Iconotropy: everything or nothing?

Review of:

Iconotropy and Cult Images from the Ancient to Modern World, Routledge Research in Art and Religion, edited by Jorge Tomás García and Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez, New York and London: Routledge, 2022, 212 pp., 49 b. & w. illus. $136.00 hdbk, ISBN 978-1-032-03065-4; $42.36 ebk, ISBN 978-1-003-18650-2, DOI: 10.4324/9781003186502.

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Many historians of art will agree that defining either 'art' or 'religion' is difficult and that attempting to understand the connections between them is as frustrating as it is tempting. The editors state that the aim of the book under review 'is to explore how images have been submitted to symbolic and material alteration as part of processes of religious interaction that have taken place from Antiquity to the Early Modern period' (2).[1] The compass guiding the exploration is the notion of 'iconotropy' developed in the 1940s and 1950s by Robert Graves to describe, in their words, 'the interpretation of a myth in a manner contrary to its original meaning' (2). They cite as the specific process to which Graves applied his term the replacement that he believed took place in Greek prehistory of matriarchal institutions by patriarchal ones (2). The editors acknowledge that 'iconotropy is not considered a valid disciplinary tool' for studying Greek mythology, but they think that although Graves's ideas have been dismissed, the concept he introduced has 'potential as a tool for interpreting images in the visual tradition' (2-3) and 'as a fundamental tool for an overarching discourse on the anthropology of the religious image' (3). 'The concept of iconotropy', however, 'needs to be rewritten to render it a useful principle that can enable the pursuit of deeper interpretations of religious images' (3).

Given the centrality of the concept to the book, it is disappointing that the editors do not provide a fuller introduction to Graves's formulation. It might be assumed from their remarks that 'iconotropy' was conceived as operative only in the realm of myths, beliefs, and institutions, and therefore that its application to

[1] Several of the essays are listed as papers in the program for the conference 'Iconotropía: Alteraciones simbólicas y materiales de la imagen de culto antigua y medieval' (Iconotropy. Symbolic and material changes to cult images in the Classical and Medieval ages) organized by the editors: http://www.man.es/man/en/dam/jcr:b3515d18-b162-4494-b2c7-807f7bcd06a5/programa.pdf.

images would represent a methodological innovation. It is not until the fourth essay in the collection, by Adolfo J. Domínguez (Monedero), that quotations from Graves's work provide an important clarification: 'I define iconotropy as a technique of deliberate misrepresentation by which ancient ritual icons are twisted in meaning in order to confirm a profound change of the existent religious system—usually a change from matriarchal to patriarchal—and the new meanings are embodied in myth.' This sentence, quoted from a footnote in *The White Goddess* (1952), begins in the original, 'In the preface to my *King Jesus*' (1946), a work that Domínguez quotes as well: Graves also speaks there of a 'deliberate misrepresentation of an ancient set of ritual icons'. The original focus of Graves's formulation, then, was Christ, not classics, and art was always included in it. .[2] Again in *King Jesus* (423), Graves went on to state, 'In iconotropy the icons are not defaced or altered, but merely interpreted in a sense hostile to the original cult.' The editors, however, rewrite the concept so that 'iconotropy proves useful when studying images that have been materially or symbolically altered' (3). Graves also stressed that the process is deliberate, but throughout the volume under review the process is 'rewritten' to include a range of actions, whether (to borrow Michele Bacci's phrase) 'intentional or fortuitous' (151). Graves's definition does not include the element of cross-cultural contact, but the editors cite (3) an 'iconotropic reading of the Book of Abraham facsimiles' by William J. Hamblin that revealed how interpretations 'had been transformed for a new culture and contributed to an intentional process of reinterpretation for a new culture that altered the book's original meaning because of its contact with another culture'.[3] The concept of iconotropy lacks not only precision, but ultimately coherence as well, and it also becomes indistinguishable from existing practices in iconographic analysis.

The notion of the 'cult image' is even more problematic in this context. The category itself is conceptually flawed and too historically contingent to serve as a constant in a diachronic and cross-cultural study,[4] and, as the focus of iconotropy,

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[2] Domínguez in García and Sáenz-López Pérez, 77; Graves, *The White Goddess*, London: Faber and Faber, 219, starred footnote; *King Jesus*, New York: Creative Age Press, Inc., 423 ('Historical Commentary' in this edition, not the preface): 'A similar technique of misrepresentation–let us call it iconotropy–was adopted in ancient Greece as a means of confirming the Olympian religious myths at the expense of the Minoan ones which they superseded.' García and Sáenz-López Pérez cite but do not quote the passage: 2 and 9 n. 9.

