

researching and writing about parallels between Greek epics and the New Testament for more than 20 years. This is his seventh book on the subject.

The author's major premise is that works by Homer and Vergil were widely known in antiquity, and also widely imitated. His minor premise is that the author of Mark's Gospel wanted "to do for early Christianity what Vergil had done for the early Empire: to provide a compelling narrative about a founding hero" (4). His conclusion is that Mark used many parts of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* as models for stories about Jesus and his superhuman feats.

Justin Martyr and Tertullian both recognized parallels between certain Gospel narratives and stories about Greek gods and heroes, and even today people familiar with the classics acknowledge similarities between miraculous conceptions and ascensions in ancient literature and stories about Jesus' birth and about his being taken into heaven. MacDonald goes further, however, arguing that Mark used specific passages from previous works as templates for specific passages when he decided to tell the story of the heroic Jesus. Later, the author of Luke–Acts borrowed from Mark and continued the practice of modeling Christian stories on Greek ones.

Although general similarities between Gospel stories and Greek legends are easily acknowledged, specific similarities for which M. argues can seem strained. It is easy to imagine that Mark was familiar with the story of Hermes walking on water, with stories of miraculous healings by gods, and with stories of heroic deaths, which he might have had in the back of his mind when composing his Gospel. It is less easy to imagine, as M. would have us believe, that Mark closely copied sequences of events in older stories when composing various episodes about Jesus. Yet this is what the book attempts to demonstrate with parallel columns of Greek and mostly Markan texts.

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Qur'āns: Books of Divine Encounter. By Keith E. Small. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2015. Pp. 170. \$25.

Small, a Manuscript Consultant to the Bodleian Library, Associate Research Fellow at the London School of Theology, and author of *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts* (2011), has produced a visually pleasing compendium of 53 Qur'ān manuscripts, most of them from the Bodleian Library. Each manuscript is shown in one photo and accompanied by a short description. In the first three chapters, S. explores the history of Qur'ān manuscripts, and in the process delivers a gentle, non-technical introduction to issues in studying Qur'ān manuscripts, such as dating, orthography, script, colophons, palimpsests, and materials. He also introduces decorative elements, including carpet pages and gold leaf, and aspects of the manuscripts related to liturgy and recitation.

The second half of the book is organized thematically, and showcases European Renaissance encounters with the Qur'ān, global dissemination of the Qur'ān, and personal copies of the Qur'ān. S. showcases Qur'ān manuscripts owned or produced by European scholars, including Robert of Ketton's twelfth-century Latin translation and Renaissance critical editions noting textual variants. His misleading overemphasis on the sympathy with which many of these scholars approached the Qur'ān creates a contrast with the next section. There, he provides the fascinating backstory to how some of the Bodleian's Qur'ān manuscripts came to Oxford: "plunder in piracy and war" (89), or through former officers in British colonies (e.g., 126–27). This section's vignettes provide a fascinating window into the past few centuries of Islamic history. The final section, on believers' personal copies of the Qur'ān, includes talismans and even an undershirt with the Qur'ān written on it to ward off harm in battle.

S. excellently analyzes how details of decoration and calligraphy relate to Islamic theology and the believer's personal encounter with revelation. I would have liked to see more examples of contemporary Qur'āns. While S. includes an appendix of recommended reading, it would be more useful for scholars if it had a bibliography for each manuscript. This book is aimed at the general reader, but is also of interest to scholars, and would also be a useful supplementary text for courses in art history, book history, or Islamic studies.

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Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader. Edited by John Renard. Oakland, CA: University of California, 2014. Pp. xviii + 461. \$39.95.

In this volume Renard brings together English translations of a diverse range of Islamic texts—beginning with the Qur'ān—concerned with God and God's nature. Some of these texts have been previously translated and published (of these many were languishing in older monographs where they were largely forgotten). Other texts have been translated and published here for the first time; R. has translated a number of these and arranged for the translation of others (by Omid Ghaemmaghami, Valerie Hoffman, Sachiko Murata, David Thomas, and David Vishanoff). The texts are organized not by chronology but in five categories roughly reflecting traditional Islamic sciences: the Science of Interpretation (Qur'ān and hadith); the Science of Community (polemics and creeds); the Science of Divine Unity (discussions of God's nature); the Science of Hearts (mysticism and spirituality); and the Science of Character (ethics and morality). At the end of the volume is a useful table presenting basic information on all of the texts translated in the work (although it does not include bibliographic references to editions in the original language), along with useful indices.

R.'s work is unprecedented. Other readers of Islamic sources are focused on texts from certain periods (classical or contemporary). R.'s is the first reader to focus on the theological tradition in particular. It will thus be of considerable use for courses on