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Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience, Richard Landes. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xix + 499 pp. Hardback US\$35.00. ISBN13: 9780199753598.

Despite the fact that the case studies treated in *Heaven on Earth* stretch back to the religious reformer Pharaoh Akhenaten in Ancient Egypt (fourteenth century BCE), and that Richard Landes is a medievalist, the book is of major importance for scholars of new religions, alternative spiritualities, and secular equivalents of religion. In the preface, when discussing the ‘apocalyptic millennial response of tribal cultures to the advent of imperialist conquest,’ Landes notes that he chose the Xhosa Cattle-Slaying in the mid-nineteenth century, but the exemplars were ‘almost limitless: the native Indian Ghost Dance, the Mau-Mau, the Rastafarians’ (xi). Of the eleven case studies, only Akhenaten, the ‘Demotic Millennialism’ of the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution pre-date the nineteenth century. Other examples include Papua New Guinean cargo cults, Marxism, the successful revolution of the Bolsheviks and the failed revolution of Nazism, and UFO religions. The book is an exercise in *la longue durée*: metanarrative, grand theory or macrohistory, which has been unfashionable in certain circles for three decades, but is making a comeback. The preface sketches a six point ‘working hypothesis’ for subsequent chapters; that there are significant shared dynamics underlying perfectionism in social thinking of all kinds; and these emotions partially shape the form of millennial movements that come into existence; and that such movements have a trajectory of an exhilarating spinning out of ‘normal time,’ then a falling back into it. Then it is argued that even members of those movements that succeed in attaining to positions of power have a crucial recognition that their vision has failed; that dealing with this disappointment has sparked many important phenomena (Landes lists “new” religions, empires, revolutions, even modernity’); and that all the documentation that scholars work from is tainted by its dating from after the failure of apocalyptic hopes (xvii).

For Landes, the greatest interest is in the cognitive dissonance generated by the experience of failed millennial visions, even in those cases when the movement infiltrates positions of power in society. The reactions generated range from ‘self-reflective and transformational, to paranoid and violent’ (xviii). Part 1, ‘Roosters, Owls and Bats,’ comprises three chapters that delineate the continuing appeal and relevance of apocalyptic and millennial discourses, despite the fact that they are perennially unfulfilled, and discusses the differences between everyday, secular time and apocalyptic, millennial time. Arguing that apocalyptic millennial beliefs are more influential than apocalyptic eschatological beliefs (because the latter are rapidly proved wrong when the

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end does not come), Landes sketches three types of response to millennial discourses. The Roosters are those who crow 'Dawn breaks, arise for the Day of the Lord!' whereas the Owls are those who insist 'Quiet! It's still the middle of the night; the master sleeps; the foxes are out; and you can only do damage by awakening the barnyard prematurely' (40). The typical behaviours of roosters and owls are explained in an analysis of Rudolf of Fulda's mid-ninth century account of the short-lived millennial movement in Mainz led by a woman, Thiota, whom he describes as a 'pseudo-prophetess' (37). A four stage model of apocalyptic time is mounted, consisting of a waxing wave, a breaking wave, a broken wave, and the return to normal time, which is the triumph of the Owls who write the records.

Part 2, 'Tribal Millennialism' is a two-chapter block examining the Xhosa Cattle-Slaying (1856-1857) and Papuan Cargo Cults of the twentieth century. In the former, an orphaned teenage girl named Nongqawuse reported that dead ancestors had spoken to her, promising that if the Xhosa 'slay all their cattle, destroy their grain stores, cease planting crops, and purify themselves from all witchcraft, a great day would dawn when the British would vanish from the land and the ancestors would live again, bringing with them new and more plentiful cattle and grain' (91). The acceptance of this millennial prophecy resulted in the death from starvation, at the end of 1857, of thirty to fifty thousand Xhosa and the slaughter of possibly half a million cattle. In his account Landes notes that seemingly irrational actions such as the Cattle Slaying partake of rationality when situated in context. The Xhosa rejoiced when news of the death of General Cathcart at the hands of the Russians during the Crimean War, as he had executed the great Xhosa prophet, Mlanjeni, and for 'them, wherever the British were defeated, the Xhosa were fighting against them' (99). This movement turned dark as the promise failed; actions of great ferocity were directed against Xhosa, the apocalyptic wave broke savagely, such that Landes notes that '[e]veryone lost but the British' (119). The chapter on cargo cults revisits familiar cases, such as the 'Vailala madness,' John Frum, and Yali, situating them in the context of the Pacific theatre of war during World War II. It is noted that in these cases Christian missionaries were moved to change their grand narrative of conversion from a top-down one to a more demotic, bottom-up story that imbues the local peoples with dignity and freedom of choice, possibly as a result of the millennial movements.

