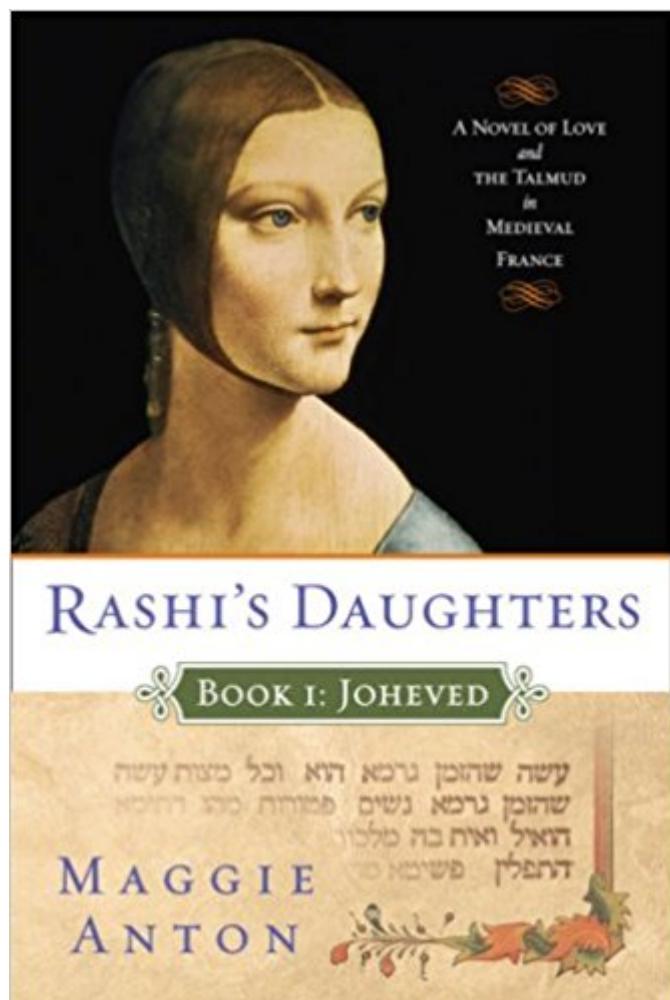


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Rashi's Daughters, Book I: Joheved: A Novel Of Love And The Talmud In Medieval France



Synopsis

The first two novels in a dramatic trilogy set in eleventh-century France about the lives and loves of three daughters of the great Talmud scholar. In 1068, the scholar Salomon ben Isaac returns home to Troyes, France, to take over the family winemaking business and embark on a path that will indelibly influence the Jewish world?writing the first Talmud commentary, and secretly teaching Talmud to his daughters. Joheved, the eldest of his three girls, finds her mind and spirit awakened by religious study, but, knowing the risk, she must keep her passion for learning and prayer hidden. When she becomes betrothed to Meir ben Samuel, she is forced to choose between marital happiness and being true to her love of the Talmud. Rich in period detail and drama, Joheved is a must read for fans of Tracy Chevalier?s Girl With a Pearl Earring.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Set in 1068, Rashi's Daughters: A Novel of Life, Love and Talmud in Medieval France is a novel about a winemaker and Talmud scholar, who undertakes an action that would be viewed negatively by the community if it became known - he dares to teach the Talmud to his three daughters. The eldest daughter finds her mind and spirit awakened with her learning, yet knows she must keep her knowledge hidden, even from her betrothed. Yet when she and her husband encounter their first crisis, the eldest daughter must make the fateful choice between marital happiness and her true self. A forceful novel of the power of learning, faith, and the two sides of love.

I became interested in this book through a friend. I was fascinated by how the author made these medieval times come alive. Her discussions of medical care, herbology, and most important Talmud and studying were a wonderful backdrop for this entrancing tale. Not being Jewish, I don't really understand the discussions of Talmud; I have not studied them. But, I do, through this book, understand their importance and meaning to Johoved. The author has somehow shared that in her book. I look forward to her next book. If it is as well-written as this, it should be a "best-seller".

