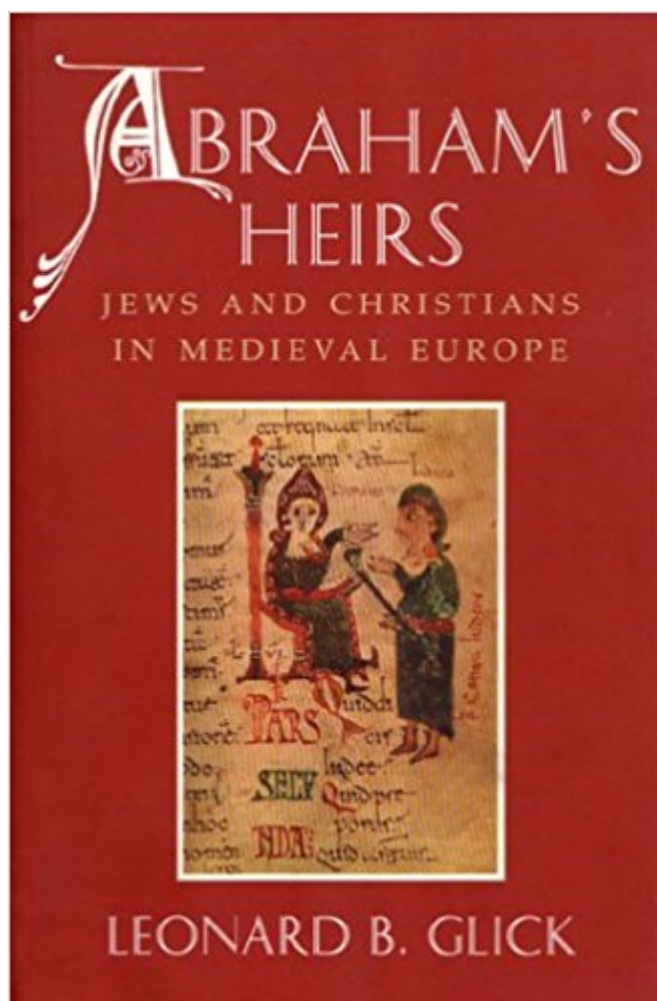


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Abraham's Heirs: Jews And Christians In Medieval Europe



Synopsis

The author of this book recounts the history of the Ashkenazic Jewish experience in medieval western Europe from the 5th to 15th centuries, focusing on interaction between Jews and Christians during this formative period.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Glick's examination of the social experience of Jews living among Christians in medieval Europe is fascinating. A social historian and anthropologist at Hampshire College, Glick looks at the "ways in which European Jewish culture, identity, and experience were molded in the crucible of western Christendom." He believes modern-day Jewish "cultural psychology" arose from "a patterned set of behavioral dispositions and values, reflecting the historical experience and adaptive strategies of Ashkenazic Jewry" in the Franco-German region. (Glick's account is unique in that he intentionally overlooks Jewish Spain, a popular focus of other scholars.) The Crusades, the Jews' relegation from merchants to moneylenders, and Jewish settlement in and subsequent expulsion from England allow Glick to realize his hypothesis. Glick makes this history come alive. An excellent choice for academic, seminary, and public libraries. ?Kevin M. Roddy, Univ. of Hawaii, Hilo Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Leonard B. Glick is professor of anthropology at Hampshire College, Amherst, where he teaches cultural anthropological approaches to religion and ethnicity.

Personally I was looking for more day to day specifics about what life was like for a Jew during this time period. Specifically what daily life might be like. This was less anthropology and more history. It's basically a historical textbook which isn't what I expected based off the blurb. If you're looking for a history of the Jews in Medieval Europe this is a fantastic book.

I teach religious high school, and I thought I knew something about the history of Jews in medieval Europe. "Abraham's Heirs" has broadened my knowledge and understanding to a degree that is simply astonishing. Like all really good histories, this one combines compelling primary sources with a clear overall structure. A great read.