[3] No page reference is given in note 14 for William Hamblin and Seely David, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2007. In a blog post, 'Iconotropy and the JS Abraham facsimiles', Hamblin states that iconotropy 'is defined as "the accidental or deliberate misinterpretation by one culture of the images or myths of another one, especially so as to bring them into accord with those of the first culture." Iconotropy is, in fact, the most common ways cultures deal with images from foreign or ancient cultures.' The definition would appear to be Hamblin's own, but the source is not specified. *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, posted April 7, 2013: https://interpreterfoundation.org/blog-iconotropy-and-the-js-abraham-facsimiles/ .

[4] For examination and critique of the concept in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Hittite Anatolia,

has also been expanded here to include '[n]ot only the cult images, but also some religious artefacts such as talismans' (4). The editors do recognize '[t]he ambiguity of the term *religio*', but to let its ambiguity permit 'a range of proposals to be explored in order to define the meaning' (6) is too vast an additional undertaking, particularly in the case of the classical cultures, in which the modern concepts of secular and religious can rarely be applied. It is not clear that the editors have provided a sufficiently sound historical foundation to support the interpretation of an ostensibly historical process, for they assert, as an unqualified given, the existence of 'a culture of free religious choice up until the emergence of Christianity' (8).

The lack of coherence in the conceptual basis of the book clearly presented challenges to the contributors, who have met the difficulty in different ways.

Cecile Brøns ('Sensuous encounters. The adornment of cult statues in ancient Greece') summarizes in one paragraph 'the concept of iconotrophy' as (re-) formulated in 1970 by the Austrian ethnologist Leopold Kretzenbacher, who saw it as 'the conversion of religious iconography from one mode of spiritual organisation to another. Iconotropic processes are those focused on reinterpretations of both religious and secular images whose original meaning was lost, forgotten, or even ignored on purpose' (14). Brøns sees this idea as 'highly relevant with regard to ancient cult images, and ancient sculpture in general' (14). The rest of the essay does not deal with this reconfigured concept; it is instead a workmanlike rehearsal of the well-known evidence for polychromy in sculpture and embellishments of various kinds of 'cult images', and it includes a discussion of ancient experiences of sound and smell, which have recently become the focus of research in classical studies, in connection with them. Although Brøns acknowledges (30 ns. 10 and 11) that 'cult image' and 'cult statue' are 'modern constructs' with no basis in ancient thought or practice, she retains them for their 'significant heuristic value' and does not move beyond the scholarship that accepts them. She thus endorses in practice a concept of 'iconotropy' that has no boundaries and a category of 'cult images' that is admittedly distinguishable from ordinary images only by use–and there is ample evidence from antiquity of unremarkable images that become, for a wide variety of reasons, the focus of special attention of a religious kind.

Rafael Jackson-Martín ('Taming the Gorgon: visual iconotropy in the Archaic Greek Medusa') discusses the well-known changes in the iconography of the Gorgon Medusa, who is shown in early Greek art as monstrous and later as beautiful. He argues that her 'visual history' can be conceived of 'as one of the most

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Greece, and Rome, see, for example, *American Journal of Archaeology* 101:2, April1997, 382-383, abstracts for Session VD of the 98th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, colloquium '"Cult" statues of the ancient world'. For Greece: A.A. Donohue, 'The Greek images of the gods: considerations on terminology and methodology', *Hephaistos. Kritische Zeitschrift zu Theorie und Praxis der Archäologie und angrenzender Gebiete* 15, 1997, 31-45.

undeniable cases of narrative iconotropy', thereby generally endorsing Graves's view of the myth of Medusa and her slayer Perseus as 'confusingly iconotropic' and associated with the change from matriarchy to patriarchy (36). Jackson-Martín cautions, however, that approaching the Gorgon through iconotropy requires consideration of additional matters, and his discussion, both chronological and thematic, focusses on the long span of time from the Bronze Age through the fifth century B.C. and includes politics, agency, enchantment, Greek identity, hybridity, architectural sculpture, eschatology, theology, wonder, sensory experience, and sympotic behaviour.

