



Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion

Joshua Trachtenberg

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Alongside the formal development of Judaism from the eleventh through the sixteenth centuries, a robust Jewish folk religion flourished—ideas and practices that never met with wholehearted approval by religious leaders yet enjoyed such wide popularity that they could not be altogether excluded from the religion. According to Joshua Trachtenberg, it is not possible truly to understand the experience and history of the Jewish people without attempting to recover their folklife and beliefs from centuries past.

Jewish Magic and Superstition is a masterful and utterly fascinating exploration of religious forms that have all but disappeared yet persist in the imagination. The volume begins with legends of Jewish sorcery and proceeds to discuss beliefs about the evil eye, spirits of the dead, powers of good, the famous legend of the golem, procedures for casting spells, the use of gems and amulets, how to battle spirits, the ritual of circumcision, herbal folk remedies, fortune telling, astrology, and the interpretation of dreams.

First published more than sixty years ago, Trachtenberg's study remains the foundational scholarship on magical practices in the Jewish world and offers an understanding of folk beliefs that expressed most eloquently the everyday religion of the Jewish people.

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