



Jewish Marriage in Antiquity

By Michael L. Satlow

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Marriage today might be a highly contested topic, but certainly no more than it was in antiquity. Ancient Jews, like their non-Jewish neighbors, grappled with what have become perennial issues of marriage, from its idealistic definitions to its many practical forms to questions of who should or should not wed. In this book, Michael Satlow offers the first in-depth synthetic study of Jewish marriage in antiquity, from ca. 500 B.C.E. to 614 C.E. Placing Jewish marriage in its cultural milieu, Satlow investigates whether there was anything essentially "Jewish" about the institution as it was discussed and practiced. Moreover, he considers the social and economic aspects of marriage as both a personal relationship and a religious bond, and explores how the Jews of antiquity negotiated the gap between marital realities and their ideals.

Focusing on the various experiences of Jews throughout the Mediterranean basin and in Babylonia, Satlow argues that different communities, even rabbinic ones, constructed their own "Jewish" marriage: they read their received traditions and rituals through the lens of a basic understanding of marriage that they shared with their non-Jewish neighbors. He also maintains that Jews idealized marriage in a way that responded to the ideals of their respective societies, mediating between such values as honor and the far messier realities of marital life. Employing Jewish and non-Jewish literary texts, papyri, inscriptions, and material artifacts, Satlow paints a vibrant portrait of ancient Judaism while sharpening and clarifying present discussions on modern marriage for Jews and non-Jews alike.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[An] illuminating and comprehensive book. . . . The difficult questions of Jewish marriage today, such as a concern over Jews marrying non-Jews and the changing definitions of who constitutes a married couple, may not actually have many new elements. Judaism of the past and present has always been in conversation with its host society about such fluid matters."--**Tawny L. Holm, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review***

From the Inside Flap

"*Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* is the most exhaustive and incisive of studies of this important topic to date and will define the problematics of ancient Jewish marriage for the foreseeable future. Its eclectic methodology and comparative perspectives will attract readers from a variety of disciplines. Classicists, historians of religion, and scholars interested generally in the institution of marriage and in attendant constructions of gender and sexuality will find valuable insights in this book."--**Steven D. Fraade, Yale University**

"A superb book, one that offers a truly sophisticated and rich social history of Classical Judaism. Michael Satlow looks at the institution of marriage from virtually every angle, and combines a good deal of common sense as well as historical imagination in order to build a compelling, detailed interpretation of his evidence."--**David Stern, University of Pennsylvania**

From the Back Cover

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