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Review of Daren Kemp & James R. Lewis, eds., *Handbook of New Age* (2007)

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Handbook of New Age. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis, eds. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. In the series *Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion* 1. James R. Lewis, series editor. x + 486 pp. Hardback \$196 USD. ISBN: 978-90-04-15355-4.

The *Handbook of New Age* is an impressive volume filled with the cream of New Age scholarship, both in form of reprinted material and articles written especially for the handbook. The array of experts in the field who have contributed to the handbook is remarkable and includes Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Steven Sutcliffe, J. Gordon Melton, Adam Possamai, James R. Lewis, Christopher Partridge, Marion I. Bowman, and Olav Hammer. As always with such anthologies, the quality of the contributions varies somewhat and parts of the earlier published material feels slightly out of context, but those are minor faults.

The handbook comprises 22 articles divided into five sections: 1. Introduction, 2. New Age and Social-Scientific Research, 3. New Age, Culture, and Society, 4. Global Aspects of New Age, and 5. New Age and Worldviews. Three reprints of strong historical articles are found in section 1. Sutcliffe sketches the origins of New Age between the two world wars, Hanegraaff charts the New Age religion of the 1980s, and Melton treats the transformation of New Age since the Harmonic Convergence in 1987, away from millennialism and towards the cultural mainstream. More groundbreaking in my opinion, though, are a number of articles that treat aspects of New Age from sociological, anthropological and psychological points of view.

The sociological articles are found in section 2, which opens with Liselotte Frisk's very useful annotated bibliography of the (few) quantitative studies of New Age done so far, mostly in Britain and Sweden. In the same section, both Adam Possamai and Dominic Corrywright discuss the social organization of the alternative spiritual milieu. Possamai develops a valuable typological matrix of cults taking into account the differences in motivation for engagement (sometimes a mere wish for entertainment). James R. Lewis's article, the best in section 3, includes a number of interesting ideas on the complex relationship between New Age and science, including a comparison of Max Weber's and Olav Hammer's ideas on legitimization of religions.

The articles in section 4 as well as Adrian Ivakhiv's article provide five anthropological case studies of New Age in specific localities around the globe. Three of these articles focus on sacred places (Bowman on Glastonbury, UK; Ivakhiv on Sedona, Arizona; and Mikael Rothstein on Hawaii). The other two treat the reception of New Age (viewed as an Anglo-American import cult) in Latin America (María Julia Carozzi) and Japan (Inken Prohl). These articles all contain a wealth of attentive observations of local

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detail which are developed into theoretical ideas especially by Bowman and Carozzi. Arguing against theorists who assert that religious eclecticism and pragmatism are unique to a globalized, postmodern condition, Bowman for instance, makes the point that vernacular religion has always been eclectic and pragmatic. Globalization has not changed its dynamics, only its geographic scope. Carozzi notes that the New Age values of individual autonomy and permanent, social circulation are in line with the general cultural values in North America and Western Europe, but are at odds with Latin American communal values. In Latin America, New Age engagement therefore requires a genuine conversion.

Psychology of the New Age is represented in the handbook by one highly interesting article by Miguel Farias and Pehr Granqvist. Drawing on the research of Granqvist and colleagues in Stockholm, the authors link insecure/ambivalent and insecure/disorganized attachment styles to New Age beliefs and involvement. Drawing on the research of Farias and colleagues in Oxford, they further show that schizotypal personality predicts New Age involvement. This is not really surprising, however, since schizotypy is defined partly by a tendency towards magical thinking in the first place. Ultimately, they cannot say whether personality or environment causes the magical ideation, but they bet on personality. It would have been really interesting if the authors had discussed their findings and ideas against Tanya Luhrmann's theory, in *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1989), of the magical cognitive style as a result of secondary socialization and interpretive drift.

I would like to highlight the discussion of two important thematic issues in the handbook that are often overlooked in New Age scholarship. The first concerns the interaction between New Age and Christianity, which is discussed especially by Marion Bowman and co-editor Daren Kemp. This discussion is interesting because it qualifies the conclusion in Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead's *The Spiritual Revolution* (2005) that the congregational domain and the holistic milieu are strictly separated. While those narrowly defined *social spheres* may well be segregated, this does not prevent transfers of discursive and ritual elements between their traditions. On the contrary, New Age ideas can be found in the congregational domain (Kemp), and Christianity within the holistic milieu (Bowman). Combinations of Christianity and New Age are even more visible in the lived religion of the majority who are active in neither the congregational domain nor the holistic milieu, but who nevertheless both celebrate Christmas and read horoscopes.

