Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations

Elizabeth J. Angowski [PhD]

Literature and the Moral Life: Reading the Early Biography of the Tibetan Queen Yeshé Tsogyal

In two parts, this dissertation offers a study and readings of the *Life Story of Yeshé Tsogyal*, a fourteenth-century hagiography of an eighth-century woman regarded as the matron saint of Tibet. Focusing on Yeshé Tsogyal's figurations in historiographic and hagiographic literature, I situate my study of this work, likely the earliest full-length version of her life story, amid ongoing questions in the study of religion about how scholars might best view and analyze works of literature like biographies, especially when historicizing the religious figure at the center of an account proves difficult at best.

In my readings, I advocate a hermeneutical approach that engages the *Life of Yeshé Tsogyal*'s self-understanding as a work that is both an authentic *terma* (*gter ma*), that is, a "treasure text" or "revealed scripture," and a *namtar* (*rnam thar*), here understood to be a narrative of an individual's pursuit of spiritual realization. Following a consideration of the work's genre, I examine two of its dominant literary features: intertextuality and dialogue. I suggest that through its use of intertextuality, the *Life* seeks to cultivate a reader who is ever eager to find more—more information but, above all, further significance—in the text. The reader who reads intertextually is apt to gain both facility and comfort with the work and even, ideally, the ability to see the work as persistently relevant to their own life. I find that through its use of dialogue, the story works to familiarize the reader with Yeshé Tsogyal in ways that extend beyond the capacities of diegesis alone. For its dialogic qualities, both among texts and between persons, I understand the *Life of Yeshé Tsogyal* to be a work of literature that seeks not only to account for the spiritual progress of Yeshé Tsogyal but also to enliven her amid the religious landscapes of Tibet and Bhutan.

Adviser: Janet Gyatso

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Reed Carlson [ThD]

Possession and Other Spirit Phenomena in Biblical Literature

This dissertation maps the functions of spirit language, rituals, and myths in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple Jewish literature. Most studies of these phenomena aim to decode them using modern categories (e.g., mental health, symbolization of oppression, demonization of the "other"). In contrast, this project applies models from cultural anthropology and ethnography on possession, trance, and other similar practices from around the world in order to reveal functions not usually associated with spirit texts (e.g., "technologies of the self," social commentary, therapeutic self-othering, a means to reembody the past). It argues that this literature was a crucial component for constructing conceptions of the self in early Judaism and Christianity. Further, it demonstrates how the problematization of the self in biblical literature led to the enigmatic conceptions of spirit possession and exorcism found in Second Temple Jewish literature.

Chapter 1, "Unfamiliar Spirits," positions this project at the intersection of two contemporary scholarly discussions in biblical studies that have often proceeded separately (studies on conceptions of "the self" and of "evil"). Chapter 2, "What Are Spirit Phenomena?" defines the terms "possession" and "spirit phenomena" as they are used in the project and lays out the underlying investigative method of the dissertation. Chapter 3 provides an overview of previous scholarship on spirit phenomena in both biblical studies and the study of religion. Chapter 4, "The Spirit and the Self," demonstrates how spirit-language is a common mode for articulating notions of personhood in biblical literature. This conception is labeled the "animating spirit" because it is conceived as material-like and as a bodily organ that is imparted at birth and extracted at death. Chapter 5, "Possessing Spirits," describes those spirit possession episodes in biblical literature that are temporally limited and imparted for a specific purpose. These spirits can be characterized as good, bad, or morally neutral, and their presence is signaled by possession or trance behavior. Chapter 6, "Demonizing the Self," surveys biblical literature and select examples from the Dead Sea Scrolls, showing how the animating and possessing modes of spirit phenomena are not mutually exclusive but exist on a spectrum.

Adviser: Jon D. Levenson

James Gregory Given [PhD]

Ignatius of Antioch and the Historiography of Early Christianity

This dissertation tracks the process by which scholarly consensus came to regard seven letters attributed to Ignatius of Antioch as "authentic" and established them as stable orientation points for the Euro-American historiography of Early Christianity. My reassessment of the chief literary and manuscript witnesses to Ignatius's letters shows that the generally accepted textual history of these letters is not only insufficient to account for the full range of evidence, but it also precludes

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

other avenues for analyzing the complex textual fluidity of the Ignatian corpus. How, then, did Euro-American scholarship arrive at this consensus view?

