understanding of Augustine's theology of grace was mediated through Caesarius of Arles (whose more nuanced theology that accepted a role for both grace and human action in salvation was widely accepted in Gregory's day). Yet, he takes Gregory's commitment to human actions one step further with a statement that runs through the rest of the book and is not substantiated by evidence: "Unlike the bishop of Arles, Gregory believed it *completely incumbent* upon Christians to seek divine protection, support and grace as conferred through the saints" (122, emphasis added). Jones states this position more clearly, arguing from a statement in the prologue to Gregory's *Life of the Fathers* 10 about how people should always seek God's help, that Gregory thought "a living holy person's willful acts of desiring and seeking preceded any grant of divine help" (126). Not only does this statement presume a direct engagement with the prevenient grace doctrine of Augustine—which Jones had already demonstrated was not the case—but it also assumes incorrectly that Gregory thought the seeking of divine help preceded the grant of help, which Jones seems to be conflating with grace. This conclusion results in Jones's unfortunate use of the phrase "merit grace" elsewhere, which does not accurately reflect Gregory's words (e.g., 131).

Fortunately, part 2, "Afterlife," in which Jones argues that Gregory wrote his *Histories* as a moral theology to teach people how to follow the examples of good and bad kings by signaling who went to heaven and who went to hell and what they did in their lives to get there, succeeds despite problems theorizing Gregory's understanding of grace. Jones need not have made a case for Gregory subverting prevenient grace for this argument to work; like Caesarius before him (and Augustine before him), Gregory understood the importance of human actions with regard to salvation and used his miracles and *Histories* to relate that lesson to his audiences.

The second half of the book is thus a comprehensive discussion of everyone Gregory sent to heaven in his narration of events, and the much larger group of people who he believed went to hell. This thorough, heavily footnoted treatment of Gregory's interpretation of the afterlives of famous Merovingians in order to induce readers to behave morally and seek the help of the saints is an interesting and welcome intervention in the field. It shows Gregory building on the work of Caesarius of Arles by using moral exempla to teach Christians to live moral lives in the hopes of a heavenly afterlife. Significantly, Jones treats each subject as more than just an exemplum but also as an actual historical figure whose afterlife, as much as their life, was complicated.

As comprehensive as it is, this book will remain an excellent resource for death in Gregory of Tours. Its expansive index makes it easy to use and ensures scholars of Gregory and sixth-century Gaul will return to it after reading.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640721002286

The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam. By **Michael E. Pregill**. Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xiv + 499 pp. $125.00 cloth.

Michael Pregill's study of traditions regarding the Golden Calf story in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is a work of great ambition and learning that brings much

needed analysis to the history of the interpretation of this pivotal story from the Hebrew Bible across the three Abrahamic traditions. The book is organized into three main sections, focusing—not surprisingly—roughly on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in succession, although the three traditions remain regularly in conversation throughout the study. The monograph opens (chap. 1) with a substantial methodological statement, explaining the author's determination to follow recent trends toward reading the Qur'an as not merely derivative of Jewish and Christian tradition but as standing itself as an important voice in the continued articulation of the biblical tradition at the end of late antiquity. Indeed, while the book devotes considerable attention to Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Golden Calf story, it should be clear that the ultimate goal of this investigation lies in finding a better understanding of how the Qur'an appropriates and interprets this tradition. I must confess that I am not expert enough to evaluate fully Pregill's analysis of the Golden Calf story (chaps. 2 and 3) as it stands in the Hebrew Bible and was interpreted in early Judaism, but suffice it to say, I found these chapters careful and convincing, and they appeared to rest on a very solid foundation of previous scholarship.

