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The Idea of Evil and Messianic Deliverance in the Satpanth Ismaili Tradition of South Asia

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RELIGION, CULTURE, AND THE MONSTROUS

OF GODS AND MONSTERS



EDITED BY NATASHA L. MIKLES
AND JOSEPH P. LAYCOCK

Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous

Of Gods and Monsters

Edited by
Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock

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Contents

PART I: THINKING WITH MONSTERS

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Five Further Theses on Monster Theory and Religious Studies
<i>Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock</i> | 3 |
| 2 | Reiterations: On Tellings, Variants, and Why Monsters
Always Come Back
<i>Douglas E. Cowan</i> | 17 |
| 3 | Horror and Bible (Six Theses)
<i>Brandon R. Grafius</i> | 29 |
| 4 | A Biological Model of Monster Flaps
<i>William Blake Smith</i> | 41 |

PART II: MONSTERS GUARDING THE GATES

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 5 | The Idea of Evil and Messianic Deliverance in the Satpanth
Ismaili Tradition of South Asia
<i>Wafi A. Momin</i> | 63 |
| 6 | Ghost Stories from <i>Tales of Retribution</i> : Understanding Elements
of Seventeenth-Century Japanese Ghost Stories
<i>Frank F. Chu</i> | 79 |
| 7 | Of Monsters and Invisible Villages: <i>Nags myi rgod</i> Tales of the
Tibetans of Gyalthang
<i>Eric D. Mortensen</i> | 97 |

- 8 Godly Aromas and Monstrous Stenches: An Analysis of Buddhist New Year Fumigation Rituals in an Indo-Himalayan Borderland 117
Rohit Singh
- 9 Man, Yeti, and Mi-go: The Transgressive History of a Monstrous Word 131
Lee A. Weiss
- 10 The Mesopotamian Demon Lamaštu and the Monstrosity of Gender Transgression 145
Madadh Richey
- 11 Topophilic Perversions: Spectral Blackface and Fetishizing Sites of Monstrosity in American Dark Tourism 157
Whitney S. May

PART III: MONSTERS TEARING DOWN THE GATES

- 12 Finding Bigfoot: The Anthropological Machine and the Generation of Monsters 171
Timothy Grieve-Carlson
- 13 Thomas Jefferson: The First Cryptozoologist? 185
Justin Mullis
- 14 Shapeshifters and Goddesses: Gods, Monsters, and Otherness in the Mysticism of Gloria Anzaldúa 199
Stefan R. Sanchez
- 15 The Monster Within: Rape and Revenge in Genesis 34 213
Leland Merritt
- 16 "Monsters among Us": The Cathartic Carnage of *American Horror Story* 225
Heidi Ippolito
- 17 To Eat or to Be Eaten—*CHEW*: A New Study between the Beast and the Sovereign 237
Elena Pasquini

- Bibliography 251
- Index 273
- About the Editors and Contributors 279

Part I

THINKING WITH MONSTERS

Chapter 5

The Idea of Evil and Messianic Deliverance in the Satpanth Ismaili Tradition of South Asia

Wafi A. Momin

MESSIANISM, EVIL, AND THE SATPANTH ISMAILI TRADITION

The coming of an awaited savior to deliver the oppressed from tyrannical power or wicked forces is a motif found in many religious movements and cultic organizations through different ages. Such revolutionary currents are dubbed under a variety of labels, including millennial, messianic, chiliastic, and apocalyptic. They have tended to rally their supporters by fostering the vision of a new world order, promising emancipation from their present sufferings and the granting of rewards here on Earth (Landes 2000, xi–xii ff.). A noteworthy phenomenon within these currents is the intermingling of such motifs across religious lines—in some cases, even drawn from what are often viewed as irreconcilable worldviews—constructing in the process a harmonious conception of human history and its ultimate destiny. An interesting case of this cross-fertilization of messianic ideals is encountered in the long-awaited, tenth incarnation of the Hindu deity Viṣṇu, known as Kalki or Kalkin, and the adoption of this idea by many Muslim groups.

The doctrine of Viṣṇu's bodily manifestations (*avatārs*) as well as an exhaustive body of stories and customs surrounding it has long been recounted in Hindu scriptures, particularly in the epics of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and the extensive body of Purāṇic literature. As per a generalized view of the doctrine, Viṣṇu has come to be associated with ten specific incarnations, moving from theriomorphic to anthropomorphic forms, which are distributed over a period of four ages (*yugas*), with each subsequent age representing a gradual decline in the observance of religio-legal and moral norms (*dharma*). In these *yugas*, whenever the evil powers are believed to

Religion | Christianity

"This is a collection I've been waiting on for years. The sacred and the profane have frequently created an unnatural union in our monsters. Scholars of a variety of disciplines have tried to make sense of where these lines meet. This volume, and the incredible collection of scholars found in it, moves beyond some of the iconic studies in the field, changing much of that we think we know about monsters, religion, the sense of the holy, and how all of these intersect in our personal and collective experience. New insights pop on every page; prepare to have older theories autopsied and buried. This book combines academic rigor with a profound sense of the dangerous cultural moment in which it appears. It will make scholars and monster fans alike rethink what those bumps in the night really mean."

—**W. Scott Poole**, College of Charleston; author of *Wasteland: The Great War and the Origins of Modern Horror*

Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous: Of Gods and Monsters explores the intersection of the emerging field of "monster theory" within religious studies. With case studies from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary valleys of the Himalayas to ghost tours in Savannah, Georgia, the volume examines the variegated nature of the monstrous as well as the cultural functions of monsters in shaping how we see the world and ourselves. In this, the contributors constructively assess the state of the two fields of monster theory and religious studies and propose new directions in how these fields can inform each other. The case studies illuminate the ways in which monsters reinforce the categories through which a given culture sees the world. At the same time, the volume points to how monsters appear to question, disrupt, or challenge those categories, creating an "unsettling" or surplus of meaning.

Contributors

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