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# VCU MENORAH REVIEW



NUMBER 49 • CENTER FOR JUDAIC STUDIES OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SPRING/SUMMER 2000

## For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

### From Trotskyism to the World of Our Fathers

Irving Howe: *Socialist, Critic, Jew*  
by Edward Alexander  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press

A Review Essay  
by Rafael Medoff

Although Irving Howe is remembered in the American Jewish community mainly for his bestselling *World of Our Fathers*, that lively chronicle of New York Jewish immigrant life actually came late in Howe's career and represented a startling departure from his previous literary ventures. In *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew*, Professor Edward Alexander reacquaints us with the many, and sometimes conflicting, themes that dominated Howe's life as a left-wing political activist, a literary powerhouse and one of the last noteworthy defenders of secular Jewishness as an ideology.

Howe's friend, colleague and political adversary all at once, Alexander is uniquely qualified to explore the Howe legacy. He does so with verve, wit and sparkling insights that make this biography fascinating to read.

Born Irving Horenstein in New York City's (then-) heavily Jewish East Bronx neighborhood, Howe began using his anglicized name while a college student, circa 1940. He was hardly alone in seeing a name change as a means of gaining acceptance in American society. Many years later, however, Howe came to regard name-changing as a reflection of "our own confused and unexamined feelings about Jewish origin." Still, Howe's life is not the story of an assimilated Jewish radical who finds his way back to his Jewish roots. It is, rather, the considerably more complex tale of a radical who never really abandoned his radicalism and a secular Jew who never gave up his secular Jewishness, but who was forced to grapple with the reality that concepts dear to

him from his youth were shaken or even shattered by historical events.

Alexander characterizes Howe as a "defender of lost causes." Howe embraced socialism, only to see it discredited first by the brutality and ultimately by the collapse of the Soviet regime. For Howe, Jewishness meant the secular, Yiddish-centered culture of New York Jewry's immigrant generation—but that culture was, in Alexander's words, "overtaken by Zionism, by religion, by assimilation, by the ravages of time." It was an ideology with no staying power; it could not be transmitted to the next generation.

During his senior year at the City College of New York (1940), Howe became an active Marxist although of the anti-Stalinist variety. More important, from the historical perspective, City College was where he met many of those who would join him in the circle that came to be known as the "New York Intellectuals." These writers and critics, Howe prominent among them, would play a crucial role in the major political and cultural debates of postwar America. Howe himself returned from military service in 1946, began writing for *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*, founded the socialist magazine *Dissent* and continued his personal evolution from Marxism to democratic socialism.

Howe's clashes in the 1960s with the New Left still make for intriguing reading more than three decades later. They also bear out Alexander's contention that Howe was not doctrinaire radical. He opposed American involvement in the Vietnam War but warned against "giving explicit or covert political support to the Vietcong." He saw merit in some aspects of the New Left but decried its "crude, unqualified anti-Ameri-

canism." In an especially controversial essay in 1968, Howe derided the tendency among some of the left to "acquiesce in almost anything said by a man whose skin is black and whose voice is loud."

*World of Our Fathers* (1976) came as something of a shock to Howe's colleagues. Over the years, he, like they, had paid scant attention to Jewish affairs and had barely noticed either the Holocaust or the establishment of Israel. Alexander asks, "Who that had known the Irving Horenstein of City College or even the Irving Howe of [the Trotskyist magazine] *Labor Action* in the 1940s would have predicted, could have imagined, that his most successful book and also the book for which he would become

**Howe moved easily in the worlds of radical politics, literature and intellectual debate but the world of "our fathers" still lived in his heart. Alexander has composed an engaging and colorful account of these many dimensions of Howe's work and life.**

best known among American readers in his own lifetime and afterward would be a massive history of the immigrant Jewish world of New York?" Scholars have noted Howe's tendency, in *World of Our Fathers*, to exaggerate the strength of socialism in the immigrant community and minimize its vibrant religious life. Still, none can gainsay Howe's singular success in bringing alive, for a generation that never knew it first-hand, the spirit of the Lower East Side of yesteryear. Howe moved easily in the worlds of radical politics, literature and intellectual debate but the world of "our fathers" still lived in his heart. Edward Alexander has composed an engaging and colorful account of these many dimensions of Howe's work and life.

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## The Feminist's Corner

A Review Essay  
by Sarah Barbara Watstein

**Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives.** By Natalie Zemon Davis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Davis has brought together, within the pages of one book, three 17th-century European women—one a Jewish merchant and mother of 12, one a Catholic mystic visionary, and one a Protestant painter and naturalist—who lived lives of daring and accomplishment on “the margins.” Each of these women left behind memoirs and writings that make for intriguing tales. The story of Gliki Bas Judah Leib is important because hers is the first autobiography from a Jewish woman that we know from the past. If you are interested in the practice of everyday Jewish life in the 17th century, you will be spellbound.

