(Ch. 7) argues that the apparent contradiction in Martin Luther’s thought between his simultaneous rejection and acceptance of human virtue and eudaemonism is reconciled when considered in light of the Neoplatonic tradition of negative theology inherited from the 14th century Dominican theologian Johannes Tauler.

In the first of two essays on “Music and Verse,” Anna Lewton-Brain (Ch. 8) shows how John Donne’s insistence on the spiritually transformative capacity of sound, and his musical figuration of the divine, echo the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of the music of the spheres promoted by the 15th century Florentine Neoplatonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino. Justin Irwin (Ch. 9) addresses the spiritual significance of music for the 17th century English Baptist Benjamin Keach. Rejecting the opposition of the spirit to the flesh, Keach drew on Pauline theology in defending the practice of hymn singing as a form through which to mediate religious principles and spirituality.

The final set of three essays on “Life and Death” turn to social contexts and urban life. Lara Apps (Ch. 10) looks at John Smith’s The Judgment of God upon Atheism and Infidelity (1704) to illustrate the exploitation of suicide in anti-atheist literature in early modern England. Richard Greydanus (Ch. 11) associates Christian beliefs about New Jerusalem, upon which the sun will never set, with the introduction of street lighting, by examining the early modern tradition of utopian literature with particular reference to Johann Valentin Andreae’s Christianopolis (1619). Finally, Gregory Bouchard (Ch. 12) argues that David Hume attempted to control the discourse surrounding his death and memory in an effort to shape his public image as an explicitly non-Christian philosopher and achieve secular immortality through posthumous fame.

From the technical side, the chapters use different referencing styles, which is rather confusing, yet this does not affect the quality of the content. The volume contains a combined bibliography of references cited in all the chapters. The lack of an index, however, makes it difficult to analyze the material covered in the book, particularly considering the wealth of information it contains.

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In this engaging work, Olga Litvak challenges the almost universal translation of the term “Haskalah” as the “Jewish Enlightenment.” Linking the Haskalah to the Enlightenment, she argues, is misleading. Over the course of the book, Litvak demonstrates convincingly that the Haskalah movement corresponded more closely—ideologically, chronologically and geographically—not to the seventeenth-and early eighteenth-century Western European Enlightenment, but rather to the Eastern European Romanticism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Litvak, Central and Eastern European maskilim (Haskalah proponents) neither denied the importance of Jewish observance nor sought civil emancipation within their absolutist environments. Rather, they sought to revive and reinvigorate Judaism through a reconciliatory fusion of rationalism and emotion.

Litvak divides her book into three parts. The first section, “Terms of the Debate,” explains core concepts in Enlightenment and Romantic thought. Here, Litvak identifies
what she sees as the key difference between the two movements: while Enlightenment philosophy emphasized reason alone as a sufficient arbiter of people’s actions, Romantic critique—expressed already in the writings of Kant and Rousseau—posited that reason without feeling cannot guarantee human morality. Litvak identifies this Romanticism in Moses Mendelssohn’s “understanding of Jewish ritual as a “living script” that engages both the heart and mind” (38).

Similarly, Litvak claims that maskilim sought a balance between modernity and tradition, a fusion she describes as the “critical reception and imaginative revision” of Enlightenment ideas. “Like other Romantics,” she argues, “maskilim produced a foundational response to the problem of secularization that inspired the modern ideology of culture and provided a metaphysical argument for nationalism” (26). This program put maskilim at ideological odds not only with advocates of emancipation and assimilation, but also with the large number of Jews who were attracted to Hasidism (which the maskilim viewed as a perversion of authentic Judaism).

The second section, “State of the Question,” contains a detailed analytical overview of Haskalah historiography, from Salo Baron and Jacob Katz to present-day historians. Litvak also analyzes the influence of the Haskalah on modern Jewish thought. Litvak contends that the Haskalah’s ideological legacy remains very much alive—in the academic work of the Haskalah’s “intellectual heirs” (Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin) within academia and in the State of Israel’s ongoing efforts at cultural “Jewish regeneration,” and (77, 22). The latter is a particularly fascinating and relevant observation; but unfortunately, apart from outing Daniel Boyarin as a modern-day maskil, Litvak does not deeply analyze the impact or development of the Haskalah past the 1880s.