I address this question by following disputes over Ignatius's letters from the sixteenth-century challenges of Reformers, through a seventeenth-century crisis over the status of bishops in England, to nineteenth-century responses to the "radical" criticism of the Tübingen School. This analysis shows that historical scholarship on the letters of Ignatius was tied up not only in academic arguments over the reconstruction of evidence, but also in political and ecclesiastical strife, colonial expropriation of cultural heritage, and theological debates, both among scholars and in the public square. In such contexts, successive generations of scholars applied their most up-to-date historical methods to craft an "authentic," early second-century Ignatian witness, eventually arriving at a critically edited collection of seven letters, familiar today among the so-called "Apostolic Fathers." This study makes it possible to reassess the status of the "authentic" sources of early Christianity and the "critical" texts that mediate them to us. In the case of Ignatius's letters, one consequence is the restoration of the "corrupted" witnesses and "late" recensions to the archive of evidence for writing history, presenting the opportunity for more richly textured accounts of how stories, concepts, and structures of Christianity were formed and reformed over time, and how textual archives were assembled for differing purposes in various times and places, from the second century to today.

Adviser: Karen L. King

Irfan Moeen Khan [PhD]

Re-centering the Sufi Shrine: A Metaphysics of Presence

The religious character of Indus Sufism is marked by its devotion to the living presence of Sufi saints at their tombs. In much previous scholarship on Sufism, the tomb has not figured prominently. This has inadvertently marginalized the worship of the saints at their shrines (*ziyāra*) into a kind of ethnographically rich yet still epiphenomenal element in the history of Sufism, a view that sees it as much more a matter of "discourse" than a lived experience. This dissertation addresses the problem of how to interpret popular religious devotion at Sufi saints' tombs most authentically; I argue that we need to begin by recentering these shrines in our studies.

In the case of Pakistan, the state has carried out a systematic program of reform to suppress, gradually, the devotional energy generated at the Sufi shrines of the Indus valley. In line with a particular trajectory of religious thinking, the state has sought to fashion the hagiographic identities of Indus Sufi saints into more normative models of piety: directly regulating Sufi shrines, promoting specific ritual interventions, and treating the saint's body as that of a deceased mortal rather than as a posthumously powerful channel of the Divine.

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Since the nineteenth century, reformist groups such as the Deobandīs and Barelwīs were theologically at odds with one another regarding the ritual of supplication (*du'ā*) at saints' shrines. Despite this disagreement between Deobandīs and Barelwīs, both schools insist that all mystical experience must be subservient to strictures of Islamic law. This legal discourse was exported to Pakistan, and there it has led many religious scholars to push the state to encourage the recitation of the *fātiḥa*, a qur'anic verse commonly employed in sending merit to the dead, as the correct way of observing *ziyāra* at Sufi shrines and graves. This ritual intervention is aimed at reversing the metaphysics of posthumous divine union achieved by the saint by stressing that the departed Sufi saint is dead. Through legal reasoning, religious scholars have sought similarly to negate other ritual practices that celebrate the power of deceased saints to communicate with their followers.

Advisers: William A. Graham and Kimberley C. Patton

Joanna Greenlee Kline [PhD]

Intimations of Jacob, Judah, and Joseph in the Stories of King David: The Use of Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2

The subject of this study is the use of narrative analogy in the biblical story of King David (1 Sam 16–1 Kgs 2), especially the parallels between this material and the stories of the patriarch Jacob and his family (Gen 25–50). Narrative analogy in the Hebrew Bible, which is related to the broader phenomena of allusion and inner-biblical interpretation, involves a series of parallels between biblical texts that function to draw comparisons between characters and events. My analysis focuses on several narratives in the books of Samuel that exhibit especially strong connections with stories in the book of Genesis. First, I discuss 1 Samuel 16–18, in which the early career of David shows parallels with the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 and 39. Next, I examine the analogical structure found in 1 Samuel 18–19 and 24–25 that compares David's relationship with his father-in-law Saul to Jacob's relationship with his father-in-law Laban. I then explore the many points of resemblance between the story of David's daughter Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 and the story of Jacob's daughter Dinah in Genesis 34. Finally, I analyze the complex analogical parallels exhibited by the narratives of 2 Samuel 11–13 and the Joseph story of Genesis 37–50, including the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.

