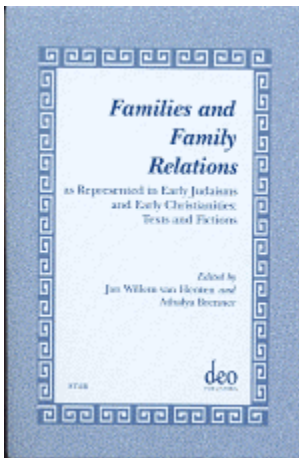


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van Henten, Jan Willem and Athalya Brenner, eds.

***Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early
Judaisms and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions***

Studies in Theology and Religion

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Only recently have scholars awakened to the fundamental importance of understanding families and family relations for the study of religious communities and texts in the Greco-Roman world. In the last decade a number of monographs have explored the realities of family life among ancient Jews and Christians from a perspective that no longer assumes a single model for the family but rather understands that families are socially constructed and that families and their structures were often the subject of debate and a point of coercion among the ancients. That *Families and Family Relations As Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianities* contributes to this ongoing discussion is evident in the title's many plurals. Not only is there a recognition of the multiplicity of family constructs, but there is an acknowledgment of the multiple forms of ancient Judaism and Christianity. This volume contains some of the papers delivered at the 1998 colloquium entitled "Families in the Ancient Near Eastern World, the Hebrew Bible and the Judaisms and Christianities of Early Antiquities" as part of the Netherlands Research School for Theology and Religious Studies. With the exception of Hachlili's paper, which explores inscriptional evidence, the individual essays analyze family relations as they are portrayed in both Jewish and Christian literary texts; the papers address the construction of marriage (Satlow), sibling relations (Kottsieper; Esler), gender (Peskovitz; van Tilborg), and personal names (Hachlili). I here comment in detail on only three of the essays.

Michael L. Satlow's article, "The Metaphor of Marriage in Early Judaism," explores the fate of the biblical metaphor of God as husband/lover of Israel in postbiblical

literature. He argues for a nearly wholesale avoidance of this metaphor, which he roots in an emerging devaluation of the husband-wife relationship in favor of the parent-child relationship and a shifting of the discourse of fornication from association with idolatry to a lack of self-control. Satlow's strongest evidence for the rejection of this metaphor comes from the Babylonian Talmud, where in commenting on Hosea, the rabbis transformed God from Israel's lover to Israel's father (but see his discussion of Christian and later Jewish appropriations of the metaphor [25-28, 36-41]). Theological liabilities were also at play: the possibility of the divorce of God and Israel was inherent in the earlier metaphor, as was the feminization of Israel. Satlow also makes the startling suggestion that the marriage metaphor, which implies intimacy and reciprocity (15), ran the danger of challenging the hierarchical relationship between God and Israel because the covenant might be perceived as too egalitarian (22). Here Satlow seems to operate upon the assumption of a pervasive ideology of the family ("*oikos* ideology") rather than multiple, competing family structures and relationships. In addition, perhaps Satlow too quickly dismissed the relevance of the erotic portrayal of Sophia in Wisdom of Solomon and Philo (17-18). This provocative imagery deserves further analysis as a significant reshaping of the biblical metaphor that might in fact offer evidence of the diversity of familial visions.

"Domesticity and the Spindle," by Miriam Peskowitz, and the accompanying response by Lieve Teugels form the most engaging pair of essays in the volume. Peskowitz explores the changing understanding of women's labor after the destruction of Jerusalem. She argues for the demise of the ideal enshrined in Prov 31:10-31 in favor of a new vision where nonwage domestic labor became conceived as an assurance of marital fidelity, necessitated since leisure invited sexual temptation (*m. Ketub.* 5:5), and wage-earning labor, including both the goods produced and the wages earned, came under the total control of the husband or father (*m. Ketub.* 6:1). She also argues that the imaginative range of women's labors also became restricted through the rabbis' iconic use of the spindle (*m. Ketub.* 5:9). In sum, the economic value of women's labor was ignored in favor of labor as an expression of "sexual containment." Teugels raises important objections to Peskowitz's use of Prov 31 as representative of a presumed monolithic Israelite vision of female domesticity and about the value of this song of praise for reconstructing domestic relations. Teugels also points toward the need for a more nuanced understanding of the influence of non-Jewish gender stereotypes on the developments reflected in rabbinic writings.

Of all the essays in this volume, Rachel Hachlili's "Hebrew Names, Personal Names, Family Names and Nicknames of Jews in the Second Temple Period" is the only one rooted in documentary evidence. Hachlili recounts the various ways names were constructed, the relatively few but extremely popular male and female names in the Second Temple period, and the common practice of ponymy. (Gerard Mussies's response to this essay contains the apt warning that Hachlili's statistical analysis should have considered the onomastic evidence of the New Testament as well as that of *CJJ*.)

Hachlili raises some intriguing areas for further research—the movement away from ponymy toward patronymy and the occasional practice of matronymy (109)—and alerts readers to evidence for alternative family structures (see her brief comments on Shlamzion [110-11]). Hachlili concludes, “The personal names, surnames and nicknames reflect the organization of life and the Jewish social environment” (112); no doubt this is true, and hopefully others will continue to analyze the dynamics of the individual families represented by this evidence.

The other essays in the volume include “ ‘We Have a Little Sister’: Aspects of the Brother-Sister Relationship in Ancient Israel,” by Ingo Kottsieper; “ ‘Keeping It in the Family’: Culture, Kinship and Identity in 1 Thessalonians and Galatians,” by Philip Esler; and “The Women in John: On Gender and Gender Bending,” by Sjef van Tilborg.

The editors claim that the papers in the volume will focus on the “dialectic processes of continuity and change in kinship/family notions” (4). While comparing the papers might lead one to a recognition of these diverse family relations, the individual papers often demonstrate the difficulties of engaging in substantive analysis without some recourse to an essentialist stereotype (see, e.g., van Henten’s criticism of Esler [186-89] and Bieringer’s criticism of van Tilborg [217-18]). The editors end their introduction with a proper note of caution: “Be the texts we read for ‘families’ what they may, they dish up to us *virtual* families only” (10). These texts are indicative of their authors’ visions of and for families, visions that no doubt were realized in at least some small sphere but that should in no way be assumed to match the reality of the authors’ larger world. This realization leads us to a clearer understanding of the volume’s subtitle, *Texts and Fictions*. The reader should not mistake this for *Reality and Fiction*, but perhaps the editors’ intent is better put *Texts and Their Fictions*. For most of the essays, the greatest addition would have been a clearer delineation of the text’s fiction and its clash with the larger realities of the text’s world, but perhaps this will only be possible as more of the fictions are revealed.