One of Litvak’s particularly interesting insights is that the rabbinic establishment’s vociferous opposition to Wessely “was not about secular education” (a subject to which Litvak devotes little attention) or about secularization (Wessely advocated traditional religious observance), but about his messianic heralding of the Christian Habsburg monarch Joseph II’s Toleranzpatent as marking a new era for collective Jewish freedom. For the rabbis, argues Litvak, Wessely’s heresy “lay in the revision myth of Exile and the shift in the metaphysical status of the non-Jewish world that this revision implied” (104).

Certain ambiguities in Litvak’s analysis remain. For example, how does Litvak reconcile her argument that maskilim “actively marginalized” Jewish women (largely by writing in Hebrew, the language of male education) when writers like Mapu and Gordon—who, according to Litvak, manipulate or suppress their female characters’ sexuality—attracted a significant number of female fans? Additionally, it may be a stretch to describe Solomon Maimon—who, in his autobiography, attempts unsuccessfully to convert to Lutheranism—as a Jew who “triumphs over the historical “necessity” of a “Jewish Enlightenment” to become the unacknowledged father of European Romanticism” who (190). Nevertheless, Litvak’s literary reinterpretation of Maimon’s Autobiography as a self-critical work meant to
reveal its author’s narcissism and acknowledgement of Eastern Judaism’s superior intellectual apparatus is extremely compelling.

Ultimately, despite any shortcomings, Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism contributes significantly to our understanding of this intellectual movement, and will make readers think twice before employing the term “Jewish Enlightenment” in the future.

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_Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiyavanna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka_.

Alagiyavanna Mukaveti (1552–ca.1625) is a household name in Sri Lanka, and his poetry is today a standard component of Sinhala secondary education curriculum throughout the country. Given his enduring renown as a literary icon for over four centuries, it is almost surprising that Stephen Berkwitz’s _Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism_ is the first ever monograph-length study of Alagiyavanna’s life and works. The basic contention of the book is that Alagiyavanna, early on a magistrate and esteemed poet at the court of King Rājasimha I, reflected in his works the tumultuous state of Sri Lankan society at the turn of the 16th century—at first as a patronless landowner amid crumbling Buddhist feudalatories, and subsequently as a servant of the Portuguese crown in the early 1600s.

_Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism_ adds to a growing body of scholarship over the past two decades concerning Asian Buddhist responses to European colonial intervention in the region. Historians of Sri Lanka have happily contributed a fair percentage to this trend, as attested in the recent works of Alan Strathern, Elizabeth Harris and Anne Blackburn. _Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism_ situates itself in dialogue with these scholars, working to disrupt the default notion that European interlopers were the dominant source of early modern cultural determination in South Asia.

The book traces three phases in Alagiyavanna’s writing—religious pluralism, moralism, and Christian-Buddhist hybridism—devoting one chapter to each of the poet’s five works. Chapter Two studies Alagiyavanna’s first composition, the _Sāvul Sandēsaya_, written some time in the early 1580s. The Sinhala poem derives its format from classical Sanskrit _dhūta-kāya_ (messenger poetry), relating the aerial journey of a cock across the realm of Sitāvaka (south-western inland Sri Lanka) to deliver a message to the deity Saman. Berkwitz highlights the heavy use of classical South Asian literary convention throughout the poem, including encomia (_praśasti_) of Alagiyavanna’s sponsor (King Rājasimha I), hyperbolic descriptions of the beauty and prosperity of the kingdom, and sophisticated use of pun, simile, and alliteration. The _Sāvul Sandēsaya_ is nonchalant in its alternating descriptions of Buddhist and Hindu sites of worship, with the _sāvul_ bird stopping to pay homage to Śiva and Umā, and to admire painted scenes depicting episodes from the _Rāmāyana_ and _Mahā-bhārata_.

Chapters Three and Four consider two works composed a decade or so later, during the twilight of the kingdom of Sitāvaka. The _Dahamsoṇḍa Kava_ recounts the story of King Dhammassoṇḍa, who thirsts so badly for merely a word of the Buddha’s Dharma that he agrees to jump off of cliff into the mouth of a demon (in fact the god Śakra in disguise), the latter of whom promises to preach to the king as he falls. The subject matter of the poem—a king endeavouring after righteous