The issue of class is a second overlooked theme which is fortunately treated in a number of articles. Discussing different modes of alternative religiosity, Sutcliffe argues

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that 'New Age' is not one phenomenon, but actually consists of two different class-bound streams. He is most interested in the development of a 'quest culture' of institutionalized seekership in Theosophy and its offshoots among the middle and upper classes, but is careful to also acknowledge the existence of a stream of folk religion for the lower classes. Sutcliffe charts the parallel history of this folk religious stream and identifies Spiritualism as its main index in the interbellum period and astrology as its dominant expression after the Second World War. Also Carozzi has an eye for class differences in her analysis of New Age in Latin America. She observes a tendency there (which can also be found elsewhere) to middle-class purism (at least as the ideal) and lower class syncretism.

Though I am generally positive about the quality of the social-scientific articles discussed above, I regret that they tend to measure, analyze and theorize *states* rather than *processes*. I miss, for instance, a discussion of New Age in relation to current theories on cultural and religious change, e.g., Steve Bruce (and others) on secularization, Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead on subjectivization and spiritualization, Colin Campbell on Easternization, and Christopher Partridge on re-enchantment. I had a similar feeling of unfulfilled potential with regard to cognitive processes. Notions of magical thinking and New Age cognition are discussed in several articles. Bowman speaks about "sacredness by association" (292), Rothstein shows how ethnic and geographical Hawaiian sacredness can be transferred to Western teachers and souvenirs, Hanegraaff, Partridge, Lewis, and Hammer discuss New Age epistemology, and Michael York demonstrates how a cognitive dissonance between cosmic determinism and free will in astrology has been solved by psychologizing the practice. These authors together point out a really fascinating body of material which had deserved to be systematically investigated with theoretical tools from cognitive theory.

Another problem in the handbook concerns the conceptual confusion and embarrassment about the very concept 'New Age'. Even though most contributors dutifully use the term, they often voice their discomfort with it. Especially when talking about New Age in a broad sense, i.e. as the cultic milieu *in toto*, many contributors prefer other terms. Sutcliffe prefers to talk about "quest culture", "seekership" and "popular religion" (51-52, 60), Melton speaks about the "occult-metaphysical" subculture or community (96), Frisk uses "popular religiosity" (119), Possamai "perennism" (153), Ivakhiv "alternative spiritualities" (263), and Bowman "vernacular religion" (296). To be sure, some contributors, e.g., Chrystides (16) and Hanegraaff (29-32), explicitly defend the use of the term New Age to denote the alternative religious field in general. These authors also emphasize the continuity between New Age in the 1980s (when the term

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New Age was actually used) and in the 21st century (when the movement has dropped the term and has become more mainstream). Other authors hold that 'New Age' should instead refer narrowly to a particular historical movement, but opinions differ about the temporal and substantial demarcations of this movement. For Sutcliffe the term most meaningfully refers to an array of supernaturalistic, millennial movements led or inspired by Alice Bailey and existing from the 1930s to the 1960s (70-71). For Melton, New Age proper instead refers to the Bailey groups' immediate successor movement around David Spangler between 1976 and 1988 (77, 85, 89-90). As a consequence of this conceptual ambiguity, many contributors have a tendency to slide between different meanings of the term New Age, and the reader is left with a hazy idea of what the subject matter of the handbook really is.

Strife about terminology and definitions is of course no novelty in the study of religion, but 'New Age' differs from many other contested scholarly terms because it carries distinctly pejorative connotations of superficiality and commodification. Already when the first academic anthology on New Age, *Perspectives on the New Age*, was published in 1992, Lewis (also then co-editor) noted that most New Agers had become uncomfortable with the term and had largely moved away from the millennial views it implies. At least since 2000, many scholars of the so-called 'New Age' have consequently avoided the term. The title of Sutcliffe & Bowman's anthology from 2000, *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, illustrates a terminological shift, which has taken place at least in the British sociology of religion. In the 2000s, theoretical advances in the 'New Age' field have increasingly been made under other labels, for instance 'occulture', 'alternative spirituality', 'holistic spirituality' and 'spiritualities of life'. By sticking to the term New Age, the handbook tends to exclude these new perspectives from the discussion. Indeed, most contributors seek theoretical refuge in Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion* and Heelas' *The New Age Movement*, two masterpieces published in 1996 when New Age was still a relatively unproblematic term. The outstanding quality of these two classics notwithstanding, it is a shame that 11 years later, they are still allowed to frame the study of alternative spiritualities so strongly that the reader is left with an (not entirely fair) impression of a quite static field.

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