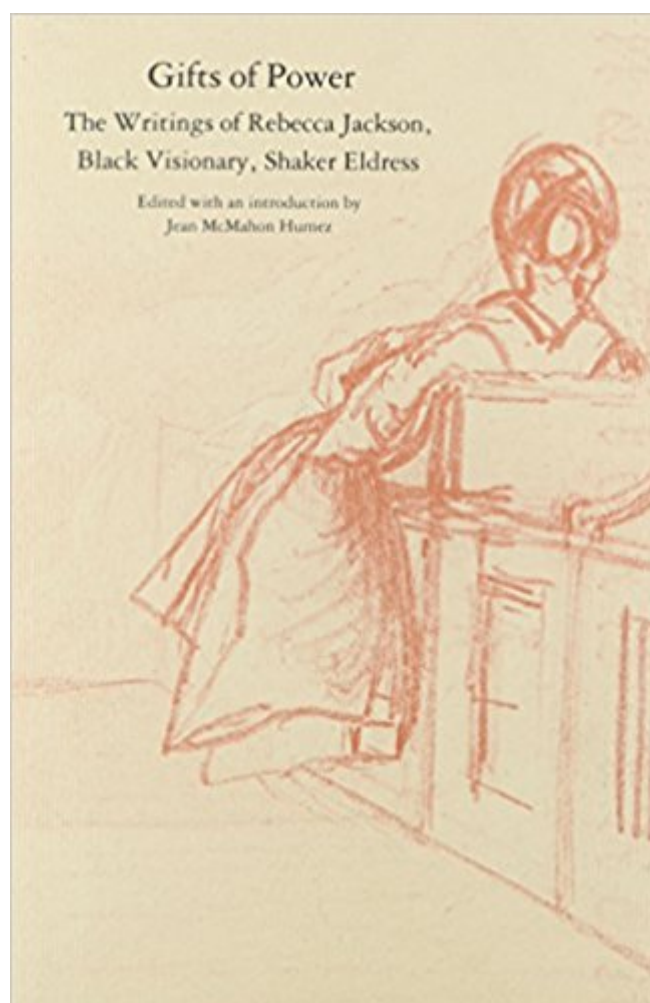


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Gifts Of Power: The Writings Of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress



Synopsis

Book by Jean McMahon Humez

Book Information

Paperback: 376 pages

Publisher: University of Massachusetts Press; Illustrated edition edition (January 29, 1987)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0870235656

ISBN-13: 978-0870235658

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #1,368,051 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #32 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Shaker #640 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > United States > African American #2910 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > African-American & Black

Customer Reviews

Book by Jean McMahon Humez

Jean McMahon Humez' "Gifts Of Power" collects the writings of Mother Rebecca Cox Jackson, whose career as preacher and Shaker leader spanned from 1830 until her death in 1871. Though the book contains a lot of detail some might find superfluous, the whole story Rebecca Jackson gives of her life and the spiritual experiences that shaped it is most interesting to read. One sees that at the beginning of her career Rebecca, a black women from Philadelphia, was a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church in her youth and was involved in "Holiness" prayer meetngs during the 1820s. This part of her career is particularly interesting for the way in which we see that Rebecca, as a result of the Holiness movement's highly participatory nature, was able to write down detailed visions of the coming of Heaven and the Day Of Judgement. These are blended in a facinating way with imagery taken from a woman's everyday life in Jackson's time. Many of her early visions realted closely to Jesus's miracles, but there was also many dreams of such mundane things as quilts, cakes, rain, and deaths of her relatives. Rebecca's writing style was immediate, dramatic, and intensely touching. Later, she decribed the strains preaching was having on her married life as she moved into intense prayer as Methodists criticised her ministry as a black woman preaching a

false doctrine. In response, we see that Jackson focused clearly and sincerely on trying to live the life of Jesus, especially after visiting the Shakers in 1836. The next part of "Gifts Of Power" deals with the way in which Rebecca, though troubled, found the Shakers. This part of the book is mystical in focus, but is really close to the heart and passionate about how Rebecca's conversion to Shakerism was really based on spiritual visions and dreams stemming from her experience with other Sisters at Watervliet. Her actual entry is likened, indeed, to the Resurrection of Jesus in fiery, yet simple language, and McMahon-Humex does a wonderful job of explaining exactly what Rebecca Jackson was doing in these densely narrated pages. As a Shaker, Rebecca Jackson did not cede that mystical, fiery character of her early writings, but her later writings have an epic tone lacking in previous letters. She saw during her residence at Watervliet a desire to do missionary work among blacks, which is seen in visions of herself travelling long distances or of the arrival of Native American seeking help. Later still, Jackson appeared to be able to see the whole of the globe, and she described her desperation in explicit and dramatic tones, notable during her brother's last illness. In Philadelphia, Jackson's dreams became focused on early events in her life, and she would dream of being united with her brother as she went on a long pilgrimage to develop a Shaker community for blacks. Her work during her second residence at Watervliet and with the Philadelphia Shakers was indeed seen by her as "going to Zion", in terms that make one clearly understand what she saw of herself like few other texts of this type. She saw herself as revealing the Kingdom of Heaven in her labours with the people of Philadelphia, and she never was afraid to conceal her feelings through her life. Jean McMahon-Humez adds fitting notes that make unraveling and interpreting the texts very easy. I do not find that these notes detract in any way from the fiery, yet touching quality of Rebecca's texts - and the glossaries make "Gifts Of Power" a true historical document. "Gifts Of Power" is a must-read for those interested in women's biographies.

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