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HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGION, FILM, AND TELEVISION. Edited by Carole M. Cusack and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson. Brill Handbooks in Contemporary Religion, 24. Brill, 2026. Pp. xviii + 591. Hardback, $217.00.

Cusack is professor of religious studies at the University of Sydney (Australia). Robertson is an independent scholar with a PhD in religion from the University of Sydney. The editors organized this book's chapters by genre, because they wished to encourage readers to see "methodological models" across specific movies, TV programs, and genres. Part One addresses "Drama, Romance, and Comedy," featuring contributions from David Feltmate, Eric Mazur, Andrew Crome, Sofia Sjö, Humairah Zainal, and Elizabeth Olayiwola. Topics include Judaism on film and various analyses of national and regional film industries like those of Britain, Malaysia, and Nigeria. Part Two covers "Historical and Political Portrayals" of religion, including essays on films portraying the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and indigenous religions. It features contributions from Elisha McIntyre, George D. Chryssides, Ulrike Wiethaus, Bettina E. Schmidt, Cato Christensen, and Torjer Olsen, Stefania Travagnin, and Ryan Wittingslow. Part Three is titled "Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction." Contributions cover topics like witchcraft, alien abductions, and paganism through retellings of *Beowulf*. This part features essays from Francisco Santos Silva, Ethan Doyle White, Venetia Robertson, Erik Östling, and Benjamin Zeller. Part Four addresses "Documentary, Reality Television, and the Media." Topics include Japanese religions on television, Scientology documentaries, and "authentic" representations of religion in documentary filmmaking. The part features contributions from Ioannis Gaitanidis, Zoe Alderton, Mairead Shanahan, Cusack, and Raymond Radford. Although many of the essays in this book are exceptional, I find David Feltmate's contribution noteworthy. He addresses the scholarly economic and political problems of studying religion and film and television in today's professorship economy and why he still finds meaning in studying film and television through religious studies. The rest of this volume remains impressive, and it will certainly be useful to scholars interested in religion, media, popular culture, and especially new religious movements.

Marceline Parker
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THE FUNCTIONS OF ANGELS IN SUFI LITERATURE. By Louise Gallorini. Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts, 218. Brill, 2025. Pp. x + 360. Hardback, €130.00.

Gallorini tries to "trace the evolution of angels as literary characters and elements of a mythopoetic process, as textual and extratextual products of human imagination." In order to do so, she takes the primary roles ascribed to angels in the Quran and compares them with Sufi "commentarial literature" (*tafsīr*) by five authors—al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, Ibn Barrajān, and Rūzbihān Baqlī in the first three chapters. The first chapter focuses on the basic Quranic functions of angels: narrative, theological, and religious praxis functions as they are depicted in the angel verses (i.e., the verses in which angels are mentioned) and the non-angelic verses (i.e., the verses that do not refer to them directly). Gallorini comes to the conclusion that a shift is noticed in Sufi *tafsīr* toward a more "symbolic reading of the verses." She further elaborates on this idea in the second chapter, introducing the general Quranic functions of angels: a cosmological function according to which angels "establish a new worldview" and a classic cosmological function which sees an angel as a messenger, but also adding the role of angels as testers. Chapter Three marks a turn in this approach and singles out two specific Sufi functions of angels: "cosmological enrichment" by which angelic figures are multiplied, populating the Unseen world, and a symbolic function according to which angels "do not seem to be part of any well-delimited group of hierarchies, but rather are left to be angels about whom we know few things, exoterically." However, it is the final two chapters that display the most intricate additions of Sufi angelology. Chapter Four showcases the role of angels that "have become symbols of 'signs' on the way—educational, challenging or alluding—signaling in these different ways to the spiritual traveler that he is on his way towards God, on his ennobling travel," belonging to two worlds at the same time and marking the boundaries between them. The final chapter focuses on Ibn 'Arabī's angelology as depicted in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, presenting the extensions to all the previously listed Quranic functions of angels, and finally "equating the nine points of contact between the human and the divine" as "angels." The book is equipped with four appendices providing a more profound insight into the issues covered in the preceding chapters.

Danijela Lekić
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MAX WEBER, RUDOLF STEINER, AND MODERN WESTERN ESOTERICISM: A TRANSCULTURAL APPROACH. By Aaron French. Asia, Europe, and Global Connections. Routledge, 2025. Pp. viii + 200. Hardback, $150.00.

