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The last section in the book is titled «Iranian Materials in Comparative Perspective». It starts with a reconsideration of the Germanic, Roman, Iranian, and Indian sources used for the distillation of an Indo-European creation myth. The next study asks how subtle mythological concepts, specifically those related to hair and nails, could come to assume a prominent role in Indo-European cosmology and early creation. Lincoln concludes by observing that «The Proto-Indo-European who buried his hair and perhaps his nails in a place covered with grass, under a fruitful tree, or with a prayer for the growth of vegetation, felt himself to be participating in the cosmogonic drama, recreating the very world with this simple gesture and re-establishing the order on which life depends» (p. 275). Next, the author discusses the center of the universe and the origin of life. By comparing various texts, including an old Scandinavian one, Lincoln identifies the intellectual currents that formed the common Indo-European heritage. The following study, however, revises talk of Indo-European myth and suggests its replacement by a «much looser discourse of widely diffused Eurasian narratives, understanding that stories do not descend in neat familial patterns» (p. 308). The section continues with a reconsideration of Latin *iūs*,

Avestan *yaoš*, and Vedic *yóś*, which since 1855 were believed to be cognates. Lincoln shows that this conclusion is problematic, especially regarding Avestan *yaoš*, which is better translated as «purity» than «justice». Yet all three can be assigned exclusively neither to the realm of religious nor to that of civil laws. The book concludes with another semantic problem, the one related to the Magi. Through a comparative linguistic study between Achaemenid and Greek sources, Lincoln discusses the role of the priests in ritualistic sacrifice and differentiates them from magicians.

This is obviously a very sophisticated and rich book, and a handy collection of Lincoln's work. His conceptual work complements and supersedes earlier scholarship, which focused primarily on lexicographical understanding. Lincoln's habit of repeatedly transferring his complex arguments into simple charts is commendable. If there is anything to criticize, it is the fact that, apart from the ancient Iranian texts, Lincoln's interlocutors are almost exclusively Western scholars.

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ALESSIA LIROSI and ALESSANDRO SAGGIORO, eds., *Religioni e parità di genere: percorsi accidentati*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura («Donne Fedi Culture»), 2022, 252 pages, ISBN: 9788893596886.

The miscellaneous volume edited by Alessia Lirosi and Alessandro Saggioro constitutes one of the first examples of systematic reflection on the relationship between religion and gender equality in the Italian context, and adds to a more general trend to reconsider this relationship that has been running through academia in recent decades; a trend fueled by the reflections of religiously inclined feminisms, particularly Islamic ones, and a more recent line of research which critically

investigates the relationship between secularism and gender. The field covered by the eleven chapters of the book is broad; it ranges from the ancient era to the present day, from the three monotheisms to new forms of religiosity, including ancient and modern polytheisms, and shamanic religions. Although the book has a fundamentally historical-religious focus, it takes a multidisciplinary approach and brings in different expertise: exegesis of sacred sources, theology, gender

studies, cultural anthropology. However, the field covered by the volume also has well-defined boundaries, more or less explicitly acknowledged by the authors themselves. The concept of «gender equality» is employed, despite the fact that its implicit androcentrism does not go unnoticed (Arianna Rotondo); the complex processes of gendered identifications are often boiled down to a man–woman binary, although reflections on fluidity and cross-gender are not lacking (Silvia Romani); heterosexuality is generally taken for granted, although the importance of queer theologies is pointed out, *en passant* (Rotondo). These limitations largely derive from the nature of the objects of study addressed by the book, namely from what the editors call the «remote institutionalization of inequality»: the tendency of «sacred histories» to remain unchanged, and to reflect «eras in which the values of the relationship between male and female were other and different than those of the present» (Lirosi and Saggiaro, p. xi; all translations from Italian are by the reviewer), and in which the invisibilization of nonconforming articulations between gender and sexuality was often greater than that experienced in the Western world in the present day. This persistence of «archaic» conceptions, however, is not caused by a sort of natural historical inertia of religious materials that are supposedly «heavier» than other cultural constructs; as the editors point out, the meaning of these continuities is rather to be sought in the nexus of religion–power dynamics, which is the common thread of the book (p. xiii).

