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Response to Jack David Eller's review of my latest book

Religio. 2024, vol. 32, iss. 2, pp. 403-404

ISSN 1210-3640 (print); ISSN 2336-4475 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2024-38669>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.80735>

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Access Date: 27. 11. 2024

Version: 20241118

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never existed in reality. So the “cucurbita movement” is surely a fiction, and, because of this, we have a very good reason to suppose the same about the other two as well (the term “yotengrit” and the shaman “Lápkumánja”). Máté also made slight alterations to all three, in accordance with his own preferences – this is not only a dishonest and shameless act, but also provides a further evidence of the falseness of the series.

From a theoretical point of view, the author made significant mistakes as well. The thesis of “completely doubting the absolute” (namely *relativism*) stands against the mighty tradition of European metaphysics; moreover, it has become popular in the modern era, causing the greatest crisis (and, it seems, the end) of Western culture. However, this doubt is not the key to freedom, because, if there were no *absolute* base, then *anything* could take its place – so the writer, contrary to his intention, takes a stand by arbitrariness.

There are serious objections to liberalism too. For instance, the principle of “personal choice” – if there is anything of substance that is left to be done beyond “doing no harm” – commits the fallacy of *appealing to authority*. For an idea (or a behaviour) does not become right merely because an authority (in this case the individual) believes it to be so.

In summary, Yotengrit is a syncretist work, containing many modern thoughts, of which one is slightly more prominent than the others – as the writer himself stated: “I wanted to promote Hungarian liberalism”. This approach is visible in advocating such ideas, and misinterpreting them as “ancient knowledge”. He also fails to recognize that relativism and excessive individualism are the primary causes of our contemporary misfortune; moreover, in the exposition of Yotengrit, he even fell into the mistake of using a fake source. Nevertheless, because of the latter, he has made it easier for us to decide on the accuracy of the books that we have examined here. Thus, the most plausible conclusion is that the series is inauthentic, mostly because its sources are partially detectable in modern era European philosophy, and especially in

a fake text. To me it is obvious that, for him, “ancientness” was just a bait and a costume with which he wanted to attract attention (as we know, people have always been fascinated by what seems “exotic”).

In spite of all of this, the writer has some interesting thoughts too, and clearly has a strength: very good language skills. He was a talented poet and a leading figure in the revolution of 1956 – but, with Yotengrit, he created an artificial “religion”, about which there are deep concerns regarding both its sources and its content.

SZABOLCS LAGLER



Religio 32/2, 2024, 401-403.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2024-38675>

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Response to Jack David Eller’s review of my latest book¹

Jack David Eller is a contemporary authority in the field of the anthropology of religion. Therefore, I cannot but take pride in the fact that in the past few years my scholarship has had the honour to receive special attention from Prof. Eller, particularly my latest two books, which have been cited in some of his own recent works.

In the latest of such manifestations of interest in my studies, Eller carried out an attentive reading and critique of what is currently (2024) my latest book, *Ritualising Cultural Heritage and Re-enchanting Rituals in Europe* (2023). The review he wrote in the issue of *Religio* prior to the current one (vol. 32/1, 2024) would under normal circumstances require no response from myself, for it is fair and balanced, alternating as it does between praise and

¹ Alessandro Testa, *Ritualising Cultural Heritage and Re-enchanting Rituals in Europe*, Durham (NC): Carolina Academic Press 2023, review by David Eller, published in *Religio* 32/1, 2024, 238-240.

criticism, and pointing out fairly but squarely the strengths as well as the weaknesses of my book. So far so good. However, the review also reveals what I consider to be a major error, one that in my opinion requires rectification, which is the main reason for my writing this response. The error lies in the fact that because of a technical miscommunication between the publisher and Prof. Eller himself – a miscommunication for which the reviewer bears no responsibility – he received a flawed and incomplete complementary electronic copy of my book. This led him to write, in his review, that mine is (I quote his words) “a short book (around 60,000 words)”. I have taken issue with this affirmation because, as a matter of fact, my book counts 83,700 words, not 60,000. Considering that the average length of an academic monograph is between 80,000 and 100,000 words, the book cannot by any means be considered a short one. It is, rather, a medium-length book. This is no trivial matter – as any author who would not like to see one third of his/her book obliterated would agree – and although the mistake was unintentional, I think it deserves rectification, nonetheless.

As I claim above, the review is fair, also when it points out some manifest shortcomings of the book, as well as some weaknesses that perhaps could have been better addressed when the book was being finalised. But the manuscript was a work long in the making, one that had to be delayed several times for a number of reasons, and, at any rate and as every author knows, there

is always a Rubicon in the writing process signalling when the moment of researching and integrating and collecting thoughts ends, and the finalisation of a manuscript for publication begins. This consideration is a reaction to Eller writing that “the book could have been expanded significantly with case material and still been of manageable length”, an affirmation true from his standpoint, but which loses much of its salience against the fact that the book is not as short as he thought, which caused him to write what he wrote.

This having been said, I beg to disagree with the author on another point – specifically, when he highlights the recapitulative function of my third chapter about rituality: true, it is a chapter mostly epitomising previous literature (ergo somewhat derivative in nature), but also true is that in the final pages of it I develop my own theory of ritual symbolic hierarchy, which I consider an original contribution to the field of ritual studies. I hope that this aspect will be considered and included in future reviews.

I conclude this short response by saluting again Prof. Eller’s encouraging words and appreciation for my scholarship, and by thanking him for having taken the time to read my book.

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Religio 32/2, 2024, 403-404.

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