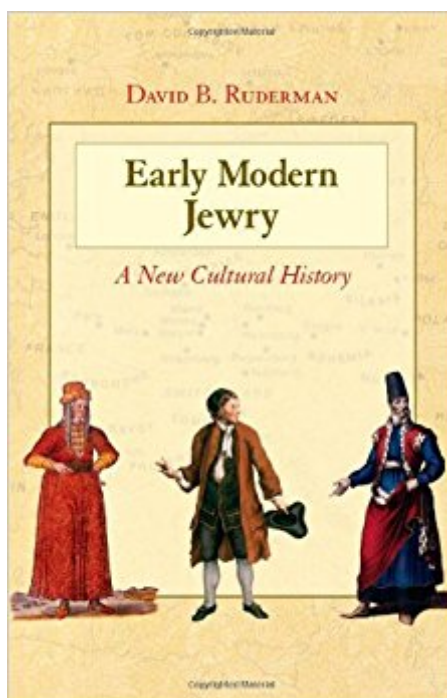


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# Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History



## Synopsis

Early Modern Jewry boldly offers a new history of the early modern Jewish experience. From Krakow and Venice to Amsterdam and Smyrna, David Ruderman examines the historical and cultural factors unique to Jewish communities throughout Europe, and how these distinctions played out amidst the rest of society. Looking at how Jewish settlements in the early modern period were linked to one another in fascinating ways, he shows how Jews were communicating with each other and were more aware of their economic, social, and religious connections than ever before.

Ruderman explores five crucial and powerful characteristics uniting Jewish communities: a mobility leading to enhanced contacts between Jews of differing backgrounds, traditions, and languages, as well as between Jews and non-Jews; a heightened sense of communal cohesion throughout all Jewish settlements that revealed the rising power of lay oligarchies; a knowledge explosion brought about by the printing press, the growing interest in Jewish books by Christian readers, an expanded curriculum of Jewish learning, and the entrance of Jewish elites into universities; a crisis of rabbinic authority expressed through active messianism, mystical prophecy, radical enthusiasm, and heresy; and the blurring of religious identities, impacting such groups as conversos, Sabbateans, individual converts to Christianity, and Christian Hebraists. In describing an early modern Jewish culture, Early Modern Jewry reconstructs a distinct epoch in history and provides essential background for understanding the modern Jewish experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2010 National Jewish Book Award in History, Jewish Book Council "Brave, stimulating,

highly erudite, and informative."--Moshe Rosman, *Jewish Review of Books*"Ruderman's provocative thesis marks a scholarly watershed. It reopens and complicates the question of when modern Jewish history began, and suggests that far-reaching but underappreciated trends analogous to those traced in this book have already inaugurated a postmodern era of Jewish history."--Lawrence Grossman, *Forward*"David B. Ruderman plunges into one of the central debates in the writing of Jewish history. . . . When we think of the history of Europe, it is in terms derived from the experience of Christians and Christianity. . . . But does this familiar timeline apply to the history of the Jews? . . . Early Modern Jewry will certainly help to shape future debates over the ways we write and interpret Jewish history."--Adam Kirsch, *Tablet Magazine*"Ruderman's learned and fluently written book presents a thought-provoking interpretation of the period beginning with the Spanish expulsion of 1492, which set into motion the extraordinary communities of Iberian Jewry--and much else besides--and stretching forward to the onset of modernity."--Yehudah Mirsky, *Jewish Ideas Daily*"Ruderman has given readers fascinated by Jewish history much material upon which to ponder."--Benjamin Ivry, *Forward*"David Ruderman . . . provides a masterful synthesis of the vast scholarship of the past 30 years. . . . This book is an important addition to any university library."--Harvey Sukenic, *AJL Newsletter*"Its thought-provoking discussion of the early modern period in Jewish history, the notes and bibliography providing additional information, and the extensive appendix discussing various historiographical interpretations of early modernity make this book indispensable for both students and teachers of early modern and modern Jewish history alike, as well as for those more generally interested in Jewish history. Ruderman's study will decisively shape future discussions about early modern Jewish history and the beginnings of modernity."--Rebekka Voss, *H-Net Reviews*"David Ruderman has produced an admirable synthesis of the latest research on early modern Jewish history, while offering a cogent assessment of the historiography of the term 'early modern' and of the role of Jews in European and world history between the medieval and modern eras. The clear structure and approachable writing of *Early Modern Jewry* make it an excellent resource."--Gayle K. Brunelle, *Canadian Journal of History*"[T]he book greatly advances scholarship toward a more holistic, multidisciplinary approach to Jewish history during this very dynamic epoch. . . . His work is a great introductory monograph for students and emerging scholars in early modern Jewish studies, providing an excellent foundation of knowledge to build upon for future research."--Barry Stiefel, *Sixteenth Century Journal*"Ruderman also discusses a number of crucial works on early modern Jewish history, making his study more accessible to novice readers. His extensive bibliography may serve as a useful starting point for the reader's own exploration of early modern Jewry"--Pnina M. Rubesh, *European Legacy*

"Ruderman's scholarship is of the highest order and shows impeccable control over a huge and diverse secondary literature. He is able to convey the nature of the historical debates over the key issues in this period with clarity and integrity, and each chapter is a model of argumentation. This book will be indispensable to anyone who studies the Jewish experience."--Gershon Hundert, McGill University  
"This is an entirely original book that for the first time offers a sustained and persuasive argument for a distinct early modern period in Jewish history. Ruderman provides a synthetic account of the period based on a masterful command of the primary and secondary scholarship."--David Sorkin, University of Wisconsin-Madison

This is a history book; a Jewish history book, to be sure, but a very good book that should be an assigned reading in a graduate-level or upper undergraduate level course. Except for one thing--it's really well written. Ruderman is clear, concise and makes his several points about the common and divergent elements in the various Jewish communities (Italian, German, Polish, Ottoman) in what is now called the "Early Modern" period, 16th - 18th centuries. He illustrates his primary theses by examples fortified by a truly impressive bibliography. (I won't summarize the topical areas as they're available in the summary material for the book.) If there is a flaw it's in the author's occasional use of the contemporary language of post-modernism where a simpler language would suffice. (Yes, Jewish lay elites often imposed their wills on the rest of the community including the rabbinate, but one needn't see this phenomenon in terms of 19th or 20th century marxist analysis!) This is not only a book for the student and the professional historian, but for the lay reader who just wants a more complete picture of Jewish life in this fascinating historical period.

Even though Ruderman's aim was not a comprehensive description of early modern Jewry, I would still have liked more description, explanation and details. For example, I wonder if Ruderman could have added more information about the Hayon Affair so I could better appreciate its importance to early modern Jewry. There seems to be too much effort put into historiography at the expense of the history. And the author's dating of the early modern period seems too easy. I would guess that the expulsion from Spain marks the end of the Jewish medieval period. It is an ending for something and not the beginning of the early modern period as Ruderman suggests. My guess is that the early modern period for Jewry starts with the beginning of the printing press. What better way to understand how the Jews were connected to the non-Jewish European world than having the early modern Jewish period begin with a non-Jewish event, the invention of the printing press.

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