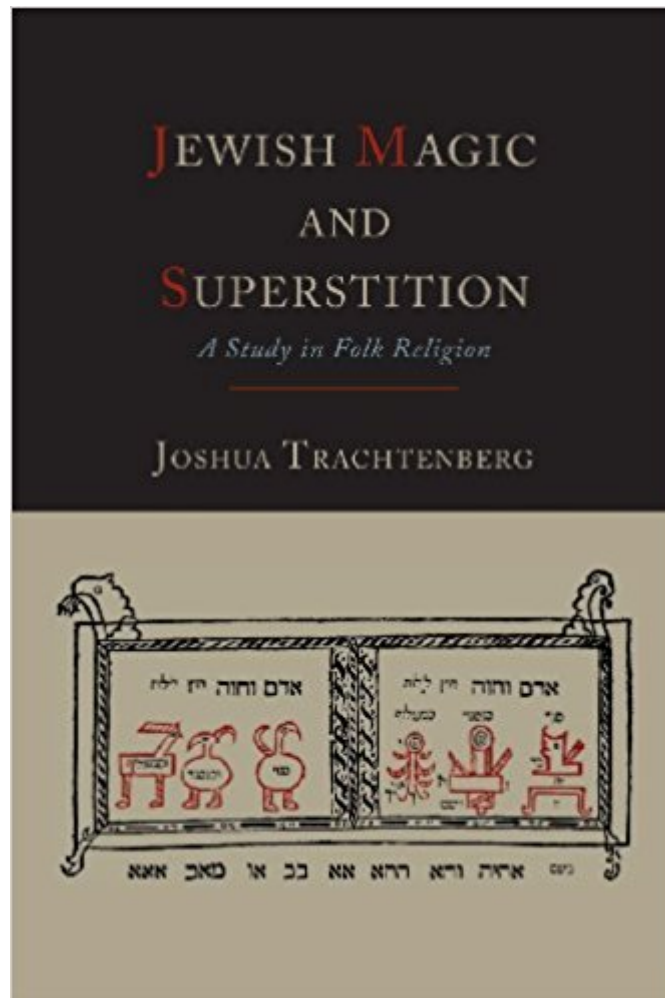




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# Jewish Magic And Superstition: A Study In Folk Religion



## Synopsis

2013 Reprint of 1939 Edition. Exact facsimile of the original edition, not reproduced with Optical Recognition Software. In the background of what has become known as ceremonial magic is medieval Jewish magic. In turn this was based on the Kabbalah, the Jewish traditions known as Haggadah, and other esoteric beliefs. This is a comprehensive review of Jewish magic from the 10th to the 15th century, including a rich lode of folklore. Many well-known Jewish traditions are explained, such as why a glass is broken at a wedding, and how the expression mazel tov is related to a belief in Astrology. Trachtenberg deals extensively with Golems, Succubi, the Lillim, (from Lilith--Adam's first wife), and other magical creatures, some well known such as werewolves, and others not so well, such as estrie, mare and broxa. There are detailed descriptions of talismans, amulets, charms, and other curious magical objects. There are chapters dealing with dream interpretation, medical beliefs, necromancy, and other forms of divination. There is also a short glossary, so if you are having trouble telling the difference between a Kaddish and a Kiddush, you're in luck. The author, Joshua Trachtenberg (b. 1904, d. 1959) was a reform rabbi on the east coast of the US. This is an elaboration of his Columbia University Ph.D. thesis. Trachtenberg's appreciation of the role of folk-magic in Jewish culture is important for the study of Judaism, and also the roots of modern Pagan beliefs and practices.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of all the charges against the Jewish people the one that has enjoyed the hardest tenacity and the

