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MENORAH REVIEW



NUMBER 19 • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • SUMMER 1990

For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ideas of Jewish History
By Michael Meyer
Detroit: Wayne State University
Press

A Review essay by
Leon J. Weinberger

Michael Meyer has edited a first-rate textbook for a course in Jewish historiography. After pointing out that contemporary forms of Jewish identity are rooted in some view of Jewish history. Meyer shares with us the problems of the historian, both the philosophical ("How can the past be known when it is not present to our senses?") and the historiographical (or methodological) relating to causality and judgments upon the past. Another problem for the historian is periodization. However, the need to locate natural divisions in the Jewish past is complicated by the fact that Jews lived simultaneously under a variety of political, economic and social conditions.

Equally difficult is the attempt to find a common bond uniting Jews in their several differing cultural and historical experiences leading to variations in Jewish self-definition — an unresolved problem to this very day. Meyer observes that the attempt to find "the spatial connection" (his term) led some historians to search behind the events of the Jewish past and discover certain religious or moral or national ideals consistently present and unfaithfully preserved.

Meyer then proceeds to list the major contributors to Jewish historiography and does a critical evaluation of their attempts to deal with the special problems of their craft. Beginning with the writers of the historical sections of the Bible, Meyer observes that in their efforts to develop a philosophy of history they broke with the historiographers of the ancient Middle East even as they influenced the later historians of the West. Unlike the scribes of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt who were employed by emperors to write about their military exploits, the bibli-

cal writers interpreted history as the record of God's special relationship with Israel, which he rewards for its obedience and punishes for its sins. Uninterested in historical events as important in themselves, the biblical writers were more concerned with interpreting the record of history as evidence of God's presence in world affairs. History thereby became a witness pointing to the truth of God's actions and therefore became a requirement in the life of Israel, God's people.

With the writing of I Maccabees, the first post-biblical work of Jewish history, the influence of Greek secular historiography is seen. God is distant from the political and military events connected with the Maccabean uprising and is never mentioned by name. Rather than focus on faith and miracles, the writer of I Maccabees gives a matter-of-fact summary of events, which spurred the revolt of Mattathias followed by a description of the resistance carried on by his sons. II Maccabees appeals both to secular Greek and traditional Jewish readerships. The writer there records God's direct and miraculous intervention on behalf of Israel. His people in the manner of the biblical historian, even as he strives to educate and entertain his readers after the model of Greek historiography.

In Josephus Flavius, the first century C.E. Jewish historian, several influences are at work. Like the Mesopotamian and Egyptian scribes of the Bronze and Iron Ages, he strove to flatter his patrons, the Flavian emperors, by espousing their victorious cause over his Judean countrymen. And following the Graeco-Roman models, he seeks to establish historical truth for its own sake, even though he is at times self-serving in his attempt to vindicate himself and justify the wars of Rome against its enemies. Nevertheless, Josephus fails to rise to the highest standards of Graeco-Roman historiography.

Following the destruction of the second Temple and the end of the Judean commonwealth, Jewish interest in history was confined to the biblical period, which became an idealized and ritually repeated *heils-geschichte* through which the community renewed itself. In support of his view

that the Rabbis "possessed no conception of the development of ideas or institutions," Meyer offers in evidence the fact that the latter insisted that the Oral Law as well as the written Torah had its origin at Sinai. One wonders if this is a fair indictment of the Rabbis. Can it not be said that having been traumatized by the loss of the Temple and the Judean state, they were more concerned with preserving the integrity of the *halakha*, "the Jew's City of God" (in Meyer's words) than in historical studies, which, like astronomy and geometry, they would have considered peripheral to wisdom, (cf. the *Ethics of the Fathers*, 3.23). More to the point is Meyer's observation that "for the most part, historical considerations remained inessential to the rabbinic view of the world."

In the Talmudic period the author *Seder Olam* sought to establish for the first time a chronology according to the creation of the world; and in the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides, following the model of the *Ethics of the Fathers*, traced the unbroken chain of *halakha* from Moses to his own day. In this effort he was probably motivated by a desire to stem the tide of Karaite polemics and not by a concern with historical studies which he, like Aristotle, considered a waste of time. Even Judah ha-Levi, who valued God's presence in history at Sinai as the most compelling evidence of Israel's faith, merely followed the model of the biblical historians. Although differing from his contemporaries who sought a philosophical basis for religious truth, Halevi valued history not for its own sake but as the preeminent foundation of that truth.

The ninth and tenth centuries produced two works of historical interest de-

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signed to counter the Karaite efforts to delegitimize the Rabbanites and the Oral Torah. These include the *Seder Tanna'im ve-Amora'im* from the year 885 or 887 and the *Iggeret* [not *Igeret* as in Meyer's text] *Rav Sherira Gaon* written in 987. In his introduction Meyer lumps Abraham Ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* of 1160-1161 with the other two and dismisses it with one sentence, (p. 16). In the body of the book he does include a short extract from Ibn Daud's work under the headings "The Reliability of the Rabbinic Transmission" and "The Unbroken Chain." This bit of literary gerrymandering is probably designed to support Meyer's thesis that basic to Ibn Daud's work is "the underlying polemic against the Karaites," (p. 79).

