

Mladen Popović, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, and Clare Wilde (eds.), *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – Tension, Transmission, Transformation 10, Boston-Berlin, Walter de Gruyter 2018, 210 p., ISBN: 978-3-11-059571-0.

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Sharing knowledge and the means of finding instruction into a particular form of knowledge differ from culture to culture and from an epoch to another. Knowledge itself has different meanings and purposes and may be culturally and historically bound. Knowledge, especially religious and theological knowledge, was and still is an essential asset of distinguished types of people (e.g. the philosopher, the scientist, the presbyter): they all have been ‘initiated’ to, and are able to recognize a specialised form of knowledge that is different from what lay persons possess. These aspects are explored by the papers of the volume *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. The volume concentrates mostly on religious knowledge (both written and unwritten), and on how it was actively concealed or disseminated in Mesopotamia and through Abrahamic religions. It is the tenth volume in the series *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – Tension, Transmission, Transformation*, run by de Gruyter Publishing House, and it is the result of the broader conference *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge: Strategies of Acculturation and Cultural Resistance in Early Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions*, organized in 2015 by the Department of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Origins (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies), at the University of Groningen. The volume contains a useful introduction and nine papers, with their respective bibliographies. The first paper approaches Assyro-Babylonian texts, the next four cover Judaic literature (chapters two to five), two papers aim at early Christianity (chapters six and seven), and the last two focus on the Islamic world (chapters eight and nine). The editors chose to think of the papers as chapters, and its sections as subchapters in an attempt to provide more unity to the volume. The time span covered is from the first millennium BC until twelfth century AD.

The intention of the editors is to restate the meaning of knowledge and its metamorphoses, with an emphasis on the distinction between types of knowledge which are concealed or, on the contrary, shared by everyone. Several strategies of sharing or concealment are touched upon. Popović, Lanzillotta and Wilde’s “Introduction” (p. 1-7) offers short considerations

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of the papers from the perspective of the tension between shared and hidden religious knowledge. It also states as focal point of the volume the need to clarify to whom was religious knowledge accessible and from whom it was concealed.

The first paper, signed by Eleanor Robson, “Do Not Disperse the Collection! Motivations and Strategies for Protecting Cuneiform Scholarship in the First Millennium”, discusses some of the sociological aspects of knowing in the Assyro-Babylonian milieu of the first millennium BC. This consistent paper considers the prescriptions of the colophons of clay cuneiform tablets in which one can observe clear denunciations to protect written content. Just to give some examples of the variations in tone of these colophons, I quote here: “Whoever takes away (this tablet), may the god Ea take him away! At the command of the god Nabu, who lives in the Ezida temple, may he have no descendants, no offspring!” (701 BC, in an Assyrian provincial town) or “Whoever fears the gods Anu, Ellil and Ea [shall not take] it away by theft(?). Ephemeris, wisdom of Anu-ship, secret of the [great] gods, treasure of the scholars. The learned may show [the learned]; the unlearned may not” (April 191 BC, the warning of an author who calculated a table of lunar eclipses). Robson scrutinizes how cultural values were subject to social and political burdens, with the focus on motives, and ways, of cultivating the secrecy of the contents in clay tablets. One can find recurrent “injunctions to secrecy” from the eighth century BC, but the author argues that this tendency must have started at least in the late second millennium. The paper debuts with a survey of the scholarship on the reason why some scribes and communities invoked secrecy, while others didn’t. Robson’s view is that this phenomenon “was not from below, via the widespread adoption of alphabetic literacy, but rather from above” (p. 13), indicating thus at the Assyrian political situation. The motivations and protective strategies of the texts are investigated in three sections. The first one, *Sharing and Protecting Scholarship in the Assyrian Empire*, aims at textual production, and its protection, in four Assyrian communities of scholars (from the eighth and seventh-century). The second part, *Destruction Events as Survival Bottlenecks for Cuneiform Scholarship*, provides the political context: royal decisions and actions in the Assyrian and Achaemenid empires. The third part, *Destruction Events as Survival Bottlenecks for Cuneiform Scholarship*, looks at the tactics of sharing and hiding knowledge in Late Babylonian contexts in Uruk.

