


In this way, Rotman's book opens the door to further developments in scholarship on Gregory and the role of hagiography in historical study.

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Door of the Wilderness: The Greek, Coptic, and Copto-Arabic Sayings of St. Antony of Egypt. By Tim Vivian and Elizabeth Agaiby. An English Translation, with Introductions and Notes. Leiden, Brill, 2021. 262 pp. \$155.00 hardback.

With *Vita Antonii* Athanasius of Alexandria made St. Antony the pioneer of and model for monastic life for Christian monasticism. In the Sayings of the Desert he is regularly the first monk quoted and recent research on the letters attributed to him has added to interest in him and his role in the emergence of monasticism. By providing English translations of the sayings attributed to or mentioning St. Antony, not only in the Greek collections, but also in later Coptic tradition the authors put St. Antony more firmly in Egypt and provide valuable insights into how his image has been transmitted in the Coptic tradition. While there are several different translations of the Greek sayings the most valuable translations in the volume are the translations from Coptic and Arabic, and in particular the latter which provide valuable insights into how Christian monasticism adapted to a Muslim society and the language of Islam. In addition the introduction and extensive notes to the Arabic section adds considerably to a tradition that has received little interest. Unfortunately the actual Arabic text, which in contrast to the Coptic and Greek is not available in a scholarly publication, is not included; only a few photos of folios of an Arabic mss are provided. The *Door of the Wilderness* thus does not only provide translations, introductions, notes, as well as valuable appendices, but it also highlights the need for further research on the Arabic transmission of the sayings of the desert and in particular the Copto-Arabic tradition known as the Garden of the Monks (*al-Bustân al-Ruhbân*).

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Apocryphal and Esoteric Sources in the Development of Christianity and Judaism: The Eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, and Beyond. Edited by Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity XXI. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. xix + 632 pp.

This interesting book derives from work presented at a conference held in Germany in 2018. In it, twenty-six far-ranging chapters by prominent specialists consider sources

produced or preserved within and beyond the Greek and Roman cultural sphere. Several chapters focus on the visual arts. Taken as a whole, these essays offer much of value to specialists across a wide spectrum of time periods, religious traditions, and literatures. All but two of the essays are published in English.

As one might expect, the useful and detailed introduction by the editor wrestles with defining the stated categories of “apocryphal” and “esoteric” with any precision, difficulties addressed by several of the contributors as well. This challenge surfaces immediately in the opening chapters. Ithamar Gruenwald (29–42) argues that the Hebrew *Book of Jubilees* attested at Qumran and well-regarded in Ethiopic Christianity should not be labelled an esoteric text, since it does not speak of secrecy, and further that the basic contrast between “apocryphal” and “canonical” texts is ultimately of little importance for the people who wrote, copied, and read these texts. Gruenwald shows how *Jubilees* continues a longstanding tendency within canonical Jewish Scripture to rewrite traditions under the claim of divine authority (cf. Deuteronomy or Nehemiah).

Tobias Niklas (43–69) suggests something analogous in his detailed treatment of the so-called *Gospel of Peter* fragment found in a grave in late-ancient Akhmim. Building on his previous work on this fifth- or sixth- century Greek manuscript, Niklas argues that the text need not witness the “apocryphal gospel” mentioned by Eusebius and other authors, or at least not directly. What we have instead is a remnant of the late-antique tendency to create what Siciu has identified as an “apostolic memoir” in his book re-categorizing the so-called *Gospel of the Savior* (Alin Siciu, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon: A Coptic Apostolic Memoir*; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). These are writings that play off the (by then) canonical gospels to extend those narratives to address current concerns, claiming to report apostolic tradition, while set imaginatively in the form of fictional sermons or discourses by Cyril of Alexandria or other prominent churchmen. Thus, if Niklas is correct, the Akhmim text should be considered more of a continuation of the scriptural tradition than as “esoteric” or “apocryphal” literature articulating an alternate theology outside the mainstream.

