

Disraeli: The Novel Politician (Jewish Lives)

David Cesarani



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Lauded as a "great Jew," excoriated by antisemites, and one of Britain's most renowned prime ministers, Benjamin Disraeli has been widely celebrated for his role in Jewish history. But is the perception of him as a Jewish hero accurate? In what ways did he contribute to Jewish causes? In this groundbreaking, lucid investigation of Disraeli's life and accomplishments, David Cesarani draws a new portrait of one of Europe's leading nineteenth-century statesmen, a complicated, driven, opportunistic man.

While acknowledging that Disraeli never denied his Jewish lineage, boasted of Jewish achievements, and argued for Jewish civil rights while serving as MP, Cesarani challenges the assumption that Disraeli truly cared about Jewish issues. Instead, his driving personal ambition required him to confront his Jewishness at the same time as he acted opportunistically. By creating a myth of aristocratic Jewish origins for himself, and by arguing that Jews were a superior race, Disraeli boosted his own career but also contributed to the consolidation of some of the most fundamental stereotypes of modern antisemitism.

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