Although Medusa has some primarily iconographic ties with the goddess Artemis, specifically in her representation as Potnia Therōn (mistress of animals), the Gorgon was not the focus of cult, and images of her were not 'cult images' but must be counted among the 'religious artefacts such as talismans' mentioned by the editors (4). While she is represented in temple decoration both as a complete figure and in the form of her severed head (the gorgoneion), these configurations also appear frequently in pottery, coroplastic work, and metalwork, as is also true of representations of gods, minor divinities, semi-divinities, and hangers-on for which no religious purpose or treatment can be convincingly argued. The body of relevant images is therefore essentially unlimited. An ambitious iconographic study such as this requires a solid foundation, but the extensive bibliography does not include the fundamental typological study of the gorgoneion by Josef Floren or the iconographic survey of Gorgons in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*.[5] Although Jackson-Martín demonstrates his familiarity with the intellectual pedigree of ideas like the connection between the Gorgon and Artemis, in attempting to treat in a short essay a subject that has generated untold articles and books, he relies too heavily on unexamined assumptions and tempting conclusions available in the scholarship. For example, in discussing the sounds associated in classical literature with the Gorgon, he argues that the Gorgon's protruding tongue is similar to the way Greek warriors made the *alalagē* (war cry) and brings in from the context of Greek sacrificial practice the *ololugē* 'raised by women attending the ritual at the very moment of the sacrifice, perhaps to conceal the raucous bellowing of the animal prior to its death' (46-47 and n. 74), referring to the summary description of Greek animal sacrifice by the influential German scholar Walter Burkert. Burkert's interpretation of Greek sacrifice, however, is rooted in his belief in its universal character, its Palaeolithic origins, and its essential nature as murder; he overlooks or ignores the evidence that shows its essentially cheerful and social character as a celebration of a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between gods and humans.[6] If indeed 'at that very moment, what was fixed–the face of the Gorgon on

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[5] Josef Floren, *Studien zur Typologie des Gorgoneion*, Münster/Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1977; Ingrid Krauskopf and Stefan-Christian Dahlinger, 'Gorgo, Gorgones', *LIMC* 4, Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 285-330.

[6] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1985, 56-57. For refutation of his views: Sarah Peirce, 'Death, revelry, and *thysia*', *Classical Antiquity* 12:2,

a pediment, an acroteria [sic], or an antefix–became alive due to the sudden ensemble of hundreds of cries' (47), the cries would not have been of horror.

Occasionally, enthusiasm weakens the argumentation. For example, Jackson-Martín proposes that Mycenaean images of octopuses are the visual forerunners of the Gorgon. The formal similarities between the severely stylised Late Helladic octopuses and the centuries-later Gorgon are indeed interesting; he need not play down his suggestion by stating that 'the Archaic Greeks could hardly see visual evidences from the Helladic period' (38), as such encounters are both known and strongly suspected, as in the case of the Doric order. In contrast, the statement, in connection with the gold ornaments from Shaft Grave Circle A at Mycenae in the form of supple octopuses, that 'Mycenaean warriors and sailors were about to be the most powerful in the Aegean world, so they could see octopuses as a perfect symbol of their dominion over the seas' (39) is retrospective aspirational anticipation, not history.

Aaron Beck-Schachter ('The religion of theft: stolen cult images in ancient Greek ritual and cult') focusses his essay on an example of a procession, attested in historical and epigraphic texts, that took place at Athens and involved carrying a statue of Athena to the shore at Phaleron to be washed. It has long been debated whether the statue in question is the 'ancient image' of Athena on the Acropolis or one, ostensibly the Palladion taken from Troy, that stood in the Palladion lawcourt (which handled cases of involuntary homicide and was located perhaps in the city, perhaps at Phaleron), and whether there was one procession or two. There are many other questions for which the scanty and contradictory evidence provides no answers; the evidence for the actual practices and personnel is fragmentary, and the origin stories for both images involve miraculous and mythological events. Beck-Schachter's primary interest is the thematic similarity among the accounts of the origins and procession(s) and the multiple traditions about the fate of two stolen statues–the Trojan Palladion and the statue of Artemis abducted by Orestes from the Taurians (the best-known version is that given by Euripides in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, ca. 414/13 B.C.). Multiple images in multiple places were asserted in antiquity to be the authentic Palladion and the authentic Taurian Artemis, and each claim was advanced for specific purposes. By attempting to identify a 'real context' for a ritual presumably reenacting the Athenian acquisition (that is to say, theft) of the Trojan Palladion through positing a situation arising from the immigration of foreigners to Athens (68-69), Beck-Schachter offers an explanation that unifies several narrative patterns. Throughout the essay, he likewise makes acute observations about the efficacy of religion as a tool for social and political manipulation ('abstract wishes of divinities are much harder to contradict than the power structures and hierarchies of humans' [60]).