Mladen Popović’s paper, “Multilingualism, Multiscripturalism, and Knowledge Transfer in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Graeco-Roman Judaea,” brings into focus the Qumran Scrolls, in an audacious attempt to reject the opinion that the site of Khirbet Qumran should be perceived as peripheral, marginal, or “sectarian”. The author argues that the classical theory of centre

versus periphery of religious dynamics, which has been often used to explain the oddness of the Qumranic community and its texts, is of little, if any, help in this case. One of the main arguments against its alleged sectarian nature – “a single community at a single place” (p. 46, 48), “a small, isolated, marginal (and even weak) community” (p. 49) – are the parallels that can be drawn with other Judaic manuscripts, which are not Essenian in origin. Popović endorses his arguments with pieces of evidence from the Qumran scrolls that attest *multilingualism* (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), and *multiscripturalism* (Hebrew and Aramaic, palaeo-Hebrew, Greek, and Cryptic scripts), at times even in the same manuscript.

The non-exclusivity of the Hebrew language is significant for Popović – who is careful enough not to dismiss the pre-eminence of Hebrew – as he takes it as a proof that “these people were not isolated but participated in various ways in ancient Mediterranean intellectual networks”. Moreover, textual communities were not just a Judean phenomenon, but also a Mediterranean one, as the readers of this volume may also consider by reading Lanzillotta’s thesis, namely that the Gnostic movement should not be perceived as atypical and isolated in the Mediterranean religious and philosophical picture. Popović succinctly reconsiders the idealized view of Steven Weitzman who affirms that the centrality of the Hebrew language could have been perceived as essential by the Qumranians, whose intention was to affirm its affiliation to a supernatural community, an apocalyptical or angelic one.¹ Popović also points out that even William Schniedewind’s seminal book, which explores the history of the people behind the language, remains ambiguous on whether the people behind the Dead Sea Scrolls were an isolated community or if one can speak about multiple communities.²

The *multiscripturalism* facet of the Qumranic scrolls, as mirroring the complexity of *multilingualism*, is evaluated also in the light of the Judean Desert’s scrolls. We have fifteen manuscripts in palaeo-Hebrew, several in square script (in which, by comparison, the Tetragrammaton is absent – probably as not to be accidentally spelled out), and also “cryptic” scripts (A, B, and C, form which only Cryptic A has been deciphered so far). An exceptional manuscript, *4QZodiacal Physiognomy* (4Q186), attests *multiscripturalism*, with its square, palaeo-Hebrew, Greek, and Cryptic A scripts.³ But

¹ Steven Weitzman, “Why Did the Qumran Community Write in Hebrew?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 (1999), p. 35-45.

² William Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period*, London, Yale University Press 2013.

³ Mladen Popović, “4Q186. *4QZodiacal Physiognomy*. A Full Edition,” in George J. Brooke and Jesper Høgenhaven (eds.), *The Mermaid and the Partridge: Essays from the Copenhagen Conference on Revising Texts from Cave Four*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 96, Leiden, Brill 2011, p. 221-258.

this *multiscripturalism* does not imply by all means that all scribes were also *pluriscripturalists*.

Concerning *knowledge transfer*, Popović draws parallels between contents of some Aramaic texts, such as *4QZodiology and Brontology* (4Q318), within both Babylonian and Hellenistic cultural settings. A brief mention of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* would have definitely deserved more space, as it would have more substantially and conceptually framed the implications of knowledge transfer. The multilingualism, multiscripturalism and scholarly literacy displayed by some Qumranic text as "prized pieces of knowledge" provide us insights into "the status of those having access to and possessing it" (p. 65). The paper is convincing in its argumentation, and it would certainly make for a strong case if, beyond the textual evidence, one could further corroborate it with archeologic data of the Mediterranean network of which the Qumranian library was part of.

The subsequent paper, "Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in the Book of *Jubilees*", by Jacques van Ruiten, is also dedicated to the Judean world and its specific types of knowledge, namely to how sacred knowledge was perceived by Israel, and in what way it was predestined to Israel *only*, in contrast to the knowledge specific to the gentiles. Furthermore, the study attempts to answer the question of how the transmission of knowledge was conceptualized and as case study van Ruiten takes the Book of *Jubilees*, a thought-provoking book, recognised as canonical only by Ethiopian Jews and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

