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Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach, Martin Mulsow, Bernd-Christian Otto, Rahul Bjørn Parson und Jörg Rüpke, eds.: *Religious Individualisation: Historical Dimensions and Comparative Perspectives*, volumes 1 and 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), xiv+1416 S., ISBN 978-3-11-058001-3 (hbk), 978-3-11-058093-8 (e-book), € 129,95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110580853>.

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This massive two volume anthology is the result of nearly a decade of research by the “religious individualisation” *Kollegforschergruppe* of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies at the University of Erfurt, a large scale collaborative project to which more than 120 members have contributed over time. The volume aims to deconstruct the “established master narrative” in which (1) individualisation was a characteristic of “Western” modernity specifically,

with (2) religion hampering individualisation, or individualisation leading to a decline in religion. Starting from the recognition that phenomena that might be called “individualisation” took place in both premodern and non-western societies, the authors construe a broad matrix of semantic meanings of “religious individualisation”. This matrix encompasses notions focused on (a) the enhanced range of individual options, (b) self and creativity, (c) deviance and critique, and (d) experience. In result, the individual contributions (53 individual chapters, authored by an almost equal number of men and women) approach comparable—but also widely varying—historical processes. Having these contributions together in a single *open access* publication is extremely valuable for future scholarship.

Religious Individualisation is divided into four parts, each part organized in several sections and including between thirteen and twenty-one chapters. The four parts are all introduced by the editors and all ten sections end with afterwords co-authored by the contributors. These introductions and afterwords add significant value to the overall project, by comparing, generalizing, and sometimes theorizing the similarities and differences between the contributions. Moreover, they imply a degree of conversation and debate among their authors that such large cooperative undertakings rarely achieve.

Part 1, entitled “Transcending Selves,” focusses on the co-constituting relationships of the self with postulated supernatural entities, social others, and (it) self. It highlights how individuals’ selves are seen to transcend the confines of their (assumed or inferred) identities, for example by examining how mystics like Meister Eckhart perceived of the self in relationship with the transcendent, or how Palmyrene priests navigated religious individualisation (here referring to iconographical choices) within the social structure of standardised ritual practices.

Part 2, entitled “Dividual,” examines situations in which the boundaries between individuals and their environment were experienced as porous. This human self is so fundamentally embedded in a web of relations that it needs more than the unifying concept of individuality. *Dividuality* acknowledges the perceived capacity of selves to be open and co-constituted with the transcendent (in trance and possession) as well as the human potential of partibility and multiple belonging. Interestingly, the contributors stress the co-existence of dividual and individual aspects of the human self, rather than considering them as necessarily belonging to distinct historical stages (premodern vs. modern) or cultural settings. Such co-existence is found in ancient Greek oracle consultations (Eidinow), recording both how ritual enquirers perceived themselves as individuals, and how the ritual produced uncertainty and a sense of distance from the self, effectively restraining the enquiring individual. Eidinow’s concluding provocation that the composite nature of the self limits agency and knowledge is directly

against the trend of Ann Swidler's "culture in action" framework, in which differentiation leads to increasing individual agency.

Part 3, entitled "Conventions and Contentions," focusses on processes of religious individualisation that become relevant for larger numbers of people, or —potentially—prompt the formation of institutions. The contributions all stress the interplay between patterns of belief and human agency, especially deviations from the norm, showing how frequently instances of enhanced individualisation were accompanied by counter-individualising or de-individualising tendencies (which they only sometimes equate with institutionalisation). This is pertinent in Mulder-Bakker's examination of two 13th-century exemplary lay religious women, showing how individualisation went hand in hand with the "conventionalisation" of individual initiatives and practices that needed to be formalised, regulated, and stabilised (p. 728). These women only developed local networks, never fully institutionalized within the Church, but through their later hagiographies they would become exemplary models, available for future institutions. Together with the other contributions in this third part, this contribution reminds us that "without ritualisation, group formation, or the establishment of textual traditions, religious individualisation may remain nothing but a niche phenomenon" (p. 640).

Part 4, entitled "Authorities and Religious Individualisation," connects with the previous part in its focus on the role of authoritative agents and processes of social and religious group formation (called "groupings"). It includes contributions on de-traditionalisation (the opening up of options and choices), pluralisation (not only the co-existence of various 'religions' or religious groups, but of a wider social/cultural field), and power dynamics (in which individuals were walking the edges of normative frameworks). The contributions in this section are most strongly defined by the Lived Ancient Religion project at Erfurt, highlighting the appropriation of religion by individuals, and its potential culmination into "religionification" (the grouping together of religious practices in sharply defined formalised groups, as for example in ancient Christian churches and early modern confessional denominations).

Altogether, *Religious Individualisation* is more than a multi-authored collection of essays. The volume is characterized by a high degree of coherence, convincingly arguing against the idea that individualisation is tied to modernity and the Western world only. While in many ways serving as a model for edited volumes, two minor critical remarks are in place. First, the introduction(s) are frequently written in a dense theoretical style, with occasional opaque and abstract language attesting to the linguistic convergence among members of the *Kollegforschergruppe*, but to a profoundly defamiliarising, if not excluding effect. Scholars without a decade of exposure to this vocabulary may wonder in what sense Rüpke's

observation, for example, that “[i]ndividualisation as well as socialisation are processes within complex and multi-layered societies, processes that are informed by basic social factors and contingent local and temporal circumstances” (p. 974) is more than a truism stating the obvious. I sometimes asked myself whether the wide matrix of meanings attributed to “individualisation” and the sheer number of contributors not also contributed to overly abstract generalisations—a doubt, however, constantly abated by high quality individual contributions. Second, the grouping of the chapters in sections and parts is often successful, but on occasion the connections between neighbouring chapters fail to convince. Sometimes, the topics are widely disparate (the “practices” in section 3.1) and the coherence can only be found in a very high level of abstraction. While the juxtaposition of an art-viewer’s engagement with the multiple meanings of modern crucifixion renderings (Vinzent) and a possession ritual (Malik) is stimulating, one wonders whether the two cases are best compared in light of the common topic addressed in this section, i. e., purported intersubjective porosity. Despite such rumination on shortcomings due to the extremely wide scope of these volumes, *Religious Individualisation* may be highly recommended to anyone dealing with such crucial issues as religion and the self, religion and personhood, individual bricolage and appropriation, and thereby with communal or even collective imaginaries and practices.