**Jewish Women in Historical Perspective.** Edited by Judith R. Baskin. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. The essays in this second edition of *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* speak of other Jewish women from the past and documents similarly evocative expressions of Jewish women's lives and experiences. Here are essays on Jewish women in the Hebrew Bible; Jewish women in the Diaspora world of late antiquity; women in classical Rabbinic Judaism; Jewish women in the Middle Ages; Sephardi women in the Medieval and Early Modern periods; Italian Jewish women; Ashkenazic women; Jewish women in Old Berlin; Jewish women in Victorian England; Jewish women in Imperial Germany; women teachers of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, 1872-1940; East European Jewish women in 1880-1930; women in pre-state Israel; the immigrant Jewish women; and Jewish women's religious lives in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. Each essay provides an overview of the period in question and asks serious questions about the general situations of Jewish women and their activities in Jewish communities where men dominated public and intellectual life, as well as their place in larger, non-Jewish cultural environments. All of the essays are accessible to the general reader. Detailed notes direct the specialist and the interested student to primary documents and important secondary studies. Eleven of these essays appeared in the first edition of this anthology and all have been revised and updated to incorporate new research published during the past decade. Four new essays also join the second edition. If you missed the first edition, don't miss out again—the essays collected here will advance your knowledge

of the diversity and richness of the Jewish female past.

**Lala's Story: A Memoir of the Holocaust.** By Lala Fishman and Steven Weingartner. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. More than an narrative of survival, this is the story of a young girl's calculated resolve to defy, resist and ultimately defeat the evil forces that sought her demise. Born into a middle-class Jewish family in 1922, Lala Weintraub grew up in Lvov, Poland. Her parents were assimilated Jews, and the family lived in a religiously and ethnically mixed neighborhood. When the Nazis came, Lala survived by convincing them she was a Christian. This book tells her remarkable story. Lala waited until after her 70th birthday to write this memoir of the Holocaust. She is to be commended for her courage and her determination to face and reclaim her past. This is a story, then, of a Jew on the run in occupied Poland; it is a story about fear and devastation, and about liberation. And, it is a story about ethnic relations. You'll meet Lala's family; you'll join her on her personal odyssey, from her childhood to the present.

**The Last Lullaby: Poetry from the Holocaust.** Edited and translated by Aaron Kramer. Syracuse University Press. Here are reminders of the Holocaust, poems that serve as a metaphor for all the genocides of the past and for all the genocides currently in our midst. Comprehensive introductory essays place each group in its historic and literary context. Kramer presents works mostly unavailable in English—until now. Here are lullabies of the Holocaust, songs of the ghetto and death camps, poems from across a wide sea—survivor poets who, although geographically removed, were transformed by the Holocaust. Kramer is equally noted as a poet and as a translator, as well as a popular public reader on both coasts, and the book is a culmination of his 50-year devotion to translating the poetry of the Holocaust. He feels that poets have a “sacred mission” and believes that poetry has “a great social and national function, with obligations, duties and responsibilities.” There is no question but that the poetry in this volume fulfills that function. Kramer succeeds in imparting to the reader a preliminary understanding of the extent to which the Holocaust left its very deep imprint on Jewish poets and Yiddish poetry throughout the world. When I put the book down I felt closer to my Jewish identity, closer to Yiddish-speaking people and closer to the Yiddish word—to Yiddish life, the Yiddish language and literature, than I ever had before. This volume promises to haunt its readers long after they have turned the last page.

**Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories**

**of Women Who Survived the Holocaust.** Edited by Brana Gurewitsch. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press. Gurewitsch presents a valuable volume of extraordinary interviews with Holocaust survivors, carefully arranged to reveal yet other angles of the Holocaust. Twenty-five testimonies arranged by theme comprise this volume; each has been carefully verified, and the editor has added extensive notes that corroborate and broaden the historical context. The division of themes is designed to highlight one dominant aspect of each experience: of mother/child relationships, of siblings or of those who engaged in organized, physical resistance. In her Preface, the editor notes that all the women, regardless of how old they were during the Holocaust, knew that they suffered because they were Jews. She continues, “This understanding, instinctively felt and clearly articulated, governed their responses and reactions.” In her Afterward, the editor notes that there are no “happy endings” to these testimonies; in most cases, the story has not ended. The interviewees still live in their experiences; their memories are part of their post-Holocaust identities, informing their lives on a day-to-day basis.” You will be challenged, both by the survivors and by the experiences, simply to know, to transmit to future generations. **Note:** If you are looking for a comprehensive or scientific survey of Jewish women's Holocaust experiences, this is not the volume for you. However, if you are looking for stories that depict the diversity and variety of women's experiences in the Holocaust, this is without question a “must read.”

