Palmyra Allāt was not the pàredros of Bēl, as Dr Krone writes (p. 369), referring to Du Mesnil du Buisson (cf. Seyrig, La parèdre de Bēl à Palmyre, Syria 37, 1960, 68-74). At p. 446 the author discusses the god Aršu at Palmyra. It ought to be mentioned that Aršu’s temple at Palmyra was discovered already in 1980 at the north side of the wadi close to the agora (cf. CRAI 1985, 286-293). These are a few points among many others which call for discussion. They, however, do not diminish the value of this monograph, but only highlight its importance for this field of the history of religion.

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Philosophical Taoism is well known in academic circles, and its principal canonical texts, the Lao Tzu (or Tao Te Ching or Classic of the Tao) and the Chuang Tzu are frequently read in American religion and philosophy courses. Chinese religion, both ancient and modern, both classically recognized (e.g., Buddhism and religious Taoism) and popular, is increasingly understood to be a vibrant strain of Chinese culture and is a subject to be studied in comparative religion. In the popular American view, the Tao functions as a universal icon without specific content and onto which individual philosophical predilections can be projected, as attested by the growing number of The Tao of . . . (Pooh, Sex, Physics, Leadership, and even Islam) books which crowd the catalogues of religious publishers. That there actually was a strong mystical movement within religious Taoism is often and misleadingly taken to lend to support to such portrayals, some of which are notably inaccurate and inappropriate. We have long needed a book which describes and analyzes Taoist mysticism for what it actually was: one of the world’s mysticisms subject to the principles which seem to prevail among other mysticisms and certainly amenable to comparative analysis.
Livia Kohn’s new book provides most of that needed accounting and is thus much to be welcomed. Concentrating on the formal, "higher", or literary Taoist tradition Kohn charts the development of ecstatic and intensive meditative practices as direct outgrowths of a combination of the two foundation texts and the transformation of Chinese mythology and shamanism into Taoist myths and mystical realization. Most helpfully, along the way, she outlines the relationship of Taoist mysticism to Buddhism and thereby clearly distinguishes the highly layered and sophisticated native analysis of approaching the sublimity of the transcendent which has sometimes been attributed entirely to the effect of the imported religion.

Kohn is at her best in explaining those whose work directly provided the basis of Chinese mysticism and describing that mysticism itself. It is the commentators on the canonical texts, such as Wang Bi (226-49), who describe the mystical Tao, "For Wang Bi, the Tao is not only the One. He also identifies it with original nonbeing and with the Great Ultimate: As such, the Tao is the clearly understood root and origin of the world." (61) There is not a great leap from this concept to the highly elaborated (and frequently successful) Taoist alchemical and medical tradition which has recently seen a long-needed revival. Kohn identifies the *Heshang gong* commentary (2nd-3rd cent. C.E.??) as the classical synthesis of this tradition: "Chinese traditional medicine defines the fundamental share all beings have in the Tao as their vital energy (qi). Everyone is endowed with this cosmic force ... the vital energy within the human body appears in definite forms. Represented as spiritual forces or body divinities (shen), it resides in certain energy centers, most commonly described as the five "intestines" or orbs. According to Heshang gong, nourishment of the five spirits is an essential prerequisite for attainment of the Tao." (67)

Kohn is particularly enlightening in her treatment of the long-lived Chinese tradition of leading religious specialists undertaking mystical explorations of fantastic other worlds in search of "immortal freedom as their ultimate goal" (96), familiar to most students of China only through the (?3rd cent. BCE) shamanic poetry collection *Ch’u Tzu (Songs of the South)*. She links the escapist verse of the third to sixth centuries CE both to the plaintive wandering of the mythicized Ch’u Yuan and to the surveys of powerful royal figures and regal-symbol dragons through outlining the ideology of the Great Man (*Daren*). Kohn carefully differentiates the Great Man of the extended shamanic-mystic tradition from the upright leading citizen called the same name in Confucianism. In this discussion Kohn demonstrated that in China, no less than anywhere else,