Aaron French, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Erfurt and the University of Copenhagen, provides a provocative and timely reassessment of the foundations of European modernity. In this meticulously researched monograph, French challenges the long-standing academic tendency to view Max Weber—the celebrated father of modern sociology—and Rudolf Steiner—the esoteric founder of anthroposophy—as irreconcilable polar opposites. Instead, French utilizes a transcultural approach to demonstrate that their intellectual trajectories were deeply entangled, particularly through their shared engagement

with Western esotericism, their critiques of technological rationalization, and their profound openness to the religious and philosophical systems of South and East Asia. The primary goal of this book is to deconstruct the binary categories—such as rational/irrational and modern/anti-modern—that have historically been used to marginalize esoteric thought in the narrative of Western progress. French argues that Weber's famous concept of "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) was itself influenced by the esoteric milieu of early twentieth-century Germany. By bringing Steiner "into the mainstream" alongside Weber, French seeks to uncover a more fluid and integrated history of global modernity, one that recognizes the "magical" elements often hidden within the structures of "Technic." The volume is organized into four main chapters and a concluding synthesis. Chapter One establishes the historical and personal connections between the two thinkers, including their shared radical social environments and experiences of psychological "rebirth". Chapter Two delves into their use of Asian religions as a framework to critique Western cultural crises, while Chapter Three examines their mutual apprehension regarding the "threat of technology" and its potential to destroy human dignity. Chapter Four focuses on Weber's time in the esoteric and anarchist circles of Ascona, providing concrete evidence of his proximity to the very "irrational" elements he is often thought to have rejected. The book concludes by advocating for a move toward "contingency, complexity, and indeterminacy" in historical scholarship. French's narrative is both academically rigorous and intellectually daring, successfully disturbing "what was previously considered immobile" in the history of social theory. While some specialists might find the "deterritorialization" of these iconic figures challenging, the work serves as an essential resource for scholars of European and Asian philosophy, social theory, and the study of Western esotericism. This volume is a significant contribution to the ongoing effort to "de-center" the European experience and is warmly recommended to those interested in the complex hybridization of ideas in our globalizing world.

Lehel Balogh
University of Szeged

LITERATURE FOR LITTLE BODHISATTVAS: MAKING BUDDHIST FAMILIES IN MODERN TAIWAN. By Natasha Heller. Contemporary Buddhism. University of Hawai'i Press, 2025. Pp. xiv + 243. Hardback, $75.00; paperback, $30.00.

Heller presents a focused and original study of Buddhist picture books in contemporary Taiwan, a scholarly terrain long overlooked by both religion scholars and children's media researchers. Rejecting the notion that these works are trivial or merely didactic, Heller positions them as serious modern commentarial literature, translating scriptures, hagiographies, and bodhisattva figures into visually rich, accessible narratives for children and families. At the heart of her analysis is the concept of "affinity work," which captures how these publications cultivate emotional and imaginative connections to Buddhism in the home, emphasizing relational and affective engagement over doctrinal instruction. Drawing on meticulous close readings of texts and images from multiple Taiwanese Buddhist organizations—including Fóguāngshān, Fǎgǔshān, Tzu Chi, and Xiāngguāng—Heller examines the adaptation of sacred stories, the representation of child monks, the formation of Buddhist family life, and the integration of environmental and scientific themes. She also attends to paratextual material such as reader's guides and prefaces, as well as interactive design elements, showing how "cuteness" and participatory engagement shape religious understanding for both children and adult caregivers. By situating picture books within broader historical and contemporary Buddhist practices, Heller demonstrates how family-based reading becomes a site for iterative learning, ethical formation, and intergenerational participation in Buddhist life. This rigorous, multidisciplinary work not only advances scholarship on modern Buddhism and children's religious media but also enriches our understanding of lived religion beyond institutional settings, highlighting how the domestic sphere can serve as a dynamic arena for religious cultivation.

Yu Qi and Biyu Wu
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THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN EURO-AMERICAN CULTURES: SOMETHING NICE ABOUT VAMPIRES. By Benson Saler. Scientific Studies of Religion: Inquiry and Explanation. Bloomsbury, 2022. Pp. xxiv + 163. Hardback, $130.00; paperback, $40.95.

This is the final volume by Saler, who passed away while completing the book. Therefore, Donald Wiebe and Luther Martin edited the volume, and the introduction is preceded by Armin Geertz's appreciative overview of Saler's scholarly work. Saler became an influential figure in the field's theoretical debates, and both the obituary and this volume aptly reflect his passion for conceptual discussions and his engagement with the cognitive study of religion that influenced his scholarly endeavor. The cognitive viewpoint thus naturally shapes his perspective on the supernatural, which he argues is essentially a Euro-American category in both origin and development, fueled by Christian theology. Hence, it is not a culturally universal belief. The book's structure also reflects this argument, as its first four chapters explore different configurations of the supernatural category across cultural settings. The first two chapters examine cases in which no native category corresponds to the supernatural, focusing first on the Ojibwa

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