**The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich.** Edited by Saul R. Friedman and translated by Laurence Kuller. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky. In 1941, the fortress city of Terezin, outside Prague, was ostensibly converted into a model ghetto where Jews could temporarily reside before being sent to a more permanent settlement. In reality, it as a way station to Auschwitz. When young Gonda Redlich was deported to Terezin in December of 1941, his reputation as an educator was established and the elders selected him to be in charge of the youth welfare department. He kept a diary during his imprisonment, chronicling the fear and desperation of life in the ghetto, the attempts people made to create a cultural and social life, and the disease, death, rumors and hopes that were a part of daily existence. Before his own deportation to Auschwitz, with his wife and son, in 1941, he concealed his diary in an attic where it remained until discovered by Czech workers in 1967. This diary is the chronicle of a man, a husband and a father, given sometimes to poetry, sometimes to prophesy. From the start, Redlich was aware of the historical signifi-

cance of events unfolding about him and his journal was a conscious effort to record as much as possible for posterity. Terezin has been the subject of memoirs, poetry and novels in more than a dozen languages. This readable diary merits praise—and your attention.

***A Thousand Kisses: A Grandmother's Holocaust Letters.*** Edited and translated by Renata Poit. Tuscaloosa, AL: *The University of Alabama Press.* These letters to a beloved son and his family tell the poignant story of one women's life in Nazi-occupied Prague and help explain why some Jews stayed behind. Spanning 1939-42, the letters provide a detailed picture of the lives of Jews in Prague during the war years. Read-

**ISRAEL TIME 1430 BETWEEN  
7 HRS 38 MIN FLYING TIME  
LEFT TO NEWARK, PAST  
VIENNA, TURNING NW TO...**

Birds refuse to fly over Maidanek.  
Over the nearby monks, sure

Crossing Europe this Jewish nonstop  
plane fares better than its Jews  
stopped by Christian guards for death  
humiliations names and

forced conversions to a faithless father  
that over time lost memory made  
true and still suspicions of the heart  
would slur the flesh

to inquisition  
torturing them both to madness and  
deceit and fire  
Christian torturers possess no  
memories no morals

their children less  
Birds won't fly over Maidanek.  
Over priests and nuns who snuggle  
crosses up to the holy mountain of  
Jews

sure the birds will fly that far before  
turned back by chimneys of smoke and  
fireburnt into their genes to nest among  
the arsonists.

Meanwhile Europe left behind its  
mini cultures thriving pure like sharks  
gone crazy at the smell of their own  
pure blood more pure

with ethnic cleansing.

—Richard Sherwin

ers will meet Henriette Pollatschek, whose letters tell the story of this book. Henriette was 69 years old when the Nazis marched into Prague, where she and her daughter had sought refuge after fleeing their German-held homeland in northern Bohemia. Henriette's son and his family had already escaped to Switzerland and later to Cuba and the United States. At each step of the way, her family urged Henriette to join them. But she was unwilling to abandon her financial independence, her accustomed way of life and the familiar objects she had gathered during a lifetime. As living conditions for Jews worsened in Nazi-occupied Prague, however, Henriette began to have second thoughts. This book brings the horrors and dilemmas of the Holocaust alive in a moving, personal account while answering pertinent historical questions about the motives of Jews who stayed behind. Did the Jews who stayed behind suffer from a "ghetto mentality"? What were the risks of emigration? What roles did economic fears and family ties play in the decision to stay behind? To what extent did Nazi regulation pose a further barrier? Did the governments of potential refuge countries or those of countries that refugees had to pass through also pose barriers to emigration? And, to what extent did the confusion and ignorance in which the Nazis forced the Jews to live add to the difficulty in deciding to emigrate? Would you have left? Would you have imagined the Holocaust?

***Hear Our Voice: Women in the British Rabbinate.*** Edited by Sybil Sheridan. Columbia, SC: *University of South Carolina Press.* In this anthology by and about Jewish women, 15 British rabbis discuss the changing role of Jewish clergywomen in the six decades since the private ordination of Regina Jonas, the first woman rabbi. Through personal testimony and scholarly inquiry, they take note of the legacy of their foremothers and grapple with what it means to be a Jewish woman in the 21st century. The contributors profile women who led the struggle for recognition and respect in the Jewish world. They also recount their own stories, describing the reasons they chose to enter the rabbinate and the challenges they face in the profession. Delving into the interpretive process from which women have traditionally been excluded, the rabbis examine female role models found in the Hebrew Bible, biblical prophecy and the feminist vision, the authorship of the Song of Songs, and the matter of canonicity from a feminist perspective. Important for Jews and for feminists in general, *Hear Our Voice* examines issues of significance for Christians as well, with some essays addressing the role of women in the Christian faith.

***Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the***

***Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women.*** By Chava Weissler. Boston: *Beacon Press.* Tkhines—Yiddish prayers for private devotion—are the subject of this book. These prayers began to appear in print in the 16th century and flourished during the 17th and 18th centuries. Because tkhines were in Yiddish, the vernacular of Ashkenazic Jews, they were available to women who rarely mastered Hebrew, the sacred tongue and the language of scholarly works. The author's analysis is based primarily on a reading of the Yiddish tkhines published in Western and Eastern Europe from 1648 to 1830 and on a comparison of them with their mishrashic or kabbalistic Hebrew sources. Chapters in Part I focus on the construction of gender in Yiddish devotional literature and tkhines for Niddah, pregnancy and childbirth. Part II concerns tkhines and mystical spirituality. Kabbalistic candle lighting, tears for the Shekhinah and candles for the dead constitute three chapters in this section. Finally, in Part III, the author turns to American transformations of the tkhines and to discussion of the feminist scholar and the tkhines. Of particular interest in the first chapter of this section are reflections on how those transformations relate to changes in Judaism, Jewish domesticity and the type of religious expression thought appropriate in the domestic realm. The tkhines give us one window into Ashkenazic Jewish life. Open it and your understanding of Ashkenazic women's religious culture will be greatly expanded.

***Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985.*** By Pamela S. Nadell. Boston: *Beacon Press.* The question of women rabbis continues to be debated. In this volume, Nadell mines a wealth of untapped sources to bring us to the first-in-depth history of those Jewish women who first fought for the right to equal religious participation—the right to become ordained rabbis. Focusing on their lives, faith, dedication, public reception and especially their extraordinary courage, her narrative begins with Mary M. Cohen, who published the first article on "the ordination question" in 1889. The volume concludes with a look at the contemporary controversy over women's ordination in Orthodox Judaism. Parallel histories also are traced: the shaping of Reform Judaism; the changes Jewish groups experienced as they encountered secularism and feminism; and women's participation and leadership in Zionist, civic, religious and feminist causes as they worked to prove their ability and right to be ordained. This is as much a book about pioneers as it is a book about religious reform, as much a book about women's presence, place and roles in their Jewish communities. Readers interested in American Judaism and the religious freedom of women during the

last century will not be disappointed. Nadell has done a superb job uncovering Jewish women's history.

***The Prairie Schooner of Contemporary Jewish American Writing.*** Edited by Hilda Raz. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. Did you happen to catch *Prairie Schooner* 71:1 (Spring 1997), a special issue on Jewish writing in America? If not, you are in for a treat. Thanks to the University of Nebraska Press, readers who missed this issue now have the opportunity to experience its treasures on their own. In this volume, readers will find manuscripts from fiction writers, essayists and poets. Here are well-known Jewish American writers alongside fresh, emerging talents. The volume offers aspects of post-Holocaust identity expressed by some American Jewish writers at work. How busy are Jewish writers in the larger American cultures? Open this book and find out. I promise this vivid collection demonstrates the continuing vitality of Jewish American writing.

***Women at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape.*** By Nehama Aschkenasy. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. The image of women at the window is prevalent in the arts of the ancient Near East and has suggested interpretations ranging from sexual availability to frustrated curiosity. In this book, Aschkenasy invites a reinterpretation of this classic image, seeing in it a mythic representation of an ancient woman's spatial restriction and her removal from the arena of history. This scholarly study focuses on Biblical tales that interpret the woman's life through the medium of space. For those who are interested in literary reading of the Bible, feminist readings of Biblical narrative and in a general understanding of this central text of Western tradition, this small study will prove a sound investment. For others who are interested in women's studies, womanhood and innerspace, role-playing and identity, this volume is sure to delight. Contemporary women may find the challenge of reclaiming sacred texts hard to ignore. This is theological exploration at its best.

***Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation.*** By Riv-ElLEN Prell. Boston: Beacon Press. What does it mean to be an American Jew today? What did it mean to be an American Jew in previous decades—the 90s, 80s, 70s, 60s and in the earlier decades of the 20th century? This book is about how gender images have served as a powerful medium through which Jews expressed and reflected their relationship to America. The author examines the development, from 1900 to the 1990s, of a group of changing images of Jewish men and women. Through maga-

zines, films, fiction, sermons, articles and letters in the Jewish press, Prell traces the assimilation and rise of gender stereotypes. Here readers will find scholarly conversations about ethnicity, gender and class. Here, too, readers will find discussions about such topics as the "ghetto girls," immigration and marriage, middle-class aspirations, and the stereotypes of Jewish mother, the Jewish American princess and the arrogant Jewish man. The book is a definitive and fascinating history of the complex relationships between Jewish men and women in the 20th century. One reviewer notes that this is a "scholarly page-turner;" I couldn't agree more. If you have spent time discussing and trying to puzzle out issues about Jewish men and women in novels, films and in people's lives with your friends, colleagues and family, you won't want to miss this book.

*Sarah Barbara Watstein is assistant director of Academic User Services, Virginia Commonwealth University, and a contributing editor.*

### Contemporary Interpretations of Ancient Israel

*A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament, Vol. 1, From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*  
by Rainer Albertz  
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press

*The Names of God: Poetic Readings in Biblical Beginnings*  
by Herbert Chanan Brichto  
New York: Oxford University Press

*Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches*  
by David M. Carr  
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press

*The Bible and the Ancient Near East, 4th Edition*  
by Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg  
New York: W.W. Norton and Co

*A Review Essay*  
by Kristin M. Swenson

How can we know about a time thousands of years past in a place that is oceans

and deserts away? How can we know what loves and loyalties, truths and questions moved its people, corrected and inspired them? And what does such knowledge matter to us now? What possible bearing could the lives and ruminations of peoples so far removed in time and space have on us today? While we pose these questions, the Bible continues to top best-seller charts, subject to translations and re-translations in countless languages. With such an impact, scholars and lay people continue to seek means of interpretation, debating methodology and proposing proper paradigms. Roughly speaking, the categories of literature and history dominate this discussion. What is their relationship?