Meyer's thesis here is debatable given Ibn Daud's expanded treatment of the history of Spanish Jewry (which Meyer acknowledges on p. 79) and his attempt to promote the authority of the Spanish rabbis as the legitimate successors of the Babylonian academies. It is much more likely that the latter was Ibn Daud's main concern given the lavish attention he devotes to the Andalusian courtier-rabbis. The Karaite polemics notwithstanding, there is a new polemical tone in the closing chapters of Ibn Daud's work. It is, in the words of G. Cohen, the effort to proclaim "the almost exclusive dominion of the Andalusian rabbinite over all the other various branches of Jewish knowledge."

Tenth century Italy produced three works of historical interest. *Josippon*, a book written in Hebrew by an anonymous author presents an account of the second Temple from "collected stories from the book of Joseph b. Gorion [Josephus Flavius]." Its great popularity attests to a greater interest in post-biblical Jewish history, as Meyer observes. *The Chronicle of Ahimaaz* by Ahimaaz ben Paltiel gives an account of the author's family and their achievements in southern Italy. Rounding out the trio is the *Chronicle of Nathan ha-Bavli*, preserved only in fragments, giving an account of institutional life among tenth-century Babylonian Jews. Franco-German Jewry in the 10th-12th centuries was not given to historical writings and only genealogies of scholars and martyrologies following the First and Second Crusades have been preserved. Not mentioned by Meyer among the historical writings from this period is the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, probably written in Spain in the 12th century.

From the sixteenth century several notable works in Jewish historiography have been preserved. The need to record for posterity the fate of Spanish Jewry expelled from their homes in 1492 led Joseph ha-Kohen to compose his *Vale of Tears* in

Hebrew in 1558 and Samuel Usque his *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* in Portuguese in 1553. Both authors follow the traditional biblical model and attribute Israel's suffering to her sins. A departure from this religious causality is Solomon Ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehuda* written in the 1520s. Probing the causes for Jewish suffering Ibn Verga advances—for the first time in Jewish historiography—secular considerations ("their pretentious, envy-inspiring behaviors") that may have accounted for their plight. Meyer correctly observes that this

Michael Meyer has filled a major void in the study of fewish historiography by presenting us with a volume that should become the standard introduction to this subject..

new component in Jewish historiography may have come from the influence of the Italian Renaissance with its emphasis on the human factors at work in historic events. In line with the new humanism coming out of Italy, Jewish writers showed an increased interest in the histories of the lands in which they lived, resulting in the histories of Venice and the Ottoman Empire by the Cretan Elijah Capsali, the histories of the rulers of France and Turkey by Joseph ha-Kohen and David Gans' world history. Commenting on these developments, Meyer notes that "because the histories of other nations could be viewed with less theological presupposition than that of Israel, increased awareness of them must have played a role in the eventual secularization of Jewish history as well."

The secular temper of the Italian Renaissance is most notable in the work of Azariah dei Rossi who applies critical and analytical methods in evaluating rabbinic legends, although he does not produce a connected historical narrative. It is only in the 19th century that integrated and comprehensive histories of the Jews begin to appear in the wake of the European Romantic movement, which sanctioned the search for historic roots of people and cultures. In addition to the *Wissenschaft* with its insistence on non-judgmental textual studies, this century produced the seminal historical writings of Leopold Zunz, Immanuel Wolf, Abraham Geiger, Nachman Krochmal and Heinrich Graetz.

Meyer observes that the third element in the mix that produced a synthetic conception of Jewish history was the "system of historically grounded metaphysical idealism." From Herder and Hegel, Jewish historians proposed that a single unique idea was at the center of the Jewish experience giving it purpose and continuity in its disparate historical and geographic settings. For

Immanuel Wolf this idea was the unity of God; for Abraham Geiger it was ethical monotheism. There were polemical considerations in the position taken by the historically grounded metaphysical idealists, who could argue that Judaism was not of limited importance, having passed its prime with the advent of Christianity, but a force that continues to be "an important and influential factor in the development of the human spirit." (I. Wolf, "On the Concept of a Science of Judaism," quoted in Meyer, p. 150.) One wonders to what degree, if any, political concerns played a role in the efforts of these historians. Certainly they were of prime importance to Leopold Zunz, who was persuaded that a familiarity with the religious heritage of Jewry will lead enlightened statesmen to grant the Jews the same civil rights as the rest of the German nation enjoys.

Other historians like I.M. Jost, who sensed the polemical nature of the idealists, began his *History of the Israelites*: "It is time to close the files on the value or lack of value of the Jews and Judaism and to begin with an analysis of the phenomenon itself, its origin and development." Meyer pays tribute to Jost's "objectivity and good historical sense," which exceeded those of the historians who followed him, such as Graetz and Dubnow, although his work did not gain the popularity of theirs. In assessing the east-European philosopher Nachman Krochmal, Meyer acknowledges his pioneering efforts in developing the first systematic philosophy of Jewish history, although in subordinating the history of individuals and institutions to the history of ideas he tends to ignore the material components in the history of the Jews.