In the end, the ancient evidence seems both too fragmented and too inherently contradictory to be resolved by a single explanation, and there are pitfalls

at every turn. For example, there are contradictions in the ancient stories of the fall of Troy with regard to the Palladion, the presence of which guaranteed the safety of the city, and the statue of Athena at which Cassandra sought refuge during its sack. Both the theft of the Palladion and the rape of Cassandra at the statue are mentioned in literature and represented in classical art. As has long been recognized, in terms of narrative, the two statues cannot be the same, as the Palladion needed to have been stolen in order for the sack of Troy to take place. Beck-Schachter, however, as many scholars have done, conflates the two images (fig. 3.3: red-figure Nolan neck-amphora, Metropolitan Museum of Art 56.171.41, 450 B.C.: 'Cassandra supplicates the Palladion'), gliding over the problem by remarking only that the existence of the 'pair of mythological episodes involving the statue' 'serve[s] to highlight the stark, "all or nothing" nature of any important cult object or statue' (63-64). The theft of the Palladion poses its own challenges: Beck-Schachter does not mention that in the scene on the Apulian red-figure oinochoe he illustrates (fig. 3.4: Louvre K 36, 360-350 B.C.: 'Diomedes and Odysseus steal the Palladion'), two Palladia are shown being stolen by Odysseus and Diomedes, one each, although the two images, made conspicuous by their white colour, will surely arouse the reader's curiosity.

The origin stories, beliefs, and practices associated with the ancient Greek images of gods will and should continue to inspire research like Beck-Schachter's, but it is not clear that 'iconotopy' has contributed very much to his attempt to contextualise and account for some of the most complex and opportunistically developed narratives in classical antiquity.

Adolfo J. Domínguez (Monedero [7]) begins his essay on 'The new life of Greek images outside Greece: the case of Iberia' by presenting statements about the concept of iconotropy made by Graves himself and citing specific reformulations of it by others (77). His careful articulation of notions such as intentionality are welcome on principle and necessary for his topic, the reuse of specific types of Greek vases in religious (funerary) contexts in Iberia in the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. He criticises approaches, common in studies of imported materials originating in different cultures, that rely heavily on the analysis of iconography to reach conclusions about the meaning of images in the new culture by extrapolating from their significance at home; such methods often lead to misunderstandings of the receiving culture and ignore the realities of ancient trade, distribution, and consumption. He asks important basic questions, often overlooked, about the degree of choice among imported materials that was actually available to customers and the extent to which they were able to develop new uses and meanings for the merchandise without concern for its original significance.

Domínguez considers the evidence of tomb groups, the distribution of pottery shapes in settlements, and specific examples of iconographic elements. He makes a number of particularly bracing observations: for example, Iberian users often seemed to value particular shapes of Greek vases and to have no interest at all in their figural decoration. He also emphasises that it is important to keep in mind

'the random nature of Mediterranean trade' (89). The summary of conclusions suggests directions for future research (92-93). Although Domínguez spells out the precise form in which the idea of 'iconotropy' can be applied to his subject, it does not seem to add clarity or weight to the evidence, the methods, or the conclusions, which would stand on their own under any label. The essay combines scrupulous and transparent methodology with exemplary analysis of archaeological materials and contexts. It is a fine corrective to the wishful thinking that so often obscures the relations between ancient Greece and its neighbours.

Giovanni Gasbarri asks the very intelligent question, 'What does an idol look like?' and offers some ideas about 'Visualizing idolatry in Late Antique Jewish and Christian art'. He begins his essay by reviewing the terminology for and the history of the concept of 'idolatry', which was 'fabricated in Hellenistic Egypt' (99-101; 109). The summary is useful, although in his treatment of pre-Hellenistic Greece (100) he accepts the mistaken idea that the Greeks had a category of 'cult image', and he ignores the pre-Hellenistic and non-Platonic theories of cultural evolution that constitute an explicit and significant element of the rhetoric both for and against images.[7] He demonstrates that in illustrating scenes of iconoclasm, Late Antique artists drew on the ordinary repertory of readily available figural types to represent the 'idols', making them recognisable as such through the action shown or by specific indications such as costume. He notes that 'none of the earliest surviving depictions of idols from the third and fourth centuries is based on readily identifiable Greco-Roman cult statues' (109); one might go farther and conclude that the category of 'idol' has little claim to exist outside the discourse of iconoclasm. Of particular interest is Gasbarri's observation that the 'artists preferred to select their models from other types of statuary, mostly related to political authorities rather than to pagan deities' (109). Readers will agree with the author that this is indeed a phenomenon that merits further investigation.

