

difficult circumstances, and suggests that a comparable dynamic lay behind the sustained popular adherence to purity rituals in the post-70 CE period.

While the book is replete with numerous novel insights on a large array of topics, a leitmotif that runs throughout the volume is that remains of stepped pools attest to widespread *popular* adherence to purity rites, whose basis was the *shared biblical tradition* common to the majority of Jews rather than any particularistic understanding of this collective heritage. This is primarily a reaction to an all-too-common tendency among archaeologists and historians to read rabbinic Halakhah into the archaeological finds. Miller stresses that it was precisely the *biblically derived laws*, and at times also popular notions of the ritually unclean, that informed the purity concerns of those who created and used these installations—commoners who lived within a complex Jewish society of which the rabbis were only a segment. The implications of this critical assertion go far beyond the limited question of stepped pools and purity observance, and I can only hope that Miller’s vitally important message finds a receptive audience within current scholarship.

The bibliography is remarkably comprehensive and up to date, including a number of unpublished doctoral dissertations consulted by the author. On practically every topic touched by the book, Miller cites an impressive array of prior scholarship, and then proceeds to assess these views in an inspiringly respectful manner. Much of this important dialogue takes place in the copious and hefty footnotes found throughout. “Dialogue” is actually an apt description of what this book is really all about; this is the author’s latest and most thorough contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding the interpretation of the finds at hand, and the implications of such interpretations for a broader understanding of the character of Jewish society in ancient and late antique Palaestina. Scholars already “immersed” in the subject matter—whether historians, talmudists, or archaeologists—will no doubt find themselves the book’s most appreciative audience. For these as well as others wishing to acquaint themselves with the *status quaestionis*, this superb volume is most certainly a mandatory read.

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Guy G. Stroumsa. *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 225 pp.
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This book brings together ten articles, nine of which have been published previously in a variety of venues between 1986 and 2015. They have been reworked slightly here, with an added introduction, to carry on a long tradition of scholarship endeavoring to place early Islam in relationship with its religious precursors. Much benefit in Professor Stroumsa’s approach derives from his many

decades of scholarship in the religions of late antiquity, his resistance to drawing firm conclusions, and the depth of his knowledge.

The ten articles are divided into four sections. The first two, “Transformations of Religion in Late Antiquity” and “The True Prophet,” delineate some of the major changes in the nature and structure of religion in late antiquity and trace the evolution of the idea of prophecy that was inherited from Israelite religion. “Religious Communities and God’s Law” treats the ways in which religious communities became the central element of religious and political life and thought during the period. These serve to underpin his last section, “The Way to Mecca,” which specifically examines the emergence of Islam within the milieu of late antique monotheistic communities.

As originally conceived, most of these articles were not intended specifically to argue the diachrony. Hence some material may not appear immediately to relate directly to the thrust of the overall discourse. Stroumsa tends to focus on the complex nature of religious sharing (and argument) between Judaism and Christianity as both religious systems emerged and grew simultaneously out of a biblical/Greco-Roman context. But he also treats Manichaeism, nonrabbinic and nonpatristic forms of Christianity, paganism and pagan forms of monotheism, and other movements as they developed during the period. He calls the cultural-religious world produced by these developments in late antiquity a “religious *koine*” or “religious commonwealth” that served as a kind of *praeparatio coranica*. The terminology might suggest a neo-utopian age, but he shows how the period was rather a rich and bubbling cauldron out of which emerged not only Islam, but the orthodox and sectarian movements that came to typify Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism. To Stroumsa, late antiquity was “the ‘Abrahamic moment’” because Abraham proved symbolic for trends far beyond Judaism and Christianity (noting for example how the third-century pagan emperor Alexander Severus claimed to have possessed a statue of Abraham together with statues of Orpheus and Apollonius of Tyana).

His first essay (“The End of Sacrifice”) treats the culmination of a very long and virtually universal practice of sacrificial offerings, replaced by the metaphor of sacrifice in rabbinic Judaism and patristic Christianity. “Patterns of Rationalization,” his second essay, treats the rationalizing trend in religion, Weber’s “disenchantment of the world” (*Entzauberung der Welt*) that marked a major change in assumptions about the role of mysterious forces on the function of life.

The next three chapters treat the complex issue of prophecy from a variety of angles. The prophetic figure representing the divine will has perhaps the most authoritative status in prophetic religion. This makes the prophetic office powerful yet unstable. While it serves as the authoritative vehicle for the divine utterance, it can also overturn the religious establishment via new claims for a divine imperative. And some prophets have presumably misrepresented the divine will or preached messages that derive from other, nondivine sources. As such, a prophet might be false (*nevi sheker, pseudoprophētēs*). Much effort was therefore expended in late antiquity to make sense of the problematic of prophecy. How does one confirm or attest to the truth of the prophet and the prophetic utterance? Is there an end to prophecy? Here Stroumsa is particularly interesting in his

unpacking of these issues, culminating with his examination of the term “seal of prophecy” as it occurs in the religions of late antiquity, and particularly in Manichaean literature. This issue is significant especially because of the Islamic position that Muhammad, as the “seal of the prophets” (Qur’an 33:40), was God’s *last* prophet. Given the use of the linguistic idiom in pre-Islamic Semitic religious literatures in late antiquity, the classical Islamic understanding may not accurately reflect the term’s Qur’anic contextual meaning.