The paper proceeds to present in a fairly descriptive manner the contents of the Book of *Jubilees* in two main sections: *Resistance against Foreign Knowledge* (p. 73-75), and *Transmission of Knowledge within the Family* (p. 75-82). The first section underlines the "anti-gentile bias" (p. 73) which is intrinsic to strong political oppositions, such as: nations *versus* Israel (the nation *par excellence*); outsiders *versus* insiders. Israel should keep distance from outsiders' customs and their practices, in order to be distinct from the gentiles and this could be realized by "abstinence from common meals, by not concluding agreements with them, and by keeping from intermarriage" (p. 74). In the second section we see how Israel's exceptional knowledge is communicated through a special channel of transmission. Compared to other nations, Israel has the privilege of a permanency of knowledge from the moment of creation. Israel's knowledge is of heavenly origin; it is the instruction of the angels who are endowed with a knowledge that originates in heavenly tablets. This specific knowledge could be transmitted only from father to son (the chosen ones) through the patriarchal chain: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Levi, Moses, and all the children of Israel. Enoch was the first to master the art of writing, and wrote book which was transmitted

through generations (which, on their turns, progressively added material to the original book). Van Ruiten contrasts this chain of inner knowledge with non-Israelite ones, which are perceived as having an external origin. This type of knowledge should not be transmitted, since it is understood as being dangerous to the people of Israel. Its origin is divine too, but it is from fallen angels. This is the case with the Chaldean astrological knowledge which is understood as an “alien knowledge”. One question that the reader would be left with at the end of the article is whether contextualization or comparison of the book of Jubilees with canonical and apocryphal texts of the time, where similar ideas are to be found or not, would shed more light on the necessity of, and means for concealing knowledge.

The next paper, “The Torah between Revelation and Concealment in Rabbinic Traditions Pertaining to the Conquest of the Land of Canaan,” authored by Katell Berthelot, restates an analogous segregation between the law of the “nation” of Israel, and the laws of other nations, looking at the Torah and how rabbinic texts dealt with its revelation and concealment, and the interdiction of granting access to the sacred Law to non-Israelites. This study offers a very useful overview of the historical context and brings into discussion the idea of rabbinic cultural resistance in the following sections: *The Biblical Traditions Concerning the Transcription of the Torah Upon the Stones* (Deut 27:2–8; Jos 4:1–24; Jos 8:30–34); *Mishnah Sotah* 7:5; *Tosefta Sotah* 8:6–7; *Mekhilta Deuteronomy on Deuteronomy* 27:8, and *The Continuation of the Debate in the Two Talmuds*. The driving question of the study is why several rabbis conceived the Torah not as a universal Law, but as particular to Israel alone.

Berthelot documents the uncertainty of the Palestinian rabbis on whether to share the Torah with the non-Jews, by providing several views on rabbinic *Midrash halakha*. One example comes from *Mekhilta* of Rabbi Ishmael, where – interestingly enough by using Greek vocabulary – a universalistic view is advanced according to which Torah should be given publicly (Heb. *dēmos*, from Greek *δῆμος*) and openly (Heb. *parrēsia*, from Greek *παρρησία*). Another example is from early rabbinic (Tannaitic) *Midrash*, the *Sifre Deuteronomy*. There is a strong emphasis here that the Torah was given to all the nations (*umot*), in four languages: Hebrew, “Roman” (Latin), Arabic and Aramean. However, as one may conclude from the texts discussed by Berthelot, several rabbis considered Torah as belonging exclusively to Israel (in their choice to write only in Hebrew and Aramaic), and, therefore, it cannot be a universal law. In what I find an extremely compelling argument, Berthelot pleads for the hypothesis that the rabbinic literature (*Mishnah*, but also *Tosefta*, *Midrash halakha*, and the *Jerusalem Talmud*) reflects a counter-cultural reaction of Palestinian rabbis to the universalism of the Roman law.

The last paper dedicated to the Jewish milieu is that of Delfim F. Leão, "Alexandria, Diaspora, *Politeuma* and *Patrioi Nomoi*: The Sharing and Hiding of Jewish Identity". The article explores the interactions between Jewish and Greek communities in the cosmopolite metropole of Alexandria. The necessity of preserving religious identity together with the need to open towards the neighbouring otherness is analysed through concepts such as *polis*, *nomos*, *idioi nomoi*, *katoikia*, *politeumata*, *politeia gegrammene*, *patrioi nomoi*, *ethe patria*, *ethnos*.

