

The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Edited by Marieke Abram, Steven Harvey, and Lukas Muehlethaler. Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions of the Middle Ages 3. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2022. 465 pp. €120 hardcover.

A challenge in teaching medieval philosophy is the extent to which historical authors perpetuated and promoted social hierarchies and intellectual elitism. Reluctantly accepting stratification as a historical fact of complex societies, newcomers to the field often have very little sympathy for related normative attitudes. That the modern study of medieval philosophy has a long tradition of inaccessibility does not help.

Much has changed recently with greater popularization of this history and scholars asking questions about the extent to which the theorizing of socio-intellectual hierarchies in medieval texts actually coincided with intellectual, textual, and social practices. The present volume reflects this state of the field and with its focus on popularization points toward the potential of the topic to inspire further research and discussion.

Combining the format of a handbook with conference proceedings, the structure of the volume alone offers a promising attempt at mapping a research problem. After an introductory section, five parts are dedicated to modes or areas of popularization (encyclopedias, books of instruction, mystical literature, exegesis and sermons, and poetry), and a final section addresses systematic and contemporary aspects. Sections typically begin with an introduction, followed by three case studies focused on Islamic, Jewish, and Christian examples, respectively. The contributors address a wide range of aspects, but mostly specialize in medieval philosophy and thought. One way in which this volume might spark further discussion is by inspiring specialists in other aspects of medieval history such as political propaganda, legal theory, literary criticism, or institutional and social history. The present reviewer can see multiple opportunities for further engagement with contemporary philosophy as well, such as Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice.

The volume will be of interest to specialists in the field who will welcome the case studies as well as the well-conceived effort to think systematically about what it may have meant to popularize what is perceived to be an elitist tradition. Specialists in adjacent fields will appreciate the opportunity to explore the relationship between different truth regimes, and those who teach these texts will find strategies to make unfamiliar texts a little more familiar to new readers.

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