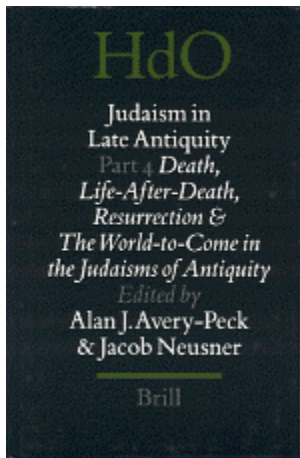


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Avery-Peck, Alan J., and Jacob Neusner

Judaism in Late Antiquity: Part 4: Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection & The World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity

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Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity exists at two levels and must be evaluated at each. First, the volume is a collection of essays on death and the afterlife in Judaism from the Biblical through the Rabbinic periods by some of the foremost interpreters of ancient Judaism. As such, it is both authoritative and stimulating, including both essays that sum up a generation of scholarship and others making new departures.

Jacob Neusner's introduction to the collection, however, casts it as a test case for the superiority of the "historical" method in the study of ancient "Judaisms" over what the writer terms the "nominalist," "harmonistic," and "theological" methods, seeking to demonstrate the diversity of ancient Judaisms through the variety of views concerning death and the afterlife. In this regard, the book is a failure in several respects. The effort to represent the volume as a test for the historical method seems to be an artificial excuse for a collection of essays that has a valid reason for existence in its own right. Here one need only note that the discussion of "Judaisms" is not explicitly carried through by the authors themselves, although they amply demonstrate the diversity present in the material studied. The collection likewise pursues a fairly narrow set of ideas through Judaism in the ancient world, making it impossible to move directly to diverse forms of Judaism and their associated social constructs and world-views. The actual arrangement of the volume and assignment of essays reflects not Judaisms but the literary and sometimes canonical categories into which modern scholarship divides the literature of ancient Judaism.

In addition to the Preface by Avery-Peck and Neusner and the Introduction by Neusner, the volume contains thirteen essays arranged in five sections. The first section, "The Legacy of Scripture," includes "Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence" by Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky Overton; "Death and Afterlife in the Psalms" by John Goldingay; "Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded 'Death after Death' in Ancient Israelite Society" by Brian B. Schmidt; and "Death and Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature" by Roland E. Murphy. In the second section, "Judaic Writings in Greek," John J. Collins examines "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature"; George W. E. Nickelsburg "Judgment, Life-after-Death, and Resurrection in the Apocrypha and the Non-Apocalyptic Pseudepigrapha"; and Lester L. Grabbe "Eschatology in Philo and Josephus." The third and fourth sections, "The Dead Sea Scrolls" and "Earliest Christianity," contain a single essay each, the first by Philip Davies, "Death, Resurrection, and Life after Death in the Qumran Scrolls," and the second by Bruce Chilton, "Resurrection in the Gospels." The final section, "Rabbinic Judaism," includes "Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources: The Mishnah, Tosefta, and Early Midrash Compilations" by Avery-Peck; "Death and Afterlife in the Later Rabbinic Sources: The Two Talmuds and Associated Midrash-Compilations" by Neusner; "Death and Afterlife: The Inscriptional Evidence" by Leonard V. Rutgers; and "The Resurrection of the Dead and the Sources of the Palestinian Targums to the Pentateuch" by Paul V. M. Flesher.

While it would be difficult in a review of this scope to comment in any depth on each of the articles, the real need is to step back and look at the collection of essays as a whole to see what one learns about the topic by bringing them together, since this task has been left to the reader by the editors. In this regard, the initial essay, "Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence" by Friedman and Overton, lifts the entire collection from the status of a reference survey and raises some important questions about the interpretation of the evidence throughout the periods covered. The two authors challenge the "scholarly models of linear progressions" in which Israel moves from a more or less exclusive emphasis upon the life of the present world to a full-blown belief in the life of the world to come at the end of the scriptural period. Their case is rooted both in the examination of archaeological evidence, which they cite as evidence for cultic observance at family tombs directed toward a belief in the afterlife, and textual study, in which they explore the acceptance or rejection of belief in an afterlife in the major literary compilations of the Hebrew Scriptures. The authors attribute the silence on the afterlife to priestly groups with an inherent lack of interest in the family cultic observances of lay Judeans in the countryside (the latter represented by the Yahwistic source) as a consequence of their concentration on the this-worldly focus of the temple cult. Friedman and Overton argue that the ascendancy of the priestly perspective is the consequence of the destruction of the Judean countryside in the invasion of the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah and the centralization of the cultus under Hezekiah and Josiah.

In "Memory as Immortality," Schmidt presents an alternative to Friedman and Overton,

rejecting the notion of an ancestor cult involving the veneration of the dead in earlier Israelite belief. He suggests instead that the interest in the Hebrew Bible is in immortality understood as the preservation of the memory of the deceased and in the legitimization of the claims of the living to birthright and ownership of land. The scholarly issues, he argues, lie in the period in which belief in an afterlife emerges and the sources of cultural influence upon the development of the idea. While Schmidt notes that “notions of immortality were possibly afloat in various periods of Israelite religious history,” he argues that the decisive transformation is to be traced to the sixth century and Mesopotamia, which will lead to the ideas of 1 Enoch. Writing respectively on the Psalms and the wisdom literature, Goldingay and Murphy serve primarily to document the silence on life beyond the grave in the scriptures.