The section *Greeks and Jews* analyses some features that belong to Jewish identity in the Hellenistic time. The primary texts examined are those of Flavius Josephus: *Against Apion* (1.190–192) and *Jewish Antiquities* (11.337–339). One of the ideas that is argued for is that a reference from *Against Apion* to Pseudo-Hecataeus (who highlights the recognition with which Alexander the Great distinguished the Jews), although difficult to prove historically, is consistent with the tradition that considered Alexander's alleged benevolence towards the Jews a sign of divine intervention. This "testimony" is related to that from *Jewish Antiquities*, where Alexander is reported to have granted rights to the Jews. In the words of Josephus: "When the high priest asked that they might observe their country's laws and in the seventh year be exempt from tribute, he granted all this. Then they begged that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media also to have their own laws, and he gladly promised to do as they asked." Leão reads this as a proof that, even if what is here testified may not be accurate, the Jews could retain during the Hellenistic period a status similar to that of the Persian occupation. The last section of the article, *A Jewish Politeuma in Alexandria?*, scrutinises the autonomy of Jewish ethnics in Greek cities (*politeumata*), with an emphasis on Alexandria, namely on how these communities accomplished to live according to their laws. The Septuagint seems to have had a comparable prominence to that of the Greek *nomoi*, and the Jews were allowed to advance a legal *koine* for common domestic issues. The author concludes that the "balanced way of sharing and hiding the boundaries of a religious identity (...) was safeguarded, in a universe marked by the confluence of multiple ethnic, political and religious sensibilities" (p. 118). Even if there is no explicit discussion of sharing versus hiding religious knowledge, but rather of ethnical identities, Leão's paper is nevertheless instructive with regards to the encounter between Jewish and Hellenistic culture in the prolific city of Alexandria, where ethnic divisions were paramount.

After this introduction to cosmopolite Alexandria, we enter the world of early Christianity and its heterodoxy. The paper of Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Ancient Greek Patterns of Knowledge Transmission and their Continuity in Gnostic Esotericism" deals with the role of secrecy in Gnosticism and in

the Greek Mediterranean world. Lanzillotta's question is whether secrecy should be understood as a subversive reaction to the Graeco-Roman world or, on the contrary, a form of acculturation. Lanzillotta constructs his paper by arguing against the idea that the Gnostics were ideologically resistant and therefore countercultural to mainstream philosophical and religious ideas. In his view the Gnostics were part of a tradition as old as the pre-Socratic philosophers and populated by various mystery cults.

In the first section of the article, *Gnostic Esotericism in Antiheretical Literature and Modern Scholarly Approaches*, the heresiologies of proto-orthodox Christians, starting with Justin Martyr, are reviewed. Irenaeus' *Against all Heresies* follows, where one can find a correspondence between openness (light) and darkness on the one hand, and truth and secrecy on the other; Pseudo-Hippolytus' *Refutation of All Heresies* places the secrecy of the Gnostics not in the sacred scriptures, but in Greek philosophy („their doctrines have derived their origin from the wisdom of the Greeks”, *Refutatio*, pref. 7-8). All these three antiheretical writers are paradigmatic for later negative attitudes against the Gnostics, and their respective detractors. Two dominant modern views are shortly discussed: Guy Stroumsa's theory that the Gnostics vanished once the secrecy within Christianity succumbed, and the complementary view of Michael W. Williams which emphasises the accessibility of demiurgic gnostic myths.

The second section, *Revisiting the Position of Gnostic Christianity in the Wider Religious Continuum of Late Antiquity*, questions the negative view of early heresiologists, and stresses that “Gnostic Christians and proto-orthodox Christians were claiming the same space in the same religious arena, and consequently that attacking others helped to define their own borders” (p. 127). Moreover, considering that “Plotinus' theory of emanations emerged during his seminars and was partly due to the interaction with his Gnostic colleagues, it is nothing but natural that he attacked their views” (p. 127). Lanzillotta points at elements of theology, cosmology, anthropology, ethics and epistemology to show segments of continuity between the Gnostics and the Greco-Roman world, contrasting them with the consistent and systematic rejection of things Greco-Roman by proto-orthodox Christians.

