

I mentioned that I have started writing my academic book on the early Christian versions of the guided tours of heaven and hell. This will be very different from the trade book coming out in March — an full eight-chapter scholarly analysis of material that I cover in a very brief overview fashion in one chapter of the trade book.

As I've mentioned on the blog before, when I get to certain points of my work on a book, I like to produce for myself an account of what it is, where it's going, how it will be organized, and so on. Now that I'm getting down to actually writing this thing after doing the research for it, I've started drafting up my summary of it, to emphasize its interest and importance, and to explain to myself how I'm imagining it working itself out, as a whole and then chapter by chapter. My current understanding of the book is closely related to what I started imagining it to be, nearly three years ago; but it is very different as well, in lots of ways. That's what research will do. You get informed and you get ideas.

This summary is not for a broad audience, and so it will be a little more academic, but not at all technical or overly erudite. It will take about four posts to pull it off, two on the general conception and point of the book, and two outlining the eight chapters. (For a year I thought there were going to be *seven* chapters*, but when I started writing chapter 1 last week I realized there was way in the universe to avoid it being two chapters. So now there are eight.)

I have no idea what the final title of the thing will be. For now (I change all the time) I'm calling it: [Guided Tours of Heaven and Hell. Otherworldly Journeys in the Early Christian Tradition](#)

Here then is the first bit of the write up for myself, trying to capture what I think is most intriguing about it.

In the winter season of 1886-87 a French archaeological team digging in a necropolis in Akhmim, Egypt made one of the most intriguing textual discoveries of modern times. In a tomb thought to belong to a Christian monk they found a 66-page book, in Greek, comprising a small anthology of texts, one of which was eventually identified as the Apocalypse of Peter. This work provides the first surviving Christian account of a guided tour of heaven and hell, told in the first person by Jesus' own disciple Peter. In the account, now known also in a longer Ethiopic version, Peter describes, briefly, the ecstasies of the elect and, at greater length and more graphic detail, the torments of the damned. Peter sees that ...

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