

of a summer colloquium held in a “picturesque, fifteenth-century chateau” (ix) in Missillac in northwestern France in 2017. In our new age of abandoned conferences, Zoom meetings, and Covid-19 travel restrictions, that bucolic setting for an academic gathering already looks like ancient history.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2021.220

The Story of Meshal Haqadmoni and Its Extant Copies in 15th Century Ashkenaz.
Simona Gronemann.

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019. xx + 194 pp. €54.

The Hebrew *Meshal Haqadmoni* (Fables from the distant past [*MH*]) is a collection of fables written between 1281 and 1284 in Spain by Isaac ibn Sahula. *MH* represents both a long-standing engagement with the fable genre within a Jewish context and a window into thirteenth-century Spanish culture and politics. *MH* constitutes an important testament to the rich Jewish literary culture of the Middle Ages, and its transmission history illustrates a vibrant transcultural exchange between the two centers of medieval European Jewish life: Sepharad (the Iberian Peninsula) and Ashkenaz (Central Europe). The earliest copies of *MH* are five illustrated fifteenth-century manuscripts from Germany and Northern Italy.

Simona Gronemann’s monograph presents a thorough engagement with these fifteenth-century manuscripts (held in Oxford, Munich, Milan, and Jerusalem) in relation to the historical and cultural background of *MH*. Gronemann argues that the iconographic program of these manuscripts represents an intercultural dialogue between the two distinct Jewish traditions, as well as with the surrounding non-Jewish cultures. To date, researchers have mostly focused on the written text of *MH* and its relation to the Jewish and non-Jewish fable tradition, as well as to the Spanish historical-political context, often consulting only one or, at most, two manuscripts (e.g., Jonathan P. Decter, Sara Offenberg, Revital Refael-Vivante, David Wacks). Through the lens of art history, Gronemann offers a novel approach that underscores the value of placing these five manuscripts in dialogue with one another.

While the monograph highlights Gronemann’s expertise in art history, in particular in manuscript illuminations and incunabula woodcuts, the section on literary history and the textual analysis are the study’s shortcomings. First, these chapters lack a consideration of medieval literary conventions and fictions, evident in Gronemann’s claim that the text serves as a reliable historical source providing accurate information about its author: “The most direct and untainted information we have about the author of *MH* is from the text itself. . . . In the introduction he tells the reader that he used to lead a free roaming life, wandering about in many countries” (6). Second, her discussion of non-

Jewish literature in fifteenth-century German-speaking lands is limited. For example, Gronemann repeatedly stresses the medieval epic *Nibelungenlied*, a text popular in the Middle Ages but almost forgotten in the early modern period and only rediscovered toward the end of the eighteenth century. Finally, and most importantly, her analysis overlooks the existence of Old Yiddish literature, which was much more popular among Jews in German-speaking lands than Hebrew literature due to limited Hebrew literacy among men and women alike. Albeit rarely illustrated, the Old Yiddish material offers crucial insights for an exploration of Jewish literature in fifteenth-century Ashkenaz. Rather than exploring this rich literary tradition, Gronemann solely relies on a comparison with German literature and thus undermines her comparative analysis of Jewish culture.

What it lacks in analysis of literary history the book makes up for in its sections on art history. Gronemann argues conclusively that the pictorial program represents a key to understanding *MH*. Through her meticulous analysis of the five manuscripts, Gronemann is able to argue that these texts' illustrations were closely related and offer essential clues about earlier manuscripts that are now lost. Among the highlights of these sections is the discussion of transcultural developments in contemporaneous aesthetics, underscoring a continuous exchange between Christian and Jewish artists and the impact of everyday Christian art (e.g., in the form of stained-glass windows), which surrounded the Jewish minority and deeply influenced their art. Supplemented by an extensive and easy-to-navigate appendix, Gronemann's work offers the reader access to the technical details of the illustrations and to their content.

This book will enable future research to take the pictorial program of *MH* into account. Gronemann's extensive, systematic overview of the illustrations and the accompanying detailed analysis are poised to inspire new and more holistic research on *MH* and to prompt a new spirited discussion of this important premodern, transcultural Jewish work.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2021.221

Giovanni Aurelio Augurello (1441–1524) and Renaissance Alchemy: A Critical Edition of "Chrysopoeia" and Other Alchemical Poems, with an Introduction, English Translation and Commentary. Matteo Soranzo.

The Renaissance Society of America Texts and Studies 14. Leiden: Brill, 2020. xxii + 338 pp. €115.

Matteo Soranzo's publication corrects a long historical injustice: the scholarly neglect of Giovanni Aurelio Augurello's poem *Chrysopoeia* (1515), a work that did not fit the Enlightenment paradigm or traditional Renaissance studies. As Soranzo points out,