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**Review of Veen, Mirjam van, Piet Visser, and Gary Waite. 2014. *Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women, ca. 1525-1900*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.**

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war but not in any great detail. The alleged attempt to win the release of Hutterite men from Camp Funston through the paying of bribes, which resulted in federal charges against three Hutterite leaders, would provide an interesting counterpoint to the story of the Hofers and Wipf.

The persecution of the conscientious objectors was but one small part of the persecution of Hutterites during the Great War, yet this aspect tends to dominate the larger narrative. The tension between the Hutterites and their neighbors was so great that 11 out of 18 colonies relocated to Canada by the spring of 1919. Stoltzfus discusses the broader challenges but not in as much detail as this important issue deserves. This is perhaps a minor quibble though, as Stoltzfus makes an important contribution to part of this larger narrative and raises the bar for anyone who might tell another part.

Stoltzfus concludes that torture “erodes a nation’s moral center just as surely as it dehumanizes the victims and in the end fails to achieve its stated goals.” He notes that the persecution of the Hutterites “was intended to be an example to deter other conscientious objectors. Instead, they became a shameful example of the failure of a government to stand by its constitutional guarantee of freedom to practice religious and promise to safeguard citizens from torture and other cruel and unusual punishments.” This example is as relevant today as ever, and policy makers and the public alike would do well to contemplate from time to time the lessons from the Great War.

**Review of Veen, Mirjam van, Piet Visser, and Gary Waite. 2014. *Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women, ca. 1525-1900*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.**

By Berit Jany, *Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Colorado*

Agent of the devil, harlot, martyr, marriage breaker, and devout maiden are some of the images attributed to Anabaptist women from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These diverse pictures from a wide array of perspectives were the focus of attention of the conference “Myth and Reality of Anabaptist / Mennonite Women in Continental Europe ca. 1525-1900” held at the Free University of Amsterdam in 2007. Scholars came together to explore the images of Anabaptist women in Europe across the centuries. Those scholars in attendance from across Europe included Piet Visser, Mirjam P.A. de Baar, Mirjam van Veen, and Nicole Grochowina, among others. From North America, most prominent were Gary Waite, Mary Sprunger, Mark Jantzen, and Michael Driedger. Their findings were put together in this collection of essays, a 2014 publication.

Attention to the role of women in the radical reformation movement has been given in a number of works, for instance *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* (eds. C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht) and *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes* (Marion Kobelt-Groch), as well as essays by

Auke Jelsma and Ineke van't Spijker. Sigrun Haude bemoaned the decline of research on Anabaptist women since the 1990s in her contribution to the *Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism* (eds. John D. Roth and James Stayer). Moreover, she pointed out that “no fundamental analysis of gender in Anabaptism and Spiritualism in general exists” (426). While the number of publications on the topic of Anabaptist women’s history has since grown, the editors of *Sisters* explain that scholarship on female believers has mostly focused on the early revolutionary stages of the movement and has placed heroic female martyrs at the center of attention. This pursues a traditional approach to the movement’s past, which is concerned with historically significant individuals and their accomplishments. With this current publication, however, the editors and writers jump into deeper waters by moving beyond the established history of exemplary women during the early period of Anabaptism and toward identifying and evaluating the image of Anabaptist women at various stages in the movement’s history.

In their analysis of the multifaceted image of the female Anabaptist, contributors follow an imagological approach. Here, too, the authors are testing the waters by utilizing imagology, a critical literary theory concerned with the examination of stereotypical perceptions of (marginalized) groups, thereby taking the concept of identity, culture, nationality, and alterity into account. Thus, the contributors of this volume explore the construction of images of the female believers and the relevance of the applied stereotypes. The analysis of negative images exposes the methods and rhetoric of opponents to blacken the movement’s reputation. Furthermore, this analysis reveals a “great deal about the broader expectations and norms for women as a whole at the time” (1). It also illuminates both (ostensibly) positive and negative images—constructed by male leaders in Anabaptist circles—to serve as a means of securing traditional gender hierarchies, despite the early movement’s seemingly egalitarian nature. In their readings of the movement’s historical and hagiographic sources, scholars uncover the superficiality of gender equality. Looking at the ways of disguising gendered hierarchies by way of images of an ideal Anabaptist woman, the researchers attend to questions such as: How did Anabaptist women see themselves? Did they aspire to the ideal image set by elders? How did this image change over the nearly five centuries of Anabaptist history in Europe?

The authors of this publication offer answers to these queries through case studies in which they explore visual, musical, and textual sources from each of the major regions where Anabaptists resided: Switzerland, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and parts of Prussia and Russia. They examine cases in both urban and rural contexts and from the perspective of both opponents and members of the movement, including women themselves. Essays are organized in three clusters: “The Sixteenth Century: Propaganda, Persecution, and Myth-Busting;” “The Long Seventeenth Century: Caricatures, Stereotypes, and Super Sisters;” and “The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Subordinate Sisters in Control.” This chronological framework offers a great insight into the changing perceptions of Anabaptist women and the historical context that influenced these images.

*Sisters* is an excellent collection of studies that guide readers in their rediscovery of

familiar texts such as *Het Offer des Heeren* through a gender-conscious lens. The volume also draws attention to lesser known texts and introduces new archival findings pertaining to the experience of female believers over the course of four centuries. It sheds light on the way that ideals about women's roles had wide-ranging impact on all aspects of private and public life within and outside of the religious movement. While the entire corpus of essays contributes to the aim of this collection to study the imagology of Anabaptist women, individual chapters pursue this topic and utilize the new methodological approach in varying ways. A few essays focus predominantly on investigating the origin of stereotypical perceptions of Anabaptist women, for instance, Mirjam de Baar's examination of the term *Menniste Zusje* which was often used as a sarcastic reference to the supposed duplicity of young Anabaptist women in the Netherlands for the last several centuries.

Other essays dissect stereotypes and put all effort into proving them wrong, as is the case in Martina Bick's study of Anabaptist hymns in which she challenges the assumption that women did not make extensive contributions to the cultural and literary life of their communities. Yet other chapters give a detailed description of the image that was drawn by polemic writings and discuss the programmatic aims behind these negative portrayals of Anabaptist women; Marion Kobelt-Groch's analysis of Thomas Birck's marriage manual, for instance, reveals the attempt by the Protestant pastor to prevent interfaith marriages by depicting Anabaptist women as a danger to the spiritual and moral life of Lutheran men. Similarly, Mirjam van Veen's study of anti-Anabaptist polemics voiced by Dutch Reformed ministers who accused Anabaptists of destroying traditional marriage and family served as a response to the movement's challenges to the established church on issues of morality and church discipline.

In a few of the contributions to this volume, authors describe the image of female believers in narrative anecdotes or provide much archival data, thereby refuting previous assumptions about the homogeneity of Anabaptist women and their assumed social rank and financial situation. These studies provide opportunities for further investigation into the subject matter and methodologically sound analysis of the data. Regardless of the varying degrees of clarity within the authors' imagotype-conscious optics, their work to identify stereotypes and trace their dissemination—as well as explain, and in some cases refute, characteristics previously attributed to Anabaptist women—significantly helps raise awareness of the study of female believers in the Anabaptist movement. *Sisters* thus provides a valuable impetus to scholarship in this new field of research.

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