

Recent Religion - December 2019

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Islam and Modernity : An Unfinished Project / Rafik Abdessalem  
Afro-Middle East Centre, South Africa 2017

x, 356p. ; 229 x152mm.  
Includes Index ; Bibliography  
9780994704818  
\$ 40.00 / null  
600 gm.

In this compelling book, Rafik Abdessalem unpacks two major lines of thought. Firstly, he examines why many Westerners dismiss Islam's vast intellectual, social, theological and cultural heritage as flawed, violent, rigid and fanatical, despite knowing virtually nothing about it. He usefully traces the genesis of this attitude, focusing on how scholars such as Weber, Habermas and others have helped to consolidate the West's view of itself as civilised, superior, developed and progressive, and how the demonisation of Islam acts as a necessary foil for these notions. Secondly, he explains that Islam is subject to a variety of interpretive choices and schools of thought ranging from legalistic fundamentalism, through rigid rationalism, to spiritual Sufism. By treating Islam, secularity and modernity as distinct and separate, rather than as interconnected and overlapping, Abdessalem makes no attempt to reconcile Islam with modernity or secularity, nor does he place one in opposition to the other. Instead, he looks at the interconnections between these broad and complex subjects. Abdessalem's analysis is useful in encouraging us to rethink both modernity and Islam, and their relationship with each other. In this rethinking lies the potential for a better understanding of the geopolitics of what is often called 'the Muslim world', including the MENA region.

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Agents of World Renewal: The Rise of Yonaoshi Gods in Japan / Takashi Miura  
University of Hawaii Press, USA 2019

x, 236p.  
Includes Index; Bibliography  
9780824880378  
\$ 68.00 / HB  
550 gm.

1. God, Japanese.
2. Japan – Religious life and customs.

This volume examines a category of Japanese divinities that centered on the concept of "world renewal" (yonaoshi). In the latter half of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), a number of entities, both natural and supernatural, came to be worshipped as "gods of world renewal." These included disgruntled peasants who demanded their local governments repeal unfair taxation, government bureaucrats who implemented special fiscal measures to help the poor, and a giant subterranean catfish believed to cause earthquakes to punish the hoarding rich. In the modern period, yonaoshi gods took on more explicitly anti-authoritarian characteristics. During a major uprising in Saitama Prefecture in 1884, a yonaoshi god was invoked to deny the legitimacy of the Meiji regime, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the new religion Ōmoto predicted an apocalyptic end of the world presided over by a messianic yonaoshi god.

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