

talismans. The latter was more than a purely academic interest: on his way from Egypt to Istanbul in 1673, terrified by the prospect of impending shipwreck, he cast one of his best Arabic manuscripts on magic into the waves to atone for the sin of owning it. (He lived to regret his rashness.) Yet Hamilton also points out Wansleben's neglect of the mosques of Cairo, part of an overall disinterest in Islam which set him apart from many of his European contemporaries.

In a sixty-page introduction that would delight Borges and Amitav Ghosh alike, Hamilton narrates Wansleben's life and guides the reader through his travel report. Wansleben published two accounts of Egypt, the first in Italian in 1671, and the second, more significant one, in French in 1677. *Johann Michael Wansleben's travels in the Levant* offers an original Italian-language version of the second report, never before printed, and also includes explanatory notes, maps, appendices and a glossary, as well as reproductions of Wansleben's beautiful illustrations.

In the end, Wansleben collected nearly 600 Oriental manuscripts for the French Royal Library; wrote a great study of the Copts, which remains a valuable scholarly resource; and published two novel descriptions of Egypt. These form an important chapter in the early European study of that country. His career also offers us an entry point into the peculiar intellectual world of Oriental studies in seventeenth-century Europe: highly sophisticated yet confronted with vast unknown horizons, at once broad-minded and confessionally motivated, shaped by a common agenda and yet sufficiently flexible to allow individual intellectual dispositions to flourish.

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German Pietism and the problem of conversion. By Jonathan Strom. (Pietist, Moravian and Anabaptist Studies.) Pp. x + 226 incl. 1 ill. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018. \$89.95. 978 0 271 07934 9
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August Hermann Francke's dramatic religious conversion of 1697 has often been interpreted as a normative model for Pietist conversion experiences in eighteenth-century Germany. Francke not only set the theological standards for Pietist thinking, but by eschewing his former life and arriving at a breakthrough it seems more than logical that he also provided a point of departure for understanding the conception of Pietist conversion. And yet a closer study of conversion narratives written by German Pietists shows that the assumption is inaccurate if not false. In his excellently researched book, Strom successfully argues that Francke's conversion narrative was more exceptional than normative in the eighteenth century.

For one, Strom analyses the publication history of Francke's narrative and demonstrates that the text, while occasionally cited in earlier decades of the eighteenth century, was not widespread until the end of the century. Not until 1790 was the narrative 're-discovered' in the archives of the Franckesche Stiftungen by August Hermann Niemeyer and Georg Christian Knapp; it was subsequently published in 1794. Only then was Francke's account widely spread to the point that

scholars of German Pietism, especially Kurt Aland, assumed that Francke's conversion had been a rule for others associated with Halle's branch of Pietism in the eighteenth century.

In part, scholarship had been influenced by English and American Revivalism, which had put a much stronger emphasis on a detailed and exactly dated conversion experience. John Bunyan's famous autobiographical account from 1666 indeed became a model for English accounts and influenced Methodists like John Wesley and George Whitefield, who also published their own conversion narratives. Strom's study, though, concludes that 'German Pietists remained much more reluctant to publish their experiences', and that 'there is nothing comparable among leading German Pietists' (p. 151).

While German Pietists read the accounts coming from England, those accounts did not create as many followers as has been suspected. Some strands of German Pietism even rejected the English narratives. Philipp Jakob Spener warned that such accounts were more a hindrance than a help in a true conversion to God: 'The accounts of conversion, rebirth, and renewal, which are based on one's own experience, have this weakness that often Christian hearts, whose nature is right, begin to doubt the truly divine beginnings and fall into deep struggles' (p. 41).

