

Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy

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Jane Lead and the Philadelphian Society are not particularly well known figures to most scholars of late 17th- and early 18th-century religion. Born in 1624, Lead experienced a spiritual awakening aged 16. On Christmas Day 1640, while her family danced and celebrated, she was overwhelmed with a 'beam of Godly light' and a gentle inner voice offering spiritual guidance. After the death of her husband in 1670 she received daily spiritual outpourings, finding comfort in a spiritual community based in London and guided by John Pordage, a follower of the German mystic Jacob Boehme. Going blind in 1695, she helped form the deeply millenarian Philadelphian Society for the public gathering of the chosen in anticipation of Christ's return in 1697. After several years of meeting, writing and publishing the group retired in 1703, losing further momentum after Lead's death in 1704.

Ariel Hessayon's edited collection, *Jane Lead and her Transnational Legacy*, offers a body of corrective scholarship for a field of research that is still, relatively speaking, in its infancy. The result of a one-day conference 'Blessed Virago: The International Mysticism of Jane Lead' held in London in 2012, the work is testament both to the quality of scholarship now applied to Lead's works, and the growing realization that Lead and the Philadelphians, though small in number, can offer us significant insight into Puritanism, millennialism, religious radicalism, and mysticism. Chapters by several of the authors, including Hessayon, Warren Johnston, Lionel Laborie and Philip Lockley, often give a genuine sense of discarding what has gone before. Some older generalizations and misapplications of Lead's work and influence have been rejected in favour of a new and more nuanced analysis driven by solid archival research and a sensitive reading of the source material. Engaging with this collection of essays leaves the reader with a sense that the prevalent understanding of Lead as the matriarch of a peaceful and genteel religious community is rapidly and purposefully being undone. Rather, the collection 'radicalizes' Lead, proposing that she was never a central unifying figure among the Philadelphians, but was rather shunned by the reserved and private majority of the group when her small band of followers decided to deliver a public testimony from 1697 onwards. The volume thus offers a three-fold reconsideration of Lead's legacy; an exploration of her audience while she was alive, a reconstruction of her posthumous readership, and a re-evaluation of her role in modern scholarship.

The first three chapters are penned by Hessayon himself. Entitled 'Lead's life and times', the chapters deal

with three distinct periods of Lead's life; her life before widowhood in 1670, a period of destitution until 1695, and finally her ascendancy to the role of Philadelphian prophetess from 1696 until her death in 1704. In the first chapter Hessayon distances himself from the secondary literature dealing with Lead's early life on account of it often being 'superficial at best, ill-informed and incorrect at worst'. Instead, through an exhaustive amount of archival research, he reconstructs a life for Lead which is 'far more radical than has been supposed' (p. 15). On a practical level, intricate research allows Hessayon to fill an impressive number of gaps in our existing knowledge of Lead. Attention given to Lead's brothers reveals connections to the radical antinomian preacher Tobias Crisp. Her father is revealed to have been one of 65 men responsible for 'maintaining the Parliamentary war machine' during the Civil Wars, while her elder brother was the brother-in-law of the Independent Robert Tichborne, a signatory to Charles I's death warrant (p. 21). Lead's own account of her life, as well as those written immediately after her death, are unsurprisingly silent on these connections. The chapter offers a warning against taking autobiographical and biographical accounts of Lead from the period at face value, showing that they often concealed as much as they revealed in terms of Lead's true beliefs and connections.

