In 1584, in the Italian village of Montereale, a poor miller named Domenico Scandella, known more commonly by his nickname Menocchio, described his view of the world’s creation:

I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed — just as cheese is made out of milk — and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels, and among the number of angels, there was also God, he too having been created out of that mass at the same time, and he was made lord, with four captains, Lucifer, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. That Lucifer sought to make himself lord equal to the king, who was the majesty of God, and for this arrogance God ordered him driven out of heaven with all his host and his company; and this God later created Adam and Eve and people in great number to take the places of the angels who had been expelled…¹

Menocchio’s vivid cosmogony is preserved in records of his inquisitorial trial, which resulted in his execution a few years later. The miller imagined that the world had formed from a mass of primordial elements from which worm-like creatures crawled and became angels, and he invokes the metaphor of milk fermenting into cheese to illustrate the process. While Menocchio’s cosmogonic ideas caused the authorities to doubt his sanity, his culinary imagery is actually resoundingly similar to ancient ideas about the world’s creation. The fifth-century rabbinic midrash Genesis Rabbah describes the formation of the heavens out of an expanse of water: “This may be compared to milk that was placed in a bowl. Before one drop of resin is placed in it, it quivers, but after a drop of resin is placed in it, it immediately curdles and stands still.”² The midrash extends its metaphor by referencing a verse from Job (26:11), “the pillars of heaven quiver”: “When the drop of resin was put into it, ‘There was evening and there was morning the second day’ (Gen 1:8). As Rav said, ‘[God’s work] was liquid

on the first day and on the second day it solidified." Though Menocchio’s cosmogony sounded preposterous and blasphemous to sixteenth-century ears, it has precedents in ancient religious traditions and scientific lore. His notion that God was created from the primordial mass, rather than having created it himself, evokes ancient debates about the world’s origins and God’s agency in the creation.

Carlo Ginzburg begins his study, The Cheese and the Worms, with Menocchio’s fanciful cosmogony. It is not surprising that this part of Menocchio’s worldview serves as Ginzburg’s point of departure for exploring the cultural universe that Menocchio and those like him inhabited. Menocchio’s cosmogony molded how he regarded the world, how he understood his place within it, and how he conducted himself as a result. It mattered to Menocchio how the universe came into being, and by what forces. His idiosyncratic views also characterized him as a quirky member of his small village, someone with unorthodox opinions, and eccentric charm. The inquisition, though, soon deemed him a heretic with dangerous ideas. For the church authorities, Menocchio’s description of the world’s origins and most importantly of God’s role in creation posed a significant threat to great theological and ecclesiastical principles. Much hung in the balance.

Debates about the proper understanding of the world’s origins are ancient, and creation stories often became the focal point of disputes long before Menocchio’s time. Among the ancient Greeks, the question of creationism was debated by Thales and the pre-Socratics, Plato and Xenophon, the Epicureans, Aristotle, and the Stoics. In his work on creation, Philo of Alexandria attempted to reconcile Platonic and biblical perspectives in response to Jewish and pagan critics who posited insurmountable

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3 Gen. Rab. 4:7.
5 David Sedley explores such debates in Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); see also M. R. Wright, Cosmology in Antiquity (Sciences of Antiquity; New York: Routledge, 1995); Arthur Stanley Pease, “Caeli Enarrant,” HTR 34.3 (1941): 163–200.
tensions between the two worldviews and the communities that espoused them.⁶

The rabbis regarded proper interpretations of problematic biblical verses that could be used to argue against God’s singular power in creation (e.g., Gen 1:1–2, 1:26–27) as litmus tests for acceptable belief.⁷ Disagreements about details in the creation story also distinguished different rabbinic schools from one another.⁸ Christian heresiological treatises often identified the cosmogonic myths of “the heretics” as examples of their dangerous attitudes towards the world, while patristic debates were particularly concerned with the problems of creatio ex nihilo, the origins of matter, and the eternity of creation. These themes challenged the reconcilability of Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian doctrine and became significant concerns for Clement, Origen, Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome, among others.⁹ Cosmogony lay at the center of debates about communal


⁸ Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai argued about the order of the creation of heaven and earth as well as whether the act of creation occurred during the day or also at night (e.g. Gen. Rab. 1:15, 12:14). According to a passage in the Palestinian Talmud, the schools of R. Ishmael and R. Akiva disagreed about whether creation could be studied, Rabbi Akiva maintaining that it was forbidden but Rabbi Ishmael permitting interpretation of Gen 1 (y. Hag. 2:1, 77c), though this dispute is not attested in tannaitic sources and may reflect contemporary debates rather than historical ones.

inclusion and exclusion, legitimate scriptural interpretation, and proper theological opinions.

Galen, writing in the second century CE, recognized the great amount of ink spilled on these debates, but provocatively disregarded inquiry into the origins of the world as fruitless and ultimately irrelevant to one’s conduct in the world. He summarizes a plethora of speculative questions about creation asked by philosophers:

whether this world is self-contained; whether there are more worlds than one; whether there are a huge number of them; and likewise whether this world is created or uncreated; just as also whether, if it had a beginning, some god acted as its craftsman, or no god did, but some irrational and unskilled cause by luck made it as beautiful as if a supremely wise and capable god had supervised its construction. But questions like these contribute nothing to running one’s own household well or minding out appropriately for the affairs of one’s city, or dealing justly and sociably with relatives, fellow-citizens, and foreigners … For these and many other such questions are perfectly useless for ‘moral and civic’ virtues and activities, just as they are for the cure of mental ailments.10

Despite the fact that Galen devoted substantial energy to defending the idea of divine craftsmanship, in works such as his treatise On the usefulness of parts and his commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, he nonetheless insisted that speculation about the origins of the universe led nowhere beyond intellectual and scientific musings. They did not, in his view, affect domestic activities or political affairs.