While questioning long-held assumptions about conversion narratives in German Pietism, Strom paints a more detailed and accurate picture of the theological concepts of conversion and its representation in printed narratives. More influential than Francke's account was a text by the Berlin theologian Johann Caspar Schade (1666–98), which was published by Francke himself in 1700 and in 1701 by Gottfried Arnold. While Schade's biographical sketch provides details about his conversion, the focus is not on his personal struggles but rather on God's work in him. Even after his conversion, Schade continues to emphasise God's help through these struggles. Conversion, as outlined by Schade, is not a dramatic breakthrough but rather, a process.

More prominent than stories about dramatic breakthroughs were books that recounted conversion experiences in light of imminent death. Commonly read was Erdmann Heinrich Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The last hours of some persons*, published in five volumes between 1720 and 1733. As Strom shows in his analysis of the fifty-one biographical narratives, more than half of the texts did not present any traditional conversion experience but conversely focused on the spiritual struggles (*Anfechtung*) instead of the breakthrough (*Durchbruch*). While Henckel von Donnersmarck's books were frequently read as collections of spiritual biographies, the diverse accounts did not present a consistent model for believers searching for a way to experience their own repentance struggles (*Busskampf*) and conversions. If anything, the books showed that there were numerous possible paths to salvation, not only one.

The idea of a breakthrough did, of course, also flourish among German Pietists. However, it was not so widely dispersed as is often assumed, and it was not based on Francke as a model. The high call for a conversion experience – that it could be described in detail, that it showed an exact date and that it resulted from a profound *Busskampf* – was more of a rarity and was often localised in certain faith communities. Strom outlines in a case study the revival at the court of Dargun in

Mecklenburg in the 1730s. The preachers in Dargun favoured a rigid schema of conversion and even punished with expulsion those who did not agree with their views. Yet the events in Dargun remained an exception, and the mounting criticism from other Pietist theologians as well as Lutheran orthodox clergy demonstrates that it remained contested throughout the eighteenth century.

Strom's book is not only an excellent exploration of different concepts of conversion in eighteenth-century German Pietism, but it is also a historiographical case study for how scholarly views can be tilted if we only focus on one person (A. H. Francke) and how our knowledge of one geographical area (English Revivalism) can shape our views about other areas (German Pietism) which might show different patterns.

One aspect that Strom might have considered more closely is the relationship between views of death and dying in Lutheran orthodoxy and Pietism. Treatises about the *Ars moriendi* saw a revival in the later decades of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries and, given the importance of 'conversion in light of death' (as his third chapter is titled), a more detailed study of how these treatises view conversion and death would have given this chapter a stronger theological and historical framework.

Overall, the previous statement does not detract from the high quality of Strom's book. Strom provides a new and more detailed foundation for future scholarship on the diverse views of conversion in German Pietism and the ways in which Francke did (and did not) shape the theological movement that he helped to start in Halle.

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The life of William Robertson. Minister, historian and principal. By Jeffrey R. Smitten. Pp. x + 268. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017. £70. 978 0 7486 4610 4
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This absorbing and deeply researched biography begins with the disarming admission that '[William] Robertson's mind is a closed book' and that this is 'especially true of his religious views and intentions' (p. vi). Yet after reading Jeffrey Smitten's study, the reader feels that the closed book has been prised open, at least to afford a partial view of a famously guarded divine. As a reserved and private man who was 'reticent about his inner life', Robertson 'left no journals, diaries, memoirs, or personal notebooks (except financial accounts)' (p. vi). There are, however, almost 800 letters, manuscript notes on his sermons, his famous histories, lesser known publications and numerous references to Robertson in contemporary sources. Moreover, over the past generation, Robertson's published works have been scrutinised by numerous historians working on the Scottish Enlightenment. Smitten synthesises this material, weaving it into a biography that is admirably precise and succinct.

Readers of this *JOURNAL* will be particularly interested in what the book tells us about Robertson's ecclesiastical career and his religious position. As the leader of the Moderate faction in the Kirk and an eminent historian of Scotland, Europe, the Americas and India, Robertson epitomised what is now termed 'the religious Enlightenment' (though, oddly, he isn't even referenced in David