In this perspective, appropriations of the religious find their meaning in the positionalities and strategies of the social groups that enact them. Reviewing the various essays in the book, it becomes clear that, while religion is not necessarily conservative, it tends to be so in all those cases where it serves the interests of hegemonic groups: men, the classes/castes at the top of social hierarchies,

the clergy, the «normal» and the powerful in their various inflections. If, therefore, the best-known expressions of the religious are objectively conservative, this is not only because they are «ancient»; the ossification process affecting them is the work of social groups (primarily religious authorities) that occupy empowering intersections, and that aim at preserving the status quo. The chapter authored by Selene Zorzi sheds light on these dynamics by showing how a top-down reform within the Catholic Church is impossible because a reconsideration of power structures cannot come from men who occupy privileged positions, as men and as part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is usually «marginal religious groups», especially «with respect to the distribution of power on the basis of a gendered order», that challenge hegemonic discourses (Rotondo, p. 2). Subordinated forms of religiosity are in a sense the ideal site of counter-discourses on gender. This is the case of neo-pagan circles dedicated to the worship of the Great Goddess (Carmelo Russo) and Asian shamanism (Davide Torri), sites of a peripheral religiosity where women are freer to take the lead, in concrete practices as well as in sacred stories; or of the most marginal ascetic communities, where the abolition of hierarchical distinctions between women and men allowed female presbyters to emerge (Emanuela Prinzivalli). Even the margins can be empowering then, as in the case of Rome's Jewish community, which, precisely because of its ghettoization, resisted for centuries many elements of the patriarchal culture that surrounded it, maintaining a prominent role for women in the economic sphere, promoting their independence in marriage strategies, and accepting the practice of contraception (Marina Caffiero).

But it is especially in «women's and feminist movements that have conducted and are conducting their political, social and cultural struggles within religious horizons» that a real «shifting of limits and boundaries» has

been attempted (Liroso and Saggiaro, p. xii). Exemplary in this regard is the case of The Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the US, which because of its acceptance of same-sex couples, the support offered by some communities for women's ordination, and its endorsement of the Obama health care reform involving contraception and abortion, attracted repression from the Vatican in the 2000s (Zorzi). Their case is exemplary not only because it shows that radical instances with respect to the gendered distribution of power can only come from those directly affected, but also because the outcome of the struggle of American nuns, forced to retreat to more moderate positions in order not to be excluded from the Catholic Church, perfectly illustrates the power dynamics that perpetuate the remote institution of inequality. The official expressions of religion, the orthodoxies, tend to erase, or depotentiate, radical instances, and it is for this reason that when we look at religion conservative manifestations are also the most conspicuous (see Marianna Ferrara; Margherita Mantovani).

The book addresses the intertwining of power dynamics, gender, and religion without indulging in cheap simplifications. While it is clear that attacks on gendered hierarchies are mainly brought from the margins, the idea that this is an automatic outcome is eschewed. As Torri points out in his essay, «every encounter is liable to generate a multiplicity of dynamics» (Torri, p. 176). After all, history is rich with examples of religious movements composed of powerless subjectivities that asserted values that were anything but progressive or radical in our eyes. The concept of margin itself is broken down by an intersectional analysis that approaches gender in its interaction

with other axes of domination. For example, Leila Karami's essay shows how in Persia the contestation of the gendered asymmetries that male power grounds on its readings of the Qur'an came in some cases from women who occupied prominent positions on the social ladder, such as women connected to the court, whose voices rose from places marginal to male power, such as the harem (cf. Ferrara). The authors succeed in the intent to keep open the different issues underlying the relationship between religion and feminisms. Not only is the analysis of power dynamics not reduced to the equation marginality = progressive ideas, the authors also undertake the challenge of considering the co-presence within the same religious traditions of conservative elements and radical instances, of appreciating the role of women's movements by considering both women's agency and the persistence of gendered structures of domination, and of encompassing in a unified interpretive framework the static nature of religious traditions and the work of interpretation and historicization that continually reinvents them. The volume's greatest scholarly merit lies precisely in its ability to avoid ideological simplifications, and to address the general question of the relationship between religion and gender through the study of its different concrete articulations, whose outcomes and purposes are in fact multiple and contradictory. The authors effectively convey the idea of the urgency of empirical research, and of an intersectional sensitivity, in the study of a topic that has often been the subject of biased and simplified analyses.

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