

Reading the Rabbis

The Talmud as Literature

Traditionally, the Talmud was read as law, that is, as the authoritative source for Jewish practice and obligations. To this end, it was studied at the level of its most minute details, with readers often ignoring the composite whole and attending only to final decisions. Methods of reading have shifted as more readers and students have turned to the Talmud for evidence of rabbinic history, religion, rhetoric, or anthropology; still, few have employed a genuinely literary approach. In *Reading the Rabbis*, Kraemer attempts to fill this gap. He uses the tools developed in the study of other literatures, particularly rhetorical and reader-response criticisms, to unearth previously unnoticed levels of meaning. His book offers a new understanding of the complexity of Rabbinic Judaism, and a new model of rabbinic piety.

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DAVID KRAEMER

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