Yet in contrast to Galen, the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius maintained that truly understanding the world required a firm grasp of creation since all things followed from it. “For I now begin,” he says, “to make my discourse on the lofty law of god and heaven above, and shall reveal the building blocks from which all things are fashioned … since it is from these that all proceed.”11 For Lucretius, what people believed about the origin of the world shaped the way they behaved in the world. “Therefore we must consider well celestial happenings, and by what principle the sun and moon run on their courses, and all phenomena upon the earth …”12

Following Lucretius, the essays in this volume demonstrate that wonderings about creation featured prominently in the ancient world and penetrated into social, political and ethical spheres far beyond the abstract musings of philosophers.13 The diverse ways in which Jews and Christians im-

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12 Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I.127–31 (Stallings, 7).
13 On the reception of Gen 1 among Jews, Christians and Greco-Roman philosophers, see the collection of essays in George H. van Kooten, ed., The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Reinterpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy,
agined the world’s creation informed their conceptions of past, present and future, the interpretation of their sacred texts, their understanding of the relationship between the divine and human worlds, their ethics, space, art and ritual practice – in short, how they constructed their own worlds and chose to live their lives.\textsuperscript{14}

By exploring a broad range of texts and contexts, from the Second Temple period through the emergence of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, this volume underscores how thinking about creation contributed to a wide spectrum of attempts at articulating the relationship among God, the cosmos, and humanity. For fourth-century inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount and newly-built Church of the Holy Sepulcher were not only sites of devotion and worship but also sat on the exact location of the world’s origin where the \textit{tehom} of Gen 1:2 lay subdued beneath a magical rock. In synagogues and churches throughout the region, the weekly liturgy reenacted the creation story, inserted worshippers into the history of salvation, and reminded them of the fragility of human existence in contrast to the permanence of God’s work. In Egypt, ascetics strove to attain the original glory of Adam, and interpreted the union between Adam and Eve as a symbol for the renunciation of sexuality. For Valentinian Christians, the belief that humanity was originally divided into three classes supported their community’s ethical expectations. In Christian schools, the placement of the creation story at the beginning of Moses’ Torah reinforced a range of pedagogical functions and communal identity markers in and out of scholastic settings. Rabbinic conceptions of procreation and the formation of the fetus were modeled on accounts of the world’s creation, while bans against the study of creation highlighted the rabbis’ fear of blaspheming God, revealing secrets, and testing the limits of human knowledge. It is a basic contention of this volume that for ancient thinkers knowledge of origins – \textit{aitia} – was key for making sense of their own experience of the world.

Several central texts and traditions form a common backbone for discussions about cosmogony in antiquity. There are, of course, the foundational sources from the Hebrew Bible – the creation stories in Gen 1–2, the agonistic elements preserved in many of the Psalms, and the cosmogonic themes in Wisdom literature, including Job, Proverbs, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Greco-Roman philosophical writings such as Plato’s

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Timaeus offered compelling theories with which Jews and Christians felt compelled to contend and reconcile the biblical traditions. Texts from the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, added additional layers of meaning to the Jewish scriptures. These complex webs of creation narratives provided Jews and Christians with an overlapping cosmogonic vocabulary from which to draw and upon which to build.

We have organized the volume into four thematic sections: I. Scripture and Interpretation; II. Theology and Anthropology; III. Pedagogy and Ethics; and IV. Space and Ritual. While each contribution touches upon many interrelated themes, the divisions are intended to highlight the several spheres of life in which creation theories played a role.

Part I: Scripture and Interpretation

In “Made to Order: Creation in Jubilees,” James VanderKam analyzes Jubilees’ creative rewriting of Gen 1–2. He suggests that the author looked in two directions as he composed his account of creation: backwards, to his base text in Gen 1–2, and outwards, to discussions and debates about creation present in his own time. Through an analysis of Jub. 2, in which the narrative departs significantly from the text of Genesis, VanderKam considers whether the author was responding to contemporary cosmogonic traditions popular in the Hellenistic world.

VanderKam demonstrates how the author took great care to write his narrative in such a way that would prevent potential misinterpretations of Genesis concerning agents of creation other than the God of Israel (e.g., Gen 1:20 “Let the waters bring forth…”; 1:24 “Let the earth bring forth…”; 1:26 “Let us make man…”). The author of Jubilees sought to show beyond doubt that God alone was responsible for creation. His careful rewording of such passages subtly emphasized that God had no help from anyone or anything in the process of creation, neither primordial earth, nor waters, nor angels – all possibilities left open in the text of Genesis. VanderKam cautiously suggests that in denying any creative agency to forces other than God, the author was consciously responding to traditional notions in Greek cosmogonic thought about the generative roles played by earth (e.g. in Hesiod’s Theogony) and water (e.g., in the philosophy of Thales), two of the four constitutive elements of Hellenistic science.

Furthermore, VanderKam analyzes how Jubilees’ treatment of the Sabbath highlights the election of Israel and bars any possibility that the Sabbath could be seen as a special day intended for all people. Jubilees draws
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a parallel between God’s twenty-two creative works before the Sabbath, and the twenty-two generations from Adam to Jacob. By implication, Jacob and the Sabbath are both blessed, and it is Jacob’s descendants who celebrate the Sabbath with God and the angels (2:20–21). VanderKam suggests that the author’s exclusivist view of Sabbath observance may hint at a contemporary debate over “the wisdom of such segregation.”

