



Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present (Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology)

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This extraordinary collection of essays is the first to approach the phenomenon of spirit possession among Jews from a multidisciplinary perspective. What beliefs have Jews held about spirit possession? Have Jewish people believed themselves to be possessed by spirits? If so, what sorts of spirits were they? Have Jews' conceptions of possession been the same as those of their Christian and Muslim neighbors? These are some of the questions addressed in these thirteen essays, which together explore spirit possession in a wide range of temporal and geographic contexts.

The phenomena known as spirit possession are both very widespread and very difficult to explain. The late Raphael Patai initiated study of spirit possession as found in the Jewish world in the post-Talmudic period by taking a folkloric and anthropological approach to the subject. Other scholars have opened up new avenues of inquiry through discussions of the topic in connection with Jewish mystical and magical traditions. The essays in this collection expand the variety of approaches to the subject, addressing Jewish possession phenomena from the points of view of religion, mysticism, literature, anthropology, psychology, history, and folklore. Scholarly views and popular traditions, benevolent spirits and malevolent shades, exorcism, social control, messianic implications, madness, literary structure, and a host of other topics are brought into the discussion of spirit possession in Jewish culture. This juxtaposition of approaches among the essays in this volume, some of which analyze the same texts in different ways, creates a broad foundation on which to contemplate the meaning of spirit possession.

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