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Much of the work in this volume is theoretical, but it includes fascinating examples of striking parallels between early Islamic themes and earlier literatures from late antiquity. These include the Qur'anic notion of *tahrif* with Christian accusations of Jewish distortions of Abraham's true religion (Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* and the Ebionite conception of a diabolical falsification of Scripture); satanic verses "added" to the Qur'an with Pseudo-Clementine Homilies; the early *shahāda* or statement of faith with "God is one, and there is no God but Him" that appears in Pseudo-Clementine writings; the synonymic appearance of *rasūl* and *nabī* in the Qur'an with *apostolos* and *proph-ētēs* in the Didache; the notion of *jāhiliyya* with the lack of any intellectual interest among Christians with "the prior falsehood" of paganism; the Islamic concept of *fitra* with the notion of a natural Christian nature of the human soul (*anima naturaliter christiana*); the Qur'anic notion of an original, pristine, and unsullied "religion of Abraham" with Eusebius's writings in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and so forth. These parallels do not suggest "borrowing," as was so commonly assumed by earlier modern researchers, but rather point to the complexity of intertextual and interideational relationships between the religions of the period. While many of these parallels were not uncovered by the author, he interrogates them methodically through a vast array of primary and secondary sources in close to a dozen European and ancient languages.

The volume is dense and the breadth of reach remarkable. Anyone interested in early Islam and the interrelatedness and intertextuality of religion in the late antique world will find this book of intense interest.

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## MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ERAS

Andrew D. Berns. *The Bible and Natural Philosophy in Renaissance Italy: Jewish and Christian Physicians in Search of Truth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 309 pp.  
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"Tra le settantadue lingue che dalle 72 natione della casa d'Israel son nate, solo tre sono state tenute sempre in grandissima veneratione fra tutte l'altre lingue cioè l'Hebraea, Graeca, et Latina. Sì perché in quelle sono state conservate le scritture delle cose divine et parimente humane." (Among the seventy-two languages that were born from the seventy-two nations of the house of Israel, only three were always held in greatest veneration among all the others: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. In those languages, writings on divine and indeed human things were preserved; pp. 55–56)

This quote was authored by none other than the famous Bolognese scientist Ulisse Aldrovandi, one of the leading sixteenth-century botanists and zoologists, a pioneer in the description of geological phenomena and a founder of modern scientific inquiry. Who would ever imagine that Aldrovandi's rich library included the most circulated Hebrew grammars of his days, such as those of Johannes Reuchlin, Johannes van der Driesche (Drusius), Nicolas Cleynaerts (Clenard), and Robert Bellarmine?

Among the intellectual achievements that distinguished the Italian Renaissance from the previous centuries, with a lasting influence on the modern age, was the central role of a more philological approach to classical texts and languages from the fifteenth century onward. The rediscovery of ancient philosophical and religious corpora, almost totally unknown in the Middle Ages, spurred humanist scholars to seek out as many sources as possible for their intellectual investigation, in order to attain what they envisaged as a universal knowledge. To achieve such a goal, competence in classical and oriental languages was necessary: as a matter of fact, throughout the sixteenth century, the teaching of Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic became increasingly common in the scholarly institutions of western Europe, and the printing industry greatly contributed to the development of such skills.

In this comprehensive project, a thorough philological and linguistic analysis of the biblical text, in its many versions, played a major role. Far from aiming only at shedding light on the Hebrew truth (*Hebraica Veritas*), that is, on the pristine original text of the Scriptures—as humanists mostly claimed, in order to feel free to penetrate the depths of the sacred writings—the careful perusal of the holy texts primarily explored relationships between faith and rational sciences. In other words, in-depth study of the Bible, paralleled by the investigation of nature according to new empirical methods, allowed Renaissance intellectuals to ascertain that the scriptural account contained precious information about God's creation. While the goal of their quest was not new, the means to establish their theses stemmed from a fresh reading of the traditional Aristotelian approach to knowledge, which paved the way to early modern science.

It is generally assumed that the Roman Church hindered this multilayered investigation of the Scriptures, especially during and after the internal strife that took place in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic opposition to such analytical understanding of biblical truths would have caused a sudden end to this scholarly fashion, quickly leading to Galilee's harsh distinction between biblical scholarship and scientific inquiry, which would later become one of the outstanding features of western European modern thought. As a matter of fact, such distinction, which has been stressed mainly by positivist scholars, took a very long time to become effective, and most of the intellectual institutions of early modern Europe, and of Italy in particular, continued to deal with both biblical studies and the investigation of natural sciences at the same time.

In this volume Andrew D. Berns compares the approach of Jewish and non-Jewish scientists active in Renaissance Italy toward the biblical text. By drawing on an extensive variety of written documents—encyclopedias, letters, treatises, dictionaries, and medical case studies—the author, who masters several languages

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including Italian, Latin, and Hebrew, analyzes the work of major scholars (such as Amatus Lusitanus, Ulisse Aldrovandi, Melchior Wieland, David de' Pomis, and Abraham Portaleone; many "minor" personalities also appear in the book), their competence in biblical exegesis, and their understanding of the Scriptures as a touchstone for their knowledge of botany, mineralogy, zoology, and medicine.

