

CELSUS IN HIS WORLD

Celsus penned the earliest known detailed attack upon Christianity. While his identity is disputed and his anti-Christian treatise, entitled the *True Word*, has been exclusively transmitted through the hands of the great Christian scholar Origen, he remains an intriguing figure. In this interdisciplinary volume, which brings together ancient philosophers, specialists in Greek literature, and historians of early Christianity and of ancient Judaism, Celsus is situated within the cultural, philosophical, religious and political world from which he emerged. While his work is ostensibly an attack upon Christianity, it is also the defence of a world in which Celsus passionately believed. It is the unique contribution of this volume to give voice to the many dimensions of that world in a way that will engage a variety of scholars interested in late antiquity and the histories of Christianity, Judaism and Greek thought.

James Carleton Paget is Reader in Early Christianity and Ancient Judaism, University of Cambridge. His interests include the Jewish origins of Christianity and the history of biblical interpretation. He has written a number of books and articles on second-century Judaism and Christianity and is co-editor of the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* and Fellow and Tutor at Peterhouse.

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Celsus in his World

*Philosophy, Polemic and Religion
in the Second Century*

Edited by

JAMES CARLETON PAGET

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Preface

Most of the material in this book dates back to a conference, ‘Celsus and his World’, held in Cambridge under the auspices of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) in the University of Cambridge. Oliver Wright in particular was an invaluable help to us both in preparing for the conference and during the event itself. We are extremely grateful for financial contributions to the costs of the conference from CRASSH, the Cambridge Interfaith Project, the Spalding Trust, and the Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge. In addition to the authors of the present volume, we very much appreciated the contributions of Prof. Tim Whitmarsh and Dr Rebecca Flemming, both from the Faculty of Classics in Cambridge, as well as those of Prof. Nicholas de Lange, Dr Thomas Graumann and Dr Mark Smith of the Faculty of Divinity. We would like in particular to thank Profs. Simon Goldhill, Richard Hunter, Gretchen Reydam-Schils and George van Kooten for joining the project after the conference to fill in lacunae which had become evident in our discussions. The present volume retains the structure of the conference, perhaps unusually including responses; we believe, however, that these constitute valuable contributions in their own right. David Sedley and George Boys-Stones were initially envisaged as presenter and respondent respectively, but we are delighted that they instead decided to divide up the material and to offer separate, substantial chapters.

In his contention with Celsus over the resurrection, Origen said that this doctrine is ‘deep and difficult to understand, in need of a wise interpreter’ (*Cels.* 7.32). The same could be said of Celsus, and we are extremely grateful to such an international cast of wise scholarly interpreters for taking part in this volume.