



**IMAGINING
THE DIVINE**

Art and the Rise of World Religions



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- This is the catalogue for a major exhibition, which is the first attempt to show the developing visual cultures of the world religions in the first millennium A.D. both individually and in dialogue with each other
- The catalogue tells both the stories of each individual religious culture and gives some hints as to shared themes and interconnections
- The catalogue contains a fine selection of illustrations, comparing the religions and their art

Religion has always been a fundamental force for constructing identity, from antiquity to the contemporary world. The transformation of ancient cults into faith systems, which we recognise now as major world religions, took place in the first millennium AD, in the period we call 'Late Antiquity'. Our argument is that the creative impetus for both the emergence, and much of the visual distinctiveness of the world religions came in contexts of cultural encounter. Bridging the traditional divide between classical, Asian, Islamic and Western history, this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue highlights religious and artistic creativity at points of contact and cultural borders between late antique civilisations. This catalogue features the creation of specific visual languages that belong to five major world religions: Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. The imagery still used by these belief systems today is evidence for the development of distinct religious identities in Late Antiquity. Emblematic visual forms like the figure of Buddha and Christ, or Islamic aniconism, only evolved in dialogue with a variety of coexisting visualisations of the sacred. As late antique believers appropriated some competing models and rejected others, they created compelling and long-lived representations of faith, but also revealed their indebtedness to a multitude of contemporaneous religious ideas and images. The book will be published to coincide with a major exhibition of the same name. The exhibition will run at the Ashmolean from 19 October 2017 to 18 February 2018. Table of Contents: List of Contributors; Preface; Encounters; Religions in the Roman World; Gods in Combination; The Rise of the Image of Christ; Jewish Art; Scripture; Word as Image; Envisioning the Buddha; Amulets and Magic; Maidens and Mothers, Virgins and Lovers; Vishnu: The Enigmatic Image of a Deity; Sacred and Imperial Power; Iconoclasm; The Emergence of Islamic Art; Aniconism; Christianity in the British Isles; Sacred Space; Travelling Objects; Chronological Table; Map of the World (Britain to India) c.250 AD; Map of the World (Britain to India) c.850 AD; Index of Geographical Names; Index of Personal Names.