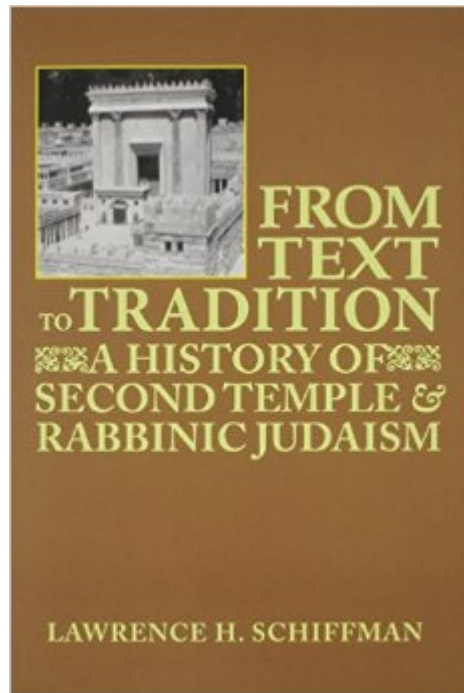


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From Text To Tradition, A History Of Second Temple And Rabbinic Judaism



Synopsis

Book by Schiffman, Lawrence H.

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Customer Reviews

For those who have wondered how the Jewish religion transformed the practice of animal sacrifice depicted in the Bible to the one we know today, this book is for you. Professor Schiffman writes a careful, thoughtful history of Jewish religious thought from the time of return from Babylon (about 560 B.C.E.) to the closing of the Talmud (about 200 C.E.). Focusing on the Greek and Roman periods, the reader is treated to the historical facts that account normative rabbinic Judaism. This is not a flashy read, but it is always engaging. Highly recommended.

Although no single book exists that covers everything one would want to know about the second temple period in the development of Judaism and also immediately following the destruction of the temple, this is a really good book related to that subject. My Rabbinics teacher really likes it as one of the textbooks for the class (for its historical treatment of that era). We use it in conjunction to studying the Talmud. This allows you to understand some of the trends, traditions and historic events that led to the development of Rabbinic Judaism that we all love today.

Schiffman is the pre-eminent Orthodox historian of ancient Israel. That said I find some parts tiresome where the standard line about moral judgment is handed down. The "Rabbis", duly respected by me, are made to sound like machines to history - repeating the value judgements that

we are all taught to make in cheder (religious elementary) when my instincts tell me the case is more difficult to pronounce. Hellenism is not explained well. The period of the redaction of Talmud is glanced over. I did enjoy the first part of the book leading up to the dispersion after the Second Temple. That piece satisfies something in me wanting to know more about the complexity of Judaism early on when Sadducee and Pharisee lived side by side

This is a good comprehensive review of Judaism in the second temple period. The writing is exceptionally clear. For instance, several times the author defines a term that might not be familiar to the lay reader, such as "sapiential" (p.124) or "Diadochi" (p. 63). More commonly, authors expect the reader to know these terms or look them up in a dictionary. Schiffman slips in the definition seamlessly, and I really appreciate this. I also liked the author's frequent lists, such as the tractates of Talmud, the generations of Tannaim and Amoraim, and many others. Most of the content of the book was familiar to me; but one new angle was Schiffman's discussion of the decline of the Hellenistic Judaism that dominated the Mediterranean coasts for several hundred years, and was replaced by Christianity and rabbinic Judaism after the first century C.E. The book documents the historical transition "from text to tradition;" but it does not provide much analysis of this transition. He briefly suggests in the Epilogue that "When the amoraic commentary in the form of the Talmuds became available, this material became the new scripture of Judaism ... Scripture had been displaced by Talmud." And, "the displacement of biblical tradition as the central authority in Judaism was a process long in the making. ...the ever-expanding, developing nature of the oral law attracted the best minds, leaving the written Torah to serve as a subject of elementary instruction, midrashic exegesis, and technical grammatical study by a select few." The success of the Talmudic enterprise in gaining the confidence and financial support of the people both in Israel and in Babylon to support these schools of reason and elaboration with a thin veneer of Torah continues to mystify me.

This text can only be completely understood when used in conjunction with Schiffmans other book, Texts and Traditions : A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. He is a scholar on the dead sea scrolls so that portion is particularly well covered, and maintains objectivity throughout, distancing himself from the history and religion, yet thoroughly covering both and their relation to one another.

This is a very important book on a somewhat tricky topic, probably of interest to anyone interested in Jewish History but particularly to Jews looking to better understand how Tanach turned into now.

Very interesting. And, as with all books like this, read critically.

I was not disappointed with this book and learned a lot I didn't know. I think for the money, it is an excellent value. If you look up some of the books Schiffman lists in his bibliography, you can't get them for under \$50, so this one is a steal. Now that I have a basic understanding of the period, I can do some more in depth reading. Two things I learned, 1) that the Jews were self-governing in Israel (even though they might have been part of an Empire) for many more years than one would think given the way people today seem to portray the Jews as "stealing" the land for the State of Israel, and 2) things really didn't get bad bad bad for the Jews until Christianity became prominent, really until Rome became officially a Christian state. The only reason I didn't give this 5 stars is because it is an overview.

very comprehensive review of a transformative period in Judaism.

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