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Deborah and Her Sisters: How One Nineteenth-Century Melodrama and a Host of Celebrated Actresses Put Judaism on the World Stage (Hardback)

By Jonathan M. Hess

University of Pennsylvania Press, United States, 2017. Hardback. Condition: New. Language: English . Brand New Book. Before Fiddler on the Roof, before The Jazz Singer, there was Deborah, a tear-jerking melodrama about a Jewish woman forsaken by her non-Jewish lover. Within a few years of its 1849 debut in Hamburg, the play was seen on stages across Germany and Austria, as well as throughout Europe, the British Empire, and North America. The German-Jewish elite complained that the playwright, Jewish writer S. H. Mosenthal, had written a drama bearing little authentic Jewish content, while literary critics protested that the play lacked the formal coherence of great tragedy. Yet despite its lackluster critical reception, Deborah became a blockbuster, giving millions of theatergoers the pleasures of sympathizing with an exotic Jewish woman. It spawned adaptations with titles from Leah, the Forsaken to Naomi, the Deserted, burlesques, poems, operas in Italian and Czech, musical selections for voice and piano, a British novel fraudulently marketed in the United States as the original basis for the play, three American silent films, and thousands of souvenir photographs of leading actresses from Adelaide Ristori to Sarah Bernhardt in character as Mosenthal's forsaken Jewess. For a sixty-year period,...



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