Section 3, 'Agrarian Millennialism,' contains chapters on the Pharaoh Akhenaten and the Taiping Rebellion. Section 4, 'Modern (Secular) Millennialism,' is the most extensive in the book, with five chapters. The first treats the difference between pre-modern and modern societies where millennialism is concerned, and argues for the

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importance of 'prime divider' politics, in which there is a 'profound division between elites and commoners' (216). Divides constructed by elites usually involve legal privilege, restricted access to knowledge, devaluation of manual labour, and the possession of honour. In modernity civil society emerges, with equality before the law, literacy, the value of working for a living, and 'positive-sum attitudes that transcend honor-shame dynamics' (227) being characteristic. Landes argues that demotic religion and demotic millennialism emerge within civil polities, and he links this with the spirit of post-Exilic Israelite polity and religion compared to that of their neighbour empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The second chapter explores links between the Enlightenment, demotic millennialism and the French Revolution. The third chapter investigates Marxism as a type of 'egalitarian millennialism' (288) and the fourth chapter concentrates on the 'Bolshevik apocalypse' of 1917-1935, bringing Landes' argument into the twentieth century.

Of greatest interest to the scholar of new religions and alternative spiritualities in the West are the final chapter in this section, 'Genocidal Millennialism: Nazi Paranoia,' and the two chapters of Section 5, 'Postmodern Millennialism,' which consider in turn the millennial expectations of UFO and alien-based religions and global Islamic *jihad*. Landes' picture of the Nazi ideology as a religious phenomenon, and of Hitler as a messiah and harbinger of the Drittes Tausendjähriges Reich (Third Millennial Kingdom), is persuasive and powerful. One problem with the book is that footnotes are reasonably sparing; while Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke is cited, it seems to this reader that Landes should be aware of Michael Burleigh's important book *The Third Reich: A New History* (2000) which argued that the Third Reich was the product of a political religion, replete with symbols, hymns, liturgy, martyrs and a Messiah, but it is not referenced. The discussion of UFO religions focuses on the Raelians and is interesting and quite insightful, despite Landes' unfortunate use of the term 'cult' to describe these religions and his attribution of 'narcissistic millennialism' to such groups (391). He extends Garry W. Trompf's argument that UFO religions are the 'cargo cults' of the modern West, and examines popular cultural phenomena for evidence of millennial time, conspiracy theories, the expectation of a millennium (for the Raelians, the arrival of the Elohim when the embassy they require is constructed in Israel), and the 'do-it-yourself Rapture' of Heaven's Gate (406). Chapter 14, 'Enraged Millennialism: Global *Jihad*' is a quite conventional treatment of the rise of militant Islam, and the relationship of Western modernity and what Landes calls the 'humiliations' experienced by Islam and Islamic societies. Landes' brief conclusion considers apocalyptic millennialism in the twenty-first century, its relation to the left-right continuum in politics, and the duties of responsible

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historians to assess these phenomena. This book is an example of big-picture thinking, which may err in many details as Landes himself admits. Nevertheless, it's a serious attempt to deal with an important topic, and is an exhilarating read, filled with fascinating detail and insight. The preponderance of post-eighteenth century material (and even the two eighteenth century chapters have relevance) makes it of great interest to scholars of alternative religions in modernity.

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