

together and to be underpinned by a deep humanism. In this book, that vision is rigorously embodied.

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The Rarest Blue: The Remarkable Story of an Ancient Color Lost to History and Rediscovered, Baruch Sterman with Judy Taubes Sterman, Globe Pequot, 2012 (ISBN 978-965-229-621-4), xii + 305 pp., \$24.95

The Bible tells us that the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, the hangings in the Tabernacle, and the garments of the High Priest should all contain the color *tekhelet*. In addition, every garment worn by a (male) Jew was to have fringes with a *tekhelet* thread in it. What color was *tekhelet*? How was it made? What is its history? Baruch and Judy Sterman have undertaken to answer these questions in their book, *The Rarest Blue*.

The Stermans begin with the history. They cite reports of the use of *tekhelet/takiltu* in very ancient society. It was sky blue in color. It was rare, and hence, it was the color of royalty, of the highest clergy, and of the powerful and wealthy. It appears together with *argaman/argamannu*, a purple color, also known as the color of royalty and the powerful. Both colors are included in the appurtenances of the Tabernacle, and in a theological statement of great power, *tekhelet* is to appear on the garment of every (male) Jew. *Tekhelet/takiltu* became so royal that Caesars decreed that production be limited, and eventually, it became forbidden to produce, sell, or possess it except in very limited circles. The Arabs, who hated the 'Romans', also forbade its production, and with time, the art was simply lost. No one knew how to make *tekhelet/takiltu*.

In the nineteenth century, a Hasidic rabbi decided he was going to recreate *tekhelet*, and the Stermans tell the tale of how this was performed, of how it was questioned, and of how eventually it was proven to be just plain wrong. In recent years, archaeologists have discovered *tekhelet* farms and factories from ancient times. This led to the 'resurrection' of *tekhelet* production, and blue fringes have reappeared. (The Stermans reference the Jewish law dispute about the validity of these recreated fringes and the various methods of tying the knots of the fringes.) One can actually visit *Ptil Tekhelet*, the production facility for the blue fringes.

The Stermans, then, launch into chapters on the biology of the *Murex trunculus* and the production of *tekhelet/takiltu* in ancient and in modern times. On the way, they devote chapters to dyeing and to the chemistry of color: when extracted, the gland of the *Murex* turns purple within thirty minutes. To use it for dyeing, one must accumulate it, preserve it,

chemically 'reduce' it (which turns it colorless), expose it to sunlight (which removes the bromine and turns it to pure indigo, which is blue), and then it can be used for dyeing. Alternatively, one can 'reduce' it and dye in the dark; this yields a purple color. Voilà *tekhelet/takiltu* and *argaman/argamannu*, except that modern chemistry allows one to 'reduce' the material by much quicker processes. All this is clearly set forth for the average reader.

Toward the end of the book, the Stermans venture into the physics of the color blue: have you ever noticed that, aside from the sky, there is very little blue in the world of nature? Have you noticed that the blue of the sky is not actually the same as the blue of large bodies of water? Or that water in small quantities such as a glass is not blue at all? With a little knowledge of physics ('scattering', 'interference', etc.) and a basic appreciation of quantum physics, the Stermans explain that the blue of the sky is generated differently from the blue of *tekhelet/takiltu*; hence, the *tekhelet* fringes are not really 'sky blue', and the blue of sapphires is not the same as the blue of indigo dyes.

The Purest Blue is a detective story – in history, in biology, in chemistry, and in physics. Probably, no one can understand all of it, but it is a fascinating story of how color, religion, craftsmanship, and social power interacted to create both beauty and social/religious meaning.

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Revelation: The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse, Gerald L. Stevens, Pickwick, 2014 (ISBN 978-1-62564-549-4), 633 pp., pb \$62

Gerald L. Stevens, 'Dr Koine', prefaces this volume by explaining that the impetus for the work arose from interactions with students, who desired a compendium of his thoughts and reflections on the book of Revelation. He eventually capitulated, and the present work is the product of that effort. In the text, Stevens makes two primary assertions about Revelation. First, the book requires 're-canonization'. Rampant misinterpretations have resulted in a diminished credibility and authority for Revelation. Stevens therefore purports to reestablish the integrity of the book. Second, and central to Stevens' presentation, is his interpretation of Revelation as gospel-centric.

Revelation is not strictly a commentary, as the book explores issues beyond the typical scope of such volumes. Part 1, consisting of Chapters 1–6, treats the history of interpretation of Revelation from the early church to the modern day. Chapter 1 examines the Jewish background of John's