As expected, Meyer devotes more space to Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow than to the historians preceding and following them. In his attempt to answer the question, "What is Judaism?" by focusing on its historical development, Graetz advocates the role of the historian over the philosopher for whom the history of an idea precedes its historical effects. Although Graetz did not presume that the philosophical idea—the Jewish "folk-soul"—could exist in a vacuum separate from Israel's historic life, he was equally certain that Jewish history was more than its national existence. In Meyer's words, "Graetz's conception of Jewish history represents an intermediate stage between the earlier view, which paid little regard to the people that brought forth and developed the Jewish idea, and the national historiography of Simon Dubnow who follows him." Like most 19th century historians, Graetz was not without his biases. Among these was his limited interest in east European Jewry, the *Ostju-*

den with their bizarre Hasidism and their “mongrel tongue,” Yiddish.

Dubnow, a native of eastern Europe, devotes much of his historical writings to Jewish life in Russia and Poland, including a history of Hasidism, even as he rejects Graetz’s thesis that the historical continuity of Jewish life over four millennia is related to their self-image as the bearers of ethical monotheism to the world. For Dubnow, the agnostic, Israel’s survival and creative life over the centuries is an expression of its national awareness as a special people. Dubnow had little sympathy for the post-Mendelssohn Germanizers whom he viewed as traitors “to the national cause.”

However, Dubnow’s avowed “sociological” approach to Jewish history is pitted with flaws not unlike Graetz’s *Leidens und Gelehrten-geschichte*. Committed to the indivisible unity of the Jewish people, he fails to expose the conflicts of social and economic interests and regional tensions in Jewish life, even as he neglects to pay due attention to the external influences of the creativity of the Jews. Although not a Zionist, Dubnow’s influence is seen in the works of the Zionist historians Ben Zion Dinur and Raphael Mahler, both of whom found the desire for national redemption and a return to the Land the catalyst for Jewish survival. Even a cursory perusal of the synagogue liturgy recited by Jews daily as well as on Sabbaths and Festivals reveals the ever-present plea for national restoration in the Land.

Meyer correctly assesses Yehezkel Kaufmann as a unique Zionist historian who perceives the love of the Land as part of a larger self-awareness that made for Jewish survival. According to Kaufmann, “religion was the sole source of the [Jewish] ... national will.” Meyer concludes his survey of Jewish historiography with selections from the work of the American historians Salo Baron and Ellis Rivkin and from Leo Baeck’s essay *This People Israel* written, in part, in a concentration camp. Meyer finds that although Baron’s sociological approach to Jewish history, described as the continuing relationship between Judaism as religion and culture and the Jewish people, has added much to our knowledge of the themes he has chosen, his methodology does not help reveal “the dynamics of Jewish history and the connections among its diverse elements.” In this Meyer echoes the observations made by other critics of Baron who find that his work lacks a conceptual framework that would help explain the continuity of Jewish history.

In line with this effort to discover a conceptual framework is the “unity concept” of Jewish history proposed by Ellis Rivkin. Rivkin’s thesis is that Jews through-

out their historical career held a unified perception of the universe, whether religious, as in the past, or secular, as at present, and that this “trans-historical principle” enabled them to blend creatively into their several environments while preserving their unique identity. However, Meyer rightly argues that a metaphysical “trans-historical principle” is not provable and he questions the accuracy of the “unity principle” given the diversity of views among modern Jews regarding the world in which they live. In Baeck’s essay we hear a voice reflecting the Holocaust experience and his efforts to come to terms with it. The Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel pose new problems for the student of Jewish historiography which, added to the already existing ones, make for an exciting and challenging discipline.

Regrettably, Meyer does not mention Levi Herzfeld, the first Jewish economic historian, considered by no less a figure than Theodor Mommsen to be “the foremost and most reliable of all Jewish historians,” (cf. G. Karpelès, *Handelsgeschichte der Juden des Altentums* [Brunswick, 1894], p. xx), and he completely ignores the seminal contributions of Moritz Steinschneider to Jewish historiography (cf. S. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians* [Philadelphia, 1964], pp. 276ff.). However, these are matters of judgment about which one can argue. In the final analysis, Michael Meyer has filled a major void in the study of Jewish historiography by presenting us with a volume that should become the standard introduction to this subject. We are in his debt.

Leon J. Weinberger is University Research Professor in the Religious Studies Department of the University of Alabama and author of Early Synagogue Poets in the Balkans.

CHILD OF ISRAEL

*The chali's sounds float to me
beyond my door ...
a yearning melody.*

*Outside my house sits a child
playing alone ...
the notes irreconciled.*

*While sirens scream he sits and plays
a song of hope ...
for softer days.*

--Jack D. Spiro

DREYFUS AND FRENCH CATHOLICISM

*The Dreyfus Affair:
Art, Truth, Justice*
Edited by Norman L. Kleebblatt
Berkeley: The University of
California Press

A Review essay by
Robert Michael

In thinking about this comprehensive book on the Dreyfus Affair, I wondered why the hundreds of artists whose work is included in the volume found it so easy to portray Dreyfus, his supporters and the Jews in such repulsive ways — as devils, locusts, rats, serpents, monsters, vampires, Judases. Why was it so difficult for pro-Dreyfus artists to find a convincing, positive image of Jews? Why was there no alternative language, no meaningful vocabulary of goodness concerning Jews that could naturally be affirmed within French culture? This essay is an attempt to answer these questions.

