existence, despite the realization that all one’s attempts to understand the nature of God and the heavens are inconclusive. The arguments lead to antinomies, and are foiled by the inevitable and inadequate use of imaginative constructs and materially based concepts that can only misrepresent purely formal, intelligible being. Yet the constant attempt to resolve these antinomies, to approach God intellectually, is for Maimonides, according to Stern, an exhilarating and awesome experience, to be practiced continually. It leads to love of God; the God who is not known but in whose existence “we cannot but believe” (187).

Stern is aware of problems that arise in his presentation of Maimonides’s position: it has no immediate historical context or sequel, and Stern identifies it with Hellenistic expressions of Pyrrhonian skepticism and with the ancient understanding, as brought out by Pierre Hadot and others, of the telos of philosophy as an intellectual-cum-spiritual exercise, rather than as the attainment of demonstrable knowledge. Stern himself doubts that (his idea of) Maimonides’s goal of even limited perfection is attainable, a person’s intellect presumably forever precluded by his imagination and material foundation from comprehending the purely intelligible world he craves to join. Moreover, Stern does not explore the problematic status that his analysis renders certain key concepts in the Guide, such as conjunction with the Agent Intellect and immortality, as well as prophecy and revelation. Maimonides’s affirmations in these issues might well complicate Stern’s thesis, or force him to suspect Maimonides’s allegiance to his faith.

If, then, The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ “Guide” does not tackle all the problems that the Guide poses, it offers an impressive and challenging study of the issues it does address.

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Alice-Mary Talbot is a Byzantine scholar who certainly deserves a Festschrift such as this rich offering. She has contributed numerous books and articles on a variety of subjects, with special emphasis on hagiography and spirituality, Byzantine women, and miracle traditions. Talbot has also contributed to such important projects as the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, the Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database, and most recently, the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, which provides Loeb-style editions and translations of important texts. But above all, as the editors acknowledge in their introduction, she has generously assisted both established and junior scholars in their research, using her outstanding linguistic, editorial, and interpretative skills in order to help them contribute to the field of Byzantine studies. The twenty-seven contributors (including the editors) to this interesting volume have all, in one way or another, benefited from collaboration with Talbot. However, as the editors also acknowledge, many other scholars who belong to this category could not be invited on this occasion; it is to be hoped that additional collections will in due course appear.

The volume is organized into three sections reflecting the main themes that have dominated Talbot’s own research: “Women,” “Icons and Images,” and “Texts, Practices, Spaces.” The number of articles assigned to each section varies somewhat, but their quality is of a consistently high standard. It is impossible in a short review to do justice to each of the articles, so the focus on just a few of these works in the discussion that follows should be recognized as reflecting, to a large extent, the interests of this reviewer.

Speculum 89/2 (April 2014)
In the first section, six articles on the subject of “women,” is an interesting selection of pieces ranging from Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s study of the Syriac preacher Jacob of Serug’s interest in “despised” biblical women (who have resonance both as historical figures and as types) through Stratis Papaioannou’s translation, along with a brief commentary, of a will that appears to have been penned by the twelfth-century princess Anna Komnene. In between these two textual studies, Alexander Alexakis, Michel Kaplan, Maria Mavroudi, and Stamatina McGrath explore the influence of educated and saintly late antique and Byzantine women, primarily on the basis of literary evidence. Mavroudi’s long article on learned women of Byzantium is worthy of special mention here: this is an erudite and illuminating study, displaying not only the contributor’s familiarity with classical, late antique, and Byzantine works by and about women but also her attempt to answer the question why women were so active as philosophers and writers in the earlier period but were content for the most part to act as patrons or friends of literary activity in the late Byzantine centuries—even though many were well educated. Mavroudi suggests that the lack of writings by women in this period may reflect a failure of transmission as much as a lack of production, but she also suggests that it reflects tighter restrictions with regard to female activities.

The second section, “Icons and Images,” contains interesting and groundbreaking studies in this field. Some articles, such as those by Annemarie Weyl Carr and Nancy Ševčenko, study individual examples of iconography that have not so far been explored in detail. Others, such as the articles by Jaroslav Folda, Sharon E. J. Gerstel, Henry Maguire, Cécile Morisson and Simon Bendall, and Brigitte Pitarakis, examine larger categories of material culture (including Byzantine icons with chrysography, coins, amulets, and lead flasks) or aspects of iconography (such as the depiction of the Virgin Mary and Saint Anna in relation to painless or normal childbirth, respectively). Two of the articles, contributed by Paul Magdalino and Elizabeth A. Fisher, revisit well-known and occasionally contentious problems, namely, the putative existence of an important icon on the Chalke Gate at the beginning of the period of iconoclasm and the literary treatment of the “usual miracle” at the shrine of the Theotokos at the church of Blachernai. With regard to the latter, Fisher explores Michael Psellos’s discussion of a legal case in connection with the miracle, as well as the influence of Neoplatonism on his interpretation of this event. In summary, this second section of the Festschrift offers a rich selection of art historical studies that span the Byzantine period and offer new insights on important topics.

