



Cultures of the Jews, Volume 1: Mediterranean Origins

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Scattered over much of the world throughout most of their history, are the Jews one people or many? How do they resemble and how do they differ from Jews in other places and times? What have their relationships been to the cultures of their neighbors? To address these and similar questions, some of the finest scholars of our day have contributed their insights to *Cultures of the Jews*, a winner of the National Jewish Book Award upon its hardcover publication in 2002.

Constructing their essays around specific cultural artifacts that were created in the period and locale under study, the contributors describe the cultural interactions among different Jews—from rabbis and scholars to non-elite groups, including women—as well as between Jews and the surrounding non-Jewish world. What they conclude is that although Jews have always had their own autonomous traditions, Jewish identity cannot be considered the fixed product of either ancient ethnic or religious origins. Rather, it has shifted and assumed new forms in response to the cultural environment in which the Jews have lived.

Mediterranean Origins, the first volume in *Cultures of the Jews*, describes the concept of the “People” or “Nation” of Israel that emerges in the Hebrew Bible and the culture of the Israelites in relation to that of neighboring Canaanite groups. It also discusses Jewish cultures in Babylonia, in Palestine during the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods, and in Arabia during the formative years of Islam.

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