The predominant Christian theology on the Jews holds that they enable Christians to know themselves as Christians and to incarnate good by contrast with Jewish evil. Anti-Jewish theological defamations, communicated and empowered by the Church, have for millennia provided the Christian populace with inspiration and justification for their contemptuous moral attitudes toward Jews. Anti-modernist, racist and nationalist ideas and movements would not necessarily have become anti-Jewish in the first instance nor would they have packed the punch they seem to have, especially during crisis periods, had theological antisemitism not been inculcated into so many Christians.

The history of the Jews in France from patristic times through the 17th century has been one of periods of peace superseded by expropriations, massacres and expulsions. Expounded in every theological text, catechism, and Christian author who wrote about the Jews — indeed, in most childhood experience — up to and during the Enlightenment was the idea that Jews were paradigmatically evil. During the debate over the emancipation of the French Jews in 1789, the predominant attitude expressed by the revolutionnaires, including friends of the Jews like Mirabeau and Gregoire, was to grant nothing to Jews unless they totally assimilated. Even after the 13 November 1791 law gave French Jews citizenship, Judaism was not given equal status with the Christian religions until 1846.

For the most part, 19th-century Europe was repelled by ideas of equality and humane treatment for Jews, who were identified as opponents of traditional, Christian society. Typical of strict Conservatives was Johann Fichte, who stirred a hate campaign based in great part on religious differences. The political Left associated Jews with exploitative capitalism. Even liberal Christians essentially told Jews, as H. D. Schmidt has noted, "to reform, conform or to depart."

By the end of the century, the Catholic Church persisted in actively supporting every antisemitic movement that emerged. Louis Veuillot, one of the leaders of the French Church, went so far as to advocate that Jewish children could be baptised without parental consent in order to "snatch a soul from Satan." Between 1882 and 1886 alone, 20 antisemitic books were written by French priests. They blamed all of France's ills on "the decidual people."

The Dreyfus Affair, 1894-1906, is *mutatis mutandis* another important manifestation of religious antisemitism. Although the fallout from economic, political and social problems lurked in the background, it was Dreyfus' Jewishness that ran like a fiery trail throughout the Affair. During his degradation ceremony in January 1895 and throughout the period, the Judas theme and the notion of Christian revenge on the Jews not only for this "betrayal" but also for their "hateful assassination of Christ" were prominent.

Zola's *J'accuse*, attacking the perpetrators of the crime against Dreyfus, served as an indictment of the values of traditional France, its Christian spirit and its national identification with the army. Typically, traditional France reacted with violence against the Jews. In the six weeks following publication of *J'accuse*, there were 69 antisemitic riots in France.

Although there was no direct intervention in the Affair by the upper levels of the Catholic hierarchy, they did little or nothing to rein in the antisemitic hysteria during this period. It is patent that those most predisposed to this antisemitism and, therefore, most hostile to Dreyfus were the faithful. Most priests, religious congregations and practicing Catholics were especially inimical to Dreyfus and the Jews and engaged in anti-Dreyfus activities throughout the Affair.

More important than the intellectual anti-Dreyfus journals was the Catholic press in cultivating and catalyzing the pre-existing religious antisemitism of French Catholic culture (in fact, the Catholic press all across Europe and the United States were uniformly, sometimes violently, anti-Dreyfus). The Jesuit *Civita Catolica*, published in Rome, was regarded as the

spokesman of the papacy. According to *Civita*, the Jews were at the root of the evils of the French Revolution and democratic society; they "were at the head of the virulent campaigns against Christianity"; they were enemies and foreigners within every country in which they lived, yet they dominated and ruled these nations, planning ultimately "to take over control of the entire world."

The Dreyfus Affair, 1894-1906, is mutatis mutandis another important manifestation of religious antisemitism.

La Croix was France's major Catholic newspaper. It was published in nearly 100 regional editions. In title, staff and faithfulness to the Pope's orders, *La Croix* seemed to be the authoritative journal of French Catholicism. And the Church itself did not dissuade people from this belief. In 1890, *La Croix* named itself "the most anti-Jewish newspaper in France, the one that supports Christ, the sign of horror for all Jews." It regarded the Jews as representatives of the Devil, totally evil; and Dreyfus meant the Jews. The editors hysterically published lists of Jews in the Army, in the press, in education and in administration.

La Croix du Nord, a popular regional version of *La Croix*, leavened its Christian disdain with economic, political and racist antisemitism. The Jews were "perfidious," "deicides," "monsters of Golgotha," who "perpetuate their decide by attempting to destroy Christian morality and ruin the Catholic Church and Catholics themselves." In a combination of racist and religious antisemitism, *La Croix du Nord* noted that Jews participated in a "war to the death that, since the original fall, separated the divine race of the Liberator of the human kind from that of the hellish serpent They are a race, a foreign race, encamped among us; a race without our blood, without our instincts, without our morality, without our ideals; an essentially cosmopolitan race, a race without country; a stubborn race, usurious, without any moral sense" This kind of propaganda went a considerable way in conditioning the minds of the faithful and destroying their Christian conscience in regard to the Jews.

Edouard-Adolphe Drumont, called "the pope of antisemitism" and author of the best-selling French book of the 19th century, *La France juive devant l'opinion*, he was the first French antisemite who also expressed himself in racist terms. Drumont serves as an example of the elemental nature of religious antisemitism and how it took priority over racism, nationalism and anti-modernism as a motive and expression of hostility

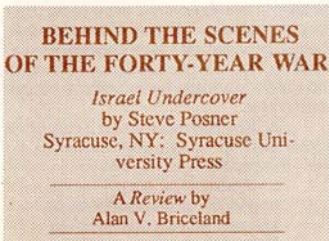
against Jews. Drumont's life was filled with things Catholic, and he attacked the Jews almost always in traditional Christian terms.

