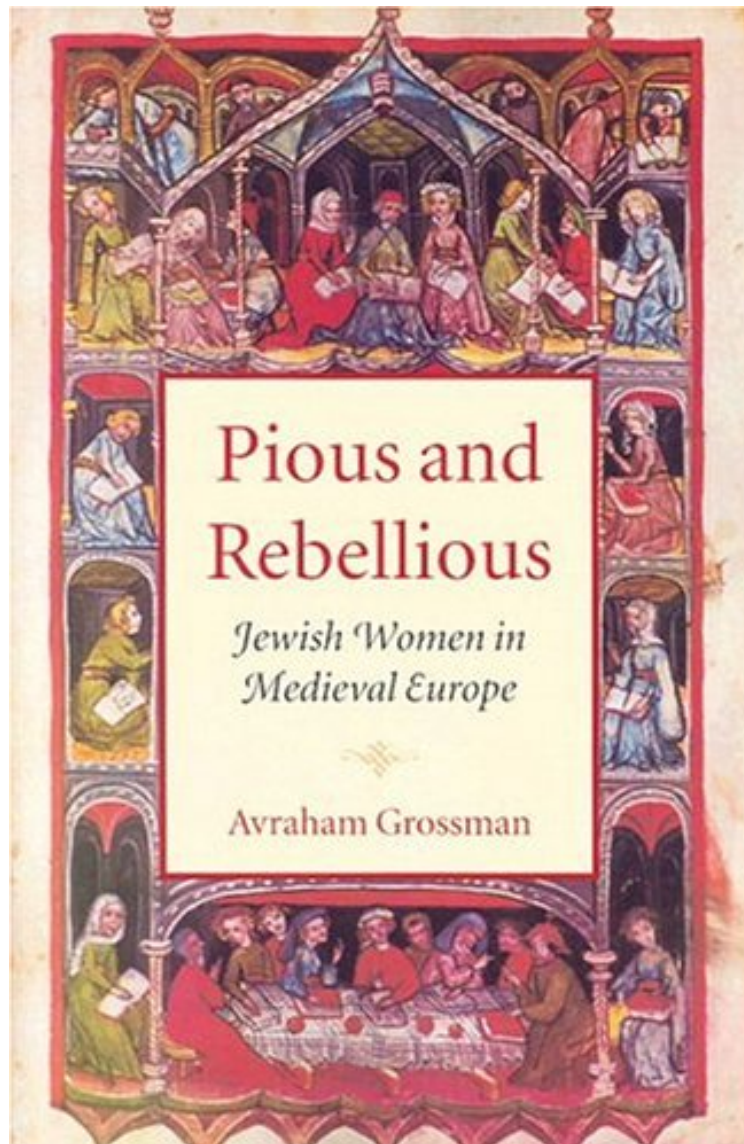


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Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry HBI Series on Jewish Women)

Avraham Grossman

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Avraham Grossman : Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry HBI Series on Jewish Women) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe (The Tauber

Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry HBI Series on Jewish Women):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. great research!By PaleSkin NorthernerVery good book about Jews in Medieval Europe. The author did a wonderful research! It does contradict somewhat to the traditional rabbinic view.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. lots of interesting stuffBy Michael LewynThis book addresses a wide variety of issues related to Jewish women in medieval Europe. Generally, the author views the Middle Ages positively, as a time when Jewish women gained status. His discussion of the following issues is especially interesting:
*The Ashkenazic ban on polygamy. Grossman suggests that Ashkenazic tradesmen often traveled from country to country, and some had the proverbial girl in every port. Rabbis sought to limit this practice because of the high risk that one of the wives would be abandoned, or at least be poorer as husbands spent limited assets on multiple spouses.
*Levirate marriage the Torah-endorsed practice of childless widows marrying a brother-in-law in order to keep the dead husbands name alive. I had thought that as Jewish sages always discouraged this practice and endorsed substitute rituals. But in fact, medieval Ashkenaz was quite divided on the issue. In some communities, levirate marriage occurred as long as either the brother-in-law or the wife wanted it; however, this led to negative results, such as brother-in-laws using the threat of levirate marriage to extort concessions on inheritance issues. As rabbis awoke to this problem, they began to discourage levirate marriage.
*Womens higher economic status than in Muslim lands. In Christian Europe, Jewish women were active participants in family businesses (especially moneylending and other commercial pursuits), and thus achieved high status. By contrast, in Muslim nations both Jewish and Muslim women suffered due to cultural obsessions with modesty; for example, Maimonides wrote that a married woman should go out once a month or a few times a month.
*Women were sometimes active in religious life; some sources refer to womens synagogues next to male synagogues; apparently, womens minyans (which even today are controversial) were allowed in some communities. Although medieval literature is highly anecdotal, Grossman seems to think that Jewish women were less willing to convert to other religions than men, and perhaps more likely to seek martyrdom during pogroms.
*In one area, Jewish law may have been more progressive than it is today in some Orthodox communities. The Torah, if read literally, seems to refer only to divorce by males- and that seems to be the modern rule (although modern Orthodox rabbis often use prenuptial agreements to prevent men from holding up divorces for frivolous reasons). However, medieval rabbis held that men could be forced to divorce women in a variety of situations- for example, if the man was impotent. In some places (especially the Muslim world) a woman could force a divorce by refusing to perform household tasks; however, as divorce became more common in the 1300s, Ashkenazic rabbis became more strict.
9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. The Medieval Jewish WomanBy Shalom FreedmanThis work is a scholarly study of the life and world of the Jewish woman in medieval Europe during the High Middle Ages, 1000 -1300 C. E. It considers the Biblical and Talmudic influence, thee influence of the surroundings i.e. the Gentile society, and the influence of economic status on the life of the medieval Jewish woman. One important development during this time was an increasing economic role for the woman. There too was to a degree an increase in equality for the woman, this especially when the European societies are measured against the Muslim ones.This work provides important historical and sociological insight not only into the changing reality of the Jewish woman during this time, but regarding the whole process of transformation of the society towards the Modern world.The work is ably translated by one of the finest presently working Hebrew- English translators of Jewish religious literature, Rabbi Jonathan Chipman.

This volume, an amazing act of historical recovery and reconstruction, offers a comprehensive examination of Jewish women in Europe during the High Middle Ages (1000-1300). Avraham Grossman covers multiple aspects of womens lives in medieval Jewish society, including the image of woman, the structure of the family unit, age at marriage, position in family and society, her place in economic and religious life, her education, her role in family ceremonies, violence against women, and the position of the divorce and the widow in society. Grossman shows that the High Middle Ages saw a distinct improvement in the status of Jewish women in Europe relative to their status during the Talmudic period and in Muslim countries. If, during the twelfth century, rabbis applauded women as "pious and pure" because of their major role in the martyrdom of the Crusades of 1096, then by the end of the thirteenth century, rabbis complained that women were becoming bold and rebellious. Two main factors fostered this change: first, the transformation of Jewish society from agrarian to "bourgeois," with women performing an increasingly important function in the family economy; and second, the openness toward women in Christian Europe, where women were not subjected to strict limitations based upon conceptions of modesty, as was the case in Muslim countries. The heart of Grossmans book concerns the improvement of Jewish womens lot, and the efforts of secular and religious authorities to impede their new-found status.Bringing together a variety of sources including halakhic literature, biblical and talmudic exegesis, ethical literature and philosophy, love songs, folklore and popular literature, gravestones, and drawings, Grossmans book reconstructs the hitherto unrecorded lives of Jewish women during the Middle Ages.

Avraham Grossman is an erudite and intellectually honest scholar who is helping to draw a true picture of Jewish

