



Israel in Exile: Jewish Writing and the Desert

Ranen Omer-Sherman

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Israel in Exile is a bold exploration of how the ancient desert of Exodus and Numbers, as archetypal site of human liberation, forms a template for modern political identities, radical skepticism, and questioning of official narratives of the nation that appear in the works of contemporary Israeli authors including David Grossman, Shulamith Hareven, and Amos Oz, as well as diasporic writers such as Edmund Jabes and Simone Zelitch. In contrast to other ethnic and national representations, Jewish writers since antiquity have not constructed a neat antithesis between the desert and the city or nation; rather, the desert becomes a symbol against which the values of the city or nation can be tested, measured, and sometimes found wanting. This book examines how the ethical tension between the clashing Mosaic and Davidic paradigms of the desert still reverberate in secular Jewish literature and produce fascinating literary rewards. Omer-Sherman ultimately argues that the ancient encounter with the desert acquires a renewed urgency in response to the crisis brought about by national identities and territorial conflicts.

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