Ancient anxieties over proper interpretation of the Genesis creation account also lie at the center of Yair Furstenberg’s essay, “The Rabbinic Ban on Ma’aseh Bereshit: Sources, Contexts and Concerns.” The ban on speculating about creation is first recorded in tannaitic sources of the second and third centuries (the Mishnah, Tosefta and Tannaitic Midrashim), and yet most previous scholarly attempts to uncover its origin and purpose have relied on elaborations of the rule in later sources (the Talmuds and Genesis Rabbah). These sources suggest that the rabbis were anxious about the proliferation of specific heretical interpretations that involved multiple primordial powers and potentially negative creative forces present before the world’s creation. While such concerns do indeed seem to have preoccupied later rabbis, just as they did the Christian heresiologists, Furstenberg finds no traces of such concerns in the earlier rabbinic texts that first set forth the prohibition. By turning, instead, to sources from the Second Temple period, Furstenberg argues that the initial rabbinic impulse to curtail study of biblical verses about the world’s creation stemmed from a widely-held concern about properly understanding the mysteries of creation, and not questioning the logic of the created world or the Creator. Maintaining God’s honor, not the potential of competing heretical sects, initially motivated the rabbis in the tannaitic period to limit the study of creation.

Rabbinic sources are not the only Jewish texts that warn against inquiring into the unknown realms of existence. The Wisdom of Ben Sira (3:21-22) urges its readers not to search out “what is hidden from you,” for one has “no business with mysteries.” For Ben Sira, such mysteries involve the world’s past and future, which are generally only accessible to and thus also concealed by God. In the Mishnah’s formulation of its prohibition, it too forbids inquiry into “what is ahead and what is behind.” Furstenberg thus locates the Mishnah’s ban within the context of Ben Sira’s anxiety about accessing knowledge that ought to remain beyond human comprehension. Several texts from Qumran that appropriate Wisdom literature also provide a helpful context for locating the Mishnaic prohibition. In contrast to Ben Sira, who discourages the quest for unattainable knowledge, multiple references among the Dead Sea Scroll texts to the raz nihyeh, “the mystery that is to be,” urge the study of these mysteries precisely in order to attain a better appreciation for God, the creation, and the trajectory of world history. Through these sources, again, it becomes clear, according to
Furstenberg, that the Mishnah has in mind such inquiry into the secrets of creation, which was promoted in the esoteric circles at Qumran but deemed potentially dangerous and blasphemous by Ben Sira and the rabbis who banned it.

Rather than expressing anxiety about what preceded the world’s creation or that which lies beyond the created world, the mishnaic ban as it is presented in the Mishnah and associated tannaitic midrashim is most concerned with maintaining respect for human fate and God’s governance of the universe from the moment of its creation. It was only in later interpretations of these sources, in subsequent centuries, that the rabbis became alarmed by the threat of inappropriate inquiry into primordial times and speculation about the cosmos, its origins, and its creator(s) by those whom they considered heretics.

While VanderKam and Furstenberg focus on attempts to curtail exploration of creation beyond what is found in Genesis, Geoffrey Smith studies a text that uses the biblical narrative to develop a complex cosmogonic myth. In “Constructing a Christian Universe: Mythological Exegesis of Ben Sira 24 and John’s Prologue in the Gospel of Truth,” Smith analyzes the biblical underpinnings of the creation story from a Gospel that most scholars believe reflects the theology of a Valentinian Christian.

Unlike other Valentinian creation stories, which involve characters such as Wisdom (Sophia) and a demiurge, the Gospel of Truth relates that the world was produced by Error (Planê), personified as female. Its cosmic drama begins with the pre-existent heavenly beings searching for God, their maker; yet because they existed within God, they could not find him. Their ignorance of the Father led to fear, and as they became terrified, the power of Error exploited their situation. Error created the material world to entice them into a dreadful life, and finished her deception by enshrouding humanity in a perpetual “mist” of ignorance.

While previous studies of the Gospel of Truth have attempted to explain this unique creation story by reference to other Valentinian myths, Smith emphasizes the need to read it on its own terms, and not as a cryptic variation of an assumed Valentinian ur-myth. He therefore asks, “How would someone with no knowledge of ‘the Valentinian myth’ interpret the myth of Error in the Gospel of Truth?” In answering this question, Smith investigates the author’s interpretation of two foundational stories from scripture, namely the prologue to the Gospel of John, and the tale of Wisdom’s descent as a “mist” in Ben Sira 24. In light of the textual fluidity of John’s prologue in the second century and the wide range of its interpretation by Christian exegetes, Smith demonstrates that the author had a text of John 1:3 before him that read “apart from him nothing came about.” The author identified “him” with the Father himself (not with the Logos), and inter-
preted “nothing” substantially, as a reference to the phantasmal world of deception created by Error, which, as Smith shows, the Gospel of Truth frequently associates with the abstract concept of nothingness. Therefore this Gospel’s creation myth explains that “all things” (the heavens) were created by the Father, while “nothing” (the world of Error) did indeed come about apart from him – that is, apart from his will. Yet if all heavenly things were created by the Father, why, then, does John say that no one has ever seen him except the Son (John 1:18)? And from where did “the darkness” arise (John 1:5)? The author of the Gospel of Truth sets forth his mythological explanation, including the myth of Error, to resolve these theological problems.

Smith offers an intriguing suggestion regarding the scriptural inspiration for the Gospel of Truth’s description of Error enveloping humanity with a mist. He points to the same, rather rare metaphor of “mist” used by Ben Sira 24:3 to describe the descent of Wisdom to the earth, and suggests that the author may have deliberately adapted the image in a creative inversion by applying it to his own feminine personification of Error. Thus, in keeping with the prologue of John, life in this world is marked by ignorance of the Father, rather than the experience of his wisdom.

