

Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity

Kim Bowes



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Conventional histories of late antique Christianity tell the story of a public institution - the Christian church. In this book, Kim Bowes relates another history, that of the Christian private. Using textual and archaeological evidence, she examines the Christian rituals of home and rural estate, which took place outside the supervision of bishops and their agents. These domestic rituals and the spaces in which they were performed were rooted in age-old religious habits. They formed a major, heretofore unrecognized force in late ancient Christian practice. The religion of home and family, however, was not easily reconciled with that of the bishop's church. Domestic Christian practices presented challenges to episcopal authority and posed thorny questions about the relationship between individuals and the Christian collective. As Bowes suggests, the story of private Christianity reveals a watershed in changing conceptions of "public" and "private," one whose repercussions echo through contemporary political and religious debate.

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