

the *Patrologia Orientalis* edition of the *Yaysmawurk*?. This will be an important contribution to the library of Armenian texts available in English.

ROBIN DARLING YOUNG, *Catholic University of America*.

MURPHY, G. RONALD, SJ. *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross in the North*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xiv+239 pp. \$39.95 (cloth).

The story told in this book is a beautiful one. Just as Christianity sought to see prefigurations in the Old Testament of events described in the New Testament, so it was that when Christianity was spread among the heathen Germanic peoples of northern and northwestern Europe, similar connections were established between the old religion of the converts and Christianity. This is clear in the wording of the ninth-century *Heliand*. The thesis of Ronald Murphy's book is, quite simply, that an important number of (mainly Scandinavian) cultural monuments dating from late Antiquity to the late Middle Ages, "and not forgetting the Christmas tree, are all indebted to the interweaving of cross and tree in the North. Their creation is an expression of northerners' realization of the rescuing function of Christ's cross in terms of the evergreen Yggdrasil" (4). Yggdrasil appears for the first time in the Poetic Edda, a collection of poems dating back to the ninth century that allows us to get to know the Scandinavians' cosmos prior to their conversion to Christianity. Here Yggdrasil is "the axis of the world, the world tree that holds up the skies, and the tree of life" (5). Yggdrasil plays a role at the time of Ragnarok, the Germanic vision of the end of time when a new earth will arise from the sea, and the last man and woman, who had been hidden within the tree to protect them, will come forth to people the earth once more. "It is very clear that Christianity could, and eventually did, see this story as a kind of parallel to Old and New Testament stories" (11–12). "Why would one feel it necessary to get rid of such a beautiful belief? Not only was it not entirely done away with, but it comes to beautiful reexpression" (12) in the Viking-age burial crosses of Yorkshire, as it does in the other works of art, objects, and monuments that one encounters in this book.

In succession, the twelfth- and thirteenth-century stave churches are dealt with, followed by the round churches on Bornholm, the burial crosses of Yorkshire, the carved runes of *The Dream of the Rood* on the Ruthwell Cross, and the runic alphabet of the older futhork itself. Finally, the Yule wreath and the Christmas tree we are still familiar with are given ritual meaning in light of the story of Yggdrasil.

It is a beautiful and intriguing story—but is it true? The textual sources adduced for telling it are few and far between; they date from the end of the first century (Tacitus) to the sixteenth century and beyond (the legend of Martin Luther's invention of the lights in the Christmas tree), and from Byzantium to Iceland. The only written sources explicitly mentioning Yggdrasil by name, however, seem to be the *Elder Edda*, which survives in a thirteenth-century manuscript, and the *Younger* or *Prose Edda*, written down by the thirteenth-century Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson. This means that historians are faced with serious problems of criticism when they want to make a scientifically convincing story out of this haphazard collection of ingredients.

For Ronald Murphy, this seems to be less important. To him, the "moment of realization" is fundamental: "When something comes home to you, something you have known and perhaps even understood for a long time, I call that a moment of realization" (1). In this case, it is the realization that the acceptance of the story of Yggdrasil by the missionaries and clergymen working in the North meant that the pagan meaning of the evergreen and the Edda's stories about it could be incorporated in a

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new Germanic-Christian language. Whereas some of the old gods had to go, the story of the tree-and-cross called Yggdrasil, on which Odin had once hung as Christ had hung on the cross, could be made to serve the interests of Christianization.

But how to prove this “realization” (1)? Surely not by merely pointing out the possible similarities between, for instance, the pillars in the center of the round churches on Bornholm and Yggdrasil, without explaining why it is only on Bornholm, which has more than a dozen other churches that are not round, and do not have huge central pillars, that one finds such tree-like structures in the church interiors. Surely it is not enough to point at the foliage of the late medieval frescoes of Bornholm to assume that these round churches therefore are to be interpreted in light of the Edda’s stories? For Murphy, after his Aha! moment, it is not always necessary even to date the sources, written or monumental, that he adduces with the eye of the believer or convert, when he would rather have needed to investigate them. To mention but two of the most worrying examples: The (unsubstantiated) note in the London copy of the *Heliand*, which states categorically that the book was owned by Canute the Great in the eleventh century (99), was written by the secretary of its seventeenth-century owner, Sir Robert Cotton, and therefore has no meaning for the assumed importance of this copy of the *Heliand* in the Christianization of the North. There is also an attempt to interpret the meaning of the order of the runes in the older futhark as saying either “Father, and hallowed be he, long ago gave mankind talking staves, hereditary property,” or interpreting the two runes which look like the Greek “XP” as, in fact, Greek, with “and hallowed be he” becoming “and Christ are one” (187). This alone would merit the book to be mentioned in the bulletin of Runic research, *Nytt om runer*, under the heading “Fantastica.”

This does not mean that no plausible explanations are offered at all for some of the monuments mentioned. I suspect that the interpretation of the Norwegian stave churches might be right, for instance, as they were constructed roughly at the same time as the two Eddas were written down, and because the links between the Icelanders and Norway are well attested for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In many other cases, however, it is simply impossible to make a case—and the number of question marks in the book’s margins has grown and grown.

MARCO MOSTERT, *Utrecht University*.

NORTHCOTT, MICHAEL S. *A Political Theology of Climate Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 345 pp. \$30.00 (paper).

In *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, Michael S. Northcott relies on up-to-date climate science to make a compelling case that revolutionary changes in modern Western political theology are needed to limit the threat of climate change. Like many environmental theologians, ethicists, and philosophers, Northcott attributes the ecological crisis to the modern Western mechanistic worldview with its division between nature and culture. Yet Northcott extends this claim by masterfully demonstrating that modernity also involves denying that human actions affect the weather. Thus, individuals, nations, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have failed to sufficiently respond because their political theology is limited. Exacerbating the denial of anthropogenic climate change are many factors including capitalism and physical infrastructure (e.g., roads, water systems) that are made possible and reinforced by fossil fuel use, particularly coal and oil. Northcott’s attention to such structures is a valuable corrective to the many environmental analyses in religious studies and philosophy that emphasize individual belief and action.