For all of these narratives, I identify possible parallels and connections with other biblical texts, classifying them according to whether the similarities are exhibited in plot, structure, language, motif, or theme. I then explore the functions and purposes of the analogical links. This analysis demonstrates that narrative analogy in the David story functions to develop characterization and to reinforce significant themes of the narrative, including sibling rivalry and reconciliation, measure-for-measure punishment, and divine election and providence. In addition to discussing the function of narrative analogy on the synchronic level, I also use text-critical data and analyze the diachronic development of each text in order to determine the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

genetic relationship between analogically connected narratives. In some cases, the evidence shows that the Genesis narratives influenced the Samuel texts; in other cases, the direction of influence appears to be the reverse. I argue that this mutual textual influence led to a strengthening of the analogical links between David and Jacob as the narratives about them were composed and transmitted.

Through its focus on narrative analogy, this project provides insights about the characterization of David, the portrayal of the institution of the kingship, and the depiction of divine providence in the books of Samuel. The study of analogical links between the narratives of Genesis and Samuel also provides evidence for a model of the diachronic relationship between these books, which appear to have influenced each other over the course of their development. Furthermore, this work contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon of narrative analogy in the Hebrew Bible more broadly, showing how analogical parallels are constructed, identifying the literary and theological functions of these parallels, and highlighting the importance of narrative analogy as a compositional technique that serves to unite originally independent narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

Adviser: Jon D. Levenson

Emily Rider Neill [ThD]

Troubling the Body: A Feminist Critique of Corporeal Politics

In the last thirty years, the category of the body has been an area of intense interest for critical inquiry, particularly for feminist theoretical approaches across the disciplines. Through the adoption of a variety of critical frameworks, feminist debates centering on the body have produced a spectrum of theoretical elaborations proposed as interventions and/or political programs to resist and dismantle oppressive structures and hegemonic thought. Taking seriously the feminist critical mandate that theories of domination are generated for the purpose of struggling against oppression, this thesis challenges the presumption that *the body* is a productive starting point for articulating feminist liberative goals.

Attention to the theory of difference and the theory of power at work in every feminist project that centers the body is central to analyzing the capacity of its proposals to challenge structures of oppression. Through a close examination and critique of representative feminist theoretical and theological body projects and the critical frameworks they employ, I show how a concern for marginalized bodies and effective political strategies for redressing the mechanisms of that marginalization is better accomplished by specifically *not* using the body as the rubric or source for one's theoretical and political endeavors. After taking account of the political capacities of different critical frameworks for this endeavor, I propose that the structural rhetorical framework is best suited to and capable of exposing the operations of structural power and naming the dynamics of *othering* that produce, regulate, and enforce the content of categories of difference and their hierarchical valuations. I argue against an understanding of critical theory as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perpetually "advancing," and I advocate instead for the continued use of categories and modes of analysis that are best suited for addressing structural inequality. Finally, I propose that following the critical arc of body studies reveals a move away from the political in academia which is particularly evident in the trend towards "new materialism," a critical framework which evidences no political commitment to the marginalized, and I make a special appeal to feminist theologians to hold their own and other feminist work accountable to stated political goals on behalf of marginalized persons.

Adviser: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Sukidi [PhD]

The Gradual Qur'an: Views of Early Muslim Commentators

This dissertation is the first endeavor to explore the formulation of the gradual Qur'an in early works of commentaries on the Qur'an (pl. *tafāsīr*, sing. *tafsīr al-Qur'ān*). It draws upon the hitherto largely neglected genre of *tafsīr* in its early, formative age to argue that the early Muslim commentators sought to formulate and work out the general theory of the gradual Qur'an through their reading and interpretation of the revealed text.

