In 70 CE, the Jews were an agrarian and illiterate people living mostly in the Land of Israel and Mesopotamia. By 1492, the Jewish people had become a small group of literate urbanites specializing in crafts, trade, moneylending, and medicine in hundreds of places across the Old World, from Seville to Mangalore. What caused this radical change? This book presents a new answer to this question by applying the lens of economic analysis to the key facts of fifteen formative centuries of Jewish history. The book offers a powerful new explanation of one of the most significant transformations in Jewish history while also providing fresh insights into the growing debate about the social and economic impact of religion.

The Scandal of Kabbalah
Yaacob Dweck

This is the first book about the origins of a culture war that began in early modern Europe and continues to this day: the debate between kabbalists and their critics on the nature of Judaism and the meaning of religious tradition. From its medieval beginnings as an esoteric form of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah spread throughout the early modern world and became a central feature of Jewish life. Scholars have long studied the revolutionary impact of Kabbalah, but, as this book argues, they have misunderstood the character and timing of opposition to it. Drawing on a range of previously unexamined sources, this book tells the story of the first criticism of Kabbalah, Ari Nohem, written by Leon Modena in Venice in 1639. In this scathing indictment of Venetian Jews who had embraced Kabbalah as an authentic form of ancient esotericism, Modena proved
the recent origins of Kabbalah and sought to convince his readers to return to the spiritualized rationalism of Maimonides. This book examines the hallmarks of Jewish modernity displayed by Modena's attack—a critical analysis of sacred texts, skepticism about religious truths, and self-consciousness about the past—and shows how these qualities and the later history of his polemic challenge conventional understandings of the relationship between Kabbalah and modernity. The book argues that Kabbalah was the subject of critical inquiry in the very period it came to dominate Jewish life rather than centuries later as most scholars have thought.

Jews and the Military
Derek J. Penslar
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Item type: book

This book is the first comprehensive and comparative look at Jewish involvement in the military and their attitudes toward war from the 1600s until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The book shows that although Jews have often been described as people who shun the army, in fact they have frequently been willing, even eager, to do military service, and only a minuscule minority have been pacifists. The book demonstrates that Israel's military ethos did not emerge from a vacuum and that long before the state's establishment, Jews had a vested interest in military affairs. Spanning Europe, North America, and the Middle East, the book discusses the myths and realities of Jewish draft dodging, how Jews reacted to facing their coreligionists in battle, the careers of Jewish officers and their reception in the Jewish community, the effects of World War I on Jewish veterans, and Jewish participation in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. The book culminates with a study of Israel's War of Independence as a Jewish world war, which drew on the military expertise and financial support of a mobilized, global Jewish community. The book considers how military service was a central issue in debates about Jewish emancipation and a primary indicator of the position of Jews in any given society. Deconstructing old stereotypes, the book radically transforms our understanding of Jews' historic relationship to war and military power.

Cultural Exchange
Joseph Shatzmiller
Published in print: 2013 Published Online: October 2017
Demonstrating that similarities between Jewish and Christian art in the Middle Ages were more than coincidental, this book combines a wide range of sources to show how Jews and Christians exchanged artistic and material culture. The book focuses on communities in northern Europe, Iberia, and other Mediterranean societies where Jews and Christians coexisted for centuries, and it synthesizes the most current research to describe the daily encounters that enabled both societies to appreciate common artistic values. Detailing the transmission of cultural sensibilities in the medieval money market and the world of Jewish money lenders, the book examines objects pawned by peasants and humble citizens, sacred relics exchanged by the clergy as security for loans, and aesthetic goods given up by the Christian well-to-do who required financial assistance. The work also explores frescoes and decorations likely painted by non-Jews in medieval and early modern Jewish homes located in Germanic lands, and the ways in which Jews hired Christian artists and craftsmen to decorate Hebrew prayer books and create liturgical objects. Conversely, Christians frequently hired Jewish craftsmen to produce liturgical objects used in Christian churches. With rich archival documentation, the book sheds light on the social and economic history of the creation of Jewish and Christian art, and expands the general understanding of cultural exchange in brand-new ways.