Finally, Smith discusses how the soteriology of the Gospel of Truth’s myth takes seriously John 1:18’s teaching that the world did not know the Father until the Son revealed him. The Gospel of Truth does not criticize the world of matter per se, but rather Error who created it. Despite the usual scholarly generalizations about Valentinian views of the created world, the theology set forth here is not anti-materialistic or anti-cosmic, but rather offers hope, through the arrival of Christ, for the improvement of a world in which most people live in ignorance.

Part II: Theology and Anthropology

In “The Emergence of Monotheistic Creation Theology in Hellenistic Judaism,” Maren Niehoff examines the genesis of a novel theological concept – that the Creator alone is the only true god – in the writings of Philo and Josephus as they responded to the fluctuating philosophical currents and political realia of the first century. Niehoff argues that the city of Rome, with its marked preference for Stoicism, was the setting in which both authors first encountered the need to harmonize Judaism with Stoic natural theology. In a climate in which anti-Jewish sentiment was on the rise, Philo and Josephus hoped to convince their Roman audiences that Judaism offered the best, and most original, exposition of Stoic ideals regard-
ing God’s eternal care for creation and humanity’s ability to know God by studying nature.

Niehoff traces a shift in Philo’s views on creation theology from the treatises of his earlier *Allegorical Commentary* on scripture, composed in Alexandria, to those of his later *Exposition of the Law*, written after his extended stay in Rome (ca. 38–41 CE). In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo rejects Stoic theories that identify God with creation itself, or which speak of God’s immanence therein. Instead, he emphasizes the Platonic doctrine of God’s utter transcendence, his existence beyond creation, and the latter’s total dependence on God. Accordingly, the “young” Philo taught that people cannot know God through the creation, by observing its orderly movements, as the Stoics believed. The only way to find the transcendent deity is to leave nature behind altogether, to “fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can,” as Plato famously prescribed in the *Theaetetus*.

However, one sees a change in Philo’s attitude toward Stoicism in the later treatises of his great *Exposition of the Law*, which were written after his visit to Rome. Here, Philo emphasizes views that are compatible with Stoic natural theology, especially the idea that God’s providence is eternally active in creation, and, as a consequence, that one can know God through creation, that is, by observing and studying natural phenomena. Philo thus presents Abraham as the philosopher *par excellence*, since it was he who first formulated monotheism by studying the movements of the heavens and, in contrast to the Chaldean astrologers of his era, inferred that there is one true God, a divine intelligence, who created and continues to maintain their order. Moreover, Abraham realized all this long before his visit to Egypt, lest anyone be misled by the claims of critics who say that Judaism is a mere permutation of Egyptian religion. According to Philo, quite the opposite is the case. Abraham anticipated the very theories of both the Stoics and the Egyptians. Niehoff then identifies nearly the same exposition of Abraham in Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*.

Why the shift in Philo’s theology and its whole-hearted adoption by Josephus? Niehoff suggests an answer that accounts for both intellectual and socio-political trends in the first century. She argues that Roman sympathies toward Judaism present in the age of Augustus gave way to hatred and slander in subsequent generations. Varro and Strabo had showed a rather open-minded attitude toward the customs of Judaism because they sought to find philosophical wisdom embedded in the ancestral traditions of ancient peoples. But the post-Augustan age witnessed a nasty turn. The

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15 For a list of the treatises which belong to each collection, see Maren Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xiii–xiv, 7–8.
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ethnic tensions in Alexandria, which erupted in pogroms against the Jewish inhabitants of the city, were followed by a failed Jewish revolt against Rome which was bitterly drawn out for several years in the land of Israel. The new socio-political climate manifested itself in the intellectual sphere, with writers such as Apion and Charaemon (Nero’s tutor) criticizing Jews and relegating the value of their writings and customs to the waste bin of history. It was in response to such criticism, Niehoff suggests, that Philo and Josephus shaped their expositions of the biblical creation story. They hoped to persuade their less than sympathetic Roman audiences that the ideals of Stoic natural theology were embedded in Moses’ account of creation, and, in fact, that it was Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people, who first introduced the concept of monotheism into religious discourse long ago.

Tuomas Rasimus’ essay, “The Archangel Michael in Ophite Creation Mythology,” investigates the origins of Yaldabaoth, the malicious creator-angel and parody of the God of Israel who figures prominently in the mythology of the Christian Ophite sect. Rasimus argues that Ophite depictions of Yaldabaoth as a lion and serpent were likely adapted from speculation about the archangel Michael already present in Second Temple Jewish thought. The essay traces traditions in three key sources of Ophite mythology: the Ophite Diagram described by Origen in Contra Celsum, which identified Yaldabaoth with Michael and depicts him as a lion; Bishop Irenaeus’ epitome of Ophite exegesis of Genesis, where Michael is portrayed as both the offspring of Yaldabaoth and the serpent in Eden; and the Apocryphon of John, where Michael largely recedes from view, and Yaldabaoth himself is depicted as a hybrid of a lion and serpent.