With impressive knowledge of the Qur'an and its Arabic language, they were able to derive the theory of the gradual Qur'an from their reading of the verb in Qur'an 17:106 in the second form, *qur'ānan farraqnāhu*—"a Qur'an that We have divided into pieces"—as opposed to the first form of the verb in the consensus-based "majority" reading, *qur'ānan faraqnāhu*—"a Qur'an that We made clear." This choice of reading meant that the revelation of 17:106 was construed as confirming the gradual, piecemeal Qur'an. This study adduces a new, long list of early and medieval authorities who supported this reading.

The proclamation of the gradual Qur'an was situated in the context of a polemical milieu. It emerged in Qur'an 25:32 in a response to unbelievers' demand for a single complete Qur'an (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*), a demand based on a preconceived notion of the true revelatory process for monotheistic scriptures as occurring "all at once." This was contradictory to the responsive, situational nature of the qur'anic revelation, which emerged in an ongoing series of prophetic-revelatory events—a *history*—as a collection of divine responses to incidents, situations, and objections in the lifetime of Muhammad.

Finally, Qur'an 53:1–18 can be shown to refer to visionary experiences as part of the gradual revelation, since here God swore by the gradual Qur'an and references his manifesting himself on different revelatory occasions. The process of visionary encounter can be interpreted as having begun with God standing on the highest horizon, then coming down slowly, drawing near to Muhammad and finally revealing the Qur'an to him in piecemeal fashion.

Adviser: William A. Graham

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rosanna Picascia [PhD]

Defending the Authority of Scripture: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge in Classical Indian Philosophy of Religion

This dissertation looks at how Sanskrit philosophers grappled with the question of how we acquire knowledge on the basis of what others tell us. In particular, it examines Sanskrit interreligious debates on the epistemic status of testimony, and, specifically, religious testimony. I analyze these debates primarily through the work of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, a ninth-century Kashmiri Nyāya philosopher, as well as through the works of his Buddhist and Mīmāṃsaka interlocutors. Through a close reading and intertextual analysis of these works, I engage historically and philosophically with the key issues in these debates.

In particular, I look at Jayanta's examination of the following set of related questions: 1) whether, and the conditions under which, testimony is a source of knowledge; 2) why, on the basis of practical factors, religious testimony merits different epistemic treatment from mundane types of testimony; and 3) how to approach the challenge of religious disagreement, particularly disagreement stemming from mutually conflicting scriptural traditions. In examining these debates, I argue that differences in opinion over the epistemic status of testimony boil down to a disagreement over the proper relationship between the individual epistemic agent and the broader social and practical world. In particular, this disagreement centers on who bears the brunt of epistemic responsibility in testimonial exchanges, the speaker or the recipient, and whether practical factors, like stakes, considerations, and interests, affect the strength of a subject's epistemic position.

I also approach these debates through the conceptual resources of contemporary epistemology and philosophy of religion in order to help clarify complex Sanskrit philosophical arguments and, ultimately, to underscore the relevance of Sanskrit texts to contemporary discussions. In particular, I argue for the usefulness of certain theoretical frameworks and principles for understanding Jayanta's work, primarily the thesis of pragmatic encroachment, which claims that pragmatic factors can affect the level of epistemic support a subject needs for certain beliefs. Additionally, I argue that Jayanta's unique approach to the problem of religious disagreement, especially his consideration of the socio-practical factors that affect the epistemic status of belief, might help break some of the deadlock in contemporary theorizing on intractable religious disagreement.

Adviser: Parimal G. Patil

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Matthew Robert Rasure [PhD]

Priests Like Moses: Earliest Divisions in the Priesthood of Ancient Israel
The history of the priesthood in ancient Israel is shrouded in mystery. While images of priests, prayer, sacrifice, and, eventually, the Temple play a significant role in all biblical periods, reconstructing the practices and organization of the institution is beset by a host of historical, chronological, and methodological problems. In 1973, Frank Moore Cross published a landmark proposal tying the history of the Israelite priesthood to the character of Moses and the establishment of the United Monarchy—the so-called Mushite Hypothesis—providing a historical foothold for the study of each.

