

begins with chapters that explore the roles of priests, scribes, and temples in Second Temple literature before turning to purity laws in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Himmelfarb helpfully highlights the intensification of some purity legislation in the exegesis of sectarian communities. The next section contains essays that bring out ways in which Judaism and Hellenism were intertwined in the Second Temple period. The remaining two sections look beyond the limits of the Second Temple period by noting literary connections that continue in later literature. In keeping with her previous work, Himmelfarb probes the development of heavenly ascents from early apocalyptic literature to *hekhlot* literature and *merkabah* mysticism. The book concludes with two chapters that analyze how certain pseudepigrapha were utilized in medieval Jewish texts. Himmelfarb's competent coverage of such a broad range of texts is evidence of the immense learning that lies behind these essays. Although some may disagree with particular interpretive decisions she makes, this book will be of interest to scholars and students of Second Temple literature and reception since it provides an enormous service by collecting such a variety of studies into a single volume.

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RECONSTRUCTING THE TALMUD. By Joshua Kulp and Jason Rogoff. New York: Mechon Hadar, 2014. Pp. 342. \$30.00.

Recent decades have seen dramatic changes in the ways that Talmudic texts have been analyzed and in the understanding that we have about the process through which the Talmudic canon came into being. However, it is not a simple matter to master these new methods, and awareness of these new approaches and the novel conclusions to which they lead has been limited to an academic audience. This volume is intended to rectify this situation, and the authors are remarkably successful. Each of the nine chapters in the books deals with a different text and employs a different method of analysis. The first chapters deal largely with the literary and source analysis while later chapters deal with the potential of feminist approaches, examination of texts in light of the Greek context or, in certain cases, in light of other contexts such as the Babylonian-Zoroastrian. The book does not take previous rabbinic knowledge for granted and provides suitable introductions for novices without being condescending or boring for more advanced students. Veteran students of rabbinic literature will be surprised at the ability of the authors to present complex Talmudic texts so clearly and to enable beginners to understand sophisticated approaches in Talmudic study. This volume has immense potential for anyone who wants to understand Talmud and can be used in a classroom situation and also for independent reading. It is a remarkable achievement.

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Judaism: Medieval/Early Modern Jewish Studies

JUDAISM, SUFISM, AND THE PIETISTS OF MEDIEVAL EGYPT: A STUDY OF ABRAHAM MAIMONIDES AND HIS TIMES. By Elisha Russ-Fishbane. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 288. \$125.00.

This long overdue study of Abraham ibn Maimun (1186–1237) paints a vivid portrait of an innovative spiritual and intellectual leader of the medieval period. Indebted to the pioneering research of S. D. Goitein, P. Fenton, and S. Wasserstrom, Russ-Fishbane continues to challenge our sense of a “symbiotic” golden age of the Egyptian pietists in Fustat, Egypt. Russ-Fishbane’s acumen for close readings of primary texts in Judeo-Arabic allows him to correct earlier misreadings and misguided neutralizations of mysticism. In particular, “the imminent renewal of prophecy” of the Maimuni dynasty is clarified. Ibn Maimun is rendered with lucidity and pathos in his “cultivating a fellowship of close disciples while simultaneously working toward a renewal of devotional practice in the broader community.” The first two-thirds of this book are concerned primarily with questions of a social scientific nature, while the final third of the book focuses on prophecy and messianism within Judeo-Sufism and how “the road to Jewish origins was expected to pass through the matrix of Islam.” Russ-Fishbane’s willingness to engage with key terms of mystical experience in Sufism allows for a more intellectually honest translation of *ittisal* as “direct contact” and *wusul* or *wuslah* in a nuanced register as “the culmination of the spiritual path, synonymous with the attainment of prophecy.” Seen through a lens of Sufi terms, the Jewish path of *suluk* aims at realizing an “attachment to God” from which the “attainment of prophecy” (*wusul al-nubuwah*) is possible. This deep commitment to divine illumination is convincingly argued in both its Maimonidean and Sufi forms as the vertebrae of the Egyptian pietists devotional life. All readers should be grateful for Russ-Fishbane’s work in reviving “the true object of the spiritual path at its very source” and for this “glimpse of the living instruction cultivated within the fellowship and disciple circles.”

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EARLY YIDDISH EPIC. Edited and translated by Jerold Frakes. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. Pp. liv + 464. Cloth, \$59.95.

The study of popular religious culture of the Jews in the medieval period in Europe is notoriously difficult since most written sources were produced by and for elite circles. Popular Yiddish literature is one of the few exceptions but until now it has been largely inaccessible. This volume is made up of translations into English