The essays dealing with Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods catalog the rise of reflection upon an afterlife in Judaism. Collins distinguishes between apocalypses that look for a general resurrection at the end of history and those that focus upon a heavenly ascent and lack the idea of a general resurrection (although they may reflect upon the reward and punishment of those who have died). He suggests that the development takes place under the influence of social dislocation and foreign ideas, but that the appropriation of foreign ideas takes a distinctively Jewish form. Nickelsburg treats the development of interest in various conceptions of the afterlife as the consequence of a concern with theodicy, as “writers continue to espouse the notion that God’s judgment is enacted in the history of the nation and the lives of individuals.” Grabbe discusses individual, national, and cosmic eschatology in the writings of Philo and Josephus, producing a useful contrast between the two writers in response to previous scholarly efforts at harmonization. The sharpest differences come in the area of the future fate of souls: Philo sees the goal of life in the soul’s freedom from the body and is vague about future rewards and punishments, while Josephus appears to believe in some form of reincarnation and is clearer about judgment after death. Davies places his treatment of death and afterlife in the Dead Sea Scrolls in the context of a distinction between the interest of the Enochic literature in the continued life of the spirit and the idea of resurrection in Daniel (apparently overlooking in his treatment of 1 Enoch as a whole the presence of the idea of a resurrection in the Similitudes in 1 Enoch 51). He details the consequent diversity in thought in the area under discussion and concludes that given this diversity it is impossible to attribute the scrolls to any one group or sect. Chilton discusses Jesus’ understanding of the resurrection in terms of “substantial regeneration and transcendence” in which human nature and existence is radically transformed with regard to social and personal distinctions (those in the resurrection will be like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage). He traces the impact of this understanding through Origen and Augustine.

There is an interesting interplay in the essays dealing with the Rabbinic period. It becomes apparent from the contributions by Avery-Peck and Neusner that interest in the life of the world to come in the Talmud and related midrashim focuses upon the nation

rather than the individual and is secondary to the study and observance of Torah. Neusner blurs the treatment by taking as his subject the “Oral Torah” (a seemingly confessional category and an approach that appears to violate his usual method of beginning with the intellectual worlds created by the individual literary units before searching for larger unities) leading to the inclusion of the Mishnah in his treatment (in spite of the scope set by his title), making it impossible to distinguish between “early” and “later” in Rabbinic literature. In examining the inscriptional evidence from the Rabbinic period, Rutgers explores the hints in the inscriptions of synagogue liturgy associated with the commemoration of the dead, and the allusions to passages of scripture that, elsewhere in Rabbinic literature, are associated with the discussion of the hereafter, concluding that the inscriptions suggest more than can be demonstrated about what they say about the world to come. In the final essay, Flesher builds upon the publication and discussion of the targumim over the last generation to show how the extensive redactional material to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan introduces a distinctive concept of the resurrection – in this world during the apocalyptic events of the end of time rather than in the life of the world to come – over the earlier versions of the Palestinian Targum. What this section lacks is an essay on the Hekhaloth literature, which probably would have served to underline the element of diversity.

What becomes apparent in viewing the collection as a whole is that the reconstruction of the views of ancient Judaism regarding death and the afterlife is shaped primarily by textual scholarship in which the process of selection underlying the survival of the texts inevitably will have skewed the portrait. The obvious example here is the Rabbinic literature, where it is not clear whether the attenuated interest in the world to come is the consequence of a shift in interest in the age as a whole, or of the nature of the texts as the discussion of legal issues solidly rooted in this world. The potential for alternative approaches to the age lies in the other two essays on the Rabbinic period, one of which turns to artifacts produced by archaeology in examining the inscriptional evidence and the other of which examines the targumim, which are more likely to reflect popular ideas given their *Sitz im Leben* in the synagogue. Rutgers’ treatment of the inscriptions does not provide the necessary alternative, however, given his conclusion that they suggest more than they actually say and the necessity of using Rabbinic texts to interpret what they might suggest. Flesher’s essay on the targumim does indicate greater popular interest in apocalyptic ideation; however, further analysis is needed to relate those materials comparatively to the tradition of Halakah.

The importance of the study by Friedman and Overton in introducing archaeological evidence into the discussion of the issue in the Biblical period is apparent, even if there is no agreement over their interpretation of this evidence, since the discussion of textually based evidence alone perpetuates the process of selection and survival noted above. The role in which they cast the priesthood as responsible for the Biblical silence with regard to death and the afterlife likewise suggests a renewed analysis of the topic in the Hellenistic

period, given the importance of the priesthood in discussions of the literature of that period.

In the Hellenistic and Roman period, the breadth of survivals is greater given the Diaspora and the development of Hellenistic Jewish literature, but even so, we are left with the difficulty of deciding upon textually-based approaches alone the reason for the variations in beliefs about the afterlife. Nickelsburg emphasizes intellectual issues (theodicy) in his discussion, while Collins emphasizes social dislocation. In any case, the problem in reaching conclusions about the variety and development of ideas is inherent in the primarily textual nature of the evidence. The difficulty in reaching conclusions about social grouping and their world-views based on textually-based scholarship alone, and focused on a fairly narrow cross section of ideas, indicates that the discussion of “Judaisms” may require a somewhat different venue.

In spite of the problems presented by the way in which the introduction casts the purpose of the collection, and by the lack of an overall survey of the issues raised by the individual essays, this set of discussions of death and afterlife in ancient Judaism represents the work of some of the foremost interpreters of ancient Judaism and deserves to be included in any academic or personal library that seeks seriously to represent the history of Jewish thought and life.