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Skidmore's "Strength in Weakness: writings by eighteenth-century Quaker women" - Book Review

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Accordingly, the book opens with an introduction to: the origins of Quakerism; Quaker testimonies; the way in which Quaker historians (Braithwaite and Jones in particular) have influenced perceptions of Quietism and eighteenth century Quakers; the passing on of the traditions of eighteenth-century Quakers, with a particular emphasis on ministry; the women themselves; the form of Quaker spiritual autobiography.

The writings of eight Quaker women have been selected, spanning the whole of the eighteenth century, from Grace Hall Chamber (1676 – 1762) to Ann Crowley (1765 – 1826). Some of the names will be familiar to Quaker readers (Catherine Phillips, Sarah Tuke Grubb) but others are less well-known. The writings include extracts from the women's published journals (mostly published after the writers' deaths), extracts from published memoirs and letters, and some letters not previously published. Grace Chamber's letters are in the manuscript collection of the Library of the Society of Friends (London), as are those of Lydia Lancaster, Ruth Follows and Sarah Tuke Grubb. Catherine Phillips's *Memoirs* were published in 1797, Sarah Tuke Grubb's *Account* in 1792, Priscilla Hannah Gurney's *Memoirs* in 1834, Mary Alexander's *Account* in 1811, and Ann Crowley's *Account* in 1842. Extracts from these are reproduced.

Gil Skidmore has edited the texts for readability – spelling, punctuation, biblical references. This gives the reader a sense of the eighteenth-century language and experience without the struggle of deciphering a text. At the end are appended brief biographical notes on other people mentioned in the main texts, again aiding comprehension of the whole.

In her introduction, Gil Skidmore is at pains to rescue eighteenth-century Friends, and Quietism as a movement, from what she perceives to be the distorting lens of Rufus Jones's account in *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan, 1921).

Rufus Jones, and most of the historians who followed him, equated Quietism with being quiet and doing nothing, but this is an oversimplification...the whole picture is much more complex...[these Quaker women] are far from inactive and often hold large public meetings in an effort to reach the 'world's people' with the Quaker message (pp. 6-7).

Accounts of the women's travel in the ministry form substantial parts of the extracts chosen for inclusion in the book.

Overall this is a welcome introductory text. The first five pages of the Introduction are in themselves an excellent brief overview of the origins of Quakerism for non-Quakers approaching this book in the Sacred Texts series. The texts reproduced are of interest in themselves and their publication in this form may stimulate interest in other writings of the period as well as in the full-length writings of these chosen authors.

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Skidmore, G. (ed.), *Strength in Weakness: writings by eighteenth-century Quaker women*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003. pp.187, 0 7591 0521 9, Paper, £14.95, \$19.95.

This book represents a development in Gil Skidmore's previous work on Quaker spiritual autobiography, and eighteenth-century Friends in particular. It is published as part of the work of The International Sacred Literature Trust which, 'encourages faiths to make available texts which are needed in translation for their own communities and also texts which are little known outside the tradition.'