Muslims and Jews in France
Maud S. Mandel

This book traces the global, national, and local origins of the conflict between Muslims and Jews in France, challenging the belief that rising anti-Semitism in France is rooted solely in the unfolding crisis in Israel and Palestine. The book shows how the conflict in fact emerged from processes internal to French society itself even as it was shaped by affairs elsewhere, particularly in North Africa during the era of decolonization. It examines moments in which conflicts between Muslims and Jews became a matter of concern to French police, the media, and an array of self-appointed spokesmen from both communities: Israel's War of Independence in 1948, France's decolonization of North Africa, the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, the 1968 student riots, and François Mitterrand's experiments with multiculturalism in the 1980s. The book takes an in-depth, on-the-ground look at interethnic relations in Marseille, which is home to the country's largest Muslim and Jewish populations outside of
Paris. It reveals how Muslims and Jews in France have related to each other in diverse ways throughout this history—as former residents of French North Africa, as immigrants competing for limited resources, as employers and employees, as victims of racist aggression, as religious minorities in a secularizing state, and as French citizens. The book traces the way these multiple, complex interactions have been overshadowed and obscured by a reductionist narrative of Muslim–Jewish polarization.

The First Modern Jew
Daniel B. Schwartz

Pioneering biblical critic, theorist of democracy, and legendary conflater of God and nature, Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was excommunicated by the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam in 1656 for his “horrible heresies” and “monstrous deeds.” Yet, over the past three centuries, Spinoza's rupture with traditional Jewish beliefs and practices has elevated him to a prominent place in genealogies of Jewish modernity. This book provides a riveting look at how Spinoza went from being one of Judaism's most notorious outcasts to one of its most celebrated, if still highly controversial, cultural icons, and a powerful and protean symbol of the first modern secular Jew. Ranging from Amsterdam to Palestine and back again to Europe, the book chronicles Spinoza's posthumous odyssey from marginalized heretic to hero, the exemplar of a whole host of Jewish identities, including cosmopolitan, nationalist, reformist, and rejectionist. The book shows that in fashioning Spinoza into “the first modern Jew,” generations of Jewish intellectuals—German liberals, East European maskilim, secular Zionists, and Yiddishists—have projected their own dilemmas of identity onto him, reshaping the Amsterdam thinker in their own image. The many afterlives of Spinoza are a kind of looking glass into the struggles of Jewish writers over where to draw the boundaries of Jewishness and whether a secular Jewish identity is indeed possible. Cumulatively, these afterlives offer a kaleidoscopic view of modern Jewish culture and a vivid history of an obsession with Spinoza that continues to this day.
Bialik and the Sephardim

Lital Levy

in Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine

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This chapter reexamines the history and indeed the idea of Modern Hebrew literature through the tension between its dominant narrative, associated with Ashkenazi Jews, and the suppressed perspectives that emerge from the literary and scholarly activities of Arab Jews and Mizraḥim both before and after the founding of the state. It illustrates this history through the saga of a multigenerational affair: the passionate and conflicted romance of the so-called Sephardim (Sephardi, Mizraḥi, and Arab Jews) with Modern Hebrew literature's leading persona, Ḥayim Nahman Bialik. Their story takes us from the 1920s to 1930s Levant—Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Cairo—to present-day Israel/Palestine, with the spirit of al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) accompanying us all along the way.

Decolonization and Migration

Maud S. Mandel

in Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict

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This chapter builds on the link between French colonial policies and Muslim–Jewish relations in the metropole by tracing how decolonization throughout North Africa changed the way a diverse set of social actors, including French colonial administrators, international Jewish spokesmen, and a wide range of indigenous nationalist groups conceptualized Jewish belonging throughout the region. It argues that the process led to the emergence of the “North African Jew,” a category to which no individual ascribed but that worked rhetorically to unite the diverse Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian Jewish populations into a collective often understood to be in conflict with “North Africans,” “Muslims,” or “Arabs.”
Introduction
Mark Chaves

in American Religion: Contemporary Trends

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This introductory chapter discusses the continuity in American religiosity between 1972 and 2008. Some might see American optimism reflected in the fact that more people believe in heaven than in hell. Others might see American individualism reflected in the fact that more people think that God is concerned about human beings personally than say that they know God exists, or in the fact that following one's conscience ranks higher than following the teachings of one's religion on the list of what it means to be a good Christian or Jew. The chapter emphasizes that these items all share the remarkable characteristic that none of them has changed much in recent decades. By world standards, Americans remain remarkably religious in both belief and practice.

