



# **Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab (SUNY series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion)**

*Carol Bakhos*

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*Explores rabbinic views of Ishmael, the biblical figure seen as the first Arab.*

Ishmael on the Border is an in-depth study of the rabbinic treatment of Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael. This book examines Ishmael's conflicted portrayal over a thousand-year period and traces the shifts and nuances in his representation within the Jewish tradition before and after the emergence of Islam.

In classical rabbinic texts, Ishmael is depicted in a variety of ways. By examining the biblical account of Ishmael's life, Carol Bakhos points to the tension between his membership in and expulsion from Abraham's household—on the one hand he is circumcised with Abraham, yet on the other, because of divine favor, his brother supplants him as primogenitor. The rabbis address his liminal status in a variety of ways. Like Esau, he is often depicted in antipodal terms. He is Israel's "Other." Yet, Bakhos notes, the emergence of Islam and the changing ethnic, religious, and political landscape of the Near East in the seventh century affected later, medieval rabbinic depictions of Ishmael, whereby he becomes the symbol of Islam and the eponymous prototype of Arabs. With this inquiry into the rabbinic portrayal of Ishmael, the book confronts the interfacing of history and hermeneutics and the ways in which the rabbis inhabited a world of intertwined political, social, and theological forces.

Carol Bakhos is Professor of Late Antique Judaism at the University of California at Los Angeles and is the editor of *Ancient Judaism in its Hellenistic Context*.

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