

Jeremy Wade BARRIER, *Witch Hunt in Galatia. Magic, Medicine, and Ritual and the Occasion of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Paul in Critical Contexts)*. Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. xiv-395 p. 15.5 × 23.5. \$132.00

The occasion of Paul's epistle to the Galatians has been a topic that has engendered speculation over the past two millennia. Many scholarly commentators in this dialogue have noted the particular importance of circumcision within this Pauline letter and have used this rite as a hermeneutical guide to reconstruct the occasion of the letter. For instance, was Paul responding to a Galatian community for whom circumcision — alongside dietary restrictions and Sabbath observance — functioned as an exclusionary identity marker (cf. J.D.G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 [1983] 95-122)? Or should we situate this letter and its emphasis on circumcision within its local "pagan" context, whereby circumcision alludes to analogous Anatolian religious practices, such as the ritual castration of the *galli* in their service to Attis and Cybele (e.g., S. Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort. Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context* [London – New York 2003])? Scholarly reconstructions of the occasion have also taken into consideration sociological perspectives that view Paul's discourse on circumcision through the lens of cultural practices, such as rites of passage, which cut across the ostensible boundaries between paganism, Judaism, and the nascent Jesus movements (e.g., M. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians. Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* [Minneapolis, MN 2002]).

The book under review offers a new, sociological approach to the occasion behind Galatians that puts this letter and its primary concerns (e.g., circumcision) into conversation with ancient medical and magical practices. With this broader context in view, Barrier argues that Paul feared that the Galatians were under a kind of curse or "Evil Eye" (cf. Gal 3,1) which had drawn them away from his gospel and that had manifested itself among some Galatians in the belief that circumcision (i.e., a "ritual surgical procedure" [105]) was a magical means to attain God's favor and protection more generally. According to Barrier, Paul's letter, which simultaneously functioned as a "counter-curse", attempted to persuade the Galatians that Jesus's *pneuma* — understood as the physiological breath of the crucified Christ — was a more powerful apotropaic ritual than circumcision. Barrier argues that Paul was not necessarily opposed to circumcision, but that the particular circumstances at play in Galatia required him to take a hardline stance against this practice.

The book consists of eight chapters, including a lengthy introduction (Chapter 1) and a concluding chapter (Chapter 8) that are divided into three main sections that progress from Paul (Section I) to the Galatians (Section II) to early Christianity (Section III). The introduction (Chapter 1) underscores some of the main concepts that receive more robust treatments in subsequent chapters (e.g., the relationship between evil-eye belief and Gal 3,1-5, and circumcision as an apotropaic defense), addresses important scholarly discussions as it relates to the Epistle to the Galatians more generally (e.g., its date and occasion), and provides a basic overview and summary of his argument and the contents of the chapters that follow. The two chapters in Section I discuss the supposed relationship between the world of ancient medicine and Paul's argument in Galatians. In Chapter 2,

Barrier investigates concepts in ancient and late-ancient medicine, physiology, and disease etiology, with particular attention to the central role many ancient thinkers — especially Galen, but also Josephus and Philo of Alexandria — assigned to *pneuma* as it relates to the proper functioning of the body (e.g., for thinking, seeing, and sexuality). He further emphasizes that, while the particulars of the Galenic notion of *pneuma* might not have been accepted or known in many ancient circles, several literary and documentary sources suggest that a physiological view of *pneuma* was widely defused among Paul's Mediterranean contemporaries. Chapter 3 bridges this medical terminology with the pneumatic language found in the epistle to Galatians. He interprets Paul's contention in Gal 4,4-7 (and elsewhere) that it is not circumcision but, rather, justification, imparted through the crucified Jesus' final exhalation of *pneuma* and his final words ("Abba, Father"), which are transmitted to the Galatians by Paul and accessed through the "apotropaic" ritual of baptism, that gives life to the Galatians and makes them "whole".

In Section II, Barrier turns his attention to the Galatians' "worldview", with particular emphasis on the Evil Eye and related rituals. Chapter 4 focuses on ritual practices (e.g., *fascina* [amulets]) designed to thwart the Evil Eye, noting how circumcision was viewed as an effective means of apotropaic protection among certain Jewish (near-)contemporaries of Paul. This insight carries into Chapter 5, where Barrier examines the Epistle to the Galatians through the cultural lens of Evil-Eye belief and ritual, contending that "Paul wrote his letter to Galatians to prevent them from circumcising people as a means for apotropaic defensive care" (277).

