Defining Jewish Difference

This book traces the interpretive career of Leviticus 18:3, a verse that forbids Israel from imitating its neighbors. Beth A. Berkowitz shows that ancient, medieval, and modern exegesis of this verse provides an essential backdrop for today’s conversations about Jewish assimilation and minority identity more generally. The story of Jewishness that this book tells may surprise many modern readers for whom religious identity revolves around ritual and worship. In Lev. 18:3’s story of Jewishness, sexual practice and cultural habits instead loom large. The readings in this book are on a micro level, but their implications are far-ranging: Berkowitz transforms both our notion of Bible reading and our sense of how Jews have defined Jewishness.

Beth A. Berkowitz is associate professor of Rabbinic Literatures and Cultures at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Her first book, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures*, won the Salo Baron Prize for Outstanding First Book in Jewish Studies. She has published articles in the *Journal for the American Academy of Religion*, the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, the *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, *AJS Review*, and *Biblical Interpretation*. She has held postdoctoral fellowships in Yale University’s Program in Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania’s Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, and New York University Law School’s Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization. She received her BA and PhD from Columbia University and her MA from the University of Chicago.
Defining Jewish Difference

From Antiquity to the Present

BETH A. BERKOWITZ

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