Ironically, the forces that would deny the importance of religion in the Affair, would also have us believe that Dreyfus was so assimilated that he had totally lost his sense of Jewishness. It is true that the whole Dreyfus family and Alfred in particular were fiercely loyal to France. Dreyfus had written, for instance: "Far above men, far above their passions, far above their errors stands France." Yet the fact remains that although he was never extroverted about his Jewishness, he seemed simply to assume it. Proud of his Jewish name, he was married in a Jewish ceremony to a Jewish woman. When depressed and desperate for comfort in Sante Prison in December 1894, he wrote to the Chief Rabbi of France, Zadoc Kahn, who had married him and Lucie, to come to comfort him. Rabbi Kahn asked the authorization of General Felix Saussier to visit Dreyfus in his cell to "bring him the succor of religion." He was refused. A few days later, when he was returned to his cell after hearing the guilty verdict of the court martial, he shouted: "My only crime is being born a Jew." There is no doubt that Dreyfus was both a Jewish Jew and an assimilated Jew. These two modes were merged in a letter to Lucie Dreyfus of 7 December 1894. Alfred wrote as if of the Shema: "Oh dear France, you whom I love with all my soul, with all my heart, you to whom I have devoted all my energy, all my intelligence"

The Affair that had ended with Dreyfus' vindication, a strengthening of the Republic and a weakening of Catholic conservatism seemed to lose its importance during the crisis of world war. In the 20th century, religious antisemitism has remained a dominant force in French society and politics. As late as the Second World War, "faced with the 'Jewish problem,' Catholic France was almost entirely dazed," as Catholic historian Pierre Pierrard put it. A large proportion of the Catholic faithful and the clergy were still bitter toward Jews. Despite important help for Jews from some elements of the Catholic population, the French Church with "near unanimity" had up to 1942 supported the Vichy regime's policy of discrimination against Jews, so long as it was carried out with "justice and charity," the phrase used by the Vatican in supporting Vichy's antisemitic legislation. Following traditional policy, most French Churchmen had no objections to the principle of the anti-Jewish laws. Although several prelates had spoken out in favor of the Jews during the first years of the war (and millions of French lay Catholics and clergy acted with courage and conviction to help Jews throughout the

Holocaust), in the roundups of Jews for shipment to Auschwitz in February 1943, it was not surprising that the Church stood silent.

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Israel Undercover: Secret Warfare and Hidden Diplomacy in the Middle East is a history of Arab-Israeli confrontations since 1948. Steve Posner argues that only through an understanding of the intelligence gathering and counter-terrorist activities of Israel's Mossad, the "secret warfare" of the title, and the workings of behind-the-scenes negotiations, the "hidden diplomacy" of the title, can a realistic view be gained of what has essentially been 40 years of continual warfare. Posner is a realist. He intends for others to see the stark realities he sees. In some ways a more appropriate title for this work might have been "Israel Under Siege: 1948-1988."

The book's actual title may imply too much. Readers expecting the disclosure of state secrets will be disappointed; the "secret" and "hidden" elements of the work have long been matters of public record or speculation. Posner's extensive interviewing of private informants and his use of a wide range of sources allow him, nonetheless, to assess the significance of the work of several Israeli undercover agents. He also throws some light on two decades of "secret" negotiations between Israeli leaders and King Hussein of Jordan.

Israel Undercover is neither an analysis of Mossad operations nor of diplomatic policy-making. It is instead a sympathetic study of Israel's attempts to develop a series of approaches for fending off, under intense and prolonged pressure, its Arab enemies. As Posner sees it, Israel is the underdog. A nation of 4 million, it has had to use its wits as much as its might to survive in a world of 200 million neighboring Arabs.

Posner divides his work into four sections, the most significant of which are "Inside Beirut" and "Across the River Jor-

dan." The two sections that have less relevance to the book's major theme are "American Dreams," which discusses covert U.S. contacts with the PLO, and "The Mysterious Middle East," which poses some concluding dilemmas.

"Inside Beirut" focuses on the intelligence gathering activities of a Circassian-Jordanian woman, Dina al-Asan, who was established in medical practice among the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon by the Mossad in 1973. Dina assisted the Mossad in the conduct of its anti-terrorist work and had significant impact on the Israeli-Egyptian peace process that culminated at Camp David.

Dina's photographing of PLO "fishing boats" (used for launching guerrilla assault craft against Israeli beaches) allowed teams of Israeli frogmen to destroy 30 such craft in Lebanese ports on the night of July 9, 1974. More importantly, however, Dina befriended the family of an assistant to the PLO's chief of military planning. She then offered her services as the family's babysitter and used the opportunity to photograph military directives. Among her discoveries were two false passports. The passports were destined to be carried by two Palestinian commandos on a journey to Tel Aviv by way of London. Mossad agents in England were alerted. They identified the two Palestinians on arrival, placed them under surveillance and witnessed the PLO operatives receive a briefcase from a former British-Army-officer-turned-arms-merchant. When the PLO commandos subsequently arrived in Tel Aviv, they were quickly and quietly arrested. Concealed in their briefcase were two machine guns and five hand-grenades.

