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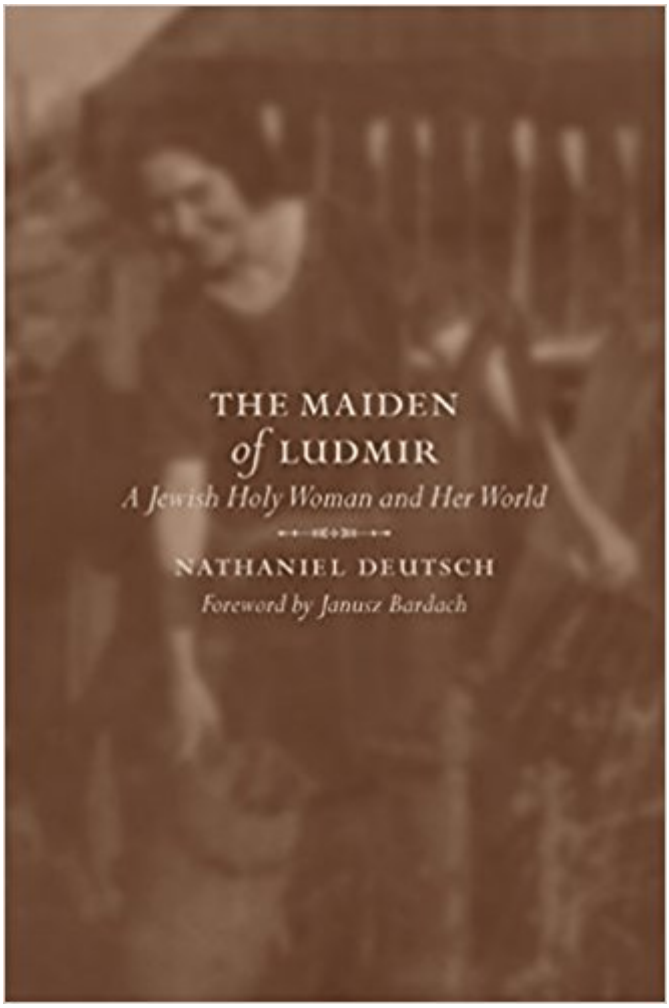
The Maiden Of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman And Her World



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Synopsis

Hannah Rochel Verbermacher, a Hasidic holy woman known as the Maiden of Ludmir, was born in early-nineteenth-century Russia and became famous as the only woman in the three-hundred-year history of Hasidism to function as a rebbe—or charismatic leader—in her own right. Nathaniel Deutsch follows the traces left by the Maiden in both history and legend to fully explore her fascinating story for the first time. The Maiden of Ludmir offers powerful insights into the Jewish mystical tradition, into the Maidenâ ™s place within it, and into the remarkable Jewish community of Ludmir. Her biography ultimately becomes a provocative meditation on the complex relationships between history and memory, Judaism and modernity. History first finds the Maiden in the eastern European town of Ludmir, venerated by her followers as a master of the Kabbalah, teacher, and visionary, and accused by her detractors of being possessed by a dybbuk, or evil spirit. Deutsch traces the Maidenâ ™s steps from Ludmir to Ottoman Palestine, where she eventually immigrated and re-established herself as a holy woman. While the Maidenâ ™s story—including her adamant refusal to marry—recalls the lives of holy women in other traditions, it also brings to light the largely unwritten history of early-modern Jewish women. To this day, her transgressive behavior, a challenge to traditional Jewish views of gender and sexuality, continues to inspire debate and, sometimes, censorship within the Jewish community.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The first book-length account of one of the most fascinating figures in modern Jewish history. With invigorating prose, The Maiden of Ludmir makes the world of 19th-century Europe come alive.

Deutsch is a fascinating, sophisticated, and rare combination of social historian and cultural critic. "—Elliot Wolfson, Abraham Lieberman Professor of Jewish Mysticism and Philosophy, New York University."A beautifully written and moving study of a woman who stood alone as a spiritual leader, breaking the bounds of womenâ ™s spirituality and gender roles to assume the position of a male zaddik, Hasidic leader. Deutschâ ™s own journey to Ludmir lends a unique and charming voice to this compelling story."—David Biale, author of Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History.

"The first book-length account of one of the most fascinating figures in modern Jewish history. With invigorating prose, "The Maiden of Ludmir makes the world of 19th-century Europe come alive. Deutsch is a fascinating, sophisticated, and rare combination of social historian and cultural critic. "--Elliot Wolfson, Abraham Lieberman Professor of Jewish Mysticism and Philosophy, New York University. "A beautifully written and moving study of a woman who stood alone as a spiritual leader, breaking the bounds of women's spirituality and gender roles to assume the position of a male zaddik, Hasidic leader. Deutsch's own journey to Ludmir lends a unique and charming voice to this compelling story."--David Biale, author of "Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History.

This is truly an exhaustive, scholarly work that presents, in painstaking detail, a composite portrait of one of the most unique, enigmatic, Jewish female spiritual leaders in Jewish history. The author certainly did not cut any corners, but I view that as both the strength -- and the weakness -- of this book. At times the author laboriously recounts not just the results of his research, but the methodology involved as well. And therein lies the rub, at least for this reader. It seemed that, at times, the author focuses more on his methodology than on the subject herself.Maybe that's because there was so little definitive information to actually present about The Maiden of Ludmir, I don't know. I believe, however, that Mr. Deutch could have maintained the same level of integrity as far as his research, while at the same time keeping the spotlight more on Hannah Rochel Verbermacher.Regardless, it is an informative biography of a most fascinating woman. The author performed a Herculean effort both with regard to his research and his methodology. The writing style itself is clear and easy to follow, and paints an impressive portrait of both the Rebbe and the culture in which she lived.

This book is worth every penny. I had searched for years for a complete biography of the Holy Maiden of Ludmir, based on sound scholarly sources. The biography of the first independent

Hasidic woman rebbe is well-written, fascinating and based on sound historical research. Chana Rochel Verbermacher functioned as a rebbe, a Hasidic spiritual leader and as a woman rabbi, over 50 years before the ordination of Rabbi Regina Jonas in December, 1935 in Germany. The Holy Maiden is a true role model for any Jewish woman seeking a greater connection with her spirituality and culture, and an encouraging example for any Jewish woman or man with innovative views that may be meeting with opposition.

The Maiden of Ludmir was a woman who took on all the duties of a male Hasidic Rabbi in the Ukraine in the early 19th century. She had a court, wore tefillin and tallis, and had her own study house. The Maiden left no written work, and for a long time she was considered mostly a legendary construct. Deutsch's instructive investigation explores the oral history of the Maiden, the scant written sources, and new documents like census records from Hasidic communities in 19th century Palestine. The latter is the most exciting part of this work. Deutsch apparently found the first real reference to the Maiden in a public document, where she is called a female rabbi and holy woman.For anyone interested in the unwritten stories of Jewish women before the modern period, this book is essential. Deutsch explores the nexus where gender, power, memory and history meet.

This is a beautifully written and comprehensive investigation into the intriguing personality of the Ludomirer Moid. Deutsch not only thoroughly investigates the literary and documentary evidence of her story, but sets both in thoughtful cultural contexts, both historic and contemporary. This involves mastery of an impressive range of disciplines, ranging from Hasidic / kabbalistic theology to radical feminism and gender theory. His investigations in Ludmir itself are poignant and elegaic. An excellent book.

If you are interested in a comprehensive document of kabbalah and mystical schools of judaism this book is a good start.

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