

Ra'anan S. Boustan

From Martyr to Mystic

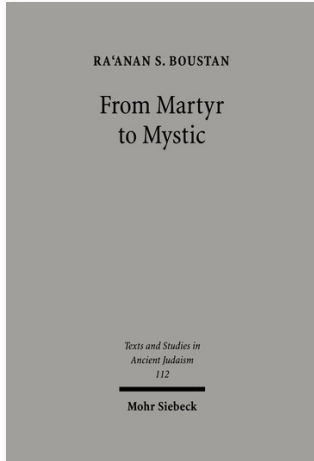
Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism

[Vom Märtyrer zum Mystiker. Rabbinische Martyrologie und die Entstehung des Merkavah-Mystizismus.]

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Ra'anan S. Boustan traces the historical emergence of the specific form of 'mystical' discourse found in *Heikhalot Rabbati*. He argues that the creators of *Heikhalot Rabbati* sought to fashion a myth of origins for their distinctive brand of heavenly ascent practice by radically reworking the narrative framework of the widely disseminated post-talmudic martyrology *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*. *Heikhalot Rabbati* not only renders redundant the notion of atoning self-sacrifice that is central to the martyrology, but also ascribes to the Heikhalot visionary the intercessory function of the martyr – here achieved bloodlessly through heavenly ascent and liturgical performance. *Heikhalot Rabbati* emerged as a part of a broader effort to fashion a distinct social identity for the Heikhalot visionary. In parsing the complex relationship between rabbinic martyrology and Heikhalot literature, the author illuminates how the figures of the rabbinic martyr and the Merkavah mystic came to play parallel, yet competing, roles within the highly influential conceptions of history that were bequeathed to medieval Jewish communities by late antique Judaism.

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