The books reviewed here represent the attempts of several scholars to articulate a response to the questions above. They differ markedly in approach, organization, emphases and target audience. Some of them share sources in common; all of them make unique contributions. Each one has grown out of a desire to plumb the depths of the Hebrew Bible's rich text. All of them wrestle with the relationship of historical context to biblical text. We will consider each one in turn, attending to the manner in which they are organized, the goals that drive them forward and the conclusions each one reaches. In the process, we will draw conclusions where appropriate, aware that this is but a superficial overview of four important texts dealing with the history and literature of ancient Israel.

The single most important artifactual evidence of ancient Israel, covering several centuries, even a couple millennia, is the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, any attempt to uncover information about this span of time must take into account the literary witness. The task is complicated, however, by the fact that the people responsible for the text that we have did not approach authorship as we do today. We have no signed copies, and we have no scientific abstracts and charts of data. As a matter of fact, the telling of history seems more a theologically or ideologically motivated task than one of objective reporting (a characteristic one might claim for all "histories"). The trouble we encounter is in assuming that we can discover the "plain meaning" once and for all of this complicated piece of literature. Employing tools of historical and literary criticism, discovery and consideration of relevant archaeological information and other literature contemporary with the Hebrew Bible enrich our conclusions.

The name Cyrus Gordon has long been associated with the archaeology of Israel and the Near East. His work has contributed enormously to our understanding of the history of ancient Israel and of the Hebrew Bible. Gary Rendsburg, a student of Gordon's, has continued the work of his

teacher, and developed philological and literary avenues as well. Together, they created a fourth edition of Gordon's *Introduction to the Old Testament Times*. Beginning with a discussion of other cultures and artifacts associated with the biblical world, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* seeks "to understand the Bible on its own terms by situating it in the world of the ancient Near East" (Gordon and Rendsburg, 12).

This book is easily manageable for those with little previous background in either biblical scholarship or archaeology, and it represents the distillation of regnant hypotheses from the etiologies of Genesis to the correlation of the Exodus with the coming of the Sea Peoples to the development of an Israelite monarchy in response to Philistine threat. Furthermore, those who are interested in exploring parallels between references in the Hebrew Bible and the literature of ancient Israel's neighbors will find Gordon's and Rendsburg's book exciting and informative. This retelling of Israelite history through biblical narrative is interrupted and supplemented by their discussion of relevant artifacts and literature from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan and Greece.

In the final chapter, Gordon and Rendsburg describe the impact of oral tradition on the final literary text. They posit the influence of ancient epics, including Gilgamesh and Kret (and others compared throughout the book), and they briefly describe the importance of Qumran discoveries in our understanding of the growth and development of the Hebrew Bible.

While the association between biblical text and historical context may seem suspiciously direct, Gordon and Rendsburg present a classic presentation of well-established theories and interpretation. Challenges to some of these have taken a strong if recent hold in biblical scholarship, but detailed description of such challenges might complicate this book's otherwise smooth progression. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* gracefully opens the door to appreciating that the Hebrew Bible grew over time out of a rich and varied environment.

Rainer Albertz's *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, translated by John Bowden from *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, is a magnificent product of lifetime scholarship. It is a work that spans two volumes of which we'll examine the first here. Volume I concerns "the beginnings to the end of the monarchy." Each chapter begins with a detailed list of sources and bibliographical material relevant to the topic at hand. The book itself begins with an overview of previous research on the religion and history of ancient Israel, illustrating significant developments, persistent problems and important methodological shifts. The section concludes with Albertz's

candid predilection for "the history of religion as the more meaningful comprehensive Old Testament discipline," compared to that of a theology of the Old Testament (Albertz, 16). Characteristic of his careful style and meticulous documentation, he goes on to state seven reasons for this conclusion. The final section of his introduction, then, introduces his approach to the history of Israelite religion: an approach that draws from sociology, geography, ideology and other spheres in which religion was and is expressed and experienced.

This brings the reader into the material of the second chapter, dealing with the importance of family as the probable hub of the earliest Israelite religion, retrojected into the patriarchal narratives. With the exodus event, Albertz suggests that Israelite religion was really set into motion when disparate groups united under a liberating Yahweh. Drawing from pentateuchal narrative and poetry, Albertz makes a case for Yahweh as a wild mountain god of southern Palestine, older

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***These books [discussed in this essay] represent four approaches to the inexhaustible task of asking after the life and thought of people millennia past and thousands of miles away.***

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than Israel, and determined to liberate.