utmost notoriety, and has produced the direct consequences, is the ritual murder accusation. In its popular version it foists upon Jewish ritual the requirement of Christian blood at the Passover service. The subject of much study and infinitely more polemics, its absurdity has been conclusively established, but the true nature of the accusation has never been made sufficiently clear. The legend as we know it has experienced several redactions - and of the idea of the Jew as sorcerer. --excerpt from 'Jewish Magic and Superstition' --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg was born in London in 1904 and died in 1959, having devoted nearly three decades of service in the American rabbinate. He is the author of 'The Devil and the Jews' (1943); 'Consider the Years' (1944); and the present work. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is stunning. I did not expect to enjoy this book as much as I did. Magic, in general, is not a topic often touched upon. Folk religion or magic lacks the refinement of religion, it is discarded as an embarrassing folk science from a bygone era, and (being a belief of the common folk) it was not often carefully recorded. This text explores this neglected area of Jewish history. I was somewhat embarrassed at first by the notion that Jewry had a magical component at one time. Magic seemed to be the antithesis of what Judaism was, how could this wholly non-Jewish thing be present in Jewish history? Yet I soon became enthralled by Trachtenberg's book. He carefully dissects and explores every facet of Jewish magic and superstition. He traces the non-Jewish incursions and he explores the uniquely Jewish component. More importantly, the text allows one to see how Jewish magic and superstition is set apart from its Christian counterpart. Jewish superstition lacked any notion of a God-Devil dualism that is present in Christian magic and superstition. That slight difference is a game-changer. The Jewish model evolves completely differently. It intersects and weaves through the canonized religion. Jewish magic was not opposed to religion, it was a field for scholars who sought to understand and use the laws of nature that came from God. In a way, it seemed akin to the emergence of early science. This book is easy to read. It will answer your questions and leave you with new ones to ponder. I would highly recommend it to anyone. Some of the information may be somewhat outdated, but it still seems to represent a core component of the study of Jewish magic and superstition. This book covers magic, superstition, some of the roots of anti-Semitic magical thinking in Christianity, and so much more.

If you're interested in Jewish folk religion, or even the history of contemporary Jewish superstition, this is a great book to read. However, I am appalled at the 2012 edition I purchased. It's cheaper than all the other options for this book and there's a reason why-- it's terrible. Then again, the ganeyvim who published it probably know that, as there's no publisher listed at the front of the book. The chapter numbers are listed without chapter titles. The layout of the book is terrible for readability. (Way too wide across a large page). And most unforgivable, the book is missing its extensive, and helpful, footnotes. Feh. Do yourself a favor, get this book and pay a few extra books for a legit, older edition.

Interesting glimpse into practices not usually spelled out in the major books but that many people were doing on their own regardless. A study of things that aren't usually talked about on the high holidays in public or in the standard histories.

This review is about the context of this work, Jewish Magic and Superstition, and not about this edition, per se. It seems that this book has gone into public domain and Forgotten Books is one of several companies that is making this work available to the general public. I know this because I accidentally misplaced my first copy and found it around the time I received this edition from . The "other" edition, published by The University of Pennsylvania Press has a purple cover with a medieval art-inscription underneath the title and inside is a reproduction of "Popular Medieval Amulet to Protect the Mother and Child Against an Attack by Lilith". And, unlike the Forgotten Press ed., the pages are a light cream color as opposed to white. The fonts, text, annotations and bibliography are identical. Either copy is priceless to own. About the text. It is a comprehensive and explicit look at some of the practices believed to have been a part of the Jewish experience in the periods just before, during and right after in medieval Western Europe. This is not a text that covers an exhaustive look at all Jewish superstitious beliefs nor for all periods of Jewish existence. That would be impossible for even 10 volumes. For a look at Jewish beliefs of Eastern Europe, I highly recommend, The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha Aggadah. Some of the topics, Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg (of blessed memory) used as a part of his doctoral dissertation, "The Powers of Evil"-- thoughts concerning the makeup, work and influence of evil. "Man and The Demons," "In the Name of..."-- using incantations of Biblical phrases and divine names. "Amulets," "Dreams," "Astrology" are also covered thoroughly. One reviewer erroneously stated that this book "only scratches the surface...[lacks] the breath and flesh." What book was he reading? Again, this book is not supposed to address all Jewish beliefs for every given period or every locale. Our own experiences are

influenced by the environment by which we inhabit, that's true for all people at all times. He should not be expected to answer all questions for all Jews at all times. This is for a specific period and for a specific location. Period. By the way, the bibliography is well-researched at 90+ pages to support his conclusions. This book, I would say, reveals the basis of Modern (not Classical) Christian Anti-Semitic beliefs. To see how medieval Christian attitudes were demonstrated I would suggest Dr. Trachtenberg's follow-up (and part two of his doctoral dissertation) *The Devil and The Jews*, and *Shakespeare and The Jews* by James Shapiro.

[Review by Alan McLemore] Well-written, comprehensive. If Jewish magic and superstition are topics of interest to you, you need this book!

This book is the author's doctoral thesis from Hebrew Union College and was first published in 1939. Yet it is accessible to the general reader. It is fascinating to see the probable origins of so many traditional Jewish practices. The need for what is described as magical interventions was so strong that the Rabbis of old could not always disallow them. The question of the divide between what constitutes faith versus what is magic and superstition will likely arise in the reader but it is not the intention of this book to speak to this. There are a few frustrations with this book. The author makes many assertions without being referenced, despite the plethora of other scholarly citations. Also there are frequent quotations in German, a language that scholarly readers of that day would know, but they are left untranslated in this edition. Finally, there is no index, though there is a glossary and other supporting material.

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