The third and final section, “Texts, Practices, Spaces,” ranges more widely in its subject matter, although certain preoccupations, such as saints and the texts written about them, feature prominently. Claudia Rapp’s “Hagiography and the Cult of Saints in the Light of Epigraphy and Acclamations” offers an innovative approach to this literary genre. Rapp suggests that the traditional view of hagiography, as a form of Christian writing that has its origins in Greco-Roman funerary orations, needs to be reassessed in the light of influence from rhetorical forms (such as inscriptions and acclamations) that could be addressed to prominent figures during their lifetimes. She thus questions the exclusive association of hagiographical writing with funerary contexts by the Bollandists and other early scholars of saints’ lives. Continuing the hagiographical theme, John Duffy reassesses the well-known story of the Jewish boy who survived being thrown into a furnace by his father, thanks to the protection of the Mother of God, and Arietta Papaconstantinou examines miracle stories in the early period of Arab-ruled Palestine and Egypt. Some interesting ideas concerning the function of polemical writing in maintaining boundaries—especially between various Christian churches rather than between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—are presented here. John W. Nesbitt explores the origins and history of the monastery of St. Diomedes in Constantinople, while Stéphanos Efthymiades provides a detailed study of the saints of southern Italy between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The remaining
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articles examine various historical or textual problems, focusing again on inscriptions, martyrologies, and the Testament of Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople. Michael Grünbart, Denis F. Sullivan, Angela Constantinides, Paul Stephenson, Brooke Shilling, and Manolis S. Patedakis all contribute, like the other authors of this volume, significant new approaches to fields on which Talbot has left her mark.

In conclusion, this is a rich and varied book that will interest Byzantinists in a multitude of disciplines. The individual articles are rewarding to read from both informative and interpretative points of view; their attention to detail—both in text and footnotes—and overall vision is, almost without exception, exemplary. Each article includes an extensive bibliography, with both primary and secondary sources. The tribute to Talbot, as the inspiration for the work that appears here, is expressed in not only the articles but also the introduction and a useful list of her extensive publications. Although illustrations, especially of the art historical articles, are somewhat sparse, the volume includes eleven colored plates.

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Several factors coalesced to make late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Europe an especially fertile ground for the generation of political thought. The growing strength and complexity of a variety of politics, from city-states to territorial monarchies, combined with the competing claims of sovereignty by the papacy, empire, and kingdom of France, brought to the fore a number of pressing questions relating to political authority, organization, and practice. Those attempting to answer these questions had at their disposal no shortage of material and tools, thanks to the translation, over the course of the previous century or so, of a vast body of ancient Greek texts and their Byzantine and Arabic commentaries, a refreshed interest in the Latin classics, and the growth of the universities and schools of the mendicant orders. Of the many intellectual luminaries who offered answers, perhaps none shines brighter in contemporary eyes than Marsilius of Padua (1270/90–1342). Hailed by Alan Gewirth in the middle of the last century as the first recognizably “modern” medieval political thinker, Marsilius has since been the subject of a steady stream of scholarly investigation. Still, it must be said that this stream seems to have swelled a bit over the last decade or so. Just to name a few of the English-language contributions, Marsilius’s chief work, the Defensor pacis, still available in Gewirth’s 1956 translation, has recently been joined by Annabel Brett’s superb 2005 version, in the series Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, and two volumes of essays collected and edited by Gerson Moreno-Riaño (2006) and Moreno-Riaño and Cary Nederman (2012).

Vasileios Syros has been a notable contributor to this new body of scholarship, having published a number of articles and chapters on Marsilius, as well as the monograph Die Rezeption der aristotelischen politischen Philosophie bei Marsilius von Padua (2007). In this earlier monograph, Syros provided a close reading of the first discourse of Defensor pacis, showing where Marsilius’s thought was indebted to Aristotle, where it diverged and disagreed, and on what other sources he relied. Syros demonstrated that Marsilius consistently preferred a functionalist approach to Aristotle’s moral and teleological one, and that he did so to such an extent that it is wrong to think of him as a medieval