

Petersen, Anders Klostergaard, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Luther H. Martin, Jeppe Sinding Jensen, and Jesper Sørensen (eds), (2018) *Evolution, Cognition, and the History of Religion: Festschrift in Honour of Armin W. Geertz*. (Supplements to Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, vol. 13.) Leiden, Boston: Brill. 702 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-38510-8 (hardback)

A Festschrift is an odd type of publication. To begin with, typical Festschriften are volumes that only have three expected readers: the honoured one, the editor(s), and the reviewer. All others are free to browse and read individual contributions at pleasure. There is a trend now to build Festschriften around a theme or even a “program”, like this one, to give them a more coherent outlook, but to me their apparent incoherence is part of the charm of good Festschriften. It is like entering a bookstore where one can make unexpected finds during a rainy afternoon.

In some fields, like ancient Iranian studies, where proper journals are lacking, many important articles have been published in Festschriften. In other fields, which have an established hierarchy of journals and where journal articles are what counts most, scholars would be discouraged to publish their strongest works in that kind of organ – in these fields (like psychology), it is increasingly unlikely for a Festschrift to be put together in the first place. In the humanities, including the study of religion\’s, where citation indexes don’t account for one’s professional standing, a Festschrift serves as an alternative index of achievement on a life-time basis. Not everybody is honoured in that way, while others even receive several Festschriften, either simultaneously or on different occasions. They can come in different formats – some are published by prestigious publishers, in reputable book series (or even as special issues in journals), whereas others are printed locally or put on the internet; some comprise just a couple of articles, others have dozens. These differences serve as reputation signals: the thicker the Festschrift, the greater the scholar. To contribute to a Festschrift is a “costly signal” that reliably communicates desirable characteristics; it is a work that indexes commitment to a scholarly community – we do additional work because our hero did. Festschriften and their contributions are “gifts” – and that can mean that they are repaid obligations, an act to keep relationships alive, where the praised one (honour be upon him) is by definition one for whom such networks are no longer required, because she/he has already achieved what is to be achieved; the praised one bestows honour to those who honour her/him, giving and receiving at the same time.

I still have to meet a colleague who would not be worthy of some sort of a Festschrift after a life-time in the field, but there are others on whom many agree that they definitely deserve one. Armin W. Geertz (b. 1948) is a particularly strong case. He is an early and rare example of an American (since 2003 a Danish citizen) who made his career in Europe rather than the other way around. For several decades he has mastered the various roles that contemporary scholars are expected to play; and he did so on local, national, regional and international levels. As a Festschrift is supposed to do, this one contains a chapter (written by Anders Klostergaard Petersen and Tim Jensen) that portrays the man and his achievements. In “Armin W. Geertz: A Genuine PhD (Puritan, Hippie and Doctor) – A Man and His Mission” (15–42) we learn that our hero, having obtained a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin in 1969, “had left his native country in 1970 partly for a Dane and partly in order to be drafter and sent to the war in Vietnam” (16). We hear about his “hippie” past and are reminded of the personal qualities that have not failed to impress all who met him: his “mild, gentle and very complaisant smile” (17), his “relaxed mood” mixed “with a zealous working habit” (18), his “workaholic nature” (19) and “inclination for loneliness” (39). We learn that “he despises

verbiage and ... has a preference for parsimony and terseness in expression” (23) and we hear about his social skills “for creating a cheerful atmosphere in which everyone would feel at ease” (39). The latter is probably also important for building up creative research environments. In fact, it seems that Geertz developed his theoretical profile in close cooperation with Jeppe Sinding Jensen, a slightly younger “fellow traveller (in many respects)” (116) who adds some recollections of his own on the emergence of their biocultural theory of religion and the agenda of consilience (“Where is the Future for the Study of Religion”? on Consilience, Anomalous Monism and a Biocultural Theory of Religion”, 115–129).

From Denmark, Geertz returned to America for the fieldwork that resulted in his studies of the Hopi that for a long time were the main ingredients on his growing list of publications and that culminated. His Hopi studies culminated in *The Invention of Prophecy: Continuity and Meaning in Hopi Religion*. This work was successfully defended as the higher Danish doctoral degree in 1992. (An abridged version was published by the University of California Press in 1994.) As he explained in an autobiographical essay published in 2007 in Danish, his career as Hopi scholar involved different dimensions and stages: the role of the public critic of exoticizing and romantic representations, primitivist discourses and imperialist and colonialist ideologies who started his career as a cultural relativist and then got actively involved in postcolonial, feminist and postmodern positionings, before turning to ethnohermeneutics, where an agnostic standpoint can serve as a platform of dialogue between “us” and “them”. Eventually, his interest in cognitive studies, psychology, and the sciences – stimulated by his undergraduate studies in the USA, but also by some experiences with his Hopi interlocutors – gained the upper hand. Yet, he finds that the study of religion as a discipline lies in the tension field between the cultural relativist particularisms and human universalism; as a scholar of specific religions one could feel like an architect reconstructing the religious worlds of other humans, sometimes erecting castles in the air and sometimes saying banalities (Geertz 2007).

From an international point of view, one easily overlooks our hero’s contributions to Danish public debates and his work on various governmental committees seeking to establish legal regulations of the new religious pluralism in Denmark. More well known internationally are his various activities as a “zealous entrepreneur in setting up new journals, associations, and organising conferences” (Petersen and Jensen, p. 39). Among other things, he served as Secretary-General of the IAHR from 1995 to 2005. Armin Geertz – I concur – has contributed to “an increasing methodological rigour and theoretical awareness” (21) in our discipline. We learn that Geertz has “a gargantuan number of articles” and other publications to his credit (35), but contrary to standard practice this Festschrift does not contain a bibliography of his published work. Even though one can find the information on the internet, if one makes an attempt to search properly, the absence of a bibliography is a shame, as such lists often hold surprises and invite for further engagement with the hero’s work.

