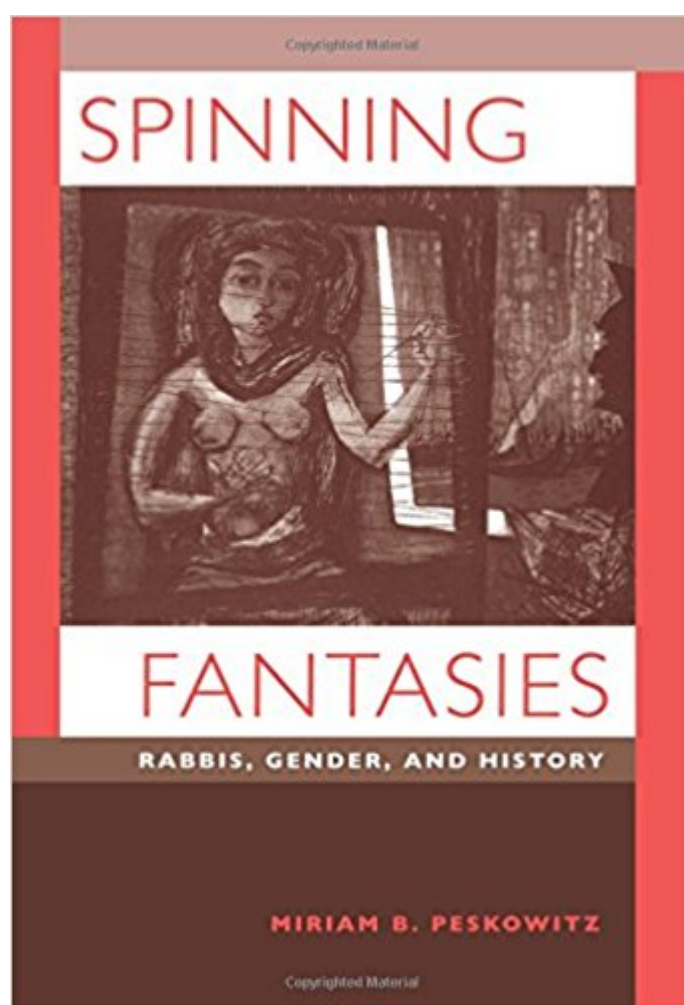


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Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, And History (Contraversions: Critical Studies In Jewish Literature, Culture, And Society)



Synopsis

Miriam Peskowitz offers a dramatic revision to our understanding of early rabbinic Judaism. Using a wide range of sources—archaeology, legal texts, grave goods, technology, art, and writings in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin—she challenges traditional assumptions regarding Judaism's historical development. Following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Roman armies in 70 C.E., new incarnations of Judaism emerged. Of these, rabbinic Judaism was the most successful, becoming the classical form of the religion. Through ancient stories involving Jewish spinners and weavers, Peskowitz re-examines this critical moment in Jewish history and presents a feminist interpretation in which gender takes center stage. She shows how notions of female and male were developed by the rabbis of Roman Palestine and why the distinctions were so important in the formation of their religious and legal tradition. Rabbinic attention to women, men, sexuality, and gender took place within the "ordinary tedium of everyday life, in acts that were both familiar and mundane." While spinners and weavers performed what seemed like ordinary tasks, their craft was in fact symbolic of larger gender and sexual issues, which Peskowitz deftly explicates. Her study of ancient spinning and her abundant source material will set new standards in the fields of gender studies, Jewish studies, and cultural studies.

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"Peskowitz weaves rabbinic rhetoric, archaeological data, and critical theory into a detailed cultural map of Roman-period Judaism. Impressively documented, compellingly argued, this work

demonstrates through its particular attention to the ordinary—work, tools, bodies, gossip, the minutiae of everyday life—how gender was constructed, maintained, and ultimately naturalized. A brilliant work from a major new voice, *Spinning Fantasies* is an interdisciplinary masterpiece."—A.J. Levine, Vanderbilt University "The reader will never look at the texts explicated in this work in the same way again. Jews and Christians alike will be fascinated by the notions of gender that cut across religions in antiquity. Peskowitz's breadth of citation is dazzling, and her methodological sophistication will undoubtedly set standards for future studies."—Judith Hauptman, Jewish Theological Seminary

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This is a tremendous book. It changed my life and the way I view the world. This book should be read by everyone interested in Judaism and gender. For an academic book, the prose is poetic and crystal clear.

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