This re-evaluation of Lead continues in Hessayon's second and third chapters. In his second chapter he explores how Pordage continued to mould Lead's theology, building on an already militant Puritanism she had fostered during her youth and combining it with the alchemical teachings of Jacob Boehme. Also influential on Lead was the German Quirinus Kuhlmann, who travelled Europe proclaiming himself to be a 'new Christ', spending several periods in London between 1677 and 1681. Lead was also visited several times by the prophetess Tanneke Denijs from Holland, who later circulated Lead's works in the Dutch Republic. In reconstructing these links, Hessayon shows how Lead was not 'a woman alone in the wilderness' (p. 48), but rather one who was intimately connected to several circles of mystics, spiritualists and prophets. This detailed reconstruction is applied most effectively to the range of 'unheralded figures' who supported Lead after the death of Pordage in 1681 and formed a tightknit community of believers. Using an intricate method of tracing witnesses to wills, Hessayon names over a dozen people previously unknown to scholars.

The third chapter, detailing the final part of Lead's life, offers several more correctives to the pre-established narrative of the rise and fall of the Philadelphian Society. Here Hessayon poses that the tightknit community Lead was part of in the 1680s and early 1690s ruptured in two just before the Philadelphian Society emerged. This community split over their intended purpose; many wished to continue privately circulating works between members, while others, spurred on by millenarian beliefs, wanted to emerge to give public testimony to the imminence of Christ's return and print works supporting such a belief. While the Philadelphians always presented themselves in an orthodox light, something many scholars have taken at face value, Hessayon's research suggests otherwise. Using letters intercepted by the Archbishop of Canterbury's agents in 1697, Hessayon posits that the Philadelphians had been actively engaging in a ceremony known as a 'Love Feast'. First practiced by German Pietists, the practice had connections to the beliefs of the notorious heterodox group the Family of Love, which some contemporaries confused the Philadelphians with (p. 80).

Hessayon offers a substantial revision of Lead's life in these chapters. While he admits the material he has unearthed is 'mainly circumstantial', he insists 'cumulatively the evidence is overwhelming' (p. 15). Indeed, the sheer volume of material Hessayon has unearthed cannot fail to impress, suggesting that more archival work concerning the Philadelphians is still waiting to be undertaken. This revision continues in a well-researched chapter by Lionel Laborie, curiously placed later in the volume rather than directly after Hessayon's contributions. Together the four chapters form the most comprehensive overview of Jane Lead and the Philadelphian Society produced to date. Laborie's chapter questions what happened to individual Philadelphians after Lead's death in 1704, a period which has received scant attention from scholars. He explores how the Philadelphians experienced a revival after merging with a group of French Prophets in 1707, co-existing for over a year before differences between the two groups emerged. Laborie's thoughtful work prompts another reconsideration of Lead. Gone is the 'matriarchal figure' who united the Philadelphians, an image created and maintained by her closest followers. Instead, Laborie argues that 'Lead

left behind a chaotic community ... and that the Philadelphians no longer constituted a cohesive movement'. Laborie's most persuasive evidence for this is the fact that during the union of the Philadelphians and the French Prophets in their shared millenarian goals, 'neither Lead nor her works were ever mentioned at any point' in the records and publications of the latter (p. 231). By giving attention to the neglected period 1704–30, Laborie allows fresh insight into the immediate legacy of Lead's work that will likely prompt further re-examination.

The remaining chapters of the volume offer reconsiderations of Lead's context and legacy. Amanda L. Capern explores Lead's indebtedness to Puritan pastoral theology, noting her inheritance of an earlier 'English radical Protestant (or puritan) tradition' (p. 92). Warren Johnston's chapter draws on his extensive expertise in 17th century apocalypticism to show how Lead's writings show an awareness of writers such as Joseph Mede and Thomas Beverley. Yet unlike Mede or Beverley, who attempted to interpret the apocalyptic meaning of Scripture, Lead insisted that her mystical and prophetic experiences allowed her access to 'new divine information that was on par with scripture itself' (p. 123). Johnston notes that many scholars have linked Lead to later 17th-century apocalyptic thought, but failed to notice this distinction. Lead went even further, going beyond new insights into existing scriptural prophecies and claiming she had been given new original revelations. Once again Lead's beliefs are revealed to have had some radical conclusions. Her insistence that the arrival of the Millennium would result in drastic change 'within and against the governments of the world' (p. 133) as well as within all the established churches, could easily be seen to have overtly seditious overtones.