One important dimension of Geertz’s work that Klostergard and Jensen fail to address in their entertaining portrait are his achievements as a mentor, advisor, and supervisor (on all levels). None of his former students, as far as I can see, appears to be a mere “clone” of his intellectual profile; he has built a school, not a regiment. Moreover, Geertz was involved in numerous PhD and Dr.phil (habilitation) defence committees and he served on many job position evaluating committees, often as chair person. Like few others in Scandinavia, Armin Geertz has shaped the “human resources” of the institutional landscape of the discipline in Denmark and Scandinavia over the past two decades. This volume is an eloquent testimony to

this important part of his activities; a dozen or so of the contributors to his *Festschrift* are directly or indirectly obliged to him in this capacity.

In addition to “A Man and His Mission” the *Festschrift* comprises forty chapters, plus a Preface that calls for a “New Synthesis” (co-authored by the editors) – that sweet dream of transcending the boundaries of the two or three cultures in a truly interdisciplinary spirit “to resume some of the really grand problems and topics in the study of human culture and society” (9). Even though I am not unsympathetic to this call, I don’t feel prepared for this program since I am lacking even basic training and understanding of computing, mathematics and natural sciences (and I have other priorities than making a doomed and pathetic attempt to remedy any of this). In the article mentioned above, Geertz recalls his experiences as an undergraduate student in the US, where he took a large number of courses across the disciplines and the academic cultures, from astronomy and biology to Shakespeare studies. If we want to foster the spirit of this “synthesis” in a sustainable and lasting manner, in continental Europe we should probably change our entire university education; maybe in the study of religion we could make a start and require of our students to take a minimal number of courses in the natural and social sciences. At present, in Norway, at the age of 16, when entering secondary school, students have to choose whether they take a natural science (“realfag”), language, or social science and economy program (or an IB). Students are thereby socialized intellectually into one of the three cultures long before they enter university. It is therefore quite unlikely that many future “synthesizers” will emerge from this country.

Does the *Festschrift* show signs of attempts at this “new synthesis”? Some Scandinavian contributors from the study of religion make brave attempts to try out new perspectives on their materials. I am here thinking of Marianne C. Qvortrop Fibiger, Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen, Ingvild Gilhus, Mikael Rothstein, and Peter Jackson Rova. Gilhus, for example, puts clothing in an evolutionary perspective and engages with material engagement theory to throw light on monastic clothes in ancient Christianity: “While monks produce clothes, clothes also produce monks and the making and wearing of clothes shape monastic cognition.” (557) Trying out theoretical perspectives seems like an important function of a *Festschrift*, which thereby serves as an intellectual laboratory or playing-ground. *Festschriften* can also give space to programmatic statements. In addition to the preface, in this *Festschrift* this is done by Ann Taves and Egil Asprem who seek to launch “worldview studies”.

Another typical feature of *Festschriften* are short pieces by wise or disgruntled old men. In this *Festschrift*, examples are the short pieces by Benson Saler and E. Thomas Lawson. Other prominent senior scholars, in longer pieces, continue their well-established agendas: Don Wiebe bemoans that departments of religious studies “are not by-and-large committed to a scientific agenda in their study of religious thought and practice” (138), while Luther Martin seeks to show that “incorporating somatic and cognitive perspectives in the tool-box of traditional historiographical methods can ‘humanize’ the mute stone of archaeological evidence” (532).

This *Festschrift* is a veritable who’s who in the so-called Cognitive Science of Religion including cognitive historiography of ancient religions. Most do business as usual, several provide meta-reflections on the state of the field, others provide useful overviews (e.g., Uffe Schjødtt on predictive coding). Merlin Donald, a major source of inspiration for Geertz and the Aarhus school, discusses whether there are indicators that humanity is entering a fourth cognitive transition (159–174). In his contribution, Jesper Sørensen draws on Geertz’s book on Hopi prophecy (that is, from his pre-cognitive period); the chapter is a nice illustration that

cognitive perspectives do not go against critical analysis (“Ideology, Prophecy and Prediction: Cognitive Mechanisms of the ‘Really Real’”). Another of his former PhD-students, Kristoffer Laigaard Nielbo, exemplifies the potentials and limitations of textual mining by selecting writings by Teresa Ávila and Armin Geertz as target data. That is, of course, a spirited way of paying tribute; yet, the pay-off of this methodological exercise was not altogether clear to me.

Two chapters resonate with Geertz’s former self as a Hopi scholar. Ekkehardt Malotki, a major figure of Hopi language documentation and preservation projects (and famous debunker of the Whorf-thesis) who lately turned into a scholar of Paleoamerican rock art, discusses Mammoth depictions at the Upper Sand Island at Suan Juan River in Utah – a site he deems worthy of being turned into a UNESCO World Heritage site. Ella Paldam, one of Armin’s latest PhD students, presents reflections on indigeneity among the Chumash, an Indian community (people, nation) in California that has witnessed dramatic changes during the past centuries. I cannot trace any cognitive or evolutionary idioms here, and we are back to postcolonialism, ethnohermeneutics and lived religion.

If, as suggested above, a Festschrift is an index of a scholar’s impact in the humanities, Armin Geertz scores high on this f-index (to rival the h-index). May he live long and continue to inspire with his gentle smile.

Reference

Geertz, Armin W. 2007. «Rekonstruktionen af hopi-indianernes religion, kultur og mentalitet. Videnskab kontra litteratur.» *Religionsvidenskabeligt tidsskrift* 50:47–57.

Michael Stausberg
University of Bergen
Michael.Stausberg@uib.no