According to Origen, the Ophite Diagram revealed the identities of the seven demons whom the soul encounters on its ascent to heaven. Each of them has two names – an archon name and an angel name – as well as an animal shape. The principle curiosity is that the diagram identifies the chief ruler as Michael and Yaldabaoth, and describes him as a lion. Rasimus argues that the association between Yaldabaoth, Michael and the lion may have been inspired by earlier merkabah speculation, which identified the four traditional archangels with the zoomorphic creatures of God’s chariot and assigned the lion’s face to Michael. The same underlying tradition, Rasimus suggests, may also have ascribed four prominent names of God (Yao, Elohim, Adonay, Sabaoth) to each of the archangels, with Michael bearing the tetragrammaton, YHWH or Yao. The origins of the obscure name Yaldabaoth, then, may be found in an amalgamation of God’s four names, perhaps arrived at through liturgical repetition, which rendered “Yao-Elohim-Adonay-Sabaoth” as Yaldabaoth. Rasimus argues that the Ophites inherited these traditions, but demonized the creator-God, Yal-
dabaoth, by demoting him to the status of an apostate angel and by identifying him with the archangel who bears his name, Michael-Yao, the traditional prince of the Jews.

Furthermore, Rasimus shows how the Ophite Diagram reflects a positive endorsement of anthropomorphic theology. The animal shapes of the demons in the diagram correspond, with only one exception, to the four creatures of God’s chariot in Ezekiel’s famous vision – a man, lion, bull, and eagle. The difference between Ezekiel and the diagram, however, is that the latter replaces the face of the man with the face of a serpent. Rasimus offers the intriguing suggestion that the discrepancy reflects an Ophite commitment to anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Ophites imagined God himself as the “First Human,” the archetype after whose image and likeness Adam was created (Gen 1:26). Therefore in order to reinforce the stark contrast between the true, divine Human and the bestial demons, the Ophites replaced the human face of Ezekiel’s vision with that of a snake. Rasimus observes that while many ancient exegetes struggled with anthropomorphic descriptions of God, and sought to explain them away, the Ophites embraced God’s human qualities as positive characteristics of true divinity, and marked the demonic pretenders as monstrous animals.

In the next essay, “Constant Creation: (Pro)creation in Palestinian Rabbinic Midrashim,” Gwynn Kessler explores the relationship between anthropology and theology in rabbinic cosmogonies by examining rabbinic texts that compare God’s creation of the cosmos to the creation of a human embryo. Her essay investigates earlier streams of rabbinic tradition that fed into Midrash Tanhuma’s idea that “the creation of an embryo is like the creation of the world.” Despite rabbinic bans on cosmogonic speculation found in Mishnah Hagigah and Genesis Rabbah (as discussed by Yair Furstenberg in this volume), Kessler observes that rabbinic sources do not share the same reservations when discussing human procreation. Paying close attention to rabbinic explanations of an embryo’s creation, then, provides a new avenue for understanding rabbinic attitudes about the creation of the world.

Passages in both Genesis Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah use the same metaphor, anchored in an exegesis of Job 10:10–12 (of the curdling of milk with a drop of resin), to describe the biological formation of the embryo in a woman’s womb and the creation of the world. According to Leviticus Rabbah’s interpretation of Job 38:8–11, God creates each human embryo and protects it during the nine months of gestation just as he originally contained the primordial sea as it burst forth from the womb of the cosmos. In this midrash, each element of the sea stands in for an element of procreation: the womb, the amniotic sac, the placenta, the three trimesters of pregnancy. Moreover, Kessler demonstrates how Leviticus Rabbah re-
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moves procreative agency from people, women and men, and instead places it in the hands of God, the true source of all creation. God’s creation of the first man (adam ha-rishon) alongside the heavens and the sea anticipates God’s intervention in the formation of each human embryo in future generations. Thus, rather than presenting creation as a mysterious act of the past, and procreation as a fundamentally human activity, these rabbinic sources portray creation and procreation as ongoing processes in which God’s creative powers are continually made manifest. Not only did God create the world and form the first man at the beginning of time, but God has continued to create and recreate the world at each moment by providing life to humanity. Indeed, according to one rabbinic passage, “each person is a small world.”

By comparing creation and procreation, cosmogony is presented not as something beyond human speculation, but as something that is both searchable and knowable. At the same time, the creation of the embryo is elevated from the realm of the mundane and becomes as divine as the creation of the cosmos. The interplay between these two discourses merges rabbinic theology and anthropology, inserting God into the very center of the human sphere and projecting each individual back into the original, mysterious moment of creation.

In “Corpus Hermeticum, Tractate III: The Genesis of a Genesis,” Christian Wildberg provides a fresh interpretation of an obscure Hermetic cosmogony, the text of which has long been regarded as hopelessly corrupt and therefore subject to a host of conjectural emendations by editors caught in “philological desperation.” Wildberg investigates this cosmogony’s own genesis by the application of a theory that emphasizes the fluidity of manuscripts as they were handled by authors, readers, and copyists in different circumstances. On the one hand, Wildberg’s text-critical approach is conservative in so far as it adheres as closely as possible to the text preserved in the manuscripts and keeps emendations to a minimum; on the other hand, it is radical, as it seeks to account for corrupt passages with the hypothesis that they originated as the marginal glosses of an ancient reader who responded critically to the text in hand by jotting down notes in the margin (not unlike many modern readers). Finally, according to Wildberg’s hypothesis, these marginalia were, at some later point, accidentally incorporated into the main text by a scribe who had little care for, or understanding of, what he was copying – a process Wildberg describes as mechanical interpolation. Thus, Wildberg concludes, “C.H. III is the genesis of not only one world, but of two parallel worlds, radically different from one another, yet tortuously intertwined.”

