

consider. The reminder that ‘sacralizing of a landscape also involves the process of desacralizing a landscape’ was particularly appreciated. Not every reader will find every theoretical framework or method helpful. I am not convinced of the need for the term ‘sacroscape’, for example, but found the toponymic mapping of Veikko Anttonen’s ‘Landscapes as sacrosapes: why does topography make a difference?’, to be of great interest. Such GIS analysis will only become more important for the field. Likewise the discussion of landscape and memory in Nordquist’s article on ancient Greece was stimulating. Torstein Jørgensen’s ‘Insiders and outsiders: theological “landscaping” in early medieval provincial laws in Norway’, emphasises boundaries and the sacred. The collection as whole often reveals its debt to Victor Turner and Mircea Eliade.

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Mosaics of faith. Floors of pagans, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land. By Rina Talgam. (Treasures of the Past.) Pp. xvi + 579 incl. 360 colour and 144 black-and white ills. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press/University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. \$129.95. 978 0 271 06084 2
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This is a big, beautifully produced book. It is a tribute to the generosity of the co-publishers that the 506 figures outnumber the 444 pages of text. These figures are mainly colour photographs, some black-and-white photographs and a small number of line drawings. Few openings are unadorned by a mosaic, pictured in full or in detail, so that the reader is immersed in an astounding variety of mosaic designs.

Talgam’s approach is multi-faceted. She allies herself with both archaeologists and historians of art, and yet feels the need to defend her moderately detailed stylistic analyses (pp. 132–3). This apologetic stance derives from her aspiration to cross disciplinary boundaries to produce not a catalogue of mosaics, but a study of the development of mosaic pavements from the Hellenistic to the Abbasid periods that addresses stylistic, iconographic and compositional concerns while also posing questions of cultural and religious meaning that may arise from the texts and images in her material.

The division of the book into three sections is not simply a practical device but, as the author acknowledges (pp. 78–9), an interpretative stance that reinforces the conventional fault lines between Hellenistic and Roman (pt I), Byzantine (part II) and post-Muslim conquest (pt III), even though she observes that ‘the continuity of local Byzantine traditions under Muslim rule raises the question of whether it is warranted to regard the fifth to the eighth centuries as a single unit’. Talgam’s choice of material and her analyses reveal an acute awareness of current scholarly concerns: while prudently insisting on widespread ‘stylistic polyphony’ (p. 132), she provides detailed yet accessible discussions of the development in figural rendering from Classicism to schematic representation to a revived Classicism; of the transmission of stylistic and compositional trends; and of the erasure of the human form. The latter subject is of tremendous interest to archaeologists, theologians and historians

alike because of the intriguing examples of selective destruction observable in many mosaics treated in section III (particularly in chapter xii, ‘The defacement of images’). Talgam illustrates examples of the phenomenon and provides a useful, brief discussion. In all sections, the descriptions and analyses are succinct and pertinent, and the more theoretical considerations – such as, for example, in chapter v (‘The Church as the heir of the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple: a microcosm, and an earthly paradise’), and chapter vi (‘The Synagogue as the “lesser temple”’) – are woven into the more technical treatments in a manner that is mutually reinforcing and provides stimulating reading interspersed with fascinating visual counterpoints.

Talgam’s is an admirable study, even if many of the questions that she raises remain necessarily unanswered. The book’s title informs the reader from the very outset that this careful study of pavements aspires to tell the story of religious communities in a particular place. The author employs the term ‘Holy Land’ as a geographical and religious designation: ‘the provinces of Palaestina and Arabia (present-day Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan) are especially rich in mosaics dating to late antiquity, when the region became a Christian and, later, an Islamic Holy Land (fourth–eighth centuries CE)’ (p. xiv). While in the preface and introductory sections Talgam can perhaps be excused for her indulgence in vague if well-intending language more akin to modern interfaith dialogue than any surviving late antique texts, there are serious omissions that cannot be explained by cultural or scholarly fashions, or even by oversight or the lack of space in an already extensive treatment. The omissions are of a different nature and include maps, on the one hand, and discussion of geometric designs, on the other. Both omissions represent significant intellectual choices worth consideration by students of late antique history, material culture and religion.

