

Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean. Ryan Szpiech, ed.

Bordering Religions: Concepts, Conflicts, and Conversations. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. xvi + 330 pp. \$55.

This book's thirteen essays explore the role played by exegesis in identity production and defense in the medieval period. But instead of looking for theological or transhistorical foundations between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts, the writers examine the role played by cross-cultural and interreligious conflict in scriptural interpretation. This approach, Szpiech argues, is less likely to make unsubstantiated connections between religious traditions and highlights the significance of medieval genres such as *disputatio*, *refutatio*, and *dialogus* (8–9). It also implies a provocative question: “Was the discourse of medieval exegetes always a polemical discourse, or was there also a counter-tradition of

'irenical' exegesis?" (14). Themes such as textual authority, authenticity, the nature of translation, conversion, and gender and exegesis form the basis of the book's four sections: "Strategies of Reading on the Borders of Islam," "Dominicans and Their Disputations," "Authority and Scripture between Jewish and Christian Readers," and "Exegesis and Gender: Vocabularies of Difference."

The three essays found in the first section examine select Islamic writers in conversation with Jewish and/or Christian texts. Sarah Stroumsa, for example, examines the writings of Ibn Masarra (tenth century) and Moses Maimonides (twelfth century), especially as they deal with Abraham and contemplation. At the same time, however, she challenges the assumption of religious tolerance in al-Andalus based on the idea that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all Abrahamic religions. The next essay, by Sidney Griffith, examines Ibn al-Maḥrūmah's (Christian) glosses on Ibn Kammūnah's (Jewish) book, *Examination of the Three Religions*. While the original book concluded that the claims of Judaism were the strongest of the three traditions, in later glosses Ibn al-Maḥrūmah challenged this conclusion, utilizing ideas found in early Muslim polemics against Jews. The last essay in this section is by Walid Saleh and examines the "difference of emotionality" (59) between the writings of al-Biqā'ī (a Mamluk scholar) and Johannes Reuchlin (Christian humanist), both of whom were interested in the Hebrew Bible.

The three essays in section 2 examine how the Dominicans dealt with Jewish and Muslim texts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The first two essays deal with Dominican anti-Muslim writings. Thomas E. Burman's article examines two Dominican linguists, both of whom wrote treatises against Islam. Although one treatise had limited influence, the other became a best seller. The second essay, by Antoni Biosca i Bas, examines the writings of the Dominican friar Alfonso Buenhombre and draws attention to his tactic of fabricating Jewish and Muslim texts in order to bolster Christian exegesis. The third essay in this section, by Ursula Ragacs, reconstructs Jewish-Christian disputations by examining the conversations between Nahmanides and the Dominican friar Paul Christian.

In the opening essay of part 3, Harvey J. Hames reconstructs Jewish-Christian polemics by examining the 1240 Paris disputation (resulting in the burning of Talmuds in the 1240s) and then discussing the Barcelona (1263) and Paris (1272) disputations. The two remaining essays in this section are interesting in that they exemplify the struggle between polemical and irenic exegesis. A good example of this is Yosi Yisraeli's examination of Pablo Santa María's critique of Rashi's *Peshaṭ*. Yisraeli emphasizes that, as a person who was formerly a Rabbi and Jewish scholar, Pablo Santa María's conversion to Christian priesthood made his text, the *Additiones*, a "unique product of interreligious and cross-cultural scholarship" (128). As such, he was "not only a channel for transmitting Jewish philological, historical, and mystical knowledge but also hermeneutical theories and conventions" (141).

Three of the four essays of the last section deal with exegesis and gender. For example, while Alexandra Cuffel examines the denigration of Jesus's masculinity in the *Toledot Yeshu*, Nina Caputo looks at Nahmanides's critique of male violence in Genesis

6:1–4. The third essay, by Esperanza Alfonso, explores how both hermeneutics and social and cultural context shaped Jewish exegesis of the strange woman in Proverbs. In the book's final essay, Steven F. Kruger addresses "Exegesis as Autobiography" by examining the writings of Guillaume de Bourges (a Christian convert) and highlighting the role that cultural location and personal history plays in the interpretation of scripture. As such, the essay provides an apt conclusion to this intriguing collection.

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