



The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel

Benjamin D. Sommer

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- *Winner of the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion from the American Academy of Religion, in the Textual Studies Category, as the best book in religious studies focusing on textual analysis published in 2009.*
- *Winner of the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association for Jewish Studies, as the best book published in biblical studies, rabbinics, or archaeology in the years 2006-2009.*

In *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, Benjamin D. Sommer investigates the notion of a deity's body and self in ancient Israel, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. He uncovers a lost ancient Near Eastern perception of divinity according to which an essential difference between gods and humans was that gods had more than one body and fluid, unbounded selves. Though the dominant strains of biblical religion rejected it, a monotheistic version of this theological intuition is found in some biblical texts. Later Jewish and Christian thinkers inherited this ancient way of thinking; ideas such as the sefirot in kabbalah and the trinity in Christianity represent a late version of this theology. This book forces us to rethink the distinction between monotheism and polytheism, as this notion of divine fluidity is found in both polytheistic cultures (Babylonia, Assyria, Canaan) and monotheistic ones (biblical religion, Jewish mysticism, Christianity), whereas it is absent in some polytheistic cultures (classical Greece). The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel has important repercussions not only for biblical scholarship and comparative religion but for Jewish-Christian dialogue.



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