Because of Dina al-Asan's work, the Mossad was alerted to the activities of the English arms merchant. He led them to another former officer, a Frenchman in the employ of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi. When threatened with exposure by the Mossad, the English arms merchant agreed to become a mole (double agent) within the Libyan-financed arms acquisition network. Through their spy the Mossad learned of the existence of a seven-man hit squad then training under the direction of the notorious terrorist Wadieh Haddad. Further work uncovered Haddad's target. The Israelis learned in 1977 that Qaddafi was financing the planned assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his cabinet surprised the Israeli intelligence community by ordering that the plot be revealed to Sadat even though Sadat was the leader of a nation then technically at war with Israel. Thus, in July 1977, the chief of the Mossad handed a file to his Egyptian counterpart in the presence of King Hassan

II of Morocco identifying the conspirators and the locations of their weapons hidden in Egypt. Sadat's security forces quickly arrested the conspirators, thereby prolonging their president's life. A few days later, on July 21, 1977, Egyptian forces invaded Libya. Two months later it was King Hassan of Morocco who contacted the Israelis with the news that President Sadat was willing to open secret negotiations with Begin. Subsequently, Sadat flew to Israel to address the Knesset. That flight would eventually lead to the Camp David Accords and to another plot, this time successfully, against Sadat's life.

Posner does not claim that the intelligence turned over to Sadat triggered the resulting peace process, but he obviously thinks that it was an event of real significance to the course of Egyptian-Israeli relations. The secret intelligence war and the workings of hidden diplomacy may have gained the victory that conventional warfare had failed to achieve.

The "Across the River Jordan" section of *Israel Undercover* focuses on Israeli efforts to influence King Hussein of Jordan through secret diplomacy. Posner traces the origins of modern Jordan and Israel from the McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration to the 1947 U.N. partition. He emphasizes that the Hashemite rulers of the British-created political entity of Transjordan are outsiders whose rule has been sustained more by force of arms than by the actual loyalty of their subjects. King Hussein understands very well the greatest threat to his throne arises not from Israel but from Arab nationalism.

Israel Undercover is . . . a sympathetic study of Israel's attempts to develop a series of approaches for fending off, under intense and prolonged pressure, its Arab enemies.

It was the April 1963 proclamation of a union between Egypt, Iraq and Syria that propelled a fearful Hussein into the first of his secret face-to-face talks with Israeli leaders. The talks began with Yaacov Herzog in September 1963, in the London office of Hussein's Jewish physician. From the beginning Hussein understood the risks. If the fact that he was meeting with Israeli leaders were ever known, it would prove an open invitation for attempts on his life. "For Hussein," says Posner, "the secrecy of his meetings with Herzog and of subsequent encounters with Israeli leaders was more than a precaution: it was an obsession." (p. 158)

This early round of talks (and most of those that followed periodically over the

next twenty years) would fail to make significant progress toward peace because, as Posner bluntly puts it, "Hussein became convinced that he was in no position to buck the tide" of Arab nationalism. (p. 159)

Nonetheless, Israel's eastern border was made more secure as a result of preserving Hussein as an independent player in Arab politics. What kept the secretive contacts going over the years was Jordan's and Israel's "mutual interest in clamping down on Palestinian guerrilla activities." (p. 159) In addition, both nations shared a mutual hostility to the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank allied to "a powerful Egypt and a radical Iraq." (p. 164)

Despite Israeliefforts, the face-to-face talks failed to neutralize Jordan. In June 1967, Hussein, under the influence of, and in concert with, Egypt and Syria, launched his forces against Israel. Within six days Hussein lost the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Three months later Hussein reopened his secret London liaisons, this time with Abba Eban and Yigal Allon.

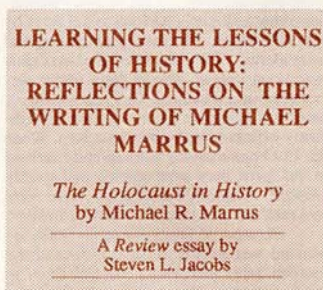
Although Posner appreciates the difficulties of Hussein's position (caught as he was between militant Arabs, the PLO and the powerful Israelis) Hussein, nonetheless, comes off as the mistake-prone villain of the piece. In the wake of his 1967 defeat, Hussein obstinately made unrealistic demands for the return of the West Bank and Jerusalem in the face of realistic political and military logic. He rejected compromise out of the belief "that unless he gave the Palestinians an outlet [meaning Israel] for their anger, they would soon turn on him." (p. 177) As it happened, by granting sanctuary, support and virtual political autonomy to PLO guerrillas, the King almost lost his country to a 1970 PLO insurrection backed by a Syrian invasion. Only the threat of Israeli and American intervention forced President Hafez Assad to order a Syrian withdrawal. Given vital breathing room by Israel's mobilization, Hussein seized the opportunity to mount his "Black September" offensive that drove the PLO out of Jordan and into Lebanon.