Chapters 4 and 5, which treat late antiquity, the Christian tradition, and interactions between Jewish and Christian interpretations, will likely be of primary interest to readers of this journal, particular for their engagement with Christian interpretation of this episode. Although the analysis of both the early rabbinic and early Christian traditions is solid in its own right, like any study, this one has its weak point, and in this case, it falls to the treatment of Christianity. Given the broad learning of this study, the somewhat flat and narrow treatment of Christian exegesis of the Golden Calf story might not be worth much mention, but for the readers of this journal, it seems especially germane to focus on this section. Indeed, in a study of nearly five hundred pages, only around seventy or so focus attention on Christian interpretation. In chapter 4, for instance, the study's treatment of the "patristic" tradition is limited to the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, whose interpretations of the imposition of the law as a punishment for the Golden Calf incident ultimately is introduced primarily to explain certain changes in response within Judaism. Pregill acknowledges, of course, that there are other church fathers who opined on the meaning of this episode—often with differing interpretations—yet, in contrast with the early Jewish and Islamic traditions, the diversity of Christian approaches to the Golden Calf story is not represented in this study, whose main quarry is clearly Judaism and Islam. Chapter 5 turns to focus primarily on three early Syriac writers: Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob of Serug. The readings of these three writers as they interpreted the Golden Calf are solid and do in fact reveal intriguing connections with contemporary Jewish discourse about the calf, even if their treatment not infrequently seems directed more toward understanding developments within Judaism than presenting the Christian tradition in its own right on an equal footing.

The three final chapters (6, 7, and 8, though there is also a brief conclusion) focus on the Qur'an, and while this topic may be beyond the scholarly purview of many readers of this journal, these chapters are the best and most important part of the book. In chapter 6, Pregill demonstrates just how deeply scholarly interpretations of the calf traditions in the Qur'an have been determined by influence from traditional Islamic understandings of the Qur'anic material, an important methodological critique of an all-too-common tendency in many studies of the Qur'an. Chapter 7 is the book's high point, though. Here, Pregill presents a very careful and detailed reading of the Golden Calf story in Qur'an 20:83–97 and Exodus 32, which I find completely

compelling. The chapter also stands as testimony to just how vague and confusing the Qur'an often is in its presentation of biblical traditions, and likewise just how much extra-textual information the Qur'an demands that its readers bring to understanding its contents. Unfortunately, this chapter especially, but to a certain extent all three of these chapters, will be difficult to follow if one is not familiar with Arabic.

Chapter 8 reaches the important conclusion that the Qur'anic traditions of the Golden Calf seem to derive not from later Jewish or Christian interpretations of this tale but rather from direct engagement with the story as found in the Hebrew Bible itself. I find Pregill's arguments in this regard again persuasive, although they point to a larger problem with the framing of his study—and to be fair, almost all recent study of the Qur'an. Pregill is right that in this instance, as in so many others, the Qur'an bears evidence that it came into existence in a context that was suffused with biblical and other religious traditions from the world of Near Eastern late antiquity. And yet, we must ask: does this even seem possible in early seventh-century Mecca? According to the most recent analysis, Mecca was a tiny village of around five hundred inhabitants, with perhaps around 120 or so free adult males, having a subsistence economy based in pastoralism. Moreover, there is no evidence at all for any Christian or even Jewish presence in Mecca, where these traditions are alleged to have been composed. Furthermore, the best and most recent scholarship on the history of the Arabic language assures us that despite the existence of writing systems for Arabic, the culture and society of Mecca and Medina were in Muhammad's lifetime fundamentally nonliterate. Nor is there any evidence for a translation of the Bible into Arabic before the eighth century or, in the case of Exodus, the ninth century. To this we should add the enormous expense and rarity of biblical manuscripts at the end of antiquity. Indeed, most Christians of this age had never even been in the same building with a complete Bible, and yet, this widely presumed framework for studying the Qur'an expects us to believe that Muhammad somehow had a copy of the Bible (in what language?) at hand and had mastered its subtleties when he began to compose the Qur'an in the poverty and isolation of late ancient Mecca. Inadvertently, then, I think one of the main contributions of Pregill's excellent study will be to spur further consideration of significant incompatibilities between the Qur'an as we now have it and the traditional circumstances of its composition in Mecca and Medina as afforded by the (much later) Islamic tradition.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640721002298

Alexander the Great in the Early Christian Tradition: Classical Reception and Patristic Literature. By **Christian Thrue Djurslev**. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. x + 232 pp. $120.00 hardcover.

There was a time when classical scholars paid minimum if any attention to the early Christian texts, leaving them to patristic scholars. Fortunately, by the influential contributions of Peter Brown, Averil Cameron, and Alan Cameron, late antiquity was