Through a detailed analysis of the Greek text, Wildberg unravels the otherwise convoluted cosmogony into two individual voices – that of the
original author, and that of the later reader and glossist. The author of the cosmogony wanted to celebrate the unique relationship between God, cosmos, and humanity, and to highlight the immortality of human beings. Thus he placed the creation of Man directly after the creation of the cosmos – itself a living creature – and then proceeded to the topic of astrology, which he described in entirely positive terms as a god-given gift for discovering God’s will and obtaining prosperity on earth. However, according to Wildberg’s hypothesis, a later reader, well-versed in the story of creation from Gen 1, and with a keen interest in astrology, reacted strongly to what he saw as the text’s naïve optimism. In the margins of his own copy, he scribbled out his response to the text’s focus on humanity by commenting on the creation of all different sorts of animals and plants (indeed, according to Genesis, God created man last of all). Then, in reaction to the author’s vision of an enchanted universe replete with goods things, he insists on the importance of astrology for the discovery “of good and bad things...” For this reader, astrology was not only for discovering favorable events and profiting from them, but also a tool for learning about the malevolence of Fate, and trying to avoid it.

*Corpus Hermeticum* III offers “snapshots” of a cosmogony on the move, from the author to a reader, and eventually to a scribe who thoughtlessly combined the two voices. Wildberg’s hypothesis thus suggests a new understanding of the kind of people who read Hermetic literature in antiquity. Instead of members of liturgical brotherhoods engaged in the pious reading of Hermes’ sacred discourses, the evidence suggests readers who reacted to and argued with the ideas they found expressed therein.

Part III: Pedagogy and ethics

In “Moses the Pedagogue: Procopius, Philo, and Didymus on the Pedagogy of the Creation Account,” Richard Layton analyses the scholastic context in which the famed rhetor, Procopius of Gaza (c. 460–530 CE), wrote commentaries on the Octateuch, the prologue of which dwells on the significance of the creation story for the education of Christians. The reading of Gen 1 at the beginning of Lent, when many new catechumens were baptized, offered an opportunity to consolidate the Christian community around the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, an affirmation of God’s total sovereignty over all creation, and therefore combat threats posed by rival Christians and pagan philosophers who taught that the cosmos was co-eternal with God.

Layton shows how theories regarding creation played an important role in the polemics between Christian and pagan intellectuals in late antiquity.
In the mid-fourth century, Emperor Julian criticized the quality of Christian beliefs, and so the integrity of the Christian community, by contrasting Moses’ brief creation story with Plato’s lengthy and elaborate account in the \textit{Timaeus}. In the Emperor’s eyes, Moses gave an obscure and inadequate explanation of the world’s origins, even omitting such important topics as the creation of angels. In contrast, Christian intellectuals maintained that the pagan notion of a cosmos co-eternal with God was simply an impious denial of God’s total sovereignty over creation, and a threat to the Church’s solidarity. By Procopius’ time, tension between Christians and pagans was further aggravated by the fact that while Christians had risen to prominent positions in government, pagans remained influential as professors in the universities where young Christian elites were educated. There, the vulnerable minds of the youth could be lured into the deceptions of human wisdom.

Procopius therefore used the prologue to promote an alternative education for young Christians, a Christian “school” in which they would surpass human wisdom and progress to the divine wisdom set forth by Moses in the Torah. Layton shows how Procopius draws upon, revises and refocuses the arguments of two important Alexandrian predecessors. First, Procopius builds upon the work of Philo Judaeus, who in his \textit{Life of Moses} and \textit{On Creation} sought to represent Moses as the best of all possible Lawgivers, whose Torah conforms to the natural law woven into the fabric of creation, and exceeds the inadequate legal theories advocated by pagan philosophers for the inculcation of civic virtue. Second, Procopius adapted Didymus the Blind’s commentaries on Zachariah and Genesis so as to elucidate the meaning of Moses’ vision of God’s “back” (Exod 33:23), not in an anthropomorphic or eschatological sense, but rather as a reference to the creation of the world. When Moses sees God’s “back,” Procopius explains, he witnessed those things that come “after” God, that is, the works of creation. The creation story therefore becomes a moment of \textit{theoria} in which Moses advances beyond mundane education. Thus the placement of the creation narrative at the start of the Torah serves as a prophaeutic, to wean the young Christian mind off idolatrous reverence for creation, and instead to point to God the creator. Moses’ cosmogony, which emphasizes God as the cause of all things, and the contingency of all things on him, is the foundation for true education.

Moving from the scholastic setting of Layton’s study, the next essay focuses on the relationship between cosmogony and ethical lifestyles among Valentinian Christians. In “‘Humanity came to be according to three essential types’: Anthropogony and Ethical Responsibility in the \textit{Tripartite Tractate},” Alexander Kocar responds critically to the traditional scholarly view that Valentinians had no concern for ethics since they believed that
they, as spiritually endowed people, were “saved by nature.” In antiquity, critics accused Valentinians of elitism because of their teaching that humanity was created in three distinct classes—pneumatics (spiritual people), psychics (ensouled people), and hylics (material people). The most vehement critic of the Valentinians, Bishop Irenaeus, argued that since they believe that they are saved by nature, they ascribe no value to ethics or to the ministry of the savior in the world.

Kocar compares the *Tripartite Tractate*’s solution to the problem of determinism to the way Stoics answered similar accusations. Stoics posited that people cannot control the stream of events in which they are swept along, but they can choose how to respond to those events. Furthermore, they believed that the way one chooses to respond has a bearing on one’s moral character, for better or worse. Kocar argues that the *Tripartite Tractate* maintains a similar view: moral character depends on how one responds to the arrival of the savior. Pneumatic people are saved because they rush to Jesus and embrace him immediately; hylics are damned because they reject him straightaway. The psychics, however, are in the middle, and can be swayed toward the direction of the pneumatics or the hylics. How they live reflects what kind of person they are. The importance of ethical behavior in the tractate is clearly seen in its exhortation to live in accordance with the Father’s will. Thus Kocar argues that the boundaries between the spiritual, psychic and hylic classes of humanity appeared fixed in theory, but were actually fluid in practice. Changing one’s behavior could change one’s class. Movement from one class to another was understood as possible because of the tractate’s cosmogonic principles: the three types of humanity were originally patterned after the three dispositions of the Logos, and the first human being was created with the essence of all three types within himself.

