

**Yahalom, Joseph.** שירת הקודש שורשי *Sources of the Sacred Song: Crossroads in Jewish Liturgical Poetry.* Jerusalem: Magnes University Press of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2019. 284 pp. \$33.00. (9789657008423).

In *Sources of the Sacred Song*, Yahalom examines major trends in Jewish Liturgy during Late Antiquity and considers the ways in which the *shirat ha-qodesh* (liturgical poems) of that period connect to other contemporary Jewish writings, such as the Aramaic Targum and Midrash, and to mystical and popular beliefs circulating at the time. He also shows how these early liturgical poems later spread to Southern Italy and then to Europe. Using the texts preserved in the Cairo Genizah collections, Yahalom demonstrates how the performance of the sacred songs evolved over time, and how they were incorporated into various liturgical cycles and survived into later practice.

Among the many things this book discusses is the relationship between the culture of sacred song and the culture of sermonizing (*derash*), between Hebrew and Aramaic translations, and between rational thinking and the radical aspects of Jewish mysticism. Chapters of the book also look at the material culture of composing and transmitting the sacred song (*piyyutim*). In the Golan, *piyyutim* were recorded on papyrus. In ancient Gaza, they were copied by noteworthy *paytanim* (the authors of the *piyyutim*) who also served as local judges. Some of the work of the ancient *paytanim* was preserved in the Cairo Genizah in palimpsest form, whereby the lower script of the original writing surface, consisting of pagan and Christian letters, was partially erased and reused by medieval Jewish scribes. By charting the historical evolution of these texts across centuries and geographies of space, Yahalom's book provides new insights into the creative process of poetic genius, and the complex process of religious and cultural appropriation and transmission. Recommended.

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