Following in the footsteps of David Ruderman, who has dealt extensively with the Italian Renaissance and especially with the relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish scientists active in the most thriving intellectual centers of the Italian peninsula, Berns argues that not only were Jews cultural mediators of scientific knowledge for Christians, but they also triggered complex intellectual dynamics, which originated new scholarly approaches to science and biblical exegesis. The cooperation of Jewish and gentile scholars was partly responsible for early modern "revolutionary" attitudes leading to a new understanding of the truths that could be derived from faith and from reason. According to Berns, Italian Jews, far from being poorly tolerated subjects obliged to live in the segregation of the ghettos, were instead "integrated members of premodern societies"; as he writes, "social and legal interactions between Jews and Christians should be understood as a 'two-way street'" (25).

Berns's choice to examine the attitude to biblical exegesis of scholars who were not rabbis, theologians, or priests allows readers to better understand the major task of historians of Renaissance culture, namely correctly evaluating the disciplines studied by early modern intellectuals. Until a few decades ago, the dominant late nineteenth-century approach to historiography induced scholars to overlook all references to the Bible or theological issues when dealing with the history of natural philosophy. That is why, for instance, Ulisse Aldrovandi is to this day mainly known for his precise descriptions of plants or insects, and not for his concern with biblical vocabulary that appears in his monumental *Lexicon latino-hebraicum et syro-chaldaicum rerum quae in Sacris Bibliis leguntur* (Latin-Hebrew and Syriac-Chaldee lexicon of topics that can be found in Holy Scriptures). Aldrovandi's work, though heavily relying on Sante Pagnini's and Benito Arias Montano's *Thesauri*, displays a certain originality in the description of natural phenomena. The case of the aloe wood explored by Berns is significant, because it is on the basis of the Hebrew text of Psalm 45 that Aldrovandi established the correspondence of the Hebrew term *'ahalot* with its Greek and Latin equivalents. The Bolognese scholar did not borrow his information only from polyglot editions of the Psalms (such as the 1516 *Psalterium* edited in Genoa by Agostino Giustiniani, the first of a long series of multilingual editions of the Bible printed in the sixteenth century), but grounded his theories also in the Hebrew *Biblia Rabbinica*, published by Bomberg in Venice. Moreover, Aldrovandi was possibly influenced by contemporaneous debates: a significant parallel may be drawn with the Portuguese physician Amatus Lusitanus's *Commentary on Dioscorides' De materia medica*, where Psalm 45 is also scrutinized. Hebrew scientific vocabulary could be adopted to amend imprecise terminology in Pliny's *Natural History*, according to Aldrovandi and his contemporary Melchior Wieland. On the other hand, Renaissance Jewish scholars, besides being knowledgeable in Hebrew and Aramaic, cherished the study of

ancient Greek. This was the case, for instance, for David de' Pomis and Abraham Portaleone, who exchanged their biblical knowledge with contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish scientists by taking advantage of the treatises written by erudite Christian scholars that accompanied the publication of Plantin's polyglot Bible.

In the wide selection of texts quoted by the author, some slight errors of transcription from both Latin and Italian occur (especially in names of persons and places), as well as some misunderstandings in the translation of the quoted texts. For example, on p. 69: "the *querza* [oak] ... alludes to the people of a republic, being ornamental and luxurious and filled with divine grace." The Italian original has "La *querza* ... che cosa significa se non il popolo della repubblica essere d'ornamenti e commodi et divina gratia abbandonato ...," which could be translated: "The oak ... alludes to the people of a republic, when deprived of ornaments, comforts and divine grace...." Such minor flaws notwithstanding, Berns's work represents an excellent paradigm of intellectual inquiry in the field of the history of ideas. This volume is a precious tool for better understanding the scholarly relationships between Italian Jews and Christians at the beginning of the modern era.

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Maud Kozodoy. *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 314 pp.

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Until the summer of 1391, when anti-Jewish riots spread across the Iberian Peninsula, the individual later referred to as Honoratus de Bonafide, a Christian physician and astrologer at the court of King Joan I of Aragon, had been Profayt Duran—a Jew from Perpignan. Although the details of Duran's conversion are lost to us, Kozodoy assumes it was a forced conversion (3). Despite the fact that he converted or was forcefully converted, he nevertheless continued to write in Hebrew and, perhaps even more interestingly, wrote anti-Christian polemical treatises. Like many other Conversos, Duran maintained a dual identity based on an inner/outer dialectic. Although to the outside world, that social space wherein he interacted with others, he was a Christian, his private domain seems to have remained Jewish. In this inner world, he reconceptualized his ancestral religion along rationalist lines because this permitted him to emphasize intention and belief over physical acts of worship. Duran is of such interest to the author because, in her own words, he was able to move eloquently "between external conduct and internal orientation, or between an externally constructed and an internally determined identity" (11).