

La Santa Muerte in Mexico: History, Devotion, and Society. Edited by Wil G. Pansters. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. xiv + 230 pp. \$65.00 cloth.

Wil Panster's edited volume *La Santa Muerte in Mexico: History, Devotion, and Society* provides context for the popular veneration of La Santa Muerte, a Mexican devotional figure whose growth in recent years has garnered popular and scholarly attention. La Santa Muerte is typically depicted as a female skeleton (see images in Anne Huffschmid's as well as Judith Perdigón Castañeda and Bernardo Robles Aguirre's essays) and represents, in Panster's view, "the personification or sanctification of death itself" (29). She is not sanctioned by the Catholic Church, and yet the rituals, prayers, altars, and body art relating to her—which are documented in this book—flourish. Although lacking the type of formal organization that would encourage her veneration, La Santa Muerte devotees are increasingly diverse; Mexican anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz notes, "The Santa Muerte cult is no longer relegated to prisons, prostitutes, and the criminal world, but rather touches on sectors of society whose livelihood can be characterized as precarious" (183).

The seven essays comprising *La Santa Muerte in Mexico* position the scholarly conversation anthropologically, seeking to situate La Santa Muerte and her followers in frameworks that historicize her popular emergence (Benjamin T. Smith); explain her partaking in the "cultural patrimonialization of death" prevalent in Latin America (Juan Antonio Flores Martos, 85); and articulate a type of familial socialization intrinsic to the beliefs and practices associated with her (Regnar Kristensen). In considering La Santa Muerte's emergence in the Tepito neighborhood of Mexico City, and comparing her with other secular devotional individuals popular in Mexico (such as Juan Soldado, Jesús Malverde, and el Niño Fidencio), the book asks the "why" behind La Santa Muerte, returning to the hypothesis that "many of the petitions and demands [presented] to dead 'saints' could be attended to and resolved by a competent state, and it is surprising that the people who approach these figures plead reiteratively for safekeeping and protection regarding the most basic of issues, exposing, quite literally, a profile of abandonment by state and government institutions" (106). *La Santa Muerte in Mexico* contributes a valuable analytical perspective to the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding this enigmatic figure.

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The Letters of Henry Martyn, East India Company Chaplain. Edited by Scott D. Ayler. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019. xvi + 596 pp. £95.00, \$165.00 cloth.

This volume is divided into two parts of unequal length but of equal interest. The main part consists of over 500 pages of the transcribed letters of Henry Martyn (1781—1812)

beginning in late 1799, when he was setting out as a chaplain and missionary from England to India, until 1812, the year of his death in Torkat, Turkey. These complete letters have been meticulously collected, researched, and annotated. They are grouped into five chronologically ordered sections based on Martyn's geographic location as he navigated his missionary vocation. The editor gives each letter's source and current location along with any of its unique characteristics; he supplies information about all the persons mentioned in it; and explanatory notes about places, events, persons, and foreign words allow the reader to understand its purpose and contents. Ample cross-referencing makes it easy to pick up the numerous threads in Martyn's life and thought as these weave themselves through the various letters. A helpful list of recipients of the letters, with all the letters addressed to each one of them, is placed at the beginning of the book.

The much shorter, fifty-eight-page introduction provides the historical background that makes possible an intelligible and intelligent reading of the letters themselves. The introduction contains a fine biographical sketch of Martyn's life along with a fair assessment of his personality, character, thought, and work. It also offers insight into the various social, religious, and intellectual milieux in which Martyn dwelt during his brief life. In addition, the introduction provides some sense of the ways in which Martyn has been viewed and received among historians and ordinary church folk. All in all, the volume is an excellent historical compendium and would be of much usefulness to researchers in the fields of mission and British colonial history.

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***Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier.* By Benjamin E. Park. New York: Liveright, 2020. 324 pp. \$28.95 cloth.**

Whereas most studies of early Mormonism understandably focus on its emergence as a new religion, Benjamin Park's engaging book *Kingdom of Nauvoo* interprets the history of the Latter-day Saints in the early 1840s primarily as a response to the failure of American democracy to deliver on its promises of the inclusion and protection of minority rights. Deeply researched and written engrossingly for both an academic and broader public audience, *Kingdom of Nauvoo* aims to reveal "not only the radicalism of the early Mormons, but also the tenuousness of the American experiment" (6).

Park's book is a portrait of political and religious alienation. We encounter the Latter-day Saints beginning in 1839 as a people traumatized by their immediately prior persecutions in Missouri. In establishing their new city on the banks of the Mississippi River in western Illinois, the Mormons sought earnestly to create a society that would provide the order, security, and assurance they craved. However, their estrangement only deepened when the federal government, consistent with the limited federalism of the period, repeatedly demonstrated its inability or unwillingness to provide relief for the very real wrongs the Saints had endured.