in terms of descent from common ancestors and where assimilation (Romanogenesis) was conceived as incorporation of outsiders (across more or less permeable boundaries and by a more or less wide range of means) into that line of descent will find focused discussion of those instances only in a dispersed manner throughout Kaldellis's book.

Furthermore, Kaldellis frequently seems comfortable going beyond the many overt expressions of Roman patriotism and assuming fairly pervasive affective states of identification and allegiance to Romanness on the part of those who were otherwise silent about such attachments. For instance, all Khurramites who were enrolled in military registers and incorporated under Roman law as part of their process of assimilation need not have internalized their identification as ethnic Romans, although Kaldellis claims such internalization was hard to resist (130). We should probably remain agnostic about the depth of feeling of such institutional or political identifications, especially when externally applied to individuals, unless there is sufficient expression of such feeling by those individuals themselves.

In spite of the resistance offered here, Kaldellis's book possesses obvious merits as a theoretically and historiographically aware investigation of Byzantium's self-ascribed Roman identity. This is a forceful and insightful—indeed, seminal—book that scholars of Late Antiquity and Byzantium will avoid at their peril.

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Michael Pregill, *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 528 pp. ISBN: 9780198852421. Three black-and-white images. $125.

In the first comprehensive study of early Christian, Jewish, and Muslim versions of the "Calf" narrative, Michael Pregill tells the story of the "Golden Calf" from its earliest iterations in the Hebrew Bible to its complex reframing in the Qur'an. Just as importantly, he goes beyond this titular aim by also mapping how European interlocutors took up the material from the Middle Ages to the modern day. Through a series of close readings, Pregill argues that the earliest versions of the "Calf" story repeatedly display a dual rhetorical interest in the Aaronid priestly lineage as well as issues of idolatry. Exodus 32

discredits the Aaronid priestly lineage and also criticizes the bull worship of Jeroboam, as described in 1 Kings 12:26–8. The Qur'anic "Calf" episode both reflects Late Antique polemics and apologetics about the ultimate significance of the narrative and represents a remarkably close engagement with Exodus 32.

Pregill offers a lucid, cogent reading of the "Calf" episode in Sūrah 20 which is elegant in its simplicity. Earlier Western scholarship and the classical *tafsir* tradition on which this scholarship is based took the approach that Sūrah 20 presupposes an enormous amount of folkloristic material. In contrast, Pregill argues that Sūrah 20 deploys several poetic calques from the Hebrew Bible that have been misunderstood. Pregill suggests that the mysterious *al-sāmirī* of the Qur'anic account is not an otherwise unknown figure who suddenly appears in the narrative but an epithet for Aaron, who is blamed for the Israelites' sin. Pregill shows that Sūrah 20 reweaves the same narrative threads as Exodus 32. This argument has wide-reaching implications both for the study of the Qur'an and of Late Antiquity more broadly.

In contrast to previous readings of the "Calf" narrative that suggest Jewish texts like the *Tanhuma*, *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan are the immediate forebears to the Qur'anic account, Pregill argues that these actually postdate the Qur'an, and that the anachronistic retrojection of this material is based on long-standing assumptions that Jewish–Muslim (or Jewish–Christian) literary influence only moves in one direction, from Judaism to Islam (or, as the case may be, Christianity). Instead, Pregill offers an account of the "Calf" that underscores dynamic influence between traditions, and in doing so he pushes his readers to consider when and how certain readings of the "Calf" event emerged and what the complex dynamics tell us about the intercommunal relations through Late Antiquity and beyond.

The book has seven body chapters grouped into three sections, alongside a substantial introduction and brief conclusion. Pregill presents his book as a case study for the circulation and reception of biblical narrative, arguing for the use-value of a broad comparison of various iterations of a story central to several communities' self-definition and polemic against others. The first body section discusses early Jewish presentations of the narrative (from the Bible, Second Temple, and rabbinic texts), while the second discusses competing Jewish and Christian claims about the "Golden Calf" narrative from Late Antiquity. The third and final section presents the Qur'anic account as understood in traditional tafsir, Western scholarship, and Pregill's own

argument, accompanied by a rich discussion of the implications of his argument for adjacent conversations in Qur'anic studies.

In chapter 1, Pregill argues that Qur'anic studies is a relatively undertheorized field that merits correction through a clear articulation of his own methodological underpinnings, which are historical-critical with special attention to the conditions of knowledge production for contemporary scholars. In chapter 2, Pregill offers a close reading of the "Golden Calf" episode preserved in Exodus 32. He contends that the narrative originally was an etiology for the Levitical priesthood and a polemic against the cultic violations of the Northern Kingdom (which, according to 1 Kings 12, placed bovine sculptures at the edges of the kingdom as an apotropaic ward). He contrasts this "inner-biblical" sense of the narrative—as a polemic between competing authoritative claims within the Israelite community—with Second Temple and early rabbinic Jewish interpretation in chapter 3. There, Pregill analyzes the account of the "Golden Calf" found in the Septuagint, Pseudo-Philo, Philo, and Josephus, noting that the first-century writers either carefully reframe the story (Pseudo-Philo) or completely ignore it (Josephus) in order to suggest the integrity of Israel's covenant with God. Pregill notes the continuity of this position of pre-rabbinic Jewish texts to early rabbinic (especially tannaitic) sources on the "Golden Calf."

