From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism: Ancient and Medieval Christian Constructions of Jewish History

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From its earliest days, Christianity has viewed Judaism and Jews ambiguously. Given its roots within the Jewish community of first-century Palestine, there was much in Judaism that demanded Church admiration and praise; however, as Jews continued to resist Christian truth, there was also much that had to be condemned. Major Christian thinkers of antiquity - while disparaging their Jewish contemporaries for rejecting Christian truth - depicted the Jewish past and future in balanced terms, identifying both positives and negatives. Beginning at the end of the first millennium, an increasingly large Jewish community started to coalesce across rapidly developing northern Europe, becoming the object of intense popular animosity and radically negative popular imagery. The portrayals of the broad trajectory of Jewish history offered by major medieval European intellectual leaders became increasingly negative as well. The popular animosity and the negative intellectual formulations were bequeathed to the modern West, which had tragic consequences in the twentieth century. In this book, Robert Chazan traces the path that began as anti-Judaism, evolved into heightened medieval hatred and fear of Jews, and culminated in modern anti-Semitism.

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