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Review: *The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion by Richard Landes; Steven T. Katz

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on Joachim highlights Whalen's argument regarding the ambivalence and duality of apocalypticism. During the heyday of the reformist popes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Rome and the papacy were viewed as the sacred agents of God's eschatological plan. Apocalypticists in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, believed that the papacy was the embodiment of the Antichrist and the new Babylon. The machinations behind this transition are outlined by Whalen with great aplomb, as is the dialectic of Christian unity through the spiritual grace of God and/or via sacred violence.

*Dominion of God* is an ambitious work. Whalen skillfully weaves into his readable narrative a vast array of complicated topics, such as the Crusades, the Great Schism, and papal politics. While not providing the final word on these issues, Whalen successfully manages these robust topics within the framework of his historical argument while also introducing a fresh perspective to the academic discourse. Such scope and detail might alienate some readers, though, especially those without prior knowledge of the history and thought of medieval Christianity. Likewise, those looking for a general overview of apocalyptic thought should look elsewhere. Still, *Dominion of God* is not to be missed for its eclectic catalogue of thinkers, and it is certain to make a major contribution to both historical and religious studies.

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*The Paranoid Apocalypse: A Hundred-Year Retrospective on The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Edited by Richard Landes and Steven T. Katz. New York University Press, 2012. 264 pages. \$35.00, cloth.

The result of a conference at the Elie Weisel Center for Jewish Studies and in collaboration with the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, *The Paranoid Apocalypse* examines the one-hundred-year history of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. After one hundred years, the editors explain, "the *Protocols* stand out as both one of the most malicious forgeries in history—'an atrocity-producing narrative'—and the most widely distributed forgery in the world" (1). Upon this basis, *The Paranoid Apocalypse* analyzes this enduring document, its history, and its influence, bringing together an array of authors who serve as journalists, policy analysts, and scholars from fields as diverse as Jewish studies, history, political science, and literature.

The volume is divided into six parts. Part I, "Conceptual Prelude: On Paranoid Politics and Apocalyptic Violence," provides the theoretical framework that emerged from the conference and shapes the themes for this book. The editors highlight three broad themes in particular:

“1. the psychological nature of paranoia in its appeal, 2. the problem of ‘truth’ and the exegetical shiftiness that detaches the text from its empirical moorings as a forgery, and 3. the power of apocalyptic belief in ‘activating’ the text as a social and political player” (3). Following two theoretical chapters, “The Melian Dialogue, the *Protocols*, and the Paranoid Imperative” by Richard Landes, and “The Apocalyptic Other: On Paranoia and Violence,” by Christopher Strozier, the rest of the book unfolds chronologically from the medieval period to the present.

Contributors to *The Paranoid Apocalypse* write with noticeable urgency. Authors are troubled by not only the general persistence of *The Protocols* since its publication in the early twentieth century but, more importantly, by what appears to be a recent resurgence of interest in *The Protocols* around the world. As Stephen Eric Bronner writes in his essay, “Conspiracy Then and Now: History, Politics, and the Anti-Semitic Imagination,” *The Protocols*, although widely discredited, “fits the [anti-Semitic] stereotype, and it is useful to mark the scapegoat”; thusly, *The Protocols* “retain its appeal” and “the new anti-Semitism is not really very different from the old in its assumptions or its theory” (219). Contributors agree that its recent increased popularity is primarily the result of apocalyptic paranoia that at once creates and sustains a myth as well as supplies a basis for violence. Parts 2–4 demonstrate the development, endurance, and consequences of anti-Semitism and its underlying paranoia across historical, geographical, and cultural boundaries. Part 6 includes two essays that seek to answer the question “Quo Vadis? How to Respond to the Return of the *Protocols*?” In addition to Bronner’s essay mentioned above, Richard Landes closes the volume by considering the effect of *The Protocols*’ twenty-first-century rise in popularity on Jewish intellectuals in “Jewish Self-Criticism, Progressive Moral *Schadenfreude*, and The Suicide of Reason.” In this essay, Landes also draws attention to the ways in which “the left” and its “progressive” dialogue and anti-Zionism contributes to anti-Semitism by “belittling Israel’s moral struggle” (230). As a result, *The Paranoid Apocalypse* ends with a sweeping critique aimed at every constituency: “Scapegoating and paranoid narratives—with their imbedded calls to violence—flourish when listeners fail to distinguish between honesty and dishonesty, no matter how well intentioned their motivations” (243).

*The Paranoid Apocalypse* will likely not appeal to general readers; however, it can be read broadly among academic audiences. The variety of backgrounds and specialties among its contributors lends itself well to interdisciplinary scholars, programs, and courses. From Japanese Literature to International Affairs policy advocates, *The Paranoid Apocalypse* has much to offer in way of detailed histories, cultural analyses, and political advocacy.

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