern world. For those readers who are not Maronite, or even Christian, *An Introduction to the Maronite Faith* will dispel ignorance of a little-known Catholic tradition. This reader found it fascinating and rewarding.

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Keagan Brewer (ed. and trans.), *Prester John: The Legend and its Sources* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015); viii, 340 pp.; ISBN: 9781409438076.

The legend of Prester John was one of the most enduring fictions entertained by Christians in the later Middle Ages. The idea that there was a Christian realm in the far east ruled over by a priest-king took root in the late twelfth century, and "there exists no piece of evidence prior to the eighteenth century that argued that argued that Prester John never existed in some form or another" (p. 2). The starting point of the legend was a story about an Indian Patriarch John who had visited the Pope in 1122. Prester John is first noted in 1145 by Otto of Freising, in a context that suggests the spur for the legend was the Battle of Qatwan in 1141, in which the Muslim army was comprehensively defeated by the Kara-Khitai, an Asian people with an empire in Central Asia. The *Prester John Letter*, most likely a Latin forgery c. 1165-1170, purports to be written by Prester John himself and describes an oriental kingdom full of marvels. The context of the *Letter* has been hypothesized as the conflict between Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III. Keagan Brewer's informative "Introduction" traces how, even when marvels were discounted, people clung to the idea that Prester John's kingdom, whether in Asia or Ethiopia from the fourteenth century, and used it to critique the nature of western Christianity and Christian monarchs, thus not "dreaming of another world" (p. 26) but rather of their own.

This very useful volume brings together all the known sources for the Prester John legend, organized in chronological blocks. Section 1, "The Beginnings of Prester John," includes five texts in Latin with English translations, including the extensive *Letter*, with all interpolations noted. Section 2, "Prester John and the Fifth Crusade," contains early thirteenth century texts, and Section 3, "Mongols and Travel Writers" covers mid-thirteenth through fourteenth century texts by some of the best-known writers on the marvels of the East (William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, Orderic of Pordenone, Marco Polo and John Mandeville). Section 4, "Prester John in Africa," covers the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, and the shift to Africa as the location of Prester John's fabled realm, based on the historical reality of Ethiopia, an ancient Christian empire ruled by a monarch who was also the head of the Ethiopian Church. From this date forward the texts are given in English only. The next

grouping, "Legends and Lies," has but three extracts, all fictional, from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and illustrates the rhetorical deployment of the Prester John trope, chiefly for propagandist purposes. The final part, "Unravelling Prester John" culminates with "the earliest source to declare that Prester John did not exist and had never existed" (p. 235). This is by the Spanish monk, Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (1676-1764), in a work titled *Reflexions upon History*.

It is not difficult to grasp the importance of this source book for various reasons. It unites all the relevant texts in English for Anglophone students without the relevant European languages, but also encourages such students to go back to the medieval Latin texts, by providing the original as well as the translation. It is a book that contributes to intellectual history, by tracing the reception of the Prester John legend and identifying events and currents that influenced the ways particular authors and the societies that were their reference points interpreted the motif of the famed Christian ruler and kingdom of marvels, far, far away. The dismantling of the legend coincides with the rise of Enlightenment thinking and the steady stripping of non-historical elements in Catholic devotional literature after the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Additionally, the extracts are interesting and enjoyable to read. Brewer is to be congratulated on producing this useful and usable volume. It deserves a place in all university libraries.

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