Introduction
Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein

in The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History, 70-1492

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This introductory chapter provides an overview of the Jews' transition into urban and skilled occupations. This transition was the outcome of a profound transformation of the Jewish religion after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, which shifted the religious leadership within the Jewish community and transformed Judaism from a cult based on ritual sacrifices in the temple to a religion whose main norm required every Jewish man to read and to study the Torah in Hebrew and to send his sons from the age of six or seven to primary school or synagogue to learn to do so. The implementation of this new religious norm during the Talmud era determined three major patterns in Jewish history: the growth and spread of literacy among the predominantly rural Jewish population, a comparative advantage in urban skilled occupations, and the voluntary diaspora of the Jews in search of worldwide opportunities in crafts, trade, commerce, moneylending, banking, finance, and medicine.
This chapter describes how many Jews there were, where they lived, and how they earned their living from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple to the mass expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. During the six centuries between the time of Jesus and the time of Muhammad, the number of Jews declined precipitously. Throughout these six centuries, most Jews earned their living from agriculture, as farmers, sharecroppers, fixed-rent tenants, or wage laborers. During the first century, the largest Jewish community dwelled in the Land of Israel. By the mid-twelfth century, Jews could be found in almost all locations from Tudela in Spain to Mangalore in India. By then, their transition into urban skilled occupations was complete. Their specialization into these occupations remains their distinctive feature until today.

Educated Wandering Jews, 800–1250
Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein

This chapter shows that once the Jews became literate, urban, and engaged in skilled occupations, they began migrating within the vast territory under Muslim rule—stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to India during the eighth through the twelfth centuries, and from the Byzantine Empire to western Europe via Italy and within western Europe in the ninth through the thirteenth centuries. In early medieval Europe, the revival of trade concomitant with the Commercial Revolution and the growth of an urban and commercial economy paralleled the vast urbanization and the growth of trade that had occurred in the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates four to five centuries earlier. The Jewish diaspora during the early Middle Ages was mainly the outcome of literate Jewish craftsmen, shopkeepers, traders, scholars, teachers, physicians, and moneylenders migrating in search of business opportunities to reap returns on their investment in literacy and education.
Segregation or Choice?
Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein

in The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History, 70-1492

This chapter assesses the argument that both their exclusion from craft and merchant guilds and usury bans on Christians segregated European Jews into moneylending during the Middle Ages. Already during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, moneylending was the occupation par excellence of the Jews in England, France, and Germany and one of the main professions of the Jews in the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, and other locations in western Europe. Based on the historical information and the economic theory presented in earlier chapters, the chapter advances an alternative explanation that is consistent with the salient features that mark the history of the Jews: the Jews in medieval Europe voluntarily entered and later specialized in moneylending because they had the key assets for being successful players in credit markets—capital, networking, literacy and numeracy, and contract-enforcement institutions.

Different Names of God
Peter Schäfer

This chapter addresses a problem that must have plagued the rabbis a great deal: the undeniable fact that the Hebrew Bible uses various names for God, most prominent among them Elohim and the tetragrammaton YHWH. Both names attracted the attention and curiosity of Gentiles, the latter because of the mystery surrounding it—it was originally used only by the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies of the Temple, and its proper pronunciation was deemed lost—and the former because it is grammatically a plural and hence could easily give rise to the idea that the Jews worshiped not just one God but several gods. The “heretics” apparently knew enough Hebrew to seize the opportunity and insinuate that the Jews were no different in this regard than the pagans and indeed accepted the notion of a pantheon of various gods.
God and Metatron
Peter Schäfer

in The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other
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This chapter focuses on Metatron, that enigmatic figure assuming the title “Lesser God.” It begins with an analysis of a midrash transmitted only in the Bavli, in which Rav Idith—a Babylonian amora of the fourth or fifth century—deflects the fierce attacks of certain heretics who insist on assigning Metatron divine status. No doubt, the notion of a second divine power alongside that of God has gained followers among the Babylonian Jews. In order to substantiate this claim, the chapter surveys all the relevant Metatron passages preserved in rabbinic literature. It turns out that almost all of them are found either in the Babylonian Talmud or in the Hekhalot literature, most notably in 3 Enoch. The Metatron of the Bavli and the Hekhalot literature is a deliberate response on the part of the Babylonian Jews to the challenges posed by Christianity.

