

Schlichter, Felix, *Mythology, Chronology, Idolatry: Pagan Antiquity and the Biblical Text in the Scholarly World of Guillaume Bonjour (1670–1714)*, Leiden: Brill, 2015, 402 pp. ISBN 978 90 04 68495 9. €135.

In the wake of the monumental work of Anthony Grafton, the history of scholarship has revolutionised our understanding of the writing of world history in early modern Europe. It has exposed previous conceptions of the period as marking a transition from an obscure and pedantic humanism fixated on the Bible to a modern and secular world of Enlightenment, led by great names such as Spinoza, Hobbes, and Voltaire, as overly predicated on a great man theory of intellectual history. Emphasis has moved instead to the orthodox mainstream, revealing how shifts within humanist historiography itself led to the undermining of biblical history, laying the foundations for the historical discipline as we know it today. Far from dusty antiquarianism, post-Graftonian scholarship has demonstrated the teeming diversity, breadth of ambition, and depth of analytical insight within late-humanist historical scholarship.

Felix Schlichter's immensely erudite and compelling book is the latest addition to this historiographical turn. Through a study of the Augustinian historian and missionary Guillaume Bonjour, Schlichter explores the world of late-seventeenth-century scholarship with reference to the three themes of his title—Mythology, Chronology, Idolatry—all central issues in the late-humanist writing of world history. After an introduction and background chapter on Bonjour's life and intellectual context, Schlichter examines his three themes in turn, devoting a separate section of the book to each, further divided into two sub-chapters. The first chapter of each section places the theme within the broader context of the European Republic of Letters, followed in the second chapter by an in-depth analysis of Bonjour's writings. The first section on mythography focuses on Bonjour's interpretation of classical Graeco-Roman and Egyptian myths as containing esoteric knowledge of sacred history; the second examines how Bonjour used Egyptian history to support biblical chronology; and the third analyses how and why Bonjour condemned the Chinese as idolaters during the famous Chinese Rites Controversy. The majority of Bonjour's works utilised by Schlichter have never been printed, so all these chapters are based on an impressive amount of archival research, often across multiple languages. Despite the density of such scholarship, Schlichter's clear prose rarely makes the weight of his materials feel overwhelming.

Bonjour himself is a fascinating and understudied figure. A native of Toulouse, he became a prominent intellectual in Rome and the wider Republic of Letters, corresponding with such luminaries as Gottfried Leibniz and Jean Le Clerc. He was appointed a missionary to China in 1707, meeting the Kangxi emperor and being sent out on the emperor's great cartographic project, dying in Yunnan after a sudden illness on Christmas day, 1714. Schlichter provides a detailed overview of Bonjour's life in the first chapter, but the book is primarily an intellectual history rather than a biography. Consequently, some aspects of Bonjour's life are treated rather cursorily, most notably his time in China, to which Schlichter devotes only a few pages of his biographical overview (79–81). Nevertheless, this study marks a decisive and successful re-introduction of the obscure, if not entirely overlooked, figure of Bonjour back into early modern intellectual history.

If Schlichter's most straightforward scholarly contribution is to resurrect Bonjour as an important European *érudit*, his broader and more ambitious offering is to build on and to some extent revise post-Graftonian history of scholarship on the collapse of biblical world history in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Schlichter agrees with the view of much of this scholarship that the critical querying of biblical world history emerged, in Noel Malcolm's famous phrase, quoted by Schlichter (15), from the orthodox centre rather than the heterodox fringes. Bonjour acts as an exemplary figure of this orthodox scholarship, with Schlichter demonstrating how his mainstream Catholic aims inadvertently "contained the seeds of heterodoxy" (122). For while Bonjour's critical target was pagan religion, his reliance on non-sacred histories like those of Egypt and China to defend the Bible inadvertently undermined the privileged status of sacred history, reducing it to simply one historical narrative among many. The result was the emergence of what Schlichter terms "a (quasi-)anthropological" view of religion, not defined "merely through the Christian, theological, distinction between religious truth and religious error" but as something "common to all peoples and shaped by specific historical, social, cultural, and linguistic factors" (280). Consequently, by the mid-eighteenth century, a scholar like Nicolas Fréret could no longer accept, as Bonjour had done, "that the entire history of the world could be written using the Bible as the main source" (350).

So far, so Graftonian, although Schlichter excels in seamlessly blending classical, patristic, and early modern theological and historiographical thought together to outline a clear context for understanding the interventions of Bonjour and his contemporaries. More innovative is his revision of this now well-established narrative by reintegrating the heterodox back into

the story. At least since Noel Malcolm's groundbreaking essay on the Book of Ezra, the significance of heterodox scholars like Spinoza and Hobbes in undermining biblical history has been an unresolved problem: if these thinkers were not, as was once thought, the leading innovators when it came to critical biblical philology, then what role did they play in the secularisation of world history? Were they in fact completely irrelevant to the changes that were going on in the orthodox centre? Schlichter's answer is a clever one: the heterodox were not necessarily the leading innovators when it came to biblical criticism, but it was their radical "twist" (14) on orthodox scholarship which sparked a critical-historical arms race, as their radically heterodox views motivated scholars like Bonjour to delve into the history of the Bible in an attempt to prove its heterodox critics wrong, only for this very response to inadvertently further contribute to the process of historicization that it was meant to oppose. Schlichter thus puts a heavy emphasis on the radical Preadamite scholar, Isaac La Peyrère, whose influence he argues should not be restricted to those who embraced his controversial theories, but also to those like Bonjour who were motivated to refute him, and thereby further extended the historicization of biblical world history. This is a convincing and important contribution to the history of scholarship, marking out a sensible middle path whereby the role of radical freethinkers is not overstated, nor entirely sidelined, as it sometimes has been by post-Graftonian historians.

The book may be a disappointment to readers interested in the more global elements of Bonjour's life and thought, however. I have already noted the cursory treatment of China in Schlichter's biography of Bonjour, and although the chapter on Chinese idolatry offers important insights into how classical and patristic conceptions of pagan religion influenced discussions of the Chinese Rites controversy, it is not as comprehensive as his other chapters. Most notable is the absence of any reference to the work of Nicolas Standaert, who has not only revolutionised our understanding of European writings on Chinese chronology, but has also in a 2017 essay made arguments similar to Schlichter's about the role of the European-Chinese encounter in the creation of an anthropological category of "religion." A more thorough discussion of whether Bonjour's role in Kangxi's cartographic project reshaped his vision of world history by giving him insight into the epochal Qing conquest of central Asia would also have been welcome.

Another surprising omission is Dmitri Levitin's 2022 book *The Kingdom of Darkness*, which may simply have been too late and too long for inclusion, but whose interpretation of European attitudes towards paganism differs from Schlichter's in important respects. For

example, Samuel Bochart features heavily in Schlichter's account but not at all in Levitin's, a difference it would have been helpful to have Schlichter's comments on.

Despite these minor oversights, Schlichter's book is an extremely impressive work, which will be required reading for anyone interested in the history of scholarship, the collapse of Biblical history, and the Chinese Rites Controversy.