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The Art of the Jewish Family

A History of Women in Early New York in Five Objects

By Laura Arnold Leibman

Published by Bard Graduate Center and distributed by the University of Chicago Press
US Publication Date: May 22, 2020 Cloth \$30.00 / £27.00
UK Publication Date: June 8, 2020 ISBN-13: 978-1-941792-20-9

In *The Art of the Jewish Family*, Laura Arnold Leibman examines five objects owned by a diverse group of Jewish women who all lived in New York in the years between 1750 and 1850: a letter from impoverished Hannah Louzada seeking assistance; a set of silver cups owned by Reyna Levy Moses; an ivory miniature owned by Sarah Brandon Moses, who was born enslaved and became one of the wealthiest Jewish women in New York; a book created by Sarah Ann Hays Mordecai; and a family silhouette owned by Rebbetzin Jane Symons Isaacs. These objects offer intimate and tangible views into the lives of Jewish American women from a range of statuses, beliefs, and lifestyles—both rich and poor, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, slaves and slaveowners.

Each chapter creates a biography of a single woman through an object, offering a new methodology that looks past texts alone to material culture in order to further understand early Jewish American women's lives and restore their agency as creators of Jewish identity. While much of the available history was written by men, the objects that Leibman studies were made for and by Jewish women. Speaking to American Jewish life, women's studies, and American history, *The Art of the Jewish Family* sheds new light on the lives and values of these women, while also revealing the social and religious structures that led to Jewish women being erased from historical archives.

Laura Arnold Leibman is professor of English and humanities at Reed College.

Praise for *The Art of the Jewish Family*

“This is a pathbreaking volume by a master scholar.”

Jonathan Sarna, author of *American Judaism: A History*

“*The Art of the Jewish Family* is an elegantly written, astonishingly researched, and persuasively argued collective biography of five early American, New York Jewish women. . . . From the moment that the book opens, we know that we are in the hands of a terrific writer. . . . Leibman’s detailed analyses of the messages encoded in the objects is brilliant. . . . Given the power of the material and the grace of the writing, I would hope that this book would reach beyond scholars to the significantly wider audience of those outside the academy who are deeply interested in early American history. . . . I am in awe of Leibman’s accomplishment.”

Pamela Nadell, author of *America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today*

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