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Matthias Egeler, *Avalon 66° Nord. Zur Frühgeschichte und Rezeption eines Mythos* (De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston, 2015) ix+590 pp; ISBN 978-3-11-044734-7; ISSN 1866-7678; e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-044872-6; e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-044851-1

Matthias Egeler, *Islands in the West. Classical Myth and the Medieval Norse and Irish Geographical Imagination* (Brepols Publishers: Turnhout, 2017) ix+355 pp; ISBN 978-2-503-56938-3; e-ISBN 978-2-503-56939-0; DOI: 10.1484/M.MV-EB.r.111538

Matthias Egeler's two extensively researched, substantial and wide-ranging volumes successfully apply tenets of post-structural cultural history to a transnational comparison of, and investigation into, the nature of the relationships between European otherworld mythologies that employ motifs of islands and island journeys to convey notions of 'blessedness and immortality'. Focusing on literary sources as well as archaeological and place-name evidence (from Iceland to Etruria), concepts like 'entangled history' are applied to interpret religion as a 'history of human interaction', its resulting myths the product of multiple regional and deep chronological interactions and entanglements. We have here, then, investigations into cultural relations (in the narrower sense) as possible indicators of interactions between belief systems.

The author's geographical starting point, and 'Grundstein für alle Vergleiche' ('base rock for all comparisons'; *Avalon 66°*: 15) for both volumes are the Icelandic otherworlds Vínland, Hvíttramannaland and the Ódáinsakr/Glæsisvellir, and their relationship with other north-west European and Mediterranean beliefs in paradisiacal islands 'at the end of the world', more often than not inhabited by otherworldly women, controlled by male rulers, and featuring magic trees and luminescence. Both volumes share a theoretical approach, main evidence base and conclusions; they both take us close to the locations (especially in Scandinavia), and provide welcome illustrations, maps, and diagrams. They necessarily differ in architecture, weighting of the material and in some content.

*Avalon 66°. Zur Frühgeschichte und Rezeption eines Mythos* offers the more detailed and closely footnoted analysis of the source material, and more explicit exposition of the theoretical foundations expected of a study which constitutes the author's *Habilitation*. Egeler takes us on a tour of Europe, setting out with detailed analyses of the Scandinavian literary evidence and its relation to the archaeological evidence of ship burials, enriched with informative maps and photos. He then presents a chapter on the 'britisch-bretonischen' motifs, sites and literary treatments connected with the myths of Arthur and Avalon, before devoting chapter 5 to a discussion of the Irish *immrama* and heroic legends. A sixth chapter considers the significance of Scandinavian, Arthurian and Irish material in the light of classical 'ethnographic' treatments on the religions of the inhabitants of north-eastern Europe. A comprehensive bibliography on sources and secondary literature on most of the regions complements the whole. *Islands in the West*, an attractive and very readable volume, approaches the subject a little differently, beginning with a conjoined investigation of the 'Irish Beginnings' and their 'Scandinavians Transformations'. Both are then related to 'The Classical Mediterranean' in a chapter which focuses on the 'deep history' of the Irish

and Scandinavian material in classical pre-Christian literature and material culture. A shorter chapter three critically analyses possible 'Eastern Roots' of these classical mythologies.

Both volumes close with substantial critical evaluations of the origins and causes of similarities of Icelandic, wider Germanic, Celtic (mainly Irish) and Mediterranean otherworlds imagined as as blessed islands between c. 700 BC and c. 1200 AD, all located in the cultural space between classical, Christian and pagan elements. Egeler suggests and evidences a typology of 'Religious Contact Exemplified by the "Islands in the West"', and suggests cultural prestige, potential self-help for personal loss, and 'hopes and expectations connected with a settlement situation' as motivations for intercultural borrowings, adaptations, influences and quotations. Both volumes will be of interest to researchers of comparative literatures and religions, as well as to those working on the individual religious regions and their (literary) cultures investigated.