Jorge Elices Ocón considers a specific case of the 'Islamic reception of classical statuary' (119) in 'Pagan statues in Islamic context: iconotropy in tenth-century al-Andalus'. He examines the evidence for and the traditions surrounding the 'lady' of Córdoba, presumably a Roman statue that functioned as a talisman at the main gate of the city, as well as for statues in similar service in the cities of Pechina, *Madīnat al-Zahrā*, and Toledo. Despite the difficulty or impossibility of identifying the actual statue in question, considerable testimony from the tenth century onward attests the various ways that it and other fragments of the pagan past were integrated into Islamic culture and rehabilitated in order to assume respectable and respected 'talismanic and symbolic' (121-122) responsibilities. While Elices Ocón's focus is the process of re-identifying pagan statues, not them simply as objects or 'their "original" identifications' (119), he does not ignore such bits of

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[7] For the Greek contributions to the iconoclastic discourse: A.A. Donohue, Xoana *and the Origins of Greek Sculpture, American Classical Studies* 15, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, 85-103, 121-150, 177-205.

archaeological evidence as come available. For example, the fragmentary head illustrated in figure 6.2, from the archaeological site at *Madīnat al-Zahrā*, might be the statue mentioned in texts, 'probably not representing Venus, but a personal portrait of a particular Roman matron' (194); if so (or even if not), what, if anything, did its visual qualities contribute to how it was regarded and used in its Islamic contexts?

The Ummayad caliphate was overthrown in 750. Its culture, which had been marked by its receptivity to diverse cultures in the creation of its own forms, continued in al-Andalus. Astrology, history, political propaganda, and popular beliefs all played a part in the tenth-century Ummayad response to the challenges posed by rival dynasties. Elices Ocón marshals a formidable and fascinating array of evidence to interpret the gate statues and situate them within the wider phenomenon of spoliation. While he is careful to articulate a 'theoretical framework' (119) for his study, his essay shows that the close examination of specific contexts and conditions is a far more effective interpretive tool than the formulation of generalities.

Michele Bacci introduces his essay on 'Cross-Mediterranean misinterpretations of sacred imagery' with a review of some definitions of iconotropy that also includes nineteenth-century investigations of misunderstood images *avant la lettre.* He adds to the already elastic meaning of the term the further case of intentional visual modifications that introduce new meanings without changing existing ones; he calls these 'appropriations' (143-144). He then offers wide-ranging and intriguing examples from Byzantine and Western art of misunderstandings, both intentional and not, involving 'materiality' and iconographic details and conventions; they include wax images, repaintings, dark-skinned Madonnas, and more. He notes as part of iconotropy the 'dynamics [that] imply a process of partial or thorough oblivion and the emergence of new interpretations' (193). What emerges from Bacci's examples is that the forgetting, although much emphasised, is far less interesting than the phenomenon of explaining. New interpretations emerge only in response to asked or implied questions, and there is no inevitable requirement that religious (or any) images be explained. The conditions in which questioning is possible invite consideration. Bacci's examinations of specific cases suggest why one or another feature of a given image may have raised or did raise curiosity; the causes are so varied that no general account of the process seems convincing. Bacci ends by speculating on the possible role of 'iconotropy as a factor in stylistic change' (153-155). Although the cases he raises seem to involve iconographic rather than stylistic features, the line between the two is admittedly not always easy to draw, and he is the only contributor who brings the issue of style to the fore.

Meital Shai's essay ('Enchanted by the "Madonna Nicopeia": reception, myth and the methodological pitfalls of the art historian') treats the misunderstandings of a Byzantine icon of the late eleventh or early twelfth century

not only by the Venetians when they acquired it, but by historians of art as well. The icon in question is the Madonna Nicopeia, still revered in San Marco in Venice. Shai traces the often-surprising history of the image and its interpretation. There is no documentary evidence for it before 1500; it was understood in Venice to be an apotropaic military icon, the talismanic 'Hodegetria' of Constantinople, taken from the city in the sack of 1204. Modern historians of art rejected that identification on iconographic grounds, but several, relying on the Venetian military reading, proposed to see it as the Platytera type, interpreted as linked with Roman military iconography. As Shai demonstrates, however, 'an elementary formal inspection' shows that the San Marco Nicopeia is clearly of the Theotokos type of Madonna and Christ child, which lacks military associations; furthermore, two of the proposals involving the Platytera rely on a chronology that is flatly incompatible with the conclusions of an extensive technical examination of the Nicopeia that had been performed more than two decades earlier (166; 168-170). On the basis of a detailed and convincing comparison of the Nicopeia and ninth-century Byzantine mosaics in the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Shai concludes that the San Marco icon is derived from a post-Iconoclastic Madonna Theotokos that is ecclesiastical, not military, in nature (170-175).