Shortly after September 1970, Hussein resumed his secret talks, this time with Golda Meir, Yigal Allon, Moshe Dayan and Abba Eban. Now, however, the King and the Israeli leaders rendezvoused at night on the Israeli-occupied island of Fa'ru in the Gulf of Aqaba. Hussein continued to reject what Posner believes to have been reasonable Israeli proposals based on the Allon Plan. King Hussein's own plan, announced in March 1972, is dismissed by Posner as ill-conceived. Hussein next compounded his problems by largely remaining aloof from Sadat's successful Yom Kippur attack of

1973. Thus, when the cease fire took effect two weeks later, "Hussein found himself without a share of the Arab glory." (p. 197) Through it all Hussein had maintained his throne, but he had not emerged as a statesman and had not materially assisted in achieving a peaceful resolution of the Middle East Conflict.

Posner is not optimistic about the prospects for peace. Continuously, for more than 40 years, Israel has been engaged in fighting what military strategists call "low intensity war." After citing a litany of terrorist attacks throughout the book, Posner concludes his examination with the stark prediction that at best "the Arabs might choose to abandon their armed struggle, but for the foreseeable future it is unlikely that they will renounce their anti-Zionism." (p. 303) Thus, at best "a type of coexistence between two intractable foes who could be deterred from fighting only by the threat of mutual destruction." (p. 303)

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1. "The History of the Holocaust: A Survey of Recent Literature," *Journal of Modern History*, 59 (March 1987); pp. 114-160.
2. *The Holocaust in History*. Hanover, University Press of New England, 1987.
3. "Recent Trends in the History of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1988, pp. 257-265.

"Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). How much the more so when we turn to the study of the Holocaust. In the last two decades there have poured forth a veritable torrent of publications: scholarly studies focusing on various aspects of the historical phenomenon, highly personalized first-hand accounts of life in

both ghettos and concentration camps, fictionalizations of varying quality and philosophical and theological reflections by both Jews and non-Jews attempting to comprehend the implications of the Holocaust for continuously meaningful existence in our post-Auschwitz age. As the events of these "nightmare years," to use William Shirer's phrase, recede into history, the necessity of re-assessment and re-evaluation of the literature in the above topic areas looms ever larger. Historian Michael Marrus has brilliantly provided one such opportunity, examining the variety of concerns with which his fellow historians have chosen to occupy themselves.

In "Recent Trends in the History of the Holocaust," he reveals quite succinctly his own perspective when he writes:

... we must view the Holocaust as part of the historical process and take into account previous historical situations and their dynamics. [p. 257]

In so stating what many will regard as the obvious in his position, he moves from historian to philosopher-theologian and challenges directly the "uniqueness school" of Holocaust scholarship, yet softens his assault by reminding us early on in *The Holocaust in History* of the primary tasks, which confront all who labor in these vineyards:

... to tell the story, either as witness or in commemoration, or as a somber warning to future generations.

... to integrate the history of the Holocaust into the general stream of historical consciousness and to apply to it the modes of discourse, the scholarly techniques, and the kinds of analyses used for all other historical issues. [p.xiii]

Arno J. Mayer's recently-published *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1988) may, justifiably, be seen, therefore, as the first such offering of positive historical revisionism. Mayer argues, quite persuasively, that the physical annihilation of European Jewry was not initially part of the Nazi agenda but only became so when the Russian campaign of 1941 began to falter. What will be the final outcome of such revisionist thinking is, at present, inconclusive.

Equally important to Marrus' understanding of the historical cross-currents in scholarly writing about the Holocaust is the critical distinction he makes between those he would classify as "intentionalists," for

example, Lucy Dawidowicz and Gerald Fleming, and German historians Eberhard Jackel and Ernst Nolte; and those he would label “functionalists,” primarily German historians Martin Broszat and Uwe Adam. For the intentionalists:

This line of thought accents the role of Hitler in initiating the murder of European Jewry, seeing a high degree of persistence, consistency and orderly sequence in Nazi anti-Jewish policy, directed from a very early point to the goal of mass murder. [p. 35]

For the functionalists:

Few historians of this school doubt that Hitler was murderously obsessed with Jews; they question, however, whether he was capable of long-term planning on this or any other matter, and they tend to look within the chaotic system itself for at least some of the explanation for the killing of European Jews. [p. 40]

Because both “schools” are open to criticism, while, at the same time, accepting the centrality of Hitler in the Gott-dammerung of destruction, Marrus turns elsewhere for an understanding of the process of the Holocaust, and, ultimately, sides with Hilberg’s view of ‘sequential steps,’ labelling his *Destruction of the European Jews* “the most important work that has ever been written on the subject.” [p. 48]

On balance, in both *The Destruction in History* and the two essays cited above, Marrus surveys all the areas of concern with which historians have addressed themselves, e.g. the role of antisemitism and its centrality, the “uniqueness issue,” ‘Lebensraum,’ ghettos and camps, resistance and refugees, rescuers and bystanders, among others. Yehuda Bauer is, however, correct in his critical review of the book that “the trouble with books such as this (and articles such as these — SLJ) is that they are outdated before the print is dry.

Problems, therefore, remain in attempting to understand the phenomenon we have identified as the Holocaust, not the least of which is the difficulty in surveying a complex literature, which continues to grow exponentially. After all, Abraham and Hershel Edelheit’s *Bibliography of Holocaust Literature* [1986] briefly addressed more than 9,000 items in English alone while admitting its own incompleteness. Thus, while Marrus continues to set for himself a truly Herculean task, and succeeds most admirably, it is a limiting and limited task

nonetheless, one which continually must be updated by himself and others, and one which is, at best, only a beginning point for any and all of the concerns, which he covers.