With entrance into the land and the beginnings of settlement came changes in the social and consequent religious profile of Israel. Likewise, with each major change in the visage of Israel came significant shifts in her religion, shifts that Albertz finds expressed in the layers both of Biblical texts and of archaeological excavation. As the hitherto, relatively autonomous groups shifted toward a monarchy, the pressure to centralize religious power and worship became too great to ignore. Albertz illustrates that such centralization was never unanimously resolved, however, and so he treats the state cults of North and South independently and addresses the issue of syncretism in the section that follows.

Albertz maintains that "the theological controversies in the social and political crisis of the eighth century" (Section 3.6) ultimately gave rise to the Deuteronomic reform movement which, while "centralizing the cult" also "brought together a whole series of interests that, while different, were united over the consequences." Albertz adds, "No wonder this part of the reform work could be fully realized!" (Albertz, 208). For "with the notion of the covenant the Deuteronomic theologians were in a position to bring the whole relationship between

Israel and God in history and the present under a single heading" (231).

Close on the heels of such an optimistic national outlook was the untimely death of the Judean king, Josiah. Albertz introduces his final chapter with the observation that Josiah's death was a national tragedy, and "the great hopes of a national, social and religious renewal which the Deuteronomic reform movement has cherished shattered under the thrust of Egyptian and neo-Babylonian expansion... The religious irritation sparked off by the death of Josiah in Megiddo can hardly be overestimated" (Albertz, 232). Albertz's first volume of the history of Israelite religion ends with the onset of exile.

Albertz follows a chronology of Israelite history similar to that of Gordon and Rendsburg, but he does not attempt to do so by retelling the Biblical narrative. Instead, his method, and resulting conclusions, show a sophisticated blend of previous research, Biblical witness and superior creative synthesis. Throughout, Albertz is ready to concede uncertainty in the face of insufficient data and hypothetical reconstruction based on a wide range of information. His attendance to the probable differences between "personal piety" and "official religion" is a strong thread connecting each stage of the growth and development of Israelite religion. While the detail supporting Albertz's conclusions and the scope of his references may be initially intimidating to the lay reader, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* is an exciting contribution to the field. He provides much-needed correctives to worn hypotheses (for example, the dismissive label of Canaanite as "fertility religion") and injects thought-provoking novelty born of careful study.

Gordon, Rendsburg and Albertz represent work of a predominantly historical ilk. Though their methods and results are very different, their goals are to explore and describe the dynamic history of ancient Israel—Albertz with attention to the interrelationship of her social situation and religion, Gordon and Rendsburg by reliance on the archaeological evidence. With Carr and Brichto we enter the world of predominantly literary criticism. Their concerns are with the literary shape of the Hebrew Bible, how it first took shape and how it continues to shape a theological and ideological thought-world. This said, they differ in approach and goals—Carr's incorporating diachronic, historical criticism into his literary study while Brichto, maintaining a synchronic reading, provides a strong counterargument to prevailing source hypotheses.

David Carr's text takes the book of Genesis as its focus and examines its development with sensitivity to historical issues and influences. In so doing, he provides a important criticism both of studies that at-

tempt to do “biblical” history without attending to the peculiarities of literature and of studies that attempt to simply “read the text as it is” without considering that its literary characteristics are inextricably bound in its historical circumstances. Carr likens traditional historical-critical methods to “strip mining” in their attempt to uncover facts of early history, and he likens the new literary approaches to “wilderness preservation” in their admiration of the immediate, surface text. In response to the insufficiencies of each of these, he proposes a “geological approach. In it the contours of the existing Biblical landscape are illuminated by plausible suppositions about how that landscape was produced” (Carr, 15).

Carr’s incorporation of historical and literary criticisms is achieved in this study of the transmission history of Genesis whereby he explores the development of the book from its latest levels of P to its hypothetically earliest “non-P,” “proto-Genesis” layers. Like Alibert, Carr observes how sociological and ideological influences have determined the shape of the text right along. For example, he posits Northern interests as determinative of early material to which Judean sympathies were added as that region began to supplant the North in leadership and power. Carr recognizes that source critics tend to follow either an independent “source” model or a “redaction” model, and he tries to walk between the two. He posits “an originally separate, but not independent P source,” which developed in conscious relation to its precursors, “a remarkable intratextual move” (Carr, 47).

This is an exceptionally well documented and detailed work that raises rich possibilities for understanding the book of Genesis and, consequently, other texts that exhibit growth and development during a period of time. Having guided his reader through the “fractures and crosscurrents” of this text, Carr proposes an ever-important corrective to once-and-for-all readings. For “such an approach loosens the interpreter’s hold on the text” and “[leaves it] open for...new readings” (333). He concludes by expressing the hope that this “pre-reading” of the fractures of Genesis may contribute to leveling the interpretive playing field, highlighting the extent to which no method can claim to offer a final account of Genesis, and the extent to which any reading of the book is a specific resolution of the irresolvably divergent voices embedded in it” (Carr, 335).