Pregill argues that the protective stance of Jewish writers was a deliberate move meant to forestall polemical claims. He describes this as a reasonable position in the face of early Christian readings of the story, which he explores in the second section. There, he shows that the overlapping concern with priesthood in third through fifth centuries and the "spousal infidelity" metaphor imply a "proximity, even intimacy," among Jewish and Christian exegesis about ultimate meaning of the narrative (265). Pregill again draws a diachronic contrast in this section, arguing that the texts that eventually came to be canonized in the Christian New Testament show continuity with other Second Temple Jewish texts. In contrast, early Christian texts written after the destruction of the Temple, which are self-consciously not Jewish, present a much more polemical tone, as visible in the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian. Pregill argues that rabbinic texts show a marked shift in interpretation of the "Calf" episode: just as Christian anti-Jewish polemic increases in intensity in the third and fourth centuries, rabbinic texts preserve previously unseen interpretations, including the assertion that Satan or the Egyptians are the real villain of the "Calf" narrative. He further argues for the interconnectedness of Jewish and Christian exegesis in the mid-first

millennium in chapter 5, where he compares rabbinic and Syriac readings of the "Golden Calf" episode. Pregill suggests Ephrem's reading of the episode as an act of spousal infidelity might have influenced later rabbinic accounts, in what was perhaps an act of rabbinic counternarrative.

In the final section, Pregill turns to the heart of his argument, the Qur'anic episode of Sūrah 20:83–93. In chapter 6, he presents traditional Muslim and Western readings of the episode that take several enigmatic phrases as fragmentary references to legendary material about the Angel Gabriel, an otherwise unknown Samaritan, and the animate properties of the calf icon. Pregill convincingly argues that although contemporary Western scholars do not necessarily cite tafsir, they generally depend on the arguments of Abraham Geiger, who himself was dependent on European translations and editions that ultimately derived from classical tafsir. With this established, he deconstructs the phrases that have historically caused the most trouble for earlier commentators and argues in chapter 7 for two poetic readings that greatly simplify the sense of the narrative. He further argues that the Samaritan figure is not a Samaritan at all but possibly a Samarian (i.e., associated with Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) or a watcher, and in either case, these are epithets for Aaron that closely relate to the concerns on display in Exodus 32. In chapter 8, he considers some of the implications of this argument, suggesting that the Ethiopic Bible and particularly its Psalter is the most likely intertext for the Qur'anic account of Sūrah 20.

Pregill's argument in this final section has several intriguing resonances: his reading of Aaron in the "Golden Calf" episode of Sūrah 20, as well as the calques he identifies, radically reshapes the implications of several other Qur'anic passages, particularly the discussion of Mary in 19:28. Moreover, Pregill argues that the Jewish materials (*Tanhuma*, *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) that had previously been viewed as precursors to Muslim tradition are actually influenced by the Qur'an. On this topic, Pregill extends his historic narrative of Jewish interpretation of the "Calf" episode, a concern that animates the first two sections. The Qur'anic narrative is core to his argument, but the history of Jewish interpretation is the thread that winds through every chapter.

Pregill models an interdisciplinary approach by presenting theoretically sophisticated readings of an multitude of sources. It would be suitable for a wide range of graduate seminars on Late Antiquity, particularly those focused on group identity formation and the dynamics of claims to the

Sinaitic past in the first millennium. Because Pregill covers such an array of material in the book from such a diverse set of communities, his readings of individual texts will surely evoke pushback from specialists in the relevant (sub)fields. However, the multidimensionality that opens his work to critique from multiple angles is also the greatest strength of the book. The astonishing scope of materials, read together, underscores the importance of Pregill's project for the study of Late Antiquity. The nuanced readings and attention not only to polemic and change but also to continuity, conversation, and interconnection show that there is much work to be done still in assessing long-standing literary readings and scholarly habits of thought around the place of the Qur'an and Islam in Late Antiquity. Sūrah 20 provides "a vital and consequential retelling of the events at Sinai that is just as worthy of scholarly attention as the biblical account of Exodus, which the Qur'an reformulates, renovates, and essentially re-reveals to its audience" (438). By plumbing the depths of a wide array of sources together, Pregill offers sustained reflection on early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim negotiation of community self-definition and claims to the covenantal legacy of Israel.

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Nicola Denzey Lewis, *The Early Modern Invention of Late Antique Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 15 black-and-white illustrations, 2 maps. ISBN: 9781108471893. $44.99.

This is an unflinching book, determined to set the record straight and overthrow the long-cherished notion that the Romans of late ancient Rome gave any credence whatsoever to the cultural complex that modern scholars commonly shorthand as the Cult of the Saints. Although elsewhere across the empire late ancient folks venerated the bodies of the holy dead, such "strange" practices, Denzey Lewis argues, "never caught on in Rome" (345). Indeed, the much-hullabalooed late antique "corporeal turn" passed through the city on the Tiber with barely a "shudder" (344). In late antique Rome, contrary to scholarly consensus, the corpse "never transcended the torpid world of decay and dissolution" (155). Consequently, observable changes (let alone continuities) in Roman urban topography, burial customs, or social and political manners have nothing whatsoever to do with any sanctity that contemporary Romans granted to the martyrs' tombs. Why have so many historians