Two chapters offer connections between Lead and continental Pietism in the early 18th century. Stefania Salvadori places Lead at the very centre of a debate within radical Pietist circles over the nature of inner spiritual growth and the possibility of physical, as well as spiritual, transfiguration. Lucinda Martin's chapter argues that Lead became a 'lightning rod figure among religious dissidents on the continent' in the mid-1690s (p. 188). She offers new perspective on the German audience of Lead's writing, arguing that her ideas 'saturated' radical Pietism (p. 189). Martin explores the activities of Johann Georg Gichtel, a German exile living in Amsterdam who had published an edition of Boehme's writings in 1682–3. Martin argues that he was the main reason Lead was known in radical Pietist circles, despite his later suspicions of her legitimacy. In 1706 he would finally declare her works to be 'a trap laid by the devil' (p. 200). Martin's chapter not only resituates Gichtel at the centre of Lead's German audience (something Gichtel himself later tried to play down), but also shows the fractious nature of radical Pietism in the late 17th century.

The final two chapters deal with Lead's influence in the 19th and 20th centuries. Philip Lockley focuses on her reception among the followers of Joanna Southcott in the early nineteenth century. Like Lead, Southcott was an English female prophet, but commanded much greater numbers of followers, totalling over 12,000 by the time of her death in 1814. While Lockley notes that Southcott herself denied reading any prophetic works besides the Bible, comparisons were made with Lead when Southcott claimed to be preparing to give birth to a messiah named 'Shiloh'. Sympathetic works used Lead to justify Southcott's claims, drawing comparisons between the two that Southcott herself seemed uncomfortable with. In 1828 one John Ward claimed to be the Shiloh the Southcottians had been waiting for. Aside from Southcott's works and the Bible, 'Lead was probably the source of prophecies that Ward referred to most' (p. 250). Rather than hidden away, Lead's works were now read aloud in chapel meetings and openly circulated among members. This would in turn influence James Greaves, 'a mystic with eclectic interests in spiritual inspiration' (p. 253). After his death, Greaves's library, including works by Lead and Southcott, found their way into the collection of the New England Transcendentalist community. This American audience is explored in more detail in the final chapter by Bridget M. Jacobs. Jacobs traces Lead's influence on 'Mary's City of David', a Southcottian group founded in 1930 in Michigan which reprinted several of Lead's works. Alongside the works of their leader Mary Purnell, the group began gathering Lead's writings, unbelievably managing to collect 'most of her extant printed works in English' (p. 269). While Lead's works were valued as testimony to be preserved among this group, others such as the Pentecostal Latter Rain movement edited, revised and altered Lead's message based on 'personal meditation, study and reflection'. In their hands Lead's work was 'not a fixed text by an inspired prophetic author, but an anonymous voice to which they could add their own'

(p. 284). Both Lockley and Jacobs provide valuable insight into Lead's modern readers, allowing the volume to address Lead's legacy almost continuously from the 17th century to the 20th century without interruption.

Overall this is a valuable and timely collection of essays that offers new direction to those concerned with studying the Philadelphians. As the chapter by Sarah Apetrei reveals, new manuscript sources of Lead's works are still out there to be discovered, and it is to be hoped that the volume inspires more researchers to explore Lead's important role in late 17th- and early 18th-century religion. Apetrei's archival findings are generously reproduced in full, along with Laborie's extensive list of known Philadelphians, providing scholars with the very latest findings to aid future research. The volume is well presented with generous scholarly endnotes. It will be of interest to students and scholars alike, especially anyone with an interest in female religiosity, alchemy, radical spirituality, mysticism, and the links between English and continental religious movements.

The editor is happy to accept Dr Temple's review of this collection and is grateful to him for his thorough reading of all the essays as well as his generous and constructive remarks.

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