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978-0-521-78386-6 - Religion and the Body
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The proliferation of studies on the 'body' (and subjects in close relation) is an obvious, even startling, feature of the literature of the social sciences and humanities in recent years. Such an explosion of interest makes the lack of a standard study of the 'body' and the major religions of the world the more surprising. In setting out to remedy this omission, *Religion and the body* aims above all to highlight the distinctive and *unfamiliar* ways in which diverse religious traditions understand the 'body', and, in doing this, to raise to greater consciousness some of the assumptions and problems of contemporary attitudes to it.

This volume brings together essays by established experts in the history of religion, the social sciences, and philosophy. Part I is devoted to an analysis of current secularized discourses on the 'body', and to exposing both their anti-religious and their covertly religious content. Parts II and III provide essays on traditional 'Western' and 'Eastern' religious attitudes to the 'body'. Each contributor focusses on some (especially characteristic) devotional practices or relevant texts; each carefully outlines the total context in which a distinctive religious attitude to 'bodiliness' occurs.

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RELIGION AND THE BODY

EDITED BY

SARAH COAKLEY

Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity, Harvard University



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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA www.cup.org
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

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First published 1997
 First paperback edition published with corrections 2000

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12.5 pt [vñ]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Religion and the body / edited by Sarah Coakley.
 p. cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions; 8)
 Includes bibliographical references.
 ISBN 0 521 36669 0 (hardback)
 I. Body, Human—Religious aspects. I. Coakley, Sarah, 1951– .
 II. Series.
 BL604.B64R44 1997
 291.2'2—dc20 96-6474 CIP
 ISBN 0 521 36669 0 hardback
 ISBN 0 521 78386 0 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

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under Turkish Rule (1964), and *The Orthodox Way* (1979). He is co-editor of the English translations of *The Festal Menaion*, (1969), *The Lenten Triodion* (1978) and *The Philokalia* (1979).

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Preface

The idea for a book on ‘religion and the body’ goes as far back as 1987, when I was a Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University. I was that year responsible for organizing a large conference at Lancaster entitled ‘The Body: A Colloquium on Comparative Spirituality’. A total of 29 papers (including 3 paper/demonstrations) were offered at the conference,¹ and enthusiastically received by a diverse audience of religionists, theologians, philosophers and social scientists. It was clear, however, that the ‘interests’ and methodologies of the participants were far from unified. The social scientists had one narrative to tell about the ‘body’, whilst feminists, Eastern religionists, Christian theologians and Western philosophers had others. Whether they were even discoursing about the same phenomenon under the rubric of ‘body’ was a matter of some intense debate at the conference itself – though without any very clear resolution at the time. It was obvious, however, that a compendium volume clarifying some of these conflicted methodological issues, as well as providing basic coverage on attitudes to the ‘body’ in the great religious traditions, was much needed.² But it was also clear that a volume such as this would have to be forged from the outset on a

¹ A book of abstracts of the paper was published by the Department of Religious Studies, Lancaster, for the conference (8–11 July 1987). Only one paper from the original conference (that of Steven Collins) appears in this volume in anything like its original form. Seven of the shorter communications from the conference were later published in *Religion* 19 (1989), 197–273, and form a useful adjunct group to the contributions in this book.

² Since the original Lancaster conference three books have appeared from SUNY Press with obvious relevance to our topic and some overlapping interest: Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Albany, NY, 1987); ed. Thomas P. Kasulis (with Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake), *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (Albany, NY, 1993); and ed. Roger T. Ames (with Wimal Dissanayake and Thomas P. Kasulis), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice* (Albany, NY, 1994). These important books are commented upon by a number of the contributors in this volume; they do not however cover the same range of religious traditions treated here.

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clear set of agreed principles, rather than operating with the variety of perspectives presented at the original conference. The rationale for this enterprise, as it has finally taken shape, is explained in the Introduction.

The project that has resulted owes a good deal to the work of Ulrike Hellen (with whom I initially conducted negotiations at Cambridge University Press), and to her successor Alex Wright. I thank them both for their support, patience, and technical assistance. As contributions were commissioned and arrived in first draft, they were vetted by up to four specialist readers in each case; and, since all these specialists – busy and eminent scholars – gave their time freely and generously, I owe them a great debt of gratitude. I must also thank the contributors themselves for their patience and goodwill during this time-consuming process of writing and rewriting. All the essays that appear in this volume have been specially written for it, with one exception, that of Annemarie Schimmel's piece, which was originally published as 'Eros – Heavenly and Not so Heavenly – in Sufi Literature and Life', in Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, ed., *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1979, 119–46. The essay is reproduced here with kind permission of the author and publisher.

The initial conception, and subsequent editorial production, of this book have spanned a period when I myself have moved in quick succession from Lancaster to Oxford to Harvard. I am therefore indebted to a number of different people for their secretarial assistance. I must mention in this connection Wendy Francis and Janice Parkes at Lancaster, for their invaluable help with the original conference; and Maggie Stanley at Harvard, who has done characteristically intelligent work with final retyping of parts of the manuscript. My two recent research assistants at Harvard, Francis Caponi, OSA, and David Kyuman Kim, have also done much to smooth the final path to publication; and Wolfhart Heinrichs and Alma Giese kindly provided technical and bibliographical assistance with the reformatting of Annemarie Schimmel's article. In addition, Jennifer Cross has done sterling work on the index. I must also record my indebtedness to the Luce Foundation, for a Henry Luce III Fellowship in the academic year 1994–5, which has enabled me to complete this project as well as others.

Finally, I want to record my special gratitude to my former colleagues at the Department of Religious Studies, Lancaster University

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(some of them now dispersed elsewhere), especially to John Clayton, Mary Douglas, Paul Heelas, John Milbank, and Paul Morris, who did much to inform the vision of this book from the outset, and whose wit and wisdom is (to some derivative extent) perhaps still reflected in it. To them I dedicate the volume in its final shape.

Sarah Coakley
Corpus Christi, 1995

In preparation for the paperback edition of this volume I have taken the opportunity to correct a few minor typographical errors and to update the details given about the contributors at the beginning of the book. The flow of publications on the 'body' has not abated since 1995; but the essays in this volume have been left in their original form, as challenges to further comparative and interdisciplinary work yet to be undertaken.

Sarah Coakley
St. Giles, 1999