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Fitzpatrick-McKinley's "Empire, Power and Indigenous Elites: A Case Study of the Nehemiah Memoir" (Book Review)

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categories falls short and “can be only partially successful” (p. xiii). Syriac writers, after all, paint a highly poetic theological vision using the language of symbols, types, and paradox – a road less travelled in the Greek and Latin West.

The real strength of Beggiani’s work is that he is able to communicate this sense of paradox and reverence in early Syriac Christianity while employing Western categories. The reader gains a vision of how, in the Syriac worldview, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, and Anthropology are interconnected within a holistic view of salvation history. Taking their cues from a strong biblical and liturgical foundation, Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and other Syriac writers approach these themes with an attitude of wonder and worship, not to define or scrutinize. Moreover, as Beggiani rightly points out, the early Syriac theological vision is decidedly Christocentric: the stream of *raze* (‘symbols’) in nature and in the Scriptures point ultimately to Christ, the central paradox of the Christian faith.

This second edition of Beggiani’s work provides welcome additions and clarifications. In particular, references to Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai have been pared back or removed in order to clarify the earlier Ephremic tradition. Yet, as Beggiani warns in the preface, “This revised edition is not a comprehensive one” (p. xiii). Although he does provide valuable updates, many translations are still taken from older editions (i.e. *The Post-Nicene Fathers*), while newer versions are now available. In future editions Beggiani might consider providing more background on post-fourth-century writers, particularly when their later theological context differs from that of Ephrem or Jacob.

In short, this is a highly articulate and concise introduction to the main themes of early Syriac theology with a focus on the Maronite tradition. At present, no other resource brings together so many diverse aspects of this rich theological tradition within a single volume.

**Empire, Power and Indigenous Elites:
A Case Study of the Nehemiah Memoir,**
by Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
327 pp. \$168.00. ISBN 9789004289888

Reviewed by Joseph Baumstarck, Jr., Library Technical Assistant, Acquisitions, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

This book is a scholarly work published as volume 169 of the series *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*. In the light of current research on ancient Persia and the Middle East it discusses the local elites whom Nehemiah, and to a lesser extent

Ezra, meet as antagonists in the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra. The author's thesis is that Nehemiah behaves as other contemporaries with an imperial commission by the Persian empire do when sent to intervene in power struggles between local elites (p. 5). The competition between Sanballat, a Samaritan; Tobiah, an Ammonite; Geshem, an Arab; the Jerusalem priesthood; and the leaders of Ashdod all attempting to maximize personal political power in a semi-autonomous, conquered territory provide the local opposition to Nehemiah's commission to establish a loyal Persian garrison in Jerusalem, which she argues is colored by Nehemiah's personal agenda of reestablishing Jehovah worship. This dissertation type work consists of nine chapters, plus an introduction, extensive bibliography, several indexes, and footnotes, occupying about one third of the work which add significantly to the value of the book. The author masterfully achieves her purpose of showing the local elites in opposition to Nehemiah in the historical context of the wider ancient Middle East including how these opposition leaders and their families fared in their future. The author supports her contentions well despite being quick to disregard Scriptural sources as significant primary historical resources. Few books address any aspect of Nehemiah's opposition in an academic historical context and this book should be considered by any library which carries academic level work on the ancient Middle East and as a resource for academic level commentary work on the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

Ethics and Moral Reasoning: A Student's Guide,

by C. Ben Mitchell. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

111 pp. \$11.99. ISBN 1433537672

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C. Ben Mitchell holds the Graves Chair of Moral Philosophy at Union University. His primer is a worthy entry in the Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series, edited by David Dockery. Like other constituent volumes, it includes a glossary, study questions, a list of further resources, and indices.

Chapter 1 confronts the challenges of modern relativism. Mitchell argues that relativism (1) does not account for simultaneous participation in multiple sub-cultures, (2) does not allow for moral error, (3) does not enable moral reformers, (4) commits the is-ought fallacy, (5) and fails to distinguish between moral practices and their underlying values (pp. 27-29).