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Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism

What did ancient Jews believe about demons and angels? This question has long been puzzling, not least because the Hebrew Bible says relatively little about such transmundane powers. In the centuries after the conquests of Alexander the Great, however, we find an explosion of explicit and systematic interest in, and detailed discussions of, demons and angels. In this book, Annette Reed considers the third century BCE as a critical moment for the beginnings of Jewish angelology and demonology. Drawing on early “pseudepigrapha” and Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls, she reconstructs the scribal settings in which transmundane powers became a topic of concerted Jewish interest. Reed also situates this development in relation to shifting ideas about scribes and writing across the Hellenistic Near East. Her book opens a window onto a forgotten era of Jewish literary creativity that nevertheless deeply shaped the discussion of angels and demons in Judaism and Christianity.

Annette Yoshiko Reed is currently an associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. A scholar of Judaism and Christianity, she focuses on questions of identity and literary practice across Second Temple Judaism and Late Antiquity. Her research looks to noncanonical and other neglected sources to open new perspectives on ancient Jews and Christians. Her books include *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism* (2018), as well as a number of edited volumes.

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To my mother, Michiko Konishi Reed

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Preface and Acknowledgments

I began this book over nine years ago, shortly before the birth of my son, and I have been working on it, on and off, in parallel with a number of other projects since then. Most of those projects trace the sort of diachronic trajectories that I characterize below as representative of the study of ancient Judaism. The idea for this book's experiment in synchronic analysis arose from a paper on demons and angels in *Jubilees* for the 2007 Enoch Seminar. What began as an inquiry into demonology, angelology, and writing, however, soon expanded to encompass an investigation into Aramaic Jewish pedagogy and the early Hellenistic age, thanks to conversations with Jonathan Ben Dov, Seth Sanders, Mladen Popović, and others at the 2011 conference on "Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge" organized by Ben Dov and Sanders at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University.

This book developed in the crucible of conversations with students and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania during a remarkable decade for Jewish Studies there. I owe much to discussions with Bob Kraft about the "tyranny of canonical assumptions," discussions with David Stern about the material histories of Jewish books and reading, discussions with David Ruderman about situating Jews within the History of Science, and discussions with Natalie Dohrmann about the need for more fine-grained approaches to the "Greco-Roman context" of ancient Judaism. And to the degree my experiments here prove successful, it is due to their honing in conversation with those whom I am honored to have had as graduate students during my decade at Penn, including Matt Chalmers, Phil Fackler, Jae Hee Han, Alex Ramos, Jillian Stinchcomb, and Philip Webster.

Earlier drafts of the Introduction and Chapter 4 were workshopped at Yale University and Brandeis University respectively, and earlier versions of Chapter 3 were presented at Columbia University, New York University, Penn’s Material Texts Workshop, and Princeton University. Arguments from Chapters 1 and 2 were presented at a MoMA R&D Salon on “Angels” and at conferences at Florida State University, Princeton University, and Yale University. On demonological fronts, I am especially grateful to Tzvi Abusch, David Frankfurter, and Dale Martin, and on the history and literature of ancient Judaism, to Benjamin Breed, Simcha Gross, Todd Hanneken, Eva Mroczek, Seth Schwartz, and Jed Wyrick. Although this is quite decisively not a book about “the Bible,” it has been shaped in conversation with biblicists such as Jacqueline Vayntrub, Liane Feldman, Steve Weitzman, and Esther Hamori. In addition, I would be remiss not to note that many of my best ideas came, not when at my desk or in the library, but rather on the mats training Muay Thai; if good breaks make good writing, I owe much of what is good in this book to Arjan Steve Milles, Arjan Simon Burgess, Kru Emily Bearden, and the community at Five Points Academy.

I am also grateful to and for Shaul Magid, who helped to mediate the completion of this book with love, patience, and support; I have been lucky to have the daily inspiration of a searingly smart interlocutor but – perhaps even more so – the unrelentingly honest editorial eye of a consummate writer. This book would have been written much more quickly had it not been for my son, KunKun (Alexander Reed Fleming), who has grown during its slow gestation from a delightful baby into a dazzlingly brilliant boy. But my life would have also have been far less interesting, and my world far less meaningful and magical. What I can give to him is a token of what I have been given, and I dedicate this book to my mother, Michiko Konishi Reed, who has filled my life with meaning and magic as well – not least through the reminder that the true enchantment of the world dwells in the wonder of the everyday.