While Brichto may disagree with elements of Carr’s approach, drawing as it does on diachronic analysis, their concluding reflections on the unity-with-complexity of Genesis have much in common. Brichto, however, is more interested in challenging the tenets of the source hypothesis championed by Wellhausen and embraced enthusiastically by Biblical scholars ever since. In

*The Names of God* Brichto carries on the work of his earlier volume *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets*. Emphasizing the literary nature of Biblical narrative (in which he argues for the inclusion of such elements as genealogies and numerical lists), Brichto observes that “dogmatic fundamentalists and genetic scientific scholars share the presumption that historiography is the intent and purpose of the Biblical author(s)...” (Brichto, ix). Instead of seeking different strands of authorship (traditionally based in part on different divine appellatives) and then evaluating an hypothetical theological or historical message from them, Brichto argues for reading Genesis as a single, unified work that deliberately employs gapping, contradiction, doublets and other asymmetry. This “poetic” reading, he suggests, will be welcomed by such “gifted young scholar[s...as] Gary A. Rendsburg” who appreciate the uniform tendency of Genesis, even while recognizing its inconsistencies (Brichto, xi-xii).

Brichto proposes looking at the fact that the Hebrew Bible retains several identifications for God as a poetic technique expressing sophisticated theological interests. This, while dismissing the notion that there are primarily two names for God, YHWH and Elohim, and that one can trace documents to one or the other of two hands based on these designations, he concludes “that the proper noun Elohim (God) is not so much a product as it is a witness of monotheistic thinking” (Brichto, 27).

Working through stories typically considered inconsistent and thereby illustrative of more than one authorial hand, Brichto argues for readings that allow for “the freedom of the creative artist and not of the reality-circumscribed scholar, the freedom of the writer of fiction, not of the faithful recorder whom we call historian” (Brichto, 50). In the process, Brichto includes a comparison of ancient Near Eastern literature with the material of the Hebrew Bible because they can “provide us with a better perspective on the elements that our Biblical author inherited...and leave us better equipped to appreciate the way he adapted them for his larger purpose...” (Brichto, 88). Throughout the book, Brichto argues repeatedly for the adept craft of ancient authors whose “intellectual capacities and philosophical concerns” are like our own (Brichto, 112).

Having described his purpose and illustrated it through the careful analysis of the creation, flood and Abraham stories, Brichto turns to the second part of his work, that of “structures” in challenging the traditional distinctions of genre. He tackles the issue of genealogies with the same poetic facility demonstrated in his discussion of the narratives and shows evidence of deliberate Biblical creativity here, too. For “...the eponym

is also a metaphor; and in his figurative disposition of such eponyms the Biblical author is signaling—Artist at Work, Look Out for Flying Metaphors” (Brichto, 312).

The book concludes with “Poetical Odds and Addenda” in which the reader is privy to Brichto’s (a)musings on individual texts and literary issues. It ends as though in the middle, fitting perhaps to its beginning where Brichto writes “my own address claims to be no more than a beginning, and offers only a literary or poetical hypothesis that stands to be further tested, refined...” (Brichto, 12). This desire echoes in the brief afterward of Brichto’s son who took his father’s dictation of the last paragraphs only a few days before Herbert Chanan Brichto died. His admonition to recognize the superb facility of the Biblical writers, indulging their creativity and respecting their literary choices should inform what work follows his.

Such apology is appropriate here as well. Attempting to discuss four important books in this single essay can only serve as a beginning to any reader’s more detailed criticism and praise of each one. These books represent four approaches to the inexhaustible task of asking after the life and thought of people millennia past and thousands of miles away. Engaging such a task, however, dignifies the fact that the literature these people left behind continues to have a profound effect on people all over the world today. Perhaps it is in approaching the task rather than defining conclusions to it that we come closest to experiencing the Bible’s relevance and truths.

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## Emancipation and Disintegration

*Imperial Russia's Jewish Question 1855-1881: Cambridge Russian, Society and Post-Soviet Studies: 96*  
by John Doyle Klier  
New York: Cambridge University Press

A Review Essay  
by Brian Horowitz

Professor Klier, Elizabeth and Sidney Corob Reader in Modern Jewish History at University College, London, describes his latest work, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, as “the product of 20 years of research and writing [which] neatly encapsulates my



# NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

*Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.*

- Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis.* By Howard Schwartz. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Island Within.* By Ludwig Lewisohn. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- The Falashas: A Short History of the Ethiopian Jews* (3rd rev. ed.). By David Kessler. Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers.
- Building Wisdom's House: A Book of Values for Our Time.* By Bonnie Menes Kass, Rabbi Stephen S. Pearce, Father Jolm P. Schlegel and Bishop William E. Swing. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Maybe Luck Isn't Just Chance.* By Ruth Liepman. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- The Suicide Academy.* By Daniel Stern. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- From Immigrant to Ethnic Culture: American Yiddish in South Philadelphia.* By Rakhmiel Peltz. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wayward Threads.* By Robert B. Goldman. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Facing the Fires: Conversations with A.B. Yehoshua.* By Bernard Horn. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- After Survival: One Man's Mission in the Cause of Memory.* By Leon Zelman. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Nineteen to the Dozen.* By Sholem Aleichem. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Immigrant Physicians: Former Society Doctors in Israel, Canada and the United States.* Edited by Judith T. Shuval and Judith H. Bernstein. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI.* By Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight During the Nazi Era.* By Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- The Memoirs of Nahum N. Glatzer.* Edited by Michael Fishane and Judith Glatzer Wechsler. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.
- Were Our Mouths Filled with Song: Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy.* By Eric L. Friedland. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.
- The Jewish Exodus From Iraq, 1948-1951.* By Moshe Gat. Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Out of the Third Reich: Refugee Historians in Post-War Britain.* Edited by Peter Alter. London: I.B. Taurus & Co., Ltd.
- Poetry and Wisdom.* By Peter Enns. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism.* By Bruce F. Pauley. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1550-1655.* By Edward Fram. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press.
- The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages.* Edited by Amnon Linder. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Comparing Jewish Societies.* Edited by Todd M. Endelman. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch.* By T. Desmond Alexander. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination: A Survey of Jewish-American Literature on Israel, 1928-1995.* By Andrew Furman. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Red State, Blue Star: The Lives and Times of Jewish Students in Communist Hungary (1948-1956).* Compiled and edited by Andrew Handler and Susan V. Meschel. New York: Columbia University Press.
- The Jews of Latin America* (rev. ed.). By Judith Laikin Elkin. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture.* By Robert Brody. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels.* By Thomas Cahill. New York: Doubleday.
- Athens in Jerusalem: Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew.* By Yaacov Shavit. Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.
- A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth.* By Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn. New York: Henry Bolt & Co.
- Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870.* Edited by Frances Malino and David Sorkin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- One Hundred Years of Art in Israel.* By Gideon Ofrat. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- The Middle East Peace Process: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* Edited by Ilan Peleg. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- I Love Gootie: My Grandmother's Story.* By Max Apple. New York: Warner Books Inc.
- The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision.* By Henry Kamen. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jacob, Menahem and Mimoun: A Family Epic.* By Marcel Benabou. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.



entire academic career" (ix). Indeed, this book reflects that expansive time commitment, giving us a well-researched, well-organized and objective exposition of the social and political situation of Jews in Russia between 1855 and 1881.

With its large size, Professor Klier presents in studious detail the main tendencies of the period, escorting us through the hopeful emancipation period and the gradual disintegration of a positive consensus about the Jews' role in Russian society. For example, Klier describes the remarkable optimism that characterized Russian society at the time of the serf's liberation. The opinion that Russia would open its entire borders to the Jews and allow them to "merge" with Russians became, for a brief moment, the majority opinion of the intellectual classes. The *Illustratsia* Affair of 1858 is revealing. The liberal Russian press objected to the attacks of V.R. Zotov, the editor of the journal *Illustratsia*, against Jewish "merging." Articles offering the view that the general reform of Russia would bring about the integration of the Jews into Russian society appeared in mainstream Russian journals, such as *Russkii vestnik*, *Severnaia Pchela* and *Otechestvennye zapiski*.

By the end of the 1860s attitudes and conditions had changed drastically. Many of those powerful groups felt themselves

losers because of the reform of Russian life. The government feared the diminution of its dominant control over society, the peasants felt cheated out of land they felt belonged to them and the gentry saw their privileged position threatened. In large part, it was from the gentry that the attacks on Jews were renewed and intensified. With the help of Jewish renegades, such as Iakov Brafman, the conservative press, vilified the Jews, depicting the leadership—the Kahal—as a masonic order bent on world domination. They described the simple people faithful to the Talmud as murderers who used the blood of Christians for Passover rituals. Since a large number of government officials and conservative journalists believed these lies, the possibility of Jewish equality and "merging" became impossible. The rhetoric of hate gained influence and repetition gave it credibility. One need not be surprised, therefore, when in the 1970s, and then in the 1880s, pogroms against the Jews became a relatively frequent occurrence.

Professor Klier's methodology reflects exactly the issue of rhetoric as a casual motive in history. Organizing his material around debates in the periodical press, Professor Klier consistently presents the language used at the time. He shows how language itself became a historical cause, how the use of debased images to describe

Jews had repercussions in the spheres of law, education and business, and finally came to promote murderous violence.

A vital feature of this book is its treatment of secondary issues connected with the Jewish question in Russia. Professor Klier discusses the relations of Poles to Jews, Ukrainian nationalists to the Jewish question and the attitudes of the Orthodox Church to its Jewish rival. He also differentiates the problems of Jews in the south of Russia and those in the north. His treatment of the anti-Semitic character of the Russian bureaucracy is indicting and poses important questions that will surely inspire further investigation.

This book is much needed, since it serves as a companion to his own excellent collection of essays, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Russian History* (1992), edited by J. Klier and S. Lambroza. A historian can only wonder how, within the span of 26 years, Russian society could drastically change its attitudes in such a negative way toward its Jewish inhabitants. In *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question* Professor Klier explains with sharp analysis and varied examples just how these changes took place.

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