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value of comics as fully-fledged contemporary cultural texts fulfilling many important social functions. Referring to the individual texts in the volume, he also poses questions and indicates potential research tropes that could be taken up and developed in further analyses of the relationship between religion and popular culture.

It is worth noting once again the cognitive and substantive value of the monograph 'Comics, Culture, and Religion. Faith Imagined'. The authors involved in its creation present a truly diverse and interesting picture of the relationship between religion and popular culture. Drawing on a wealth of sources, they offer readers multiple approaches to the problem resulting from the representation of different scientific disciplines, traditions, and research areas. They use a range of methods of analysis: literary analysis, surveys, interviews, digital ethnography, ethnographic fieldwork, and the content analysis of comics and other media. The creators of the comics studied, the readers, and the works themselves come from Europe, Japan, India, and the United States. In turn, the authors of the individual chapters come from countries with different histories of comics, of their socio-cultural status and reception. Regardless of this (or perhaps because of it), reading the texts contained in the monograph provides invaluable insights into the religious needs of contemporary people and the ways in which they are realised in popular culture. The sociological approach to this issue allowed the authors to recognise and interestingly describe the multiple social functions of religion, as well as the deep-rooted and unrelenting need for such experiences and their ever-evolving socio-cultural dimension. This is also true in the context of the secularised Western world, where traditional religious institutions no longer organise religious life, yet religious (and more broadly spiritual) needs have not disappeared and people are still looking for new, often very individual forms for their expression. A certain shortcoming of the monograph is the lack of illustrations in some chapters. In a publication about visual culture texts, they are an integral part of the

narrative. However, this in no way detracts from the publication as a whole.

In conclusion, one must once again agree with the editor of the monograph, Kees de Groot, that creative and substantive research into popular culture texts, including comics, can serve to better understand the place and function of religion and popular culture in contemporary culture and society. In the last sentence of the book, he suggests the possibility of continuing the research. Surely many readers who have already read the publication with real satisfaction will eagerly add: "Dear Editor. We hold you to your word"!

MARCIN JAWORSKI



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Imre Máté, Yotengrit (vol. 1-2),

**Győr: Palatia Nyomda és Kiadó
Kft. 2004-2005, 178 p., 207 p.**

**ISBN 978-963-7692-11-8,
ISBN 978-963-9906-61-7.**

In recent decades, there has been a strong interest in so-called "ancient religion" (I would rather say old/early culture) in Hungary, just like almost everywhere in Europe (and maybe elsewhere too). With this brief review, I want to share some remarks about the 1st and 2nd volumes of one popular exponent of such interest – that is *Yotengrit*, a four-volume series of books published between 2004 and 2008. The author, Imre Máté claims that he has uncovered "ancient knowledge" preserved by a secret group of shamans who lived in the *Kisalföld* (a region in north-western Hungary). Could this be true?

Before examining the books, we have to look back on the unfortunate history of the country in the 20th century, and its connection to the many (still) widespread nonsensical theories about the history and culture of (early) Hungarians. (Some claimed, already in the 1920s, that they originated from Atlantis along with the Aztecs and other peoples, or from Mu and the Americas, or that there is a kinship between Hungarians and the Maori people, etc.) The reason for this is essentially that people's identity has become uncertain – a situation which has come to pass as a consequence of several things, not least Soviet occupation (1944–1989) and its (spiritual) destructiveness, and the Treaty of Trianon (1920) which caused a profound level of distress. As we can see from the aforementioned examples, these theories began to gain more ground around this time: the treaty not only caused enormous political and economic upheaval, but also left a deep scar in the Hungarian people's psyche. Tales of fictional "greatness" are, as so often, symptoms of cultural decay and identity-crisis – but let us not forget to consider one important perspective: this ongoing crisis of identity is a part of a greater issue, namely our *derailed modernity*, which is accompanied by the perplexity surrounding the question of man's role in the world. I have clarified all of this in order to identify the motives behind the growing demand for "ancient history and traditions" beyond the natural and normal interest in them.

Nevertheless, Yotengrit is not among the most implausible of conceptions, but rather the description of a culture that never existed, with myths, stories, (liberal) ethics, and so on, presented in the costume of "antiquity". The most appealing aspect reading the books is that some thoughts clearly have their origin in a detectable source. They talk of the shaman as a mediator, just like Eliade, about reversed values of Christianity, like Nietzsche, about evolution, like modern science, and, first and foremost, have a strong emphasis on promoting liberalism: the usual phrase "everything is allowed that does not hurt anyone else" and other equivalents appear regularly – which is the Harm Principle, best known

from J. S. Mill, but, of course, holds the mentality of liberalism in itself (see Locke, Rawls, etc.). Another, very weighty statement is that, according to Yotengrit, "the individual is not subject to the community" – but it is difficult to imagine how this idea could have functioned in the past, or even function today. I really wonder why anyone would advocate this excessive individualism, when it is one of the most destructive dispositions towards communities, including nation and family, which (it seems) were important to the author himself. Moreover, it talks about "tolerance and humanism", "liberty, equality, fraternity", and being "in harmony and love with nature", thoughts that have become popular in the last few centuries – this again demonstrates the modernity (and not antiquity) of Yotengrit.

Is there any external evidence supporting the content of the series? Not really, but some facts present a different picture to its self-interpretation. For instance, Máté claims to be Ferenc Nagy's disciple. Nagy's great-grandson wrote his thesis about his great-grandfather, in which we can read that the keeping of his knowledge was an inner family tradition, and that it was forbidden to reveal it to outsiders. This may be the reason for a particular contradiction: Máté usually refers to him as his personal master; however, in an interview, he said that it was his grandmother who taught him Nagy's knowledge. These two statements cannot be true together.

Finally, the accuracy can be determined, because Máté used a fake book entitled *Középkori magyar inkvizíció* [*Medieval Inquisition in Hungary*] as his source. This is the origin even of the word *yotengrit* (originally without *t* at its end) – and the two books (Yotengrit and *Medieval*...) are the only ones that mention a shaman named "Lápkumánja" and a heretical movement named as "cucurbita movement". About the latter, I found no information anywhere else, including even Philip Schaff's extensive church history. The writer of *Medieval Inquisition* did not keep himself back from arbitrarily modifying his sources: he deliberately "misunderstood" the term *cucurbita*, thus he created a "movement" which

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



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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.