



Rereading *The Rabbis*: A Woman's Voice (Radical Traditions S)

Judith Hauptman

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Fully acknowledging that Judaism, as described in both the Bible and the Talmud, was patriarchal, Judith Hauptman demonstrates that the rabbis of the Talmud made significant changes in key areas of Jewish law in order to benefit women. Reading the texts with feminist sensibilities—recognizing that they were written by men and for men and that they endorse a set of social relations in which men control women—the author shows that patriarchy was not always and everywhere the same. Although the rabbis whose rulings are recorded in the Talmud did not achieve equality for women—or even seek it—they should be credited with giving women higher status and more rights. For example, during the course of several hundred years, they converted marriage from the purchase by a man of a woman from her father into a negotiated relationship between prospective husband and wife. They designated a bride's dowry to be one-tenth of her father's net worth, thereby ending her Torah-mandated disenfranchisement with respect to inheritance. They left the ability to grant a divorce in male hands but gave women the possibility of petitioning the courts to force a divorce. Although some of these developments may have originated in the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, the rabbis freely chose to incorporate them into Jewish law. *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* also breaks new ground methodologically. Rather than plucking passages from a variety of different rabbinical works and then sewing them together to produce a single, unified rabbinical point of view, Hauptman reads sources in their own literary and legal context and then considers them in relationship to a rich array of associated synchronic and diachronic materials.

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