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Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism by Isaac Lubelsky; Yael Lotan

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Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Vol. 17, No. 4 (May 2014), pp. 109-111

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2014.17.4.109>

Accessed: 26/05/2014 11:52

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best, quacks and frauds. At worst they were suspected of being in league with demons. This was why, in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment intellectuals worked so hard to separate legitimate chemistry from what was now resolutely presented as abominable, occult alchemy. By moving his discussion of the eighteenth century forward in the book, Principe demonstrates how its reconstruction of alchemy as entirely occult and esoteric provides a false lens through which to view sixteenth and seventeenth-century chymistry. But unfortunately, by disrupting his chronology, he prevents us from fully appreciating how and why that reconstruction occurred.

Another important part of Principe's analysis also gets truncated because of his preemptive treatment of the modern period. In his concluding chapter he presents a crisp explication of the divide between early modern natural philosophy and modern science. While natural philosophy contained many elements of modern science, its intellectual gamut was much wider. This means that alchemists were as much concerned with divine truth and spiritual revelation as they were with practical experiments, and that they admired elegant allegorical arguments as much as empirical evidence. Their practices reflect "the larger context of early modern thought as it existed before the narrowing of natural philosophy into science" (206). That phrase elegantly captures the intellectual distance separating the early modern world from the modern, but also begs the question of how we got here from there. The answer lies, in part, in the eighteenth-century denigration of alchemy, but, having already dealt with that topic, Principe does not return to it. The reader can go back and re-read Chapter 4 in light of Chapter 7, but this is not the same as having the author's own linear analysis of this fraught question.

Nevertheless, Principe has produced an erudite and engaging introduction to a complex topic. This book deserves to be read by anyone interested in the history of magic, science or religious esotericism.

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Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism. By Isaac Lubelsky. Translated by Yael Lotan. Equinox Publishing, 2012. 361 pages. \$99.95 cloth; \$34.95 paper.

Monographs on Theosophy have become more frequent over the last five years. As the fields studying new religious movements and Western Esotericism expand, Theosophy is becoming more popular with scholars. This is how it should be, as the tradition was extremely influential and still informs many religious movements of today. Isaac Lubelsky's *Celestial India* is a welcome and important work in these emerging fields.

Do not let the title fool you, there is much more covered in 300+ pages than just the discussion of Theosophy's role in Indian independence. Lubelsky gives an excellent historical summary of the emergence and spread of Theosophy, pays attention to the doctrine—a topic frequently overlooked—and follows the course of events and personalities, always with a critical eye and sound analysis. Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) looms large in this work. According to Lubelsky, Müller's orientalist fingerprints are on much of the Theosophical Society's work and view of India. While I am not always convinced Müller had such an influential role in general, it is hard to deny his significant impact on Madame Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and others in the Society.

One area that Lubelsky does not shy away from is the organizational politics, schism, and personal disputes. His analysis of these details is generally well-reasoned and thoughtful. Though his narrative ultimately follows the historical continuities of the Theosophical Society headquartered in Adyar, India, he spares no one from his critical lens. For instance, when looking at the role Blavatsky played in the Theosophical Society, Lubelsky boldly states, “her death in 1891 saved the Society from the constant criticism she attracted, and opened new possibilities for the Society's relations with the press and the academic world” (229). These new possibilities are explored in detail. Other topics include the schism of the United States section from Adyar and the emergence of Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934) as progenitors of new doctrines and ideas.

Besant, in particular, receives a chapter of her own because of her central role in expanding the Theosophical Society and her involvement with Indian nationalism, the Indian Home Rule organization, and the Indian National Congress. This is what I find somewhat strange about the book's title. In the end it was Besant who did all the work and envisioned for Indian independence. In one sense, the book might have more correctly been titled, *Annie Besant and the Birth of Indian Nationalism*, since this is the primary focus of the last third of the book. Even so, one could easily argue it was Blavatsky's assertions about India being the source of the fifth root-race, the Aryans, which ultimately brought Besant to the country and led her to see it as worthy of its own self-determination. Unfortunately for Besant, the early Theosophical influence on Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) faded and, beginning in 1915, he began to oppose her influence in Indian nationalism. This culminated in 1919 when Gandhi replaced Besant as the president of the Indian National Congress.

The last chapter presents an excellent analysis of the life of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986). Lubelsky masterfully ties the Theosophical views of India to the views of a Brahmin boy in whom the Theosophical Society's members placed all their messianic hopes. Of course, his rejection of this role at the end of the 1920s was a severe blow to the Theosophical

Society, one, as Lubelsky correctly notes, from which the organization has never recovered. Nevertheless, Lubelsky brings his same insight and analysis to the complicated relationship between Krishnamurti and the Theosophical Society. Critical of the way Besant manipulated the circumstances of Krishnamurti's emergence and education, Lubelsky claims this interaction "exposed the moral price the Society was willing to pay to achieve its purpose. Besant in fact kidnapped the boys, convinced that the aim justified the means" (314). Throughout the volume, Lubelsky does not pull his punches.

Despite these many strengths, no work is perfect. Clearly there were some translation errors that resulted in awkward sentences or unclear sections. Probably the most significant misspelling is "Dzian" for "Dzyan," the text from which Blavatsky supposedly took the mystical verses that formed the basis of her two-volume *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). In other places, dates are slightly off, including when the first edition of Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-Forms* was published (1905, not 1901). Similarly, Leadbeater's first important work is given as *Invisible Helpers* (1896) in place of *The Astral Plane* (1895). My biggest complaint, however, is the woefully inadequate index provided by the publisher. A book of this depth and complexity needs more than five pages of indexing. These flaws, however, are minor and do not significantly detract from the considerable contribution this book makes to the study of new religious movements.

In his short Postscript, Lubelsky makes a few comments about what came after the conclusion of Besant's presidency of the Society with her death in 1933. He notes the way George Arundale (1878–1945) was positioned to take over leadership of the Theosophical Society and the way the current infrastructure of the Society is aging and, as he observes about the Theosophical Society building in England, is "gloomy" and invokes a feeling of nostalgia for the past (321). Indeed, the size and influence of the Theosophical Society will never match that of 1928, when it was at the height of its influence and power. Be that as it may, the Theosophical Society's worldwide legacy in both politics and religion are a testament to the reach and impact it once had. *Celestial India* transports us to this time and reveals the way particular events and individuals shaped the history of tens of thousands of people. I am confident that this volume will become a standard text for those interested in reading about the first six decades of Theosophy.

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