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0521831024 - Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions

Edited by Raʿanan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed

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Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions

Heaven held a special place in the late antique imagination. A poignant sense of the relevance of heavenly realms for earthly life can be found not only in Judaism and Christianity but also in Graeco–Roman religious, philosophical, scientific, and “magical” traditions. The preoccupation with otherworldly realities transcends social, regional, and creedal boundaries. The topic of heaven thus serves as an ideal focus for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding this formative era in Western history. Drawing on the expertise of scholars of Classics, Ancient History, Biblical Studies, Jewish Studies, and Patristics, this volume explores the different functions of heavenly imagery in different texts and traditions in order to map the patterns of unity and diversity within the religious landscape of Late Antiquity.

Raʿanan S. Boustan is Assistant Professor in the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Minnesota. A scholar of early Judaism, he has published studies on early Jewish mysticism, the relationship between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity, and the role of gender and sexuality within Judaism, among other topics.

Annette Yoshiko Reed is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University. Her research spans the fields of Biblical Studies, Jewish Studies, and Patristics, and her publications include *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (coedited with Adam H. Becker).

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Edited by

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Preface

The present volume is the product of a unique sort of collaborative effort aimed at bringing together relatively unseasoned scholars – that is, graduate students – and their more experienced counterparts in an environment conducive to interdisciplinary research. In 2000, when the editors were both still in the midst of our doctoral studies in the Religions of Late Antiquity subfield of the Department of Religion at Princeton University, Prof. Peter Schäfer approached us for ideas about innovative ways to enrich graduate-student training and to foster further collaboration between faculty and students in our subfield, with the support of funds generously granted for this purpose by Prof. John F. Wilson, then Dean of Princeton's Graduate School. This dovetailed with a growing sense on the part of the students in our subfield that we would benefit from having a formal yet supportive forum at which to share our ongoing research. Excited discussions soon yielded a plan for an event with a twofold structure: (1) a semester-long workshop on a theme of special relevance to the study of Late Antiquity, at which students would present papers and receive feedback from Princeton students and faculty, culminating in (2) a public colloquium that would feature reworked versions of these papers, alongside presentations from the faculty members of the workshop and invited scholars from other institutions.

To enhance this project's benefits for graduate-student training, it was determined that the responsibility for organizing both elements of this event, as well as for choosing the topic, the title, and the scholars to invite to the colloquium, would fall to us. Working under the guidance of Prof. Schäfer, we decided that the distinctively late antique fascination with the otherworldly realms presented a suitably variegated and widespread phenomenon for our project, intersecting the diverse areas of interest represented in our subfield while also opening the way for a profitably interdisciplinary vista onto the religious landscape of Late Antiquity. Accordingly, we chose a title that

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reflected our interest in the relationship between images of heaven and the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shaped them: “In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Imagined Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions.”

From September to December 2000, the faculty and doctoral students in our subfield met biweekly to discuss student papers on this theme. As we had hoped, these meetings served to foster a productive setting of continued, informal dialogue and to encourage the exchange of research between members of our subfield with expertise in different religious traditions and geographical areas, even as they fulfilled the aim of providing students with feedback toward revising their papers for presentation at the culminating colloquium. At this event, held at Princeton on January 14–15, 2001, we were joined by scholars from other universities, from a range of intersecting fields – Classics, Religious Studies, Ancient History, Jewish Studies, Patristics – who shared the products of their ongoing research on images of heaven.

The success of this event surpassed our expectations. The individual papers were of high quality, the dialogue that they sparked was unusually spirited, and even the participants expressed their surprise at the powerful perspective on late antique religion that emerged from the cumulative effect of the diverse presentations. Despite our different disciplines and fields of specialization, we found ourselves confronted by many of the same interpretative issues and methodological problems; not only were we pleased to discover many intriguing parallels and patterns within different late antique religions, but our interdisciplinary dialogue also allowed us to share the products of our individual attempts to forge heuristic new approaches to studying Late Antiquity. The present volume aims to capture the spirit of this event and to build upon its insights. We here include many of the papers presented at the 2001 colloquium, which have been revised and expanded to reflect our discussions there, together with six additional contributions solicited especially for this publication.¹

Space does not permit a complete list of all those, at Princeton and beyond, who contributed to the success of the workshop and colloquium and who helped to make this volume possible. We would be remiss, however, not to express our deepest debt of gratitude to Prof. Schäfer, without whom

¹ The success of this project also opened the way for another workshop and colloquium in 2001–2002 – the second of what we hope are many, many more to come – which tackled the topic of early Jewish–Christian relations. Proceedings have recently been published by Mohr Siebeck: A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen, 2003).

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none of this could have happened. From our initial brainstorming sessions about the workshop and colloquium until the completion of this volume, he has shown an intuitive understanding of how to guide this project with a sure hand, while at the same time ensuring that it continued to be shaped primarily by those it was intended to serve, us graduate students. His selfless mentoring has been a rare gift, from which we both have profited more than words can say.

We would like to express our appreciation to Profs. Peter Brown, Fritz Graf, Martha Himmelfarb, and Elaine Pagels for participating in the workshop and chairing sessions at the colloquium. We are, in addition, profoundly grateful to Dr. Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for her keen advice on the shape, scope, and focus of this book during every stage of its growth, and for her kindness and patience in shepherding us through the publication process. The volume also benefited from the extensive and incisive comments offered by the anonymous readers who reviewed the manuscript. To Lily Vuong and Jennifer Sanders, we offer thanks for their herculean indexing efforts. And, last but not least, we offer our warmest thanks to the contributors to this volume for their unflagging patience and enthusiasm.

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Abbreviations of primary sources, journal titles, and names of book series within this volume follow P. H. Alexander, J. F. Kutsko, J. D. Ernst, S. A. Decker-Lucke, and D. L. Petersen, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Mass., 1999), and S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1996).

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