Section III sets its sights on the reception of Paul's notions of *sperma* and *pneuma* in early Christianity. In Chapter 6, Barrier surveys ecclesiastical voices (especially, Tertullian and Augustine) that reflect how Paul's physiological approach to the *pneuma* impacted the doctrine of the Trinity, noting concomitantly the conceptual development of *pneuma* over time from an orientation around embodiment to one of theology. Chapter 7 investigates notions of *pneuma* in the *Apocryphon of John*, underscoring that, despite its deployment of a vision of *pneuma* that is largely philosophical and theological, this Coptic text bears traces of a material *pneuma* in its cosmology (e.g., its transference through divine speech and through procreation) that resonates with Paul's — and also Tertullian's — embodied *pneuma*.

In his concluding chapter (Chapter 8), Barrier summarizes his primary claims and reflects on possible future areas of study that derive from his book, including the interface of disability studies and Gal 4,12-20; the possibility that there was "a health epidemic (or something similar)" (327) in Galatia around the time Paul wrote his epistle; and the implications of Paul's notion of inspiration/breathing for "scientific discussions of nature versus nurture" (327).

Barrier has offered his readers a creative approach to the occasion of Galatians, which usefully brings ostensibly magical and medical evidence to bear on this question. His sustained and developed presentation of the apotropaic function of circumcision is something with which future scholars will certainly need to contend. What is more, Barrier has demonstrated a keen awareness of the principal issues and scholarship associated with the Galatian epistle. His governing hermeneutic, however, relies on a considerable amount of speculation and inference (more than most) and, in my judgment, allows information gleaned from the Mediterranean world to overpower his reading of Galatians. Although Barrier rightly highlights certain features of the ancient Mediterranean world (e.g., the importance of the body, the apotropaic function of circumcision, and the connection between

miscarriage and the Evil Eye), he uses such contextual details to make claims that, in my opinion, go beyond the evidence at hand (e.g., in Gal 4,13-14 Paul is in fact conceding that he had introduced the Evil Eye into the Galatian community through his affliction [269]). In addition, his engagement with broader comparative categories (e.g., magic, medicine, and apotropaic practice) does not sufficiently grapple with up-to-date scholarship on these categories and on their contiguous evidence (e.g., amulets and curse tablets). As a result, Barrier makes claims or entertains interpretive possibilities that, at the very least, require further discussion and better grounding in ancient material evidence (e.g., that Paul was an “itinerant *magus*” [289], who might have designed his letter to be a “binding spell” or a “curse tablet” [278]). In the end, although most readers will greatly benefit from Barrier’s extended discussions of medical and magical evidence, I imagine that few will be fully convinced by his primary thesis and by many of the individual conclusions in the chapters.

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Todd A. SCACEWATER, *The Divine Builder in Psalm 68*. Jewish and Pauline Tradition (Library of New Testament Studies 631). London, T&T Clark, 2020. xii-186 p. \$120.00

How does Paul read Ps 68,19 in Eph 4,8? What is the common theme between Ps 68,19 and Eph 4,7-16 that explains Paul’s citation of the psalm in Eph 4,8? The interpretation history of this NT passage includes a wide range of options. Paul may have used a midrashic *peshet* or a Moses typology to read Ps 68,19; Christ would replace Moses and the Torah, making Christ greater than them. Todd A. Scacewater (hereafter TS) studies in this monograph the *crux interpretum* in Eph 4,8 and proposes the *topos* of the “divine builder” as the hermeneutical key for Paul’s typological interpretation of this text.

This monograph consists of six chapters and a brief conclusion. The introductory chapter presents general information about authorship and the audience of the letter. It introduces the literary context of Eph 4,8, including TS’s exegesis of Eph 4,7-16. The following three chapters concentrate on the OT context of Psalm 68 in its Ancient Near Eastern milieu. Chapter 2 studies the flow of the psalm and demonstrates v. 19 as its narrative climax. In this chapter TS also proposes the “divine builder” literary *topos* as the hermeneutical key of Psalm 68. Chapter 3 documents in detail the “divine builder” theme throughout the Ancient Near East. TS also argues against any influence of the Baal traditions in Psalm 68 in order to safeguard his Hebrew interpretation of the psalm. Chapter 4 explores the psalmist’s use of prior OT traditions in Psalm 68. By analyzing some old victory songs in the OT, TS deduces that in the second half of the psalm, the psalmist draws the war imagery from three eschatological passages (Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Numbers 24). Chapter 5 studies some Jewish readings of Psalm 68, including the Mosaic interpretation and the eschatological interpretation. In this chapter TS reviews Harris’ monograph (*The Descent of Christ*. Ephesians 4:7-11 and