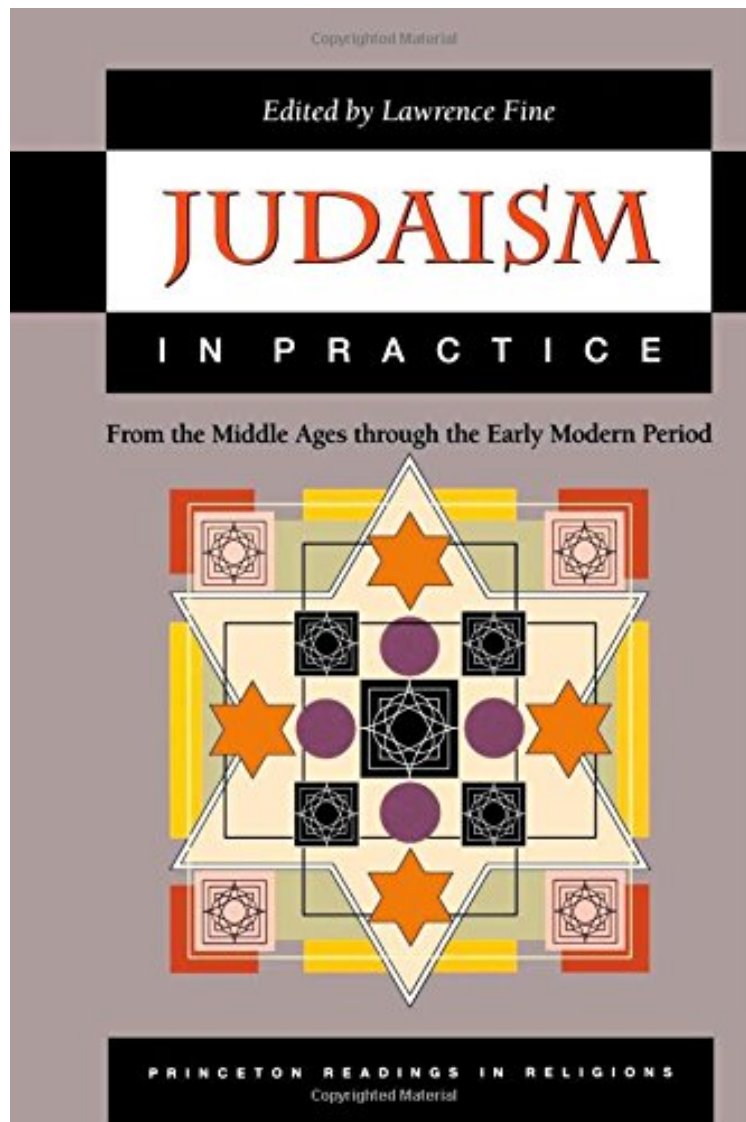


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Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period.

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From Brand: Princeton University Press : Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period. before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period.:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Medieval to Early Modern Jewish Practices. Conflict Between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim Portrayed as Bitter at TimesBy Jan PeczkisThis work covers many topics, and has a few

chapters on women in Judaism. It has sections dealing with the life cycle, Torah and learning, Jewish community life, etc. I focus on a few salient topics:

DIFFERENCES IN TRADITIONSA number of chapters deal with the Karaites. They believed, contrary to rabbinical tradition, that one should refrain from lighting a fire before the Sabbath, and not just on the Sabbath itself. (Exodus 35:3). (Lawrence Fine, p. 25). The Karaites, distinct from the Rabbanite and rejecting the rabbinic tradition by the 8th-10 centuries A. D., today number about 20,000-25,000, and live mainly in the State of Israel, the USA, and Europe. (Daniel Frank, p. 249).

EXPANSIVE JEWISH LEGALISM EXPLAINED AND CLARIFIEDAuthor Lawrence Fine introduces this subject, (quote) In the course of this process the rabbis determined that there were 613 basic legal obligations or precepts (MITSVAH) in the Torah. But from each of these 613 MITSVOT, the rabbis derived numerous further precepts, resulting in an ever-expanding body of Jewish law, or, as it came to be known, HALAKHA. The term HALAKHA, refers to the entirety of Jewish law, including the Mishnah and its subsequent development. A good example of this process may be seen in connection with the laws of the Sabbath. Whereas the Torah itself prescribes rest on the Sabbath, it provides very little specific guidance as to what such cessation from labor entails. When we turn, however, to the treatise of the Mishnah devoted to the laws of the Sabbath, we find that the sages delineated no fewer than thirty-nine types of activity that they regarded as labor. For each of these thirty-nine activities, rabbinic tradition derived still further precepts, thus exponentially expanding the laws and ritual governing the Sabbath. (unquote). (p. 4).

