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Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West

Leiden: Brill, 2014. xx + 374 pages,
€147.00/\$180.00, ISBN 978-90-04-25528-9

PETER WICK & VOLKER RABENS (EDS.)

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The thirteen papers included in this volume were originally prepared for a conference at Ruhr Universität Bochum in 2010 exploring the relationship between religion and trade. As the editors correctly note in their preface,

Contact between religions is key to their formation and development...
Trade is a prominent generator of intercultural contact and is thus one of
the most important triggers of religious contact (p. xi).

Contributors to the volume include specialists in Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, and Islam, as well as religions of the ancient Near and Middle East.

The editors raise in their brief introduction several points which could be helpful in devising a framework for analyzing the role of trade in the shaping of religious traditions. For example, they note that while trade is generally a symmetrical process of exchange, cultural interactions (including religious ideas and symbols) “are usually *asymmetrical* because by and large they are not rationally negotiated” (p. 13). They go on to identify characteristics that typically result from such exchanges in the

domain of religion, specifically *inclusion*—whereby a religion absorbs foreign elements, often transforming them in the process—and *demarcation*, where such foreign influence is resisted, which can result in traditions redefining themselves in the face of a perceived threat.

Following a ‘programmatic’ essay by Christoph Auffarth (pp. 19-44) using the example of the Egyptian deity Serapis, a ‘god designed for export’ to the West (i.e., Rome), the remainder of the book is divided into four thematic sections of three essays each. The first section, featuring papers by Jason Neelis (pp. 45-64), Georgios T. Halkias (pp. 65-116), and Abishek Singh Amar (pp. 117-140), deals with the multicultural space of the northwestern Indian subcontinent where Buddhism developed. The second section, which treats the appropriation of religious symbols, contains contributions from Izak Cornelius on the ancient Near Eastern symbols of the winged disk and the lunar crescent (pp. 141-166), the late Joan Goodnick Westenholz (to whom the book is dedicated) on the iconography of the goddess Nanaya (pp. 167-198), and Sylvia Winkelman on the pre-Iranian religious art of the Iranian plateau (pp. 199-232). The third section, on transformations of religious knowledge, has Michael Willis discussing Tibetan Buddhism (pp. 233-260), Geoffrey Herman on possible Zoroastrian elements in the Jewish Hannukah celebration (pp. 261-282), and Al Makin on the similarities between the Qur’anic message of Muhammad and the poems of one of his Arabian contemporaries (pp. 283-308). The fourth and final section, concerned with ethical systems includes chapters by Livia Kohn on Daoist monasticism (pp. 309-332), Volker Rabens on the appeal of Judaism to the Gentiles of Hellenistic Alexandria (pp. 333-356), and Loren T. Stuckenbruck on household codes in the Book of Ephesians (pp. 357-366).

While no less than four of the papers deal with Buddhism, it is strange that Islam is scarcely mentioned at all, given that it can be considered the most ‘pro-business’ of the world’s religions whose spread was arguably

more directly tied to trade than any other, Buddhism included. Moreover, the one Islam-related article included in the volume, by an Indonesian scholar, is not about Islam *per se* but rather discusses the religious system expressed by one of Muhammad's Arab rivals. The complete absence of Manichaeism is likewise to be lamented, given that it appears to have played a key role in stimulating the self-definition of other major religions.

In a broad sense this book can be considered to have supported its editors' claim to provide "new support for the thesis that intercultural and interreligious exchange plays a substantial role in the way religious traditions take shape and develop" (p. 13), though it is hard to see how (or why) that thesis could be contested. However, as is often the case with conference volumes, the essays in this collection treat an extremely diverse range of topics, and the effort to tie them together through the theme of religion and trade often feels somewhat forced. Many of the essays really seem to be about something else, with a few lines or observations tying them to the conference theme. Thus, while the individual contributions generally appear to be of a high scholarly standard, their attraction will perhaps be more disciplinary than thematic: it is easier to imagine a reader consulting this volume out of interest in one or two of the chapters connected to his or her own specialization, than to learn more about the theoretical relationship between religion and trade as such. A theoretical treatment, hinted at in the editors' introduction, would be better served in the form of a monograph.

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