

ings. In this way, God is forced to uphold true justice. This collection of articles is a very useful and learned complication and I can warmly recommend it.

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STUART S. MILLER

*At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools,  
Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity Among Jews of Roman Galilee*

JAJ 16, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, Hardcover, 423 pages,  
€150.00, ISBN: 978-3-525-55069-4

Stuart Miller is professor of Hebrew, History, and Judaic Studies in the Department of Literatures, Cultures and Languages at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. In this book, Miller brings together four previously published articles that he has revised and adds a substantial amount of new material. The result is an in-depth examination of purity practices with a particular focus on the use of ritual baths, *miquva'ot*. Miller's broad knowledge in Jewish history, including rabbinic traditions and archaeology, is evident in his nuanced and compelling analyses of both texts and archaeological data in his quest for understanding the dynamics and development of ritual purity practices. The title is a bit misleading, since the scope of his examination in many aspects includes both Galilee and Judea, although he pays special attention to Sepphoris (Chapter 6, "The Stepped Pools of the Western Acropolis at Sepphoris"; Chapter 8, "Domestic Judaism and the 'Well-Ordered Bayit': Who Bathed/immersed in the Stepped Pools at Sepphoris and Why?"; Chapter 9 "Priests, Purities, and the Jews of Roman and Late Antique Galilee – Rethinking the Priests of Sepphoris and the Mishmarot"). Miller is mainly interested in the Roman period up to the second century CE, investigating how and why purity practices changed over time. The book consists of a lengthy introduction, eleven chapters, and a postscript about pools in 19th century Chesterfield in Connecticut. It includes indexes not only of primary sources, but also of places, foreign terms, and subjects, which are very helpful. The book is illustrated with

maps and photos. Many footnotes include added information and long discussions of the kind that possibly would work better in the main text (e.g., 78–79 n. 70; 198–200 n. 2).

The book is very timely. Only in the last few decades has the extent of the spread of stepped pools been revealed. About 850 stepped pools mainly from the last two centuries of the Second Temple period have been discovered in the whole country. Many stepped pools appear to have been used up to the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 CE and the construction of such pools taper off after that time. The popularity of these pools also in Galilee, far from Jerusalem and its temple, demonstrates their importance in Jewish life and consequently the need to examine their use. Miller argues that we should stop using the term *miqveh* when talking about stepped pools from antiquity, but instead use the neutral term “stepped pool” since they had multiple functions (Chapter 1, “Misleading Use of Terminology: The ‘miqveh,’ ‘bet tevilah,’ and other ‘Ritual Baths’”). Furthermore, the term *miqveh*, which means “gathering of water,” is only used consistently for ritual pools in late rabbinic literature. He corrects much of previous research, which has tended to interpret the stepped pools in light of late rabbinic texts. For example, scholars have assumed that rabbinic regulations concerning the constructions of ritual baths were in place prior to 70 CE. Miller demonstrates that this was not the case (see Chapter 2, “The Evolving, Non-Monolithic ‘Ritual Bath’”). Instead, there was a great variety in shapes and forms of stepped pools for a long time. He explains, “it must be remembered that a stepped pool at Sephoris or elsewhere only functioned as a ‘miqveh’ when a person immersing did so expressly for ritual purification” (50). Furthermore, there were no laws in the Second Temple period concerning the means by which the baths should be filled, which instead developed much later. He notes that the discussions on purifications in water in Mishnah and Tosefta do not concern the architectural design of the *miqveh* but rather the nature of the water (308).

An interesting suggestion is that the stepped pools from the beginning may have had multiple uses, both secular and religious. He points to the discovery of vessels in some of these pools and rabbinic traditions

about cooling-off in these baths (51–55). Since these pools typically do not have a drain it would have been useful to get more information about possible profane uses. It is hard to understand how a bathtub structure without a drain would be useful for example in washing dishes or rinsing fruit, as Miller argues. Still, rabbinic regulations about coloured water suggest that some people rinsed grapes in these constructions.

Miller rejects the attempts to tie the forms of the baths to certain groups such as the Pharisees or priests, arguing instead that no regulations were in place concerning specificities of construction (Chapter 3, “Pre-Rabbinic, Non-Rabbinic, and Rabbinic Ritual Immersion Practices in the Making”). He presents the various forms of stepped pools and discusses the reasons behind their constructions. For example, he interprets the feature of a divided stairway as a style that symbolically separated between the pure and impure, but actually did a poor job keeping them physically apart (56–62). He also emphasizes that the presence of an extra storage pool (*ʿosar*) is a rare feature. In contrast to many scholars who take for granted that the water of a *miqueh* would be invalidated if drawn, he points to the lack of any early discussion on how the pools should be filled. He praises E. P. Sanders for “boldly” suggesting that many pools in Jerusalem must have been filled with drawn water (72). Miller analyzes the key texts on purity from Qumran and the archaeological data, which add to the diverse picture of purity practices in the late Second Temple period. He thoughtfully concludes, “The ritual bathing *and other* purity practices of the rabbis evolved out of a complex matrix of practices that were derived from diverse understandings of the biblical tradition” (95, italics Miller).