ONGOING ANTI-CHRISTIAN THEMES IN MEDIEVAL JUDAISMSome commentators have asserted that Judaism had nothing to say about Christianity, that that Jews spoke up about Christianity only when Christians persecuted Jews. Such was not the case. In actuality, Judaism created a series of long-term anti-Christian rites and narratives.Ivan G. Marcus writes, (quote) By weaving tougher elements from earlier Jewish traditions, Jews developed a ceremony in the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Germany and northern France that in many ways parodied and subverted aspects of Christian rituals and symbolsEating special cakes baked with foods that symbolize Torah (flour, honey, milk, and oil), and shelled hard-boiled eggs on which words of Torah were written served as a Jewish antidote to the increasingly more prominent central Christian rite of the Eucharist [eucharist in original] that bound Christians to one another and to the living sacrificed Christ. (unquote). (p. 116).Author Marcus continues, (quote) By protectively wrapping the small Jewish boy in a coat or prayer shawl when he was carried from home to the teacher, Jews acted out the message that Jewish boys, not Jesus, were to be sacrificedto a life of Torah studythe Jewish boy caressing his fathers cheek as he is brought to the schoolteacher and is seated on the teachers lap. These are Jewish adaptations of two well-known Madonna and Child types: the MATER AMABILIS (lovable mother) and the Throne of Wisdom, respectively (unquote). (p. 116).The foregoing can be generalized, (quote) They [Jews] often did this through rituals or narratives that denied and even mocked the competing stronger ideology of Christianity in medieval Europe. (unquote). (ibid, pp. 116-117).Of course, not everything in the practice of Judaism was negatively oriented towards Christianity. For instance, Ephraim Kanarfogel (pp. 193-194) mentions a Jewish custom of ensconcing oneself, in ones fortress, from worldly temptations, and devoting all ones time for studying the holy work of God. He suggests that this was a form of Jewish emulation, and adaptation, of Christian monastic traditions. (pp. 193-194). The foregoing contradicts the notion, advanced by some, that Judaism unilaterally frowned upon Christian ascetic practices as a denial of God-given joys.

THE HASIDIM AND THE MITNAGDIMAuthor Arthur Green characterizes Hasidism, like the earlier Kabbalah, as a mystical tradition. Does Hasidism blur the distinction between the Creator and the creation? Though Green does not go this far, he does make this comment, (quote) Thus Hasidism constantly struggles, for example, to find elements of its own semi-pantheistic God concept in the highly personified theology of the biblical and early rabbinic sources. (unquote). (p. 401).Author Allan Nadler portrays the conflict between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim as one that sometimes turned bitter. The Gaon of Vilna led the struggle of the Mitnagdim against the Hasidim. Nadler adds that, (quote) The Mitnagdim not only polemicized against Hasidic doctrine; they waged an uncompromising war against its practitioners, placing them under the rabbinic ban of excommunication and, when possible, denouncing their zaddikim (Hasidic religious leaders; lit. righteous men) as subversives to the tsarist authorities. (unquote). (p. 513).

UPSHEERIN: THE HAIR-CUTTING RITEAuthor Ivan G. Marcus describes the practice, derived from ancient times, among 18th- or 19th century Jews, of cutting a Jewish boy's hair when he turned three years old. This compared the child to a new fruit tree whose yield can now be harvested. (pp. 118-119).I find UPSHEERIN personally interesting. We are not Jewish, but, when I was about three years old, my mother cut off some hairs of mine and saved them.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Great Selection of ArticlesBy mbczThis book has a little of everything. Articles on History, Jewish Practice, Mysticism, and Biographies, to name a few of the topics presented. The articles are scholarly but easy enough for pleasurable reading.Accompanying each article is section which provides sources for additional reading on the topics touched upon. Also accompanying each article, are a selection of the actual sources being discussed, enabling the reader to get a good feel of the material.All in all, the interesting topics in addition to the two features listed above make this a good book.

This collection of original materials provides a sweeping view of medieval and early modern Jewish ritual and religious practice. Including such diverse texts as ritual manuals, legal codes, mystical books, autobiographical

writings, folk literature, and liturgical poetry, it testifies to the enormous variety of practices that characterized Judaism in the twelve hundred years between 600 and 1800 C.E. Its focus on religious practice and experience--how Judaism was actually lived by people from day to day--makes this anthology unique among the few sourcebooks available. The volume encompasses the broad scope and complex texture of Jewish religious practice, taking into account many aspects of Jewish culture that have hitherto been relatively neglected: the religious life of ordinary people, the role and status of women, art and aesthetics, and marginalized as well as remote Jewish communities. It introduces such remarkable personalities as Moses Maimonides, Leon Modena, and Gluckel of Hameln, and presents extraordinary texts on festival practice, Torah study, mystical communities, meditation, exorcism, the practice of charity, and folk rites marking birth and death. Representing state-of-the-art scholarship by distinguished academics from around the world, the volume includes many materials never before translated into English. Each text is preceded by an accessible introduction, making this book suitable for college and university students as well as a general audience. Whether read as a deliberate course of study or dipped into selectively for a glimpse into fascinating Jewish lives and places, *Judaism in Practice* holds rich rewards for any reader.

"Lawrence Fine . . . has assembled an impressive array of writings that explore the variegated ways in which Jews have practiced their religion. . . . By giving us a variety of texts and materials that go beyond the boundaries of conventional sources, Fine has opened up ways of thinking about the Jewish experience that are likely to challenge readers' expectations. In doing so, he and his contributors raise essential questions about the nature of Judaism as a religion and a culture, shake readers out of complacency and leave us to wonder at the marvelous scope of the Jewish people's history."--Barry W. Holtz, *The Forward* From the Inside Flap "This is a rich collection. Fine has secured contributions, introductions, and a selection of materials from accomplished scholars in each area covered. There is no other volume like it. The book is well suited for an undergraduate readership in Jewish studies, and Fine's introduction is appropriate for readers encountering the study of Judaism for the first time."--Robert S. Schine, Middlebury College, author of *Jewish Thought Adrift: Max Wiener* From the Back Cover "This is a rich collection. Fine has secured contributions, introductions, and a selection of materials from accomplished scholars in each area covered. There is no other volume like it. The book is well suited for an undergraduate readership in Jewish studies, and Fine's introduction is appropriate for readers encountering the study of Judaism for the first time."--Robert S. Schine, Middlebury College, author of *Jewish Thought Adrift: Max Wiener*