I was assigned Glick's book by my Medieval History professor Dr. Paul Halsall. I opened the book thinking I knew a lot about the experiences of Jews in France and Germany in Medieval Europe; and what I found was that I was wrong. This book is an excellent book about the cultures of the Jews and the Christians, how these two cultures interacted with each other and how Medieval Jewish culture effects the culture of American Jews, who predominately come from these Ashkenazic Jews. The book is divided chronologically and this division works. It shows the downward spiral pattern of Christian and Jewish interaction that finally hit rock bottom with the expulsion of Jews from France and in England. I especially enjoyed reading about the devastating effects of the Crusades on the Jewish communities of the Rhine river region. I was amazed to read that many of the higher Church officials tried to protect their neighbor Jews from the angry and violent mobs. Bishops tried hiding Jews, tried baptizing Jews, and showed real sorrow and guilt when Jews in their communities were harmed. I also found the history of the evolution of Christian thought about the Jews very fascinating. The early Christians, who didn't even know they were Christians, clearly saw themselves as religiously Jewish. By the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, this has changed. The Gospel of John is somewhat anti-Jewish. When the Christians began using "rational thinking," especially with the creation of Universities, they became even more hostile toward the Jews. This book is a definite "must-buy" for any graduate student of European history or any serious undergraduate.

I had been brought up to believe that when a culture mistreats the Jews, that culture inevitably deteriorates (as exemplified, for example, by the decay of the Spanish and Ottoman Empires after the 16th century). But Glick's book discusses a terrifying counterexample: the rise of France and Germany in the late Middle Ages. The so-called Dark Ages were actually quite pleasant for Jews: in

the centuries after the end of the Roman Empire, Jews circulated through western Europe, specializing in international trade. Charlemagne and his successors were quite friendly towards Jews in the 700s and 800s, even using them as diplomats now and then. But in the 1000s, European agriculture became more productive, thus generating surplus products that could be sold elsewhere. Christians became merchants to sell these products, and formed connections with other Christian merchants. These merchants saw the Jews as competitors, and formed guilds that excluded Jews from commerce. Jews were squeezed into the moneylending industry, thus enabling Christians to use Jewish money without having to compete with Jews. The ghettoization of Jews into moneylending was a disaster for Jews. Because Jews were allowed to hold money but not large amounts of land, Christian kings soon realized that they could squeeze Jews unmercifully, extorting money in return for protection. Jews tried to pass on the costs to debtors by charging higher interest rates, thus causing Christian borrowers to hate Jews even more than they did before. Borrowers decided that they could avoid debts by the simple expedient of robbing and/or killing their Jewish creditors. (And this easy repayment option ensured that borrowers used Jewish rather than Christian lenders; anyone who borrowed from the latter would actually have to repay the loan rather than killing the banker!) Eventually, Jews were left without assets and were thus useless to Christian kings, who forced them to leave France and most of Germany. The intellectual revival of Christianity also posed problems for Jews. As Christians became less ignorant, they learned that Judaism had evolved beyond the written Torah, creating a massive corpus of rabbinic law through the Talmud and other works. But in the Christian world, Jews' legitimacy was based on their connection to the Old Testament. So Jewish scholarship other than the Old Testament was perceived as something akin to heresy, and made the Jews even more hated.

This is not the kind of book I normally would have read (regrettably), but it came to me highly recommended. Having grown up in a Jewish environment but feeling some loss of identity and lack of knowledge of my ancestral history, I took the initiative to try to learn more. Abraham's Heirs unexpectedly had a profound influence upon how I view my cultural heritage in a way I never anticipated. In a chronological and clear -- yet fair -- manner, the text depicts life and cross-cultural relationships and attitudes between Jews and Christians as central Europe developed. Through the progression of events depicted, the book demonstrates marked patterns which evolved across both time and location, which is crucial towards understanding how and why history regrettably progressed as it did. Many events are quite disturbing, sometimes difficult to grasp in magnitude, but can't be forgotten nor simply glossed over. Importantly, Glick tells it the way things were, which also

made it hard to put the book down. His content is exceptionally well-written, easy to follow, and highly informative, making it appropriate and essential for all readers.

The author weaves an incredible tapestry of historical social commentary. Thoroughly researched, well written, and definitely well worth the read. You will find yourself unable to put this book down!

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