



Forms of Rabbinic Literature and Thought: An Introduction

Alexander Samely

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Alexander Samely surveys the corpus of rabbinic literature, which was written in Hebrew and Aramaic about 1500 years ago and which contains the foundations of Judaism, in particular the Talmud. The rabbinic works are introduced in groups, illustrated by shorter and longer passages, and described according to their literary structures and genres. Tables and summaries provide short information on key topics: the individual works and their nature, the recurrent literary forms which are used widely in different works, techniques of rabbinic Bible interpretation, and discourse strategies of the Talmud. Key topics of current research into the texts are addressed: their relationship to each other, their unity, their ambiguous and 'unsystematic' character, and their roots in oral tradition. Samely explains why the character of the texts is crucial to an understanding of rabbinic thought, and why they pose specific problems to modern, Western-educated readers.

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