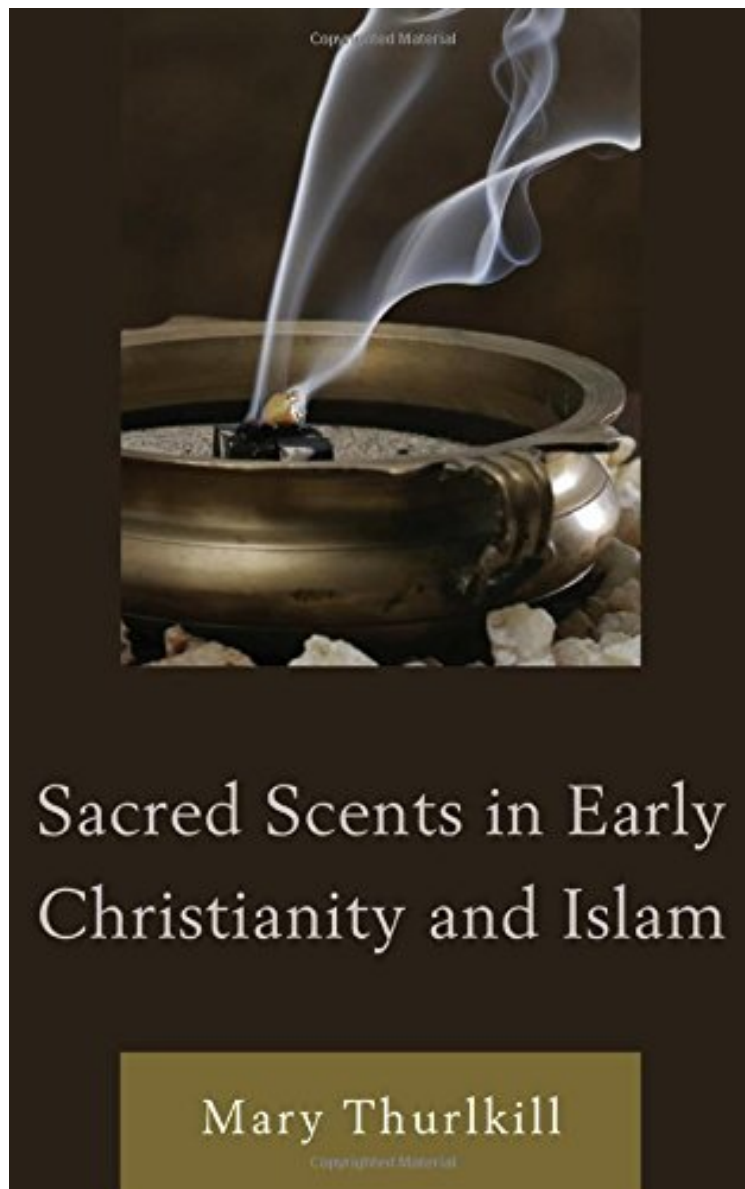


(Download pdf ebook) Sacred Scents in Early Christianity and Islam (Studies in Body and Religion)

Sacred Scents in Early Christianity and Islam (Studies in Body and Religion)

Mary Thurkill

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Mary Thurkill : Sacred Scents in Early Christianity and Islam (Studies in Body and Religion) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sacred Scents in Early

Christianity and Islam (Studies in Body and Religion):

Medieval scholars and cultural historians have recently turned their attention to the question of smells and what olfactory sensations reveal about society in general and holiness in particular. *Sacred Scents in Early Christianity and Islam* contributes to that conversation, explaining how early Christians and Muslims linked the sweet smell of sanctity with ideals of the body and sexuality; created boundaries and sacred space; and imagined their emerging communal identity. Most importantly, scent itself transgressive and difficult to control signaled transition and transformation between categories of meaning. Christian and Islamic authors distinguished their own fragrant ethical and theological ideals against the stench of oppositional heresy and moral depravity. Orthodox Christians ridiculed their stinking Arian neighbors, and Muslims denounced the reeking corruption of Umayyad and Abbasid decadence. Through the mouths of saints and prophets, patriarchal authors labeled perfumed women as existential threats to vulnerable men and consigned them to enclosed, private space for their protection as well as society's. At the same time, theologians praised both men and women who purified and transformed their bodies into aromatic offerings to God. Both Christian and Muslim pilgrims venerated sainted men and women with perfumed offerings at tombstones; indeed, Christians and Muslims often worshipped together, honoring common heroes such as Abraham, Moses, and Jonah. *Sacred Scents* begins by surveying aromas quotidian functions in Roman and pre-Islamic cultural milieus within homes, temples, poetry, kitchens, and medicines. Existing scholarship tends to frame scent as something available only to the wealthy or elite; however, perfumes, spices, and incense wafted through the lives of most early Christians and Muslims. It ends by examining both traditions' views of Paradise, identified as the archetypal Garden and source of all perfumes and sweet smells. Both Christian and Islamic texts explain Adam and Eve's profound grief at losing access to these heavenly aromas and celebrate God's mercy in allowing earthly remembrances. Sacred scent thus prompts humanity's grief for what was lost and the yearning for paradisiacal transformation still to come.

The book's scope is highly ambitious, ranging from the role of incense in Roman sacrifice to the spice-infused purity rituals prescribed by medieval Islamic jurists.... Its comparative framework...yields some valuable insights.... In sum, this is a stimulating book.... The book's chief accomplishment lies in its bold comparative scope. Thurlkill demonstrates the extensive overlap in the use of scents to mark sacred spaces both real and imagined in Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thought. (Studies in Late Antiquity) Thurlkill does it again with the second of her two truly groundbreaking books. Not unlike her stunningly innovative contribution to comparative medieval hagiology in *Chosen among Women*, the author opens yet another incredibly rich avenue for the comparative study of religion. By focusing her breadth of historical acumen and depth of aesthetic sensibility on the significance of scent in the late antique Roman and Arabian worlds, Thurlkill invites us to consider the fascinating ways in which the religious experience and discourse of early Christians and Muslims was informed and mediated by their sense of smell. Like musk emanating from the hair of the beloved, or cumin from the hearth, this book beckons the reader to enter a world of intellectual delight nearly impossible to resist. (Scott C. Alexander, Catholic Theological Union) This lovely book helps us to better understand the stuff of religion by connecting the premodern worlds of Christianity and Islam. (Amir Hussain, Loyola Marymount University) About the Author Mary Thurlkill is associate professor of religious studies at the University of Mississippi.