Finally, Kocar explores the biblical underpinnings of the *Tripartite Tractate*’s notion of the three classes of humanity and the role ethics plays in its view of human salvation. The way the text describes the hylics as utterly condemned by their outright rejection of the savior reflects an interpretation of John 3:17–21, where those who “believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already.” The tractate’s notion that each type of humanity can be identified “by their fruit” clearly reflects Jesus’ preaching in the synoptic tradition that “You will know them by their fruit” (Matt 7:16; cf. Luke 6:43–45). Its view of the final judgment and eschatological *apokatastasis* draws on Matt 25’s teaching that humanity will be divided between those on the right and those on the left depending on the quality of their works in this life. And the final obliteration of distinctions among people in the *apokatastasis* is clearly
inspired by Pauline formulas ("no male and female, nor slave and free," etc.).

In the last essay of this section, "Recovering Adam’s Lost Glory: Nag Hammadi Codex II in its Egyptian Monastic Environment," Lance Jenott discusses the monastic goal of returning to humanity’s original condition in Adam before the Fall, and how Nag Hammadi Codex II encourages its readers to pursue that goal through a life of sexual asceticism. Jenott departs from traditional approaches to the Nag Hammadi Codices that view them as sources for Gnosticism in the second and third centuries, and instead focuses on the Coptic readers of the manuscripts in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Codex II contains Coptic versions of some of the most famous non-canonical Christian writings from antiquity, such as the Gospels of Thomas and Philip and the Apocryphon of John, which have long been recognized for their strongly encratic teachings that exhort readers to renounce human sexuality and pursue a spiritual marriage with Christ. How do these texts relate to the religious culture of late antique Egypt? Who would have been interested in collecting them? And what difference would it make hermeneutically if they were read together in a single volume? Jenott analyses how several of the texts in Codex II use the original union between Adam and Eve as a symbol not for marriage between man and woman, but for the soul’s marriage to Christ in a life of celibacy. Codex II’s exegesis of Genesis and encratic ethics supported monastic ideals regarding Adam in Coptic Egypt. By renouncing sexuality and receiving Christ as one’s bridegroom, the ascetic could recover the glory Adam once possessed in Paradise, even transforming his or her body into a divine light.

The three papers in this section thus highlight the centrality of themes about the creation of the world and the first human in texts that were used to instruct their readers in proper conduct, whether pedagogical, ethical, or spiritual.

Part IV: Space and Ritual

Naomi Koltun-Fromm’s essay, “Rock Over Water: Pre-Historic Rocks and Primordial Waters from Creation to Salvation in Jerusalem,” examines competition between Jews and Christians to establish cosmogonic significance in the sacred topography of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was considered a holy place because of the sanctuary it once housed and the historical events believed to have taken place on the Temple Mount, including Abraham’s binding of Isaac and God’s appearance to David. For the Letter of Aristeas and Jubilees, the mount was the very center of the
universe and the cosmic navel from which the world emerged. Yet after the
destruction of the temple in 70 CE, as Jewish attachment to the city’s holi-
ness intensified, new rabbinic traditions emerged about a natural rock,
called even shetiyah in Hebrew, that served as the foundation stone not only
of the temple but of the entire world. It was from this rock that God be-
gan to create the world. A targumic tradition insists that this very rock served not only as the source of the world’s freshwater but also as a plug that prevented the chaotic waters of creation (the tehom) from flooding the world. According to this tradition, the Holy of Holies had been located di-
rectly above this rock. The fact that the temple was now in ruins and una-
ble to keep the waters at bay made the world all the more vulnerable.

At precisely the time that Jews were developing traditions about the
even shetiyah, Christians were also ascribing significance to sacred rocks
in the holy city. Eusebius records Constantine’s discovery of Jesus’ rock-
cut tomb, which was believed to be hallowed from the very beginning of
time, and the rock of Golgotha came to be associated with Adam’s skull
and the waters of creation. These sacred rocks added a mythological di-
mension to the churches constructed in the new Christian topography of
Jerusalem. Koltun-Fromm shows how many of the cosmogonic themes as-
associated with the Jewish temple were transferred to Constantine’s new
sanctuary built in a different part of town as a physical replacement of the
former Jewish sanctuary with its primordial foundation rock. Thus two
communities, Jewish and Christian, developed parallel mythologies
grounded in the geography of Jerusalem, and claimed the location of their
holiest sanctuaries as the very spot of the world’s creation from which life-
giving waters flow. Implicit in these simultaneously developing traditions
was a sense of competition, a rush to claim specific sites as sacred not only
in the past, but also in the present, as potent places of access to the divine,
now and in the eschatological future.