Has God a Father, a Son, or a Brother?
Peter Schäfer

in The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other
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This chapter returns to the realm of Palestinian Judaism and analyzes midrashim referring to God's family background. These midrashim again reflect the power structure of the Roman Empire with the emperor's dynasty, which includes the father, the brother, the son, and probably also the adoptive son. Since this hierarchy forms the backdrop of the nascent Christological speculations, it appears that it is the relationship between God and his Son in particular that is at stake in these sources. Additionally, some of these midrashim hint at the increasingly heated debate between Jews and Christians over the question of who is true heir to the Land of Israel.
This chapter focuses on Hellenistic Jewish writings and Second Temple period texts that to various degrees accept the Greek dichotomy between natural law and conventional law. It examines Hellenistic Jewish writings that try to bridge the gap between biblical and Greco-Roman conceptions of divine law by applying the latter's discourses of natural law to biblical divine law. This apologetic effort culminates in the writings of Philo, who identifies the Mosaic Law with the natural law and confers upon it the attributes of rationality, truth, universality, and fixity. The chapter also considers Second Temple period writings that bridge the gap between biblical and classical conceptions of divine law by moving in the opposite direction: these writings transfer some of the attributes of biblical divine law to the laws that govern the natural world.

This chapter examines three passages that associate with the “conservative,” transmission-oriented aspects of Torah study the occupation with the two bodies of knowledge that the rabbis received: the Written Torah (Scripture) and the Oral Torah (rabbinic tradition). These passages are all premised on a dichotomy between the “received” knowledge of Scripture and oral tradition, on the one hand, and the innovative, creative aspects of study on the other. Building on the work of Daniel Boyarin, Jeffrey Rubenstein, and others who showed that the Babylonian Talmud places a high value on dialectic and analysis at the expense of tradition and memorization, the chapter demonstrates the centrality of this preference to the self-perception of the Talmud's creators and situates it within a polemical conversation among Jews in late ancient Mesopotamia.
The Debate about Recitation
Moulie Vidas
in Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud
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This chapter examines discourses about recitation in Zoroastrian and Christian literature. It first considers a Zoroastrian distinction similar to the one the Babylonian Talmud makes between the reciter and the scholar. It then looks at a Christian author who is also using a negative portrayal of Zoroastrian recitation and argues that in both the Talmud and the Christian text, the representation of Zoroastrian practice is employed to promote particular visions of Judaism and Christianity and dehabilitate others. Both texts contrast the performative, embodying practice of recitation with the scholarly approach that they promote, and by associating that recitation with Zoroastrian ritual they seek to mark it as foreign, as non-Jewish or non-Christian. It is possible that the encounter with Zoroastrian culture, in which recitation took a central role as a main component of ritual and as the exclusive interface to sanctified traditions, increased the importance of recitation for some Mesopotamian Jews and Christians.

From the “Hebrew Bedouin” to “Israeli Arabic”
Lital Levy
in Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine
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The current relationship between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine is the outgrowth of over a century of sociolinguistic, political, and cultural developments; though the two languages had shared a long and storied past, Zionism catalyzed their reunion in the context of modern nationalism. This chapter surveys that historic landscape to offer a counternarrative of Israeli language and culture, arguing that Arabic has played a central, formative, yet paradoxical role in the self-definition of Modern Hebrew from the very outset. The repressed story of Arabic and Hebrew in Israel/Palestine is inseparable from the triangulated history of Ashkenazi Jews, Palestinian Arabs, and Mizrahi Jews, each group having faced distinct yet interrelated dilemmas of language. In excavating this multilayered site of memory, the chapter traces pre-state linguistic
practices, the institutionalization of Modern Hebrew, and the continuing evolution of Hebrew and Arabic in the political scene, concluding with the question of literary translation between the two languages.