

## Book Reviews

*Handbook of New Age*, edited by Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis. Brill. 2007. 484pp., hb, \$201.00, ISBN-13: 9789004153554.

Reviewed by Milda Alisauskiene, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, m.alisauskiene@smf.vdu.lt.

### Keywords

New Age, modern religiosity

The phenomenon of New Age has for more than twenty years been the subject of academic discussions among sociologists, historians and anthropologists of religion. *Handbook of New Age* edited by Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis is the contribution to these discussions. It presents summary of the works by most significant scholars in this area starting with Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Steven Sutcliffe, Liselotte Frisk, Mikael Rothstein, J. Gordon Melton and others. The wide geography of the authors of this volume reveals the global aspects of New Age phenomenon and at the same time allows to grasp its local manifestations.

The volume is divided into five parts. The Introduction presents to the reader the problems of definition of New Age, its relations to Western Esotericism, and its place in the history of spiritual ideas and recent transformations. George Chrystides's opening chapter asks important question, "How do we define New Age?", and analyzes existing scholarly definitions of the phenomenon. The following chapters by Wouter J. Hanegraaf, Steven Sutcliffe and J. Gordon Melton also contribute to the New Age's definition problem from the history of religion and religious studies perspectives. For instance, Steven Sutcliffe traces the birth of New Age ideas in the interwar period and its specific historical context. Meanwhile J. Gordon Melton approaches New Age as a millennial movement and discusses its transformation from millennial to post-millennial movement.

The second part of the volume "New Age and Social-Scientific Research" contributes to the broader understanding of New Age as a social phenomenon and gives us insights from the fields of sociology and psychology. Liselotte Frisk raises the problem of the lack of quantitative research into

the New Age, arguing that such data that would enable scholars to make comparisons on statistical grounds between different countries. As the author correctly observes the problems of applying the quantitative data starts from the problems of operationalization of the concepts needed for such researches. Respondents in various countries understand the meanings of the terms spirituality, religiosity, etc. differently, while the notion of New Age may not be applied in some countries at all, especially those with experience of Communism because of the restrictions of freedom of religion.

In their chapter, Miguel Farias and Pehr Granqvist approach the New Age believers from the psychological point of view and based on their own research discover their differences from the believers of traditional religious communities. Adam Possamai approaches New Age as the network and uses the term cultic milieu to describe it, instead of the church-sect typology that is widely used by sociologists of religion. He argues that the notion of cultic milieu reveals the essence of New Age—“affinity-networking of ‘New Agers’ across all the different types of cults, but this networking is far from being limited to cults and the cultic milieu alone” (163).

Dominic Corrywright in his contribution “New Age Diffuse Communities” continues the discussion about the social manifestations of New Age diffuse web-communities. He argues that New Age challenged the previously established typologies and refers to this phenomenon as the manifestation of postmodernity.

The third part of the volume “New Age, Culture, and Society” localizes New Age within broader culture of contemporary Western societies. Martin Ramstedt discusses the relations between New Age and business. The editor of this volume, James R. Lewis, contributes with the analysis of the relations between New Age and science. He discovers that New Agers use science as the philosophy of nature and its authority to legitimate their own ideas.

Christopher Partridge in his chapter “Truth, Authority and Epistemological Individualism in New Age Thought” discusses that New Age is not a postmodern but rather modern phenomenon because of its understanding of self, truth, etc. Anna E. Kubiak discusses old myths and their new mysticism in the context of New Age. Adrian Ivakhiv in his contribution analyzes the place of pilgrimages in New Age milieu.

The fourth part of this volume analyzes global aspects of New Age phenomenon. It starts with Marion I. Bowman’s contribution about Glastonbury in England which attracts the spiritual seekers and religious practitioners of different religious traditions. Mikael Rothstein in his contribution “Hawaii in New Age Imaginations: A Case of Religious Inventions” analyzes how New

Age presents Hawaiian religion and discovers that it has no relationship to the original; nevertheless the possible relations between these two traditions are being used for the purpose of New Age legitimization. Maria Julia Carozzi discusses the concept of Latin American New Age and indeed proves that New Age in Latin America differs from other countries in its interactions with other religious traditions.

The fifth part of the book presents comparative perspectives on New Age and other religious traditions. Swedish scholar Olav Hammer analyzes his data from the fieldwork about the New Age and its sceptics. Well-known expert on New Age and Neopaganism Michael York in the next article analyzes how astrology becomes the mainstream appeal. Maria Tighe and Jenny Butler discusses the relationship between New Age and holistic health movement. Melissa Harington analyzes the relations between New Age and Neopaganism and reveals that the followers of the latter resist being understood as a part of the first one. In the last contribution the co-editor of this volume Daren Kemp presents his own research—comparison of New Age and Christianity and discovers that there are few ways how Christians approach to New Age.

In general it should be pointed that the volume *Handbook of New Age* should be seen as the one which summarizes the academic discussions about the social phenomenon New Age in Western society which lasted for more than twenty years and it should attract the attention of everyone who is interested in it. Many contributions of the volume indicate landmarks where and how the research of New Age should continue in the future and ask what is the future of New Age. One of the main shortcomings of this volume is its high price, making it affordable mainly by libraries, but even in such case this book should find its place in every library whose readers show any interest to religion in the contemporary world.