The third and the last section, *Gnostic Esoteric Knowledge Transfer: Cultural Continuity or Discontinuity?*, develops around means of conveying secrecy upon Gnostic doctrines. Lanzillotta insists on two types of instrumentaria for conveying secrecy: riddle-like language (*Gospel of Thomas* [NHC II, 2] 50), and complex mythological structures (*Secret Book of John*). “Concealing and revealing for the first time clearly develop as forms of social interaction; knowledge is conceived of as a scarce commodity and is consequently the door to social promotion.” This secrecy, assures us Lanzillotta,

it is not something that the Gnostics made up, as they were sharing in the religious and philosophical typologies of their time; the Gnostics perpetuated initiation techniques similar to mystery cults, the Presocratics, Plato's unwritten doctrine, Stoicism – just to name a few. While Lanzillotta's re-evaluation of the connection between the Gnostic and Greek philosophical schools is indeed a well-needed contribution, a study on how this lineage was accommodated within Jewish apocalypticism would complement the view advanced by this paper.

The paper by George van Kooten, "The Sign of Socrates, the Sign of Apollo, and the Signs of Christ: Hiding and Sharing Religious Knowledge in the Gospel of John – A Contrapuntal Reading of John's Gospel and Plato's Dialogues" compares the figures of Socrates and that of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Van Kooten elaborates here his investigations into the relationship between Greek Philosophy and New Testament writings.⁴ After an introduction in which we are presented with some parallels between Plato's *Symposium* and John's *Gospel*, the subsequent three sections introduce us to the "signs" of Socrates, Apollo, and Christ. The first section, *The Sign of Socrates* (p. 147-152) analyses Plato's narrative about Socrates' "daimonion" (δαίμόνιον) and his "inner voice" (φωνή), the accusation against Socrates of introducing new deities and of innovating the established Greek religion. A special attention is given to the *daimonion*, which is interpreted by Socrates himself as a "sign" (σημείον), more precisely a "sign of the god" (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ σημεῖον). Another emphasis is on the daimonion's nature, which is "apotreptic," and not "protreptic," and the notion of the appropriate time to take an action. The apotreptic nature "serves to develop a particular reflective and receptive attitude that keeps pace with a divine timing, which breaks the daily grind of earthly patterns or inclinations" (p. 152). For van Kooten, this feature is similar to John's Gospel, "where we find the same interrelatedness between apotreptic delay and resumption of action at the proper, divine hour and time" (p. 149). Socrates and Jesus thus appear both as responding to a higher calling, they "wait till their divine chronology is synchronised with the mundane" (p. 150). The conclusion for these resemblances drawn by the author is that John must have been acquainted with Plato's writings.

The second section, *The Sign of Apollo* (p. 152-157), develops Anthony A. Long's idea⁵ that Socrates' divine sign is the sign of Apollo. Socrates's wis-

⁴ Such as George van Kooten, "The Last Days of Socrates and Christ: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* Read in Counterpoint with John's Gospel," in Anders K. Petersen and George van Kooten (eds.), *Religio-Philosophical Discourses in the Mediterranean World: From Plato, through Jesus, to Late Antiquity*, Brill, 2017, p. 219-243.

⁵ Anthony A. Long, "daimōn," in Gerald A. Press (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Plato*, London, Continuum 2012, p. 152-154.

dom was confirmed by the oracle at Delphi, resulting in Socrates having a divine mission in questioning specialized people (politicians, poets, hand-workers) on their knowledge. This mission should be correlated with an anti-sophistic attitude, in which Socrates intends to reach out to all social classes, and “to *share* his insights” (p. 154). A striking similarity for van Kooten is Socrates’ hymn to Apollo, which, according to Plato, he writes shortly before his death and is the only piece that he seems to have written. Van Kooten parallels the exceptional relationship to writing that Socrates had to that of Jesus, who “in an equally or perhaps even more ephemeral mode, is said to have written in the sand” (p. 154). Another issue that connects Socrates with the divine Apollo is that he is condemned to death during the Athenian festival of Apollo. For this reason, his execution is postponed, in a manner that is similar to the religious constraints for the execution of Jesus to be found in John’s *Gospel*, but not in the synoptic gospels (p. 154).