In this dissertation, I explore the priestly roles of Moses and Aaron in the Hebrew Bible as an avenue of inquiry into the early history of divisions in the Israelite priesthood. My research focuses on three interrelated areas: the competing visions of Moses, Aaron, and their priesthoods in the pentateuchal sources; the narrative and topographical profiles of significant cultic sites in ancient Israel and the clergy operative at these sites; and the web of genealogical relationships the Bible describes between various priestly groups, with particular emphasis on the fluidity of these relationships.

This project reveals the existence of two spectra on which different biblical voices may be positioned: the opposition of geographical center and periphery, and the opposition between Aaron and Moses. What emerges from these oppositions is a picture of two priesthoods active in contiguous but distinct regions. The interactions between these priesthoods shape the history, politics, and cult of the United Monarchy, the Divided Monarchy, and beyond.

Adviser: Jon D. Levenson

Axel Marc Oaks Takács [ThD]

Imagining Forth the Incarnation: A Theo-Poetics of the Flesh
This dissertation is an exercise in comparative theology between two pre-modern textual traditions, one Islamic, the other Christian. I read these traditions together, interreligiously, in search of critical and embodied constructive interpretations with a view to our contemporary world. The Christian textual tradition under discussion is the Latin corpus of Johannes Scotus Eriugena (d. circa 877), an Irish theologian whose main influences were Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), Pseudo-Dionysius (who wrote before 532), Gregory of Nyssa (d. circa 395), and Maximus Confessor (d. 662). The Islamic textual tradition under discussion is the *dīvān* (collected love lyrics, *ghazal* [sg.]) of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz (d. circa 1390) along with a seventeenth-century, South Asian Persian commentary entitled *A Mystical Commentary on the Love Lyrics of Ḥāfiẓ* (*Sharḥ-i ʿirfānī-yi ghazalhā-yi Ḥāfiẓ*), written by a certain Abū al-Ḥasan Khatamī Lāhūrī, whose reading is configured principally by two Islamic discursive traditions (which had coalesced

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nearly seamlessly in his South Asian context): the first known as the *madhhab-i ʿishq* (School of Love), and the second known as the School of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240).

This dissertation employs the method of comparative theology informed by the work of Francis X. Clooney, S.J. By reading Eriugena's corpus through an Islamic theo-poetics, it seeks to redress the highly rationalistic and disembodied reading of his oeuvre that prevails in much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on the Irish theologian. Rather than view Eriugena as a philosophical idealist devoid of any incarnational theology, the function of the imagination (*khayāl*), metaphor (*majāz*), poetry, the imaginal world, and passionate love (*ʿishq*)—all central to an Islamic theo-poetics (as constructed in this dissertation through a reading of Ḥāfiẓ/Lāhūrī)—is applied to Eriugena's theology to draw out the constitutive and formative function of the Incarnation in his work. This comparative exercise illuminates the incarnational theology of Eriugena's thought otherwise occluded by his dialectical reasoning.

The texts are read in the context of their respective historical and intellectual discursive traditions but in a way that emphasizes the resources they possess for a liberating praxis today. A theo-poetics of the flesh is constructed through this exercise in interreligious, comparative theology. Drawing from the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Cornelius Castoriadis concerning social imaginaries, I transpose this theo-poetics of the flesh into an incarnational imaginary. The formative function of imaginaries is explored and subsequently related to the Incarnation to suggest that the flesh is constitutive of our relationship, not just to each other and the world but to God. A theo-poetics of the flesh is an incarnational imaginary that functions to disrupt and subvert dominant and oppressive social imaginaries that have no relation to the Word-made-flesh. Just as the reading of these texts is attuned to their poetics, *how* texts mean is likewise a theo-poetics of the flesh attuned to *how* we may imagine forth the Incarnation in spaces and communities today: *theo(poïe)sis* is our communal *theosis*.

In addition to contributing to scholarship on Eriugena and to constructive Catholic theology, this dissertation also produces critical insights into the fields of Persian literature (particularly ṣūfī poetry), the Islamic mystical tradition (Sufism), and the state of seventeenth-century South Asian Islamic discourse. It challenges the dualistic (secular-religious) reading of Ḥāfiẓ's love lyrics prevalent in the field of Persian literature, and the prominent, modern scholarly conceptions of the purpose of mystical terms (*iṣṭilāḥāt*) vis-à-vis commentaries on Persian poems. Together, these contributions provide a nondual conceptualization of theology, anthropology, cosmology, and interpretive traditions. This nonduality configures the incarnational imaginary in the constructive portions of the dissertation.

