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The spiritual Tolkien milieu : a study of fiction-based religion

Davidsen, M.A.

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Author: Davidsen, Markus Altena
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The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-based Religion

This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the organisation and development of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, a largely online-situated network of individuals and groups that draw on J.R.R. Tolkien's literary mythology for spiritual inspiration. It is the first academic treatment of Tolkien spirituality and one of the first monographs on fiction-based religion, a type of religion that uses fiction as authoritative texts. Adopting a semiotic approach to religion, the book raises questions about the persuasive power of narrative, about religious blending, and about rationalisation of beliefs. How can some readers come to believe that supernatural agents from fictional narratives are real? How do fiction-based religions emerge when their authoritative texts lack important religious building-blocks, such as descriptions of rituals? And how do adherents of fiction-based religions legitimise their beliefs, given the fact that their religion is based on fiction? In short, with Tolkien religion as a case the dissertation aims to uncover the semiotic structures and processes involved in the construction and maintenance of fiction-based religion and the social structures that support the plausibility of such religion.

Markus Altena Davidsen (1981) studied religion at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. He carried out the work for this thesis as an international PhD student, funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (Humanities), employed by the University of Aarhus, and located and supervised at Leiden University, the Netherlands. He is currently employed as a teaching associate (docent) at the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion where he teaches sociology of religion and courses on new religions and alternative spirituality.

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