The third section, *The Signs of Christ: Divine, Divinely Authorised, and Apotreptic* (p. 157-165), insists on Socrates’s divine apotreptic sign, which delays or suspends his actions, as a basis for John’s apotreptic Christology. Socrates’s and Jesus’s apotreptic behaviour appears fundamentally “linked with the notion of an underlying divine chronology”, as, for example, Jesus’ final statements “that his hour (*ῥῥα*) had come to depart from this world” (John, 13:1), and Socrates’ final words of defence before the Athenian judges: “But now the time has come to go away” (*Apology*, 42a). The last section, *Apollo’s Signification*: “Neither Telling nor Concealing, but Signifying,” develops on Heraclitus’ fragment B 93 DK: “the Lord whose prophetic shrine is at Delphi neither tells nor conceals, but signifies”, in an attempt to show how Jesus’ semiotic strategy resembles Apollo’s semiotic strategy in Plutarch’s view. It is from Plutarch that we know that at the time of Heraclitus, Delphic oracles used to communicate in “proverbial figures of speech”, and after the Roman conquest plain speech and simplicity dominate Pythia’s speech. Exactly this transition from unintelligible towards intelligible speech “is reflected in Jesus’s progressive semiotic strategy in John’s Gospel” (p. 166), during the “Last Symposium”: “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly” (John 16: 25), and „now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech” (16: 29).

Van Kooten’s parallelism between John’s Gospel and some of Plato’s Socratic dialogues is enjoyable speculation, but it somehow falls short in convincing the reader that John had any acquaintance of Plato’s dialogues. Perhaps one could ask whether one could speak of a *tertium*, a biography of an elected divine character that could be both of Platonic inspiration and the source of elements ornamenting Jesus’ chronology in the Johannine gos-

pel. The discussion of primary sources alone may be indeed tonic – a sort of parallel biographies in neoPlutarchian style – however the thesis would gain more credibility should more secondary literature be covered.⁶

Clare Wilde's article "*Wish to Extinguish the Light of God with Their Mouths* (Qur'ān 9:32): A Qur'ānic Critique of Late Antique Scholasticism?" introduces Islamic perspectives, through the discussion of Qur'ānic references to those who distort (*tahrīf*) the word of God. The first section reviews incidents of oral distortion: "a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues... And they say: It is from God when it is not from God; and they speak a lie concerning God knowingly (Qur'ān 3:78)". Another accusation, which alludes to the Jews, especially to the Mishnaic tradition, is that they rather conceal than share knowledge (Qur'ān 6:91). Even though Islamic traditional interpretation understands the allusions to scriptural distortion as references to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), Wilde stresses that Qur'ān is not criticizing Jews alone for these scriptural distortions (p. 173). There are also references to violations of the Law by the Christians, as they misrepresent God as having a Son (Jesus), similar to the Jews who thought also that God has a Son (Ezra).

The most stimulating hypothesis Wilde advances is that these distortions could be testifying in the Qur'ān for some familiarity with Late Antique Christian debates infused by Hellenism (probably from a Syriac milieu, and around Chalcedonian debates). The subsequent sections provide insights into this hypothesis, by reviewing the manners in which the alterations are done: either by adding words (Qur'ān 3:78), or by "twisting one's tongue" (e.g., Qur'ān 4:46). Moreover, "Jews" and "Christians" are accused of considering the *aḥbār* (doctors of law) and the *ruhbān* (monks) lords besides God and of taking "the wealth of the people". It is the very same *aḥbār* and *ruhbān* that are recalled for their involvement into an "oral" obliteration of God's word, and the author suggests that this could actually be a reference to the so called 'scholastic'⁷ movement, among both Jews and Christians, in Late Antique Mesopotamia. Her hypothesis is that the movement seems to have been documented upon in the Qur'ān, especially with regards to the schools of Nisibis and Seleucia, which were functioning in the same period and geographical space as the Babylonian Rabbinic academies did.

⁶ The bibliography at the end refers only to seven titles, with some notable omissions: Pierre Destrée and Nicholas D. Smith (eds.), *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice and Value in Socratic Philosophy*, Academic Printing and Publishing, 2005. Or Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Jesus as Philosopher. The Moral Sage in the Synoptic Gospels*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁷ The author is using here the term of Adam H. Becker from the article "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians", *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 34 (2010), p. 91-113.

The Qur'ānic accusation of distortion of the scripture could be an allusion to the critique by monks of the 'scholastic' intellectuality. Wilde provides telling excerpts from Evagrius Ponticus, the little known Dadišo' Qaṭrāyā, and Ephrem the Syrian, suggesting possible parallels to Qur'ān's first auditors.

These first auditors could be familiar to both Hellenising tendencies in the school of Nisibis, and the critique against 'scholasticism', launched indeed in an Evagrian spirit. I found Wilde's paper suggestive and the identification of Christians with specific late antique pro and anti-intellectual movements is a track that deserves further exploration into Qur'ānic textual evidences.

