Preface

As an observer of the intersection of Cultural Studies with Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an scholarship, I recognized the lively interest developing during the last few decades in the profound impact these sacred texts have had and continue to have on individual and community lives. Cultural Studies embraces a polymorphous array of literary theories to focus on how the texts themselves—the words on the pages and the reception through the centuries and across cultures and civilizations—become tools for cultural and thus individual and communal formation. While that formation has served to develop the great religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam whose cultural impact informs many other world views, the formation has also reached into the everyday and intimate life of its adherents and communities to establish normative standards. On the one hand, these standards nurture a *communitas*, the visible/invisible bonding web, creating a community that functions as a unit, supports individual members, and achieves an amenable stability. On the other hand, their very success serves to erase individual identity. Thus, the idea of the troubling aspect of the texts and their functions grew to address the ecosystem that negotiates conflicting contexts, needs, desires, and outcomes both for individuals and communities.

I am particularly gratified at the diversity of voices that speak through this collection in very personal yet academic ways. Contributors come from universities in Egypt, Israel, United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, Ghana, and across the United States. They represent a spectrum of sectarian and public, large and small, seaboard and heartland academic environments. Contributors themselves are diverse in academic maturity, gender, confessional identity, ethnic background, and age. Most contributors participated in an American Comparative Literature Conference held at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 2016, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands 2017, and Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 2019. Their willingness to offer their maturing scholarship is forever and profoundly appreciated.

The chapters herein attest to the eternally dynamic nature of the texts and their reception. That very vibrancy is what has propelled and empowered our contributors to focus on an element demonstrating the malleability of texts and particularly their use as tools of empowerment or suppression. Contributors have demonstrated a particular compassion for those who, on the one hand, may have been strangled by polemic power of these texts, but who, on the other, may have been enriched by the very malleability that the texts bring to bear in validating often-conflicted lives and circumstances.
Special gratitude goes to Sophie Wagenhofer, Senior Acquisitions Editor, De Gruyter, who, as early as the Society of Biblical Literature/American Academy of Religion Conference in Boston 2018, expressed interest in the collection and continued to encourage its progression through various stages of collection and formation. This volume builds upon the comparatist work of *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture* (Brill 2009) whose contributors have given me confidence that cross-national, interdisciplinary, and diverse scholars share a common passion for interrogating sacred texts. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, College of Liberal Arts, and the English Department continued to support this endeavor with funding and interest. Additional heartfelt gratitude goes to my children, each of whom contributed editing, conceptualization, and endless encouragement.