I am an Orthodox Jew who happens to deeply enjoy history and well-written historic fiction. I have strongly mixed feelings about this book. I am deeply impressed with the research that went into this book as well as Anton's ability to compile an enjoyable story from her research. Unfortunately, it is clear that Anton does not know enough about living the type of authentically observant life that Rashi and his family enjoyed to write about these people without over-laying them with a 21st century mentality. Those of us who follow the traditions given down from parent to child over the generations know that Rashi's daughters did not wear tefillin and learn Talmud because they were rebels. On the contrary, they were very holy women who followed the law to the letter. Judaism is, at its authentic pure level, NOT a sexist religion. Further, those of us who live the observant lifestyle are aware at a bone-deep level the benefits of abstaining from prohibited activites. E.g., the prohibition against mature, unmarried men and women touching at all (not to mention "making out" or "snogging" or what have you), along with the observance of the laws of married life, create an intense, passionate bond between husband and wife. No intelligent woman (or man) who has lived this lifestyle and learned significant amounts of Torah (the term Torah is often used to include the Talmud, Mishnah, Midrashim, etc. - basically all of the accumulated studies) would be foolish enough to put themselves in a position such as the female characters in this book found themselves with their "beaux." To clarify what one of the other reviewers stated, yes, Jewish women at that time were mostly illiterate - especially as regards to Judaic studies. But so were most of the Jewish men. Only the special few - those with outstanding mental abilities or those with the finances to pay for an education - were able to learn enough to read and/or write Hebrew. And learning more than that was even harder to accomplish. On the other hand, Anton's portrayal of Rashi's mother as an active, educated intelligent woman who ran her own business is strikingly accurate. Plus, I enjoyed learning about the lifestyle and history of Jews living during the time of Rashi. I really would have preferred to give the book 3 1/2 stars or even 3.75 stars, because I do think it is very well-written and interesting. Unfortunately, books which do not portray Torah true Judaism accurately tend to do more harm than good. From the other reviews I have read, this already seems to be the case.

Rashi's Daughters quickly draws the reader into a well-researched, brilliantly-nuanced medieval world rich with timely details that are fascinating to us today. Hygiene and herbal remedies of the time -- remedies that could well be relevant to our needs today -- share space with subtle treatments of timeless life issues such as sexist and non-sexist traditions, premarital sex, respect for others, and details of viticulture and winemaking, all with a Jewish perspective. We REALLY care about the characters, both because Maggie Anton is a marvelous writer, and also because we know that many were real people who were important to Jewish history, law, letters and culture. I loved reading this book out loud with my 86 year old mother, who loved it! If I had a daughter over the age of perhaps 15, I'd read it out loud with her, too! This book could well be appropriate, as well -- and a great "ice-breaker" -- for groups discussing Jewish orthodox sex issues. While certain explicit sexual descriptions may not be appropriate for younger children under the age of 15, other chapters and sections of the book are perfect for reading out loud to children of any age, and may well initiate interest in Talmudic study, history, and current events. This book is a true tour de force of historical fiction, and I can't wait to read the next books of the trilogy and bury my nose in Maggie Anton's words and worlds. Mazal Tov to writer and readers alike! This book is a major gift to the greater Jewish library, although non-Jews will also love it and find it fascinating. Parental discretion is advised for children under 15 reading certain parts of the book. The rest of us can dig in and relish it all!

How often do you encounter the situation that you start a new book, and all you need is a cup of tea and limitless time to feel like you're in paradise? Well, that's what it was like when I opened "Joheved", the description of Rashi's oldest daughter's life. Maggie Anton succeeds in painting a lively picture of the times, including their way of making a living, gender roles and limitations, family life and - last not least the religious life. All is interwoven into a colorful dynamic presentation plus - from a woman's perspective. From time to time I forgot that it was fiction; historic fact and Anton's fantasy blend easily. The reading pleasure was well worth the 2 very short nights of sleep, and I only wished she could write the second book as fast as I read!

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