The last paper of the volume deals also with the Islamic world and it is written by Paul E. Walker, "Techniques for Guarding and Restricting Esoteric Knowledge in the Ismaili *Da'wa* during the Fatimid Period". The paper, which is dedicated to esoteric knowledge in Islam, represented by Ismaili *da'wa* inside of Shi'a. The *Introduction* presents us how the Ismaili thought that the true meaning of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān are not accessible to ordinary Muslims. The real meaning comes only through the imams, and, according to Shi'a, the failure to recognise, "the living imam, the imam of the time," leads to damnation. Thus, the transmission of knowledge comes from the *da'wa*, and its agents, the *dā'īs*. This contrasts Ibn Rushd's views on the way of interpreting (*ta'wīl*) the ambiguous verses in Qur'ān, as Walker underlines. Ibn Rushd, known in the Latin west as Averroes, argues that those proficient in "demonstrative thought" do have the necessary knowledge to do *ta'wīl* and that it should be required from their part. But this knowledge should not be shared to everyone. In the next sections, Walker displays two methods of restricting access to the knowledge of the Ismaili. The first section, *The Oath of Allegiance*, analyses ceremonial texts in which the novice (*mustajīb*) swears loyalty, namely that he will not divulge the accessed knowledge to somebody who does not belong to the *da'wa*. For Walker, the purpose of the oath is twofold: "to ensure the absolute loyalty of each new member or adherent and the other, more germane for us, is to guard and protect and thus control access to the esoteric knowledge imparted in the course of the *da'wa*'s appeal and its instruction" (p. 192). One detail that maybe of some importance in these sessions is that they are not strictly androcentric, but include also female membership.

The second section, *Payments of Dues and Alms*, brings attention to tithes and fees as a necessary condition to be initiated in to the esoteric knowledge of *ta'wīl*. Through these fees new members are tested. Without the payment, information is not to be provided. With examples from the earliest Fatimid caliphate (909 to 1171), Walker shows how this process worked. The texts speak for themselves (p. 193-194): "The believer pays

what he pays on the measure of his sincerity (...) in order to test him. (...) he distinguishes himself from the people of outward meaning. If he pays a second time, his *da'ī* knows the goodness of his intention (...) reveals to him the secrets of the interpretation. If he pays out a third time, his status with God's guardian rises (...) God orders him [the *da'ī*] to examine the believers who seek the benefits of the religion to test out their secrets."

The paper points out that the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) provided by *da'wa* is not only the allegorical interpretation given for obscure passages in the Qur'ān, but it also encompasses other forms of interpretation of qur'ānic verses or legal texts (p. 194). Walker argues that Ismaili writings, which were fashioned by the agents of the *da'wa*, are perhaps two hundred works in all. "A century ago we would have known little about what has survived and what might be recovered. In part our ignorance was a deliberate result of Ismaili secrecy" (p. 195). Nowadays some of them are becoming available, but not all *da'wa* writings are to be categorized as *ta'wīl*, since the corpus of *da'wa* contained works for the general public as well. The author concludes with the open question of how much from this corpus does really lie under the law of secrecy and by questioning the legitimacy and accuracy of the interpretation given to this corpus by scholars who "have gained access without agreeing to the oath or making the necessary payments of fees and dues."

The volume ends with indexes of primary sources and modern authors. Short notes on the contributors would have been also useful for the reader. Overall, this is a very dense publication, with challenging papers for any scholar interested in the power of knowledge and the religions of the book. I find the initiative of bringing together under such a theme scholars working on very specialised fields who would rarely have the chance to engage in comparative dialogue, to be a salutary one. The papers are very diverse and specialised in their content, and, in order to follow the dynamic and morphology of the various types of religious knowledge it addresses, one needs a good expertise into comparative religions (especially Assyro-Babylonian political history and religiosity, Judaism and its rabbinic traditions, Christianity and its Gnostic counterpart, Islam, especially Shia, and the formation of Qur'ān). If one considers precisely this great variety in core questions of some of the papers – with studies on the clash of different religious beliefs and social customs (as for example the chapter five or eight) or pattern emulations (chapter seven) – one might find the title slightly restrictive. But knowing the conference behind, with its larger heading, one realises that the papers of this volume are also about *Strategies of Acculturation and Cultural Resistance*.