As the events of the Holocaust continue to recede into history, scholars of this discipline will continue to debate the weight attached to various factors delineated in describing various specific events and the influence of such political, social, economic and ideological factors in relation to those events. What will more and more be demanded of Holocaust historians in the future, however, for others, including themselves, to begin to “make sense” of the Holocaust, is a crossing-over into the conjoint realms of philosophy and theology: how may we best use our historical knowledge — that 4 million Jews died in the camps and another 2 million in the ghettos, for example — to begin to further explore the implications of such knowledge for our contemporary realities and survival. If, as Marrus himself writes, the primary task of the historians of the Holocaust will be to warn future generations of the sins of their predecessors, then they, too, will have entered what Richard Rubenstein has called the “universe of moral obligation” and have become the most practical of academic scientists. Sadly, however, though Marrus points us in the direction we must travel, nowhere in these writings does he even allude to the signposts, which will guide us on our way.

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BOOK BRIEFINGS

Inclusion of a book in "Briefings" doesn't preclude its being reviewed in a future issue of Menorah Review.

Health and Medicine in the Jewish Tradition. By David M. Feldman. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. The author provides a thematic development of inherited Jewish concerns about health, medicine, illness and well-being through all the cycles of life. It sets forth the precepts affirmed and the stance taken, the principles and the value system reflected. Elements of the book’s fundamental thesis emerge with clarity: that in Jewish law and practice the pursuit of preventive and curative medicine is a religious obligation; that human life is to be revered for its own sake,

above its apparent lack of quality or conflicting ritual demands; that health implies a respectful concern for body and soul, unhyphenated; and that these objectives are to be sought in the individual, social, sexual and therapeutic dimensions of life.

The Anthropology of Evil. Edited by David Parkin. New York: Basil Blackwell Inc. This book provides anthropological perspectives on one of the most intriguing and disturbing problems of the natural and human worlds: the nature of evil. Thirteen authors discuss the problem in the context of different societies and religions: Christian, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and others. The book also provides unusual perspectives on questions such as the nature of innocence, the root of evil, the notion of individual malevolence and whether God is evil. Much has been written on evil by historians, theologians and philosophers. This book shows how distinctive and revealing the contributions of anthropologists can be.

Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice. By Bernard Lewis. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. The Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East has unsettled the world for over half a century. What are the roots of this violence? Does it spring from old-style conflict between nations and peoples over territory? Is it simply the “normal” prejudice found through time between neighboring peoples of different cultural traditions or ethnic origins? Or is hostility toward Israel a unique case of antisemitism that goes beyond normal prejudice in ascribing to Jews a quality of cosmic evil?

The thesis of this book is that, while all three kinds of prejudice are involved, the third and newest prejudice — virulent antisemitism — so long a poison in the bloodstream of Christianity, seems to have entered the body of Islam. To understand how this has happened, the author leads us step by step through the history of the Semitic peoples and languages to the emergence of the Jews and their enemies, linking the Nazis, the Holocaust and the Palestinian question and arriving finally at the war against Zionism, which, for some, has turned into a war against the Jews.

Judaism. By Nicholas de Lange. New York: Oxford University Press. Contemporary Judaism, in all its diversity, is the main focus of the author’s account; but he shows the essential unity of the Jewish tradition by examining how each of these apparently divergent groups has been influenced by a common historical heritage. The vocabulary of Judaism, particularly the language of

worship, is studied in detail, both to present Judaism on its own terms, and to familiarize the reader with words and thoughts, which are at the heart of everyday Jewish religious life.

Jewish Mysticism & Jewish Ethics. By Joseph Dan. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. This is a study of 700 years of diverse Jewish theological creativity, including many extreme, radical and even seemingly heretical schools of thought, which were integrated into a constructive, traditional Jewish ethics within the framework of Hebrew ethical literature. The ability of Jewish ethics to absorb and sustain conflicting ideas, which originated in schools that fought each other fiercely, presents a fascinating chapter in the history of ideas.

Who Was Jesus? By Roy A. Rosenberg. Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc. The author tells the story, from a historical and scientific perspective, of Jesus the man from Nazareth, and what he was trying to accomplish. He traces the teachings of Jesus to the Jewish sectarians of the first century, some of whose writings are preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. He recaptures the vision that Jesus

had of the ideal man who would descend from heaven as the ruler of the new age, when heaven and earth would be transformed, when the "first would be last and the last would be first" and the meek would inherit the earth.

Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting. By A. Roy Eckardt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Jews and Christians possess distinct religious and historical identities; yet, in America today, both identities share a participation in our heterogeneous culture. The author thoughtfully probes the implications of this paradoxical modern relationship. He considers recent trends in thought and praxis, identifying varying alignments within the Christian and Jewish communities, always exploring the reasons behind the responses. His work is profoundly challenging to Jewish and Christian readers.

Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism. By Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin. New York: Simon and Schuster. The authors refute the common beliefs that antisemitism is only another ethnic or racial prejudice, or that it is caused by Jewish economic success or by the need for scape-

goats. Instead, they show that the causes of antisemitism are paradoxically the very beliefs