Other chapters connect with Scriptural traditions in different ways. Felicity Harley’s enlightening discussion of visual representations of the Adoration of the Magi (Matt 2:9–11) in the funerary art of Christian Rome before the Council of Ephesus (383–410) demonstrates how artists painted catacomb murals and carved sarcophagi not as simple illustrations of the gospel scene but instead create something of a dialogue between text and depiction. She shows that by adapting Roman conventions for the portrayal of a modest upper-class matron, these artists draw the viewer’s eye away from the magi who are the gospel passage’s main interest toward the seated mother and child, “introducing new details that vibrantly colour and so interpret the text” (399), as a reflection of Marian devotional practices. Jean-Pierre Mahé discusses a thirteenth- or fourteenth- century carved tympanum and inscription from the Armenian Monastery of Noravank that depicts the creation of Adam. We see the Ancient of Days flanked on one side by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and on the other by the crucified Christ, evincing an interestingly material Trinitarian understanding (144–152).

A different connection between the First and Last Adam is drawn by Sergey Minov’s essay on patristic and medieval speculation as to how it was that Adam’s body came to be buried on Golgotha, site of Jesus’ crucifixion (153–178). Had Adam lived out his days in “Judea” after his expulsion from Eden, and had he died and been buried there? Such had been claimed by Tatian and the Ebionites, according to Epiphanius. The *Commentary on Isaiah* attributed to Basil of Caesarea, which found currency in

its Syriac version, adds the datum that after the Flood, Noah took note of Adam's skull on Golgotha and passed this knowledge on to his descendants. Related suggestions were that Adam's body was actually carried to Calvary by the Flood in the days of Noah (so the Coptic *Encomium on John the Baptist*, attributed piously to John Chrysostom), or by Noah himself (so the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* preserved under the name of Ephrem). Even more imaginative were proposals by Bulgarian authors that angels had brought Adam's corpse from the island where the Ark had landed (so the Slavonic *Scaliger Paterikon*), or that this miracle occurred by the powers of the River Jordan as late as the time of Jesus (so the Slavonic *Tale of the Tree of the Cross*, tenth century).

The final contribution to the collection that I have space to discuss is Ezio Abrile's thorough study of the late Byzantine philosopher and churchman Giorgios Gemistus Plethon, highlighting his contributions to the interpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles* (124–140). These remnants of Middle Platonic theology and theurgy are well introduced and explained in the first third of the chapter. Born in Constantinople around 1360, Plethon drew on a range of mystical traditions, apparently including Jewish esotericism and Iranian thought, as transmitted through Arabic commentators on Aristotle. He produced a commentary on the *Oracles* that strove to remove accretions to the manuscript tradition from Christian Neoplatonist scholars, as well as to demonstrate the influence of what he saw as Zoroastrian ideas. Exiled from Byzantium due to opposition from the Constantinopolitan clergy, Plethon settled eventually in Florence, where he produced a treatise twenty chapters in length (*De differentia platonicae et aristotelicae philosophiae*, PG 160, 889–932), attempting to minimize the value of Aristotelian influence on the Florentine Platonic Academy sponsored by the Medici. The remainder of Abrile's chapter is devoted to the work of Plethon's disciple, Cardinal Basilio Bessarion.

This fascinating collection is suitable for any research library that caters to scholars of Jewish or Christian thought and practice East or West from antiquity down to the Renaissance.

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***Christians, the State, and War: An Ancient Tradition for the Modern World.* By Gordon L. Heath. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022. x + 261 pp. \$110 cloth; \$35 eBook.**

Gordon L. Heath (McMaster Divinity College) offers an impressive survey of the extensive historical and secondary literature on Christian attitudes towards violence, the state, and war. Heath notes that many earlier discussions treat the issue of war as a binary one between pacifism and the just war position. Taking as his departure point a statement by St. Vincent of Lérins that there was a common tradition in the pre-Constantinian church “believed everywhere, always and by all,” Heath offers a more nuanced and detailed treatment of the subject by proposing “five interrelated and intertwined