



The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World

Nathaniel Deutsch

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Hannah Rochel Verbermacher, a Hasidic holy woman known as the Maiden of Ludmir, was born in early-nineteenth-century Russia and became famous as the only woman in the three-hundred-year history of Hasidism to function as a rebbe—or charismatic leader—in her own right. Nathaniel Deutsch follows the traces left by the Maiden in both history and legend to fully explore her fascinating story for the first time. *The Maiden of Ludmir* offers powerful insights into the Jewish mystical tradition, into the Maiden's place within it, and into the remarkable Jewish community of Ludmir. Her biography ultimately becomes a provocative meditation on the complex relationships between history and memory, Judaism and modernity.

History first finds the Maiden in the eastern European town of Ludmir, venerated by her followers as a master of the Kabbalah, teacher, and visionary, and accused by her detractors of being possessed by a *dybbuk*, or evil spirit. Deutsch traces the Maiden's steps from Ludmir to Ottoman Palestine, where she eventually immigrated and re-established herself as a holy woman. While the Maiden's story—including her adamant refusal to marry—recalls the lives of holy women in other traditions, it also brings to light the largely unwritten history of early-modern Jewish women. To this day, her transgressive behavior, a challenge to traditional Jewish views of gender and sexuality, continues to inspire debate and, sometimes, censorship within the Jewish community.

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