Adviser: Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Andrew Edward Walton [PhD]

The Language of Rebellion in the Hebrew Bible and the Ambivalent Attitude(s) It Represents

Rebellion has been an incessant feature of human history, and every society has had to struggle with it. The states of Israel and Judah were no different in this regard. These two societies, insofar as they are represented in the Hebrew Bible, discussed the topic of rebellion with some frequency. Their discussions provide readers with a window into what some in ancient Israel thought about this political act. As is the case with many societies, the language of rebellion in ancient Israel was vast and complicated. As a result, modern scholars have often confused the numerous rebellion terms appearing in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., מרד, פּשׁע, קשׁר, חטא) and have failed to discuss others adequately as rebellion terms (e.g., ישׁע). In this dissertation, I clarify what these terms indicate in a rebellion context, and I highlight additional terms the biblical writers use to describe rebellion.

The results of my research demonstrate that while the ancient Israelites may not have written political treatises on the phenomenon of rebellion, they did have a set of interrelated terms in place—a type of terminological system—to describe the various types of rebellions that existed within their society. The presence of the system, along with the ways in which they manipulated it, betray, albeit to a limited extent, their recognition of a larger or overall category of rebellion. The biblical writers had descriptive words to describe rebellion, as in מרד, פּשׁע, and קשׁר. They had expressions that could stand in to describe rebellion, as in רום יד ב. There were also positive rebellion terms—ישׁע and נצל—that focus on the aspect of liberation. In contrast, the biblical writers also employed terms connected to criminal behavior (e.g., חטא) to describe select rebellions. The words they chose and the contexts in which these words appear betray their ambivalent feelings about rebellion. The biblical authors recognized that rebellion could be destructive and present a challenge to the divine order, but they also recognized that rebellion could serve to bring freedom from foreign oppression or, in other circumstances, to remove a wayward monarch.

Adviser: Peter Machinist

John Zaleski [PhD]

Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia

This dissertation examines the development of Christian and Islamic writing on asceticism, especially fasting and celibacy, in Iraq and northern Mesopotamia during the formative period of Islam. I show that both Christians and Muslims created ascetic traditions specific to their communities by reinterpreting the significance of disciplines they held in common and by responding to the practices and ideals of rival confessions. As I argue, Muslims transformed Late Antique models of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asceticism and in so doing led Christians to reshape their own ever-evolving monastic traditions.

The first part of the dissertation examines ascetic texts written by members of the East Syrian church, the largest Christian community in Iraq at the time of the Islamic conquest. I demonstrate that East Syrians appropriated Late Antique monastic thought by commenting upon, adapting, and reinterpreting Greek monastic texts. These commentators thus developed a self-consciously East Syrian tradition of interpreting ascetic practice, directed against rival Christian confessions and monastic movements. Central to this tradition was an emphasis on fasting and celibacy as mutually reinforcing disciplines, necessary throughout a monk's life in order to reorient the soul's desire toward God.

In the second part of the dissertation, I show how early Muslim authors re-envisioned the value and meaning of ascetic disciplines that were central to eastern Christian monasticism and often associated by Muslims with Christian monks. In particular, I argue that Muslims reinterpreted the purpose of fasting and sexual abstinence in light of qur'anic and prophetic models of piety. Far from imitating Christian asceticism (as has been suggested by scholars in the past), Muslims thus created self-consciously Islamic traditions of ascetic practice.

The final part of the dissertation argues that this Islamic ascetic discourse, which I call the "language of *zuhd*," became a *koiné*, in which members of multiple religious confessions in Iraq took part. This section thus shows how East Syrian Christians confronted Islamic ascetic ideals—ideals formed by Muslims partly in response to Christian monasticism. Through these mutual responses, Christians and Muslims alike formed new traditions of asceticism, which have perdured among Muslim and Christian communities in the Middle East.

Adviser: Charles M. Stang

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000282 Published online by Cambridge University Press