While Koltun-Fromm identifies the role that cosmogonic themes played
in efforts to mark the geography of Jerusalem, Mika Ahuvia’s essay,
“Darkness Upon the Abyss: Depicting Cosmogony in Late Antiquity,” fo-
cuses on creation motifs on the interior of Christian churches and the effect
they had on worshippers. Ahuvia examines images of the abyss (the tehom of Gen 1:2) found in fifth- and sixth-century churches in the
Transjordan region. Congregants would have been familiar with the abyss not only from passing reference to it in the opening passages of Genesis, but also from its frequent appearance in the Psalms, which played a central role in Jewish and Christian liturgical prayers. The Psalms preserve traces of cosmogonic myths from ancient Babylon that depict the abyss as a threateningly powerful source of water that once covered the earth before God contained it during his work of creation. In later periods, it was be-
lieved that the abyss and its waters were accessed through temple rituals and libation ceremonies during the Feast of Tabernacles, while the Gospel of John (7:37–38) presents Jesus as a substitute for the temple’s primordial living waters. Other texts, including a prayer from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a rabbinic dialogue preserved in *Genesis Rabbah*, and a homily by Basil of Caesarea, highlight the continued centrality of the abyss in liturgical as well as exegetical and heresiological contexts.

Ahuvia argues that the ambiguity of the abyss in the cosmology of the Hellenistic Near East was key to its enduring resonance. Congregations may have incorporated visual abyss motifs into their sanctuaries to remind viewers of God’s providential care of the cosmos, his subordination of chaotic waters to divine order, as well as to promote the typological understanding of Jesus as the living water, already present with God at creation. Rather than dismissing images of the abyss as merely decorative, Ahuvia shows the ways in which these depictions convey a community’s values and anxieties within a space – the church – that served as a site of cultural formation. As she puts it, “What better place to raise a theological knot and unravel it properly than in the church?” Ahuvia reminds us that grappling with cosmogonic themes was not limited to educated elites, as symbols adorned the spaces of ordinary people in areas both rural and urban. They reminded people of the fragility of life and the dark forces that lay dormant in the world from its very beginning.

Finally, Ophir Münz-Manor’s essay, “The Ritualization of Creation in Jewish and Christian Liturgical Texts from Late Antiquity,” continues the analysis of space through a discussion of ritually-recited poetry on the theme of creation. Like Ahuvia, Münz-Manor attempts to access more diverse audiences than those of exclusively scholarly milieus by analyzing liturgical texts. Through the recitation of these texts, entire communities placed themselves within a salvation history that began at the inception of the universe and continued into their own lifetimes and beyond. Rituals that invoke cosmogonic moments in history “make present primordial times” and highlight the link between the moment of creation and the present.

Münz-Manor focuses on creation themes in rituals of atonement and the consecration of holy places, and highlights intriguing parallels between Jewish and Christian poetry in the late antique East. He first presents sources from West-Syrian and Byzantine anaphoras concerning Jesus’ deeds in the Last Supper, and *piyyutim* describing the temple ritual of the Day of Atonement. In both these groups of prayers, the retelling of the creation story appears to be associated with the atoning deeds of Jesus and the temple cult. In a second set of Jewish and Syriac-Christian poems, the desert tabernacle is presented as a microcosm of the created order. The taber-
nacle, and by extension the space of the church or synagogue in which each poem was recited, corresponded to the entirety of the cosmos; its construction completed the process of creation, a theme complemented by the temple and tabernacle imagery that adorned synagogue and church floor mosaics. In synagogues and churches, where these texts were performed, a powerful ritual experience was thus created that molded individual and communal identities through the ritual narration of creation.

We welcome the reader into this journey through ancient visions of the world’s creation. In the diversity of these visions, as in the diversity of approaches employed by the authors of these essays, we hope the reader will discover new insights on Judaism and Christianity in antiquity.
There is no an independent school of Late Antiquity study in Russia the experts operate either in the field of antiquity, or in the field of Byzantine studies. The concept became quite well-known in our country, perhaps, since the beginning of the XXI-st. century, but the period of its development and European recognition accounts for 1970-80-ies, when the change of historical paradigms took place in scientific practice of only one generation of historians. During this period there was a real Â«explosionÂ» in historical science concerning the study of late antiquity [12]. Such interest of researchers in this era is not an accidental one. Article appearing in Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity. Author: Mika Ahuvia. Publisher: Mohr Siebeck. Date: 2013. Read More about Darkness Upon the Abyss: Depicting Cosmogony in Late Antiquity here. Related Regions. Middle East. Zoroastrianism in late antiquity. Article written by: Ursula Sims-Williams. Themes: Sacred texts, Zoroastrianism. Written in Pahlavi it describes a cosmogony and cosmography based on the Avesta. It includes a detailed account of the perfect creation of Ahura Mazda, or rather Ohrmazd as he is called in Pahlavi, which was attacked by the evil Ahriman and afflicted with disease and death, but which will finally be restored to perfection at the end of time. The opening shows the beginning of chapter 27: Â“On the nature of the plantsÂ” India, 17th or 18th century. View images from this item (1). "Authors, along with editors and publisher, are to be congratulated for challenging boundaries -- Jewish and orthodox and nonorthodox Christian -- to pursue this shared theme of cosmogony." - -Steven Thompson, Review of Biblical Literature, 7.16.2015. About the Author. Lance Jenott, studied History, Classics, and Religion at the University of Washington in Seattle (BA, MA) and Princeton University (PhD); lecturer in Religion at Princeton University. Product details. The cosmogony begins, as is usual with cosmogonies, by thinking away all things in the world. It is remarkable that the empty void is expressed by first thinking away civilization, temples, gardens, houses, cities; the ancient cities are even given by name: "Nippur had not been built, E-Kura [its temple] had not been constructed.Â Not unfrequently the cosmogonic functions of the egg are attributed to a lotus-bud. In one of the inscriptions of Denderah, Pharaoh hands a lotus flower to the solar deity, saying: "I hand thee the flower which arose in the beginning, the glorious lily on the great sea. Thou camest forth in the city of Chmun out of its leaves, and thou didst give light to the earth, till then wrapped in darkness."