Miller questions the common view that that the popularity of stone vessels was primarily due to purity concerns (Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, “Further Observations on Stone Vessel Finds and Ritual Purity in Light of Talmudic Sources”). That stone was impervious to impurity is a rabbinic concept that has no basis in biblical laws. Importantly not even the Damascus Document (12:15–16) or the Temple Scroll (11QT<sup>a</sup> 49:14) from Qumran assume that stone was impervious to ritual impu-

rity (95–96). Miller contends that stone stoppers used to close clay vessels may originally have been used not to preserve the purity of the content but “because they made great-fitting stoppers!” (175). Instead, pointing to the flourishing stone industry in Judea, he argues that their benefits, with regard to purity according to some circles, is just one factor among others that help explain their popularity. Another important argument is that purity practices were never tied to the temple but were popular among the Jewish population all over the country. He interprets the continued practice of purity after 70 and into the periods of Mishna and Talmud as evidence of this broad interest.

A main concern for Miller throughout the book is to highlight the tendency among scholars to read “the present into the past” (306). He compares the preconceived notions of *miqva’ot* based on late rabbinic texts to the study of ancient synagogues. Hence, scholars in the early 1900’s who analyzed the remains of a synagogue in Capernaum did not hesitate to interpret a stairway as leading up to a women’s section, although there is no evidence of special sections for women until modern times. Furthermore, no one would have expected to find zodiacs in ancient synagogues, but there they are (see Chapter 11, “From Stepped Pools to *Miqva’ot* and the Society that Produced Them”). It should be noted that Miller is not the only one who has pointed out anachronism in contemporary scholarship on *miqva’ot*. Also the archaeologist Yonatan Adler has criticized such a perspective in many publications. In his last chapter, Miller broadens his investigation by probing questions of Jewish identity and Judaism of the late Second Temple period. While noting that scholars are divided over whether to emphasize the plurality (e.g., Jacob Neusner) or commonality (Sanders), he prefers the expression “complex common Judaism” and places himself somewhere in between the two alternatives.

For anyone who is interested in Jewish purity practices in the Roman period, this book is a gold mine of information and detailed discussions. By its uncompromising analysis of the archaeological data on their own terms without taking later rabbinic sources into regard, the study provides a highly valuable corrective to current scholarship. Since matters

of purity and purification were important parts of Jewish life, the book is an important contribution to the scholarship on early Judaism in general. I warmly recommend this book to everyone who works in the field of early Judaism and cognate areas.

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JOHN R. L. MOXON

*Peter's Halakhic Nightmare: The "Animal" Vision of Acts 10:9–16  
in Jewish and Graeco-Roman Perspective*

WUNT II 432, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, Paperback, xxv + 638 pages,  
€129, ISBN: 978-316-15301-3

Peter's roof-top experience in Joppa—in which he falls into a trance, sees all kinds of clean and unclean animals, and is commanded to kill and eat—is one of the more enigmatic passages in the book of Acts. Although the vision on the surface level undoubtedly concerns dietary restrictions, the narrative context strongly suggests the admittedly different issue of whether a pious Christian Jew, such as Peter, can visit and enjoy table fellowship with a Gentile, such as the centurion Cornelius. Many interpreters have read the vision as curtly abolishing all Jewish dietary restrictions, and by extension the validity of much of the Torah, even though such a negative stance toward Jewish practices would be foreign not only to the narrative character of Peter, but also to the implied author of Acts. Furthermore, the narrative enigmatically presents Peter, the unchallenged leader of the narrated Christian community, as completely bewildered after receiving a divine message that otherwise would have provided him with an additional source of authority. These incongruences are central to John R. L. Moxon's 2017 monograph *Peter's Halakhic Nightmare*, a heavily revised version of his Durham dissertation from 2011.

While many previous interpreters have assumed Peter's vision to be a pre-existing narrative aiming for complete abolition of dietary restrictions, inexpertly incorporated into Luke's narrative, Moxon assumes the vision to be purposefully included by a competent redactor. Whether the vision was imported or written for the purpose, Moxon presumes it