Shai attributes the erroneous conclusions drawn by art historians to methodological failures ranging from neglecting to distinguish among types of historical evidence to simply ignoring visual comparanda (175-177). Particular blame attaches to reception theory, which replaced interest in the original meaning of images. Shai additionally advocates the revival of Ernst Cassirer's theory of myth as symbolic form and the adoption of iconotropy as a way to correct the limited focus of 'reception methods' on 'a single time frame and society', asserting that it 'generally traces changes in the appearance and/or interpretation of symbols, figures, or iconographic subjects throughout history and societies' (177-178). It is not clear, however, that iconotropy is inherently or inevitably so inclusive, or that iconographic research is so limited. Nonetheless, both Shai's criticisms of flawed scholarship and her own analyses are valid and instructive. Her pointed and cautionary concluding remark, like Domínguez's, is well worth keeping in mind (178): 'Ironically, it seems that the visual aspect of the image itself was as insignificant to the Venetians as it was to most scholars who examined it.'

Marco Musillo ('Avalokiteśvara is mutating again: Chinese and Japanese encounters with the Virgin Mary') deals with the widest geographic and cultural distance between artistic spheres featured in this volume, focussing on exchanges among the West, China, and Japan, for the most part in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is a contrast between the clearly explained specific examples he gives of the iconography of the Virgin Mary in the context of Western missionary activity and the rather opaque concepts he enunciates, such as 'osmotic processes of mutation' and 'an ontological-geographical space where myth and religious [sic] more around freely' (183). Although Musillo makes every effort to provide the reader with sufficient background information to understand the

evidence, the complexity of Buddhist conceptions, particularly the 'polymorphic nature' of the deities 'and the syncretic cultural milieus in which they strived' (190) differs from what might initially seem like comparable elements in Judeo-Christian traditions, and they require more extensive knowledge than can be fitted into an essay. Musillo is able to make understandable the difficulty faced by Christian, specifically Catholic missionaries trying to prevent the dissemination of their beliefs and images into turning into 'idolatry' in cultural contexts they did not control or often even comprehend. At times, iconographic flexibility could be useful to all parties, as in the case of the 'hidden Christians' in Japan after Christianity was outlawed in 1614 (190-191). Given the appeal of figures like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, a compassionate being dedicated to saving human beings from all kinds of danger, willing to entertain special requests, such as granting children, and able to take both male and female form, the necessity of guarding against religious contamination was clear not only to the missionaries, but also to Christians back home who were exposed to informative representations of exotic Chinese and Japanese deities (189-190). It is not clear how Avalokiteśvara could 'become a sacred presence outside religion', but while this and other sweeping pronouncements may not be helpful, Musillo's explanations of his well-chosen examples do illuminate both the circumstances of the Christian missionaries and why they took the actions they did.

The volume may not convince every reader that iconotropy has value as a concept, a process, or a method. Like Panofsky's 'iconology', which he ultimately admitted was the same as the 'iconography' from which he had attempted to differentiate it,[8] iconotropy seems to be an example of illusory methodological rigor that offers nothing that lies outside the capacity of existing iconographic research. That being said, each of the essays has value that does not depend on the writer's particular attitude, whether favourable or sceptical, toward iconotropy. Regrettably, the authors and editors have been poorly served by the publisher. Many of the illustrations are insufficiently legible. The volume is badly marred by typographical errors and, more seriously, obvious errors in English (for example: 'sphinxes with *polloi*' [44]; 'two principle methodological oversights' [166]; 'destructed in 1922' [(172)] 'it seems like that' [190]). All the contributors deserve far better.

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[8] Joan Hart, 'Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: a dialogue on interpretation', *Critical Inquiry*, 19:3, Spring 1993, 564 n. 74; Elina Räsänen, 'The panopticon of art history: some notes on iconology, interpretation, and fears' in Lena Liepe, ed., *The Locus of Meaning in Medieval Art: Iconography, Iconology and Interpreting the Visual Imagery of the Middle Ages*, *Studies in Iconography: Themes & Variations*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018, 48.

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