We are treated to over a hundred pages of useful notes and an extensive bibliography, but there is not a single map. This is a strange omission for any study that attempts to track artistic and religious interaction in practice, using evidence from often lesser known archaeological sites, and it is certainly inconsiderate of the reader. In a characteristic statement of her goals Talgam writes that ‘This book traces the multifaceted interactions of the various religious groups that lived in the Holy Land during the most significant periods when the three major monotheistic faiths crystallized. Observation of the mosaic floors brings to light the diverse ways of communication and reveals cultural, religious, and social processes that were the outcome of close and direct contact with people of the other faiths’ (p. ix). Perhaps Talgam expects too much from the observation of floors. Nevertheless, our efforts to reconstruct channels of communication and cultural, religious and artistic exchange must be painstakingly traced on the ground and plotted on maps, a process which may also aid our understanding of the possible modes and routes of transmission of the very ideas and practices that Talgam hopes to reveal.

The second omission might also be seen as a window open for future investigation. As if responding to a critic, Talgam admits that ‘I have virtually ignored the geometric motifs that form the largest part of mosaic floors’ (p. 168). But if we are interested to understand more about ‘extensive commonality’ (p. ix), might we pay more attention to the geometric patterns found across the entire chronological span that Talgam studies? What might these motifs, and the ubiquitous

carpets and textiles that they echo, and possibly inspire in turn, tell us about the less overtly theological aspects of what Talgam prefers to call 'faiths' rather than religions, religious traditions, beliefs or practices? Talgam's rich collection of mosaics could now serve for a second complementary study that would investigate not why aniconism, but why geometry. Such a question would also distract us from the current erroneous association of Islamic culture with iconoclasm, and offer those interested in pursuing questions of commonality a truly shared visual world, and one that would go from strength to strength over time in all the traditions that she explores – namely, that of geometric design.

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The Gospel of Thomas. Introduction and commentary. By Simon Gathercole. (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study, 11.) Pp. xii + 723. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2014. €193. 978 90 04 19041 2; 1574 7085

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With competence on the *Gospel of Thomas* already established through previous publications (for example *The composition of the Gospel of Thomas: original language and influences*, 2012), Gathercole has herewith produced what is now the most important English-language commentary on this much-discussed text. It is a major work, both in size and contents, and will now be a key resource in all future scholarly analysis of *Thomas*. His aim, expressed in his preface, is simply 'to understand the meaning of the sayings of *Thomas* in its second-century historical context' (p. ix), giving thereby advance indication of when he situates the composition of the text.

The 183-page introduction (organised in twelve chapters) addresses all the questions about the origins and nature of the text: manuscripts (both Greek and Coptic), named references to a *Gospel of Thomas*, early references to the contents of *Gospel of Thomas* the original language (Gathercole opting for Greek *contra* proposals for a Semitic original), the provenance (after weighing various proposals, he sagely judges that 'we do not really know'), the date of composition (various evidence supports a date before 200 CE and after 135 CE, which he notes rules out both an apostolic and a Manichaean authorship of this pseudonymous text), the structure (granting that the *Gospel of Thomas* is 'not a particularly carefully ordered collection or list' of material, nevertheless, he notes that there is an introductory prologue, and numerous word or subject links between pairs or small clusters of sayings, and he finds 'a much greater proportion of links than one would conventionally find in a piece of literature'). As to the *genre* of *Thomas*, Gathercole concludes that it is a mixture of 'Gospel' and sentence/chreia collection, finding Kelber's view of the text as a 'sayings Gospel' appropriate. Gathercole rejects various proposals that the *Gospel of Thomas* was formed in some sort of rolling recensional process, and judges that it was composed pretty much as we have it in the Coptic translation at some point in the second century CE.

The longest chapter of the introduction is rightly given to 'the religious outlook' of the text (pp. 144–75). Gathercole finds the fundamental emphasis of *Thomas* to be 'soteriology', declared explicitly from the opening words about finding life through interpreting aright the sayings that follow. Gathercole lays out the main