In “God’s Rule in Late Antiquity” (chapter 7), Stroumsa considers the relationship between religious and political authority in the late antique world, with particular interest in possible influence on the birth of Islam. Covering a lot of ground in a few pages, this important topic will hopefully be expanded in future writings. Chapter 8 treats Jewish-Christianity and Islamic origins, a topic of particular interest today as the current trend in the study of Qur’anic roots has shifted toward Syriac literatures and notions produced and practiced by Jewish-Christian communities, particularly the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and the Didaskalia, a fourth-century text on ritual and legal precepts that draws on the Didache (a Jewish-Christian text from the late first, early second century). Stroumsa is particularly tuned into the eschatological tensions that reached a fevered pitch between Jews and Christians in relation to the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 CE. He senses that, notwithstanding the lack of hard evidence, some Jewish-Christian groups must have continued to exist into the seventh century. The many parallels between the Qur’an and earlier Jewish-Christian literatures and ideas are just too overwhelming to discount. Yet there is no “smoking gun,” and the emergence of Islam turns out to be much more complex than had been assumed by previous Western scholarship. To make sense of early Islam, “All sectarian and hermeneutical trends stemming from the foundational texts of Jews and Christians must therefore be studied together. These include not only the various Jewish-Christian groups as mentioned by the Christian heresiologists, such as the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, or the Elchasaites, but also Gnostic and Manichaean dualists and also the ‘noble’ heresies of the Monophysites and Nestorians, who together represent the majority of late antique Christians in the Near East, from Egypt and Syria to Armenia and Iran” (148).

In “Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem,” Stroumsa treats the revival of the importance of Jerusalem in the wake of the Byzantine-Sassanian wars, another topic of enduring concern for scholars and practitioners alike. “At least from the conquest of Jerusalem by the Sasanians in 614 and the capture of the Holy Cross, the Christian world was rife with expectations of the *Endzeit*, with its traditional imagery of cosmic war between the forces of light and darkness.... Scholars have recently highlighted the centrality in these polemics of the Holy Land, the Holy City, and its core, the Temple Mount, as well as their direct impact on the earliest Islamic program in Jerusalem” (169). And in the final chapter, Stroumsa sees the Christian perceptions of Jews, pagans, Arabs, and themselves to be profoundly influenced by changes in the definitions of “barbarism” and “heresy” as a result of the particularities of Christian identity formation in late antiquity.

Much of the work in this volume is theoretical, but it includes fascinating examples of striking parallels between early Islamic themes and earlier literatures from late antiquity. These include the Qur'anic notion of *tahrif* with Christian accusations of Jewish distortions of Abraham's true religion (Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* and the Ebionite conception of a diabolical falsification of Scripture); satanic verses "added" to the Qur'an with Pseudo-Clementine Homilies; the early *shahāda* or statement of faith with "God is one, and there is no God but Him" that appears in Pseudo-Clementine writings; the synonymic appearance of *rasūl* and *nabī* in the Qur'an with *apostolos* and *proph-ētēs* in the Didache; the notion of *jāhiliyya* with the lack of any intellectual interest among Christians with "the prior falsehood" of paganism; the Islamic concept of *fiṭra* with the notion of a natural Christian nature of the human soul (*anima naturaliter christiana*); the Qur'anic notion of an original, pristine, and unsullied "religion of Abraham" with Eusebius's writings in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and so forth. These parallels do not suggest "borrowing," as was so commonly assumed by earlier modern researchers, but rather point to the complexity of intertextual and interideational relationships between the religions of the period. While many of these parallels were not uncovered by the author, he interrogates them methodically through a vast array of primary and secondary sources in close to a dozen European and ancient languages.

The volume is dense and the breadth of reach remarkable. Anyone interested in early Islam and the interrelatedness and intertextuality of religion in the late antique world will find this book of intense interest.

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MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ERAS

Andrew D. Berns. *The Bible and Natural Philosophy in Renaissance Italy: Jewish and Christian Physicians in Search of Truth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 309 pp.
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"Tra le settantadue lingue che dalle 72 natione della casa d'Israel son nate, solo tre sono state tenute sempre in grandissima veneratione fra tutte l'altre lingue cioè l'Hebraea, Graeca, et Latina. Sì perché in quelle sono state conservate le scritture delle cose divine et parimente humane." (Among the seventy-two languages that were born from the seventy-two nations of the house of Israel, only three were always held in greatest veneration among all the others: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. In those languages, writings on divine and indeed human things were preserved; pp. 55–56)