

*Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke–Acts.* By Brittany E. Wilson. New York: Oxford University, 2015. Pp. xiii + 341. \$74.

Wilson offers a careful and thorough investigation that challenges many scholars who claim that the masculinity that weaves through Luke–Acts strengthens elite (masculine) ideals. While she acknowledges in part that Luke–Acts may be relatively elite vis-à-vis other Synoptics, when looked at within the norms of the early Roman principate and the Lukan narrative as a whole, Lukan men are refigured to look distinctively “unmanly” according to those ancient mores.

By tracing the history of research on Luke–Acts masculinity and on the construction of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world, W. concludes that Luke–Acts intersects with recurrent patterns of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world which claimed that “real men” had to be socially elite, be able to maintain bodily boundaries (as “impenetrable penetrators”) and project proper bodily demeanor (thus, not have deformities/disabilities, or similar defects), and have power and self-mastery over the body and emotions. W. selects for characters: two minor characters, Zechariah and an Ethiopian eunuch, and two major characters, Paul and Jesus, to see how they measure up to these standards. W. finds that Gabriel’s silencing of and relinquishing of paternal power by Zechariah, the Ethiopian eunuch’s castration/impotency, Paul’s loss of his corporeal control and inability to see in his conversion narrative, and Jesus’ emasculating crucifixion which required the penetration on his body, all point to loss of masculinity. The point of these refigurations is to demonstrate God’s victorious power in a cosmic drama against Satan (or those who ostensibly wield power). God’s paradoxical act of self-emptying power in Jesus’ refiguration sets the standard for how all men ought to fight Satan: by undergoing bodily invasions or an “unmanning” process, by carrying the wound from it, and by depending on God’s power whereby powerlessness and loss become victorious.

W. is careful to acknowledge where these four characters do not fit her thesis (that is, their heroic portrayal). W. is successful, however, in meeting her goal and demonstrates an overall agenda of the Lukan narrative through these four characters: subverting power that overcomes elite power. W. guilelessly leaves out other characters (including Peter) in her study. Readers will have to wait for additional work on these characters to make this study more complete.

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*Mythologizing Jesus: From Jewish Teacher to Epic Hero.* By Dennis R. MacDonald. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015. Pp. xiv + 164. \$34.

Many books have been written about how Jesus became the Christ, or the Son of God, or the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Here is another.

It comes with a certain plausibility. The author has taught at prestigious schools of theology, and he has held regional offices in the AAR and SBL. Moreover, he has been

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.