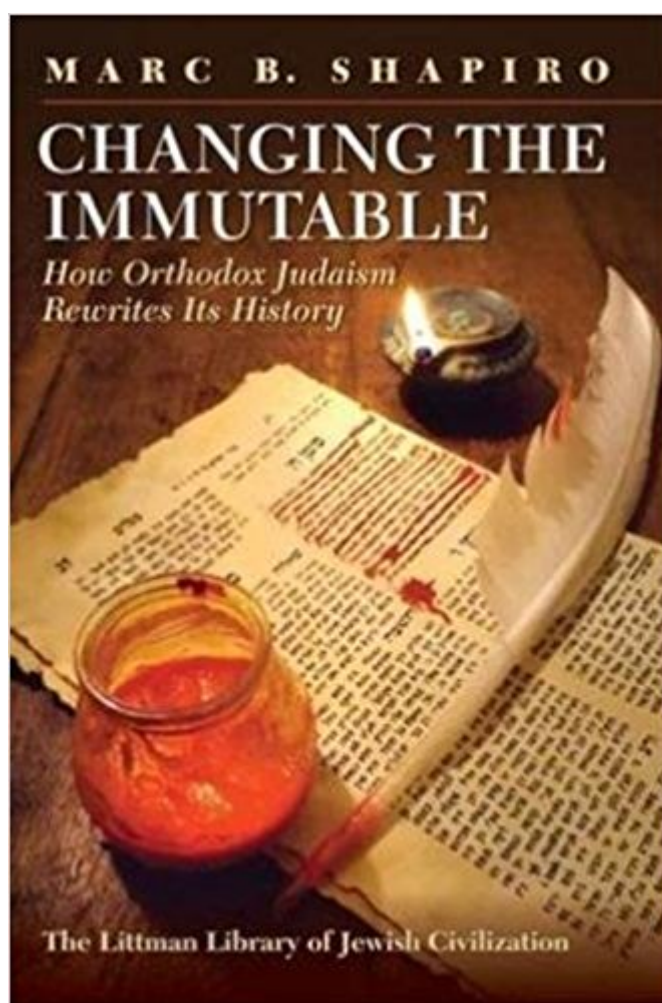


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Changing The Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization)



Synopsis

Changing the Immutable focuses on how segments of Orthodox society have taken upon themselves to rewrite the past, by covering up and literally cutting out that which does not fit in with their contemporary world-view. For reasons ranging from theological considerations to internal religious politics to changing religious standards, such Jewish self-censorship abounds, and Marc Shapiro discusses examples from each category. In a number of cases the original text is shown alongside how it looked after it was censored, together with an explanation of what made the text problematic and how the issue was resolved. The author considers how some Orthodox historiography sees truth as entirely instrumental. Drawing on the words of leading rabbis, particularly from the haredi world, he shows that what is important is not historical truth, but a 'truth' that leads to observance and faith in the sages. He concludes with a discussion of the concept of truth in the Jewish tradition, and when this truth can be altered. Changing the Immutable also reflects on the paradox of a society that regards itself as traditional, but at the same time is uncomfortable with much of the inherited tradition and thus feels the need to create an idealized view of the past. It considers this practice in context, showing the precedents for this in Jewish history dating back to talmudic times. Since the subjects of censorship have included such figures as Maimonides, Bahya ibn Pakuda, Rashi, Naphtali Herz Wessely, Moses Mendelssohn, the Hatam Sofer, Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, A. I. Kook, and J. B. Soloveitchik, as well as issues such as Zionism, biblical interpretation, and attitudes to women and gentiles, Changing the Immutable also serves as a study in Jewish intellectual history and how the ideas of one era do not always find favour with future generations.

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Customer Reviews

"It is a blessing to have in English such a felicitous treatment of the fruits of modern Israeli scholarship on piyyut or Jewish hymnography incorporated into the author's own prodigious research ...The work is the best introduction in English to the whole subject ...It is bound to encourage scholars of English-speaking universities to mount courses in this heretofore neglected area of Hebrew poetry. The lack of a good textbook can no longer serve as an excuse." -- Reuven Kimelman

Marc B. Shapiro holds the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania. A graduate of Brandeis and Harvard universities, he is the author of *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966* (1999), also published by the Littman Library, and is editing the collected writings of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, the first volume of which appeared in 1998, and the second in 2003.

I just spent the recent holiday weekend reading this important and fascinating (if somewhat depressing) book from cover to cover. Marc Shapiro has given us another excellent work. With meticulous documentation he shows a series of different examples of how Orthodox rabbinic works have been altered, censored and mutilated to hide what the original authors wrote or thought (or wore - it includes a few examples of doctored photos), in order to conform with later, and, inevitably, narrower opinions. By removing evidence, the effect is to delegitimize and narrow the range of opinions, beliefs, views and behaviors within the Orthodox Jewish world. Two chapters are devoted to the overall treatment of two major Orthodox thinkers - S.R. Hirsch and Rav Kook - at the hands of subsequent editors. As he points out, his examples - which are many - are, however, only a representative selection. He also discusses the Orthodox view of the "function" of history, and the notion of historical or other truth in Jewish tradition. Although this serves as an explanation of the thought-processes behind the revisionist activity, it also strongly suggest that there is an unbridgeable gap between "history" and "Orthodox 'history'". Marc Shapiro has the gift of being an

excellent, clear and easy-to-read writer. An excellent book for anyone interested in Jewish history and trends and currents in the Orthodox world.

A book certain to anger the traditionalists of Judaism. I prefer to know about the messy, behind the scenes activities being performed to redefine Judaism in a new and more limited way. The scholarship done is impeccable, and the evidence of the censorship and altering of the writings of respected rabbis to make them conform to today's narrow viewpoint is irrefutable. Orthodox Judaism is slowly but surely eliminating opinions that defy the current dogma, and if unchallenged will soon allow no dissent at all.

Oh YES. Real eye opener. If you believed 60% of what you read..... that just dropped to less than 10. Very Revealing. A good THUMB in the EYE!

Solid piece of research on how Jewish texts are rewritten, edited or mistranslated in order to conform with Orthodox beliefs on a certain time and place.

I read this book in one go; it was fascinating . The examples given (as obviously it is impossible to cover everything that goes on in this area) are quite illustrative . As far as I could see, the research was done very well, too. The author does deserve kudos for this book, IMHO.

both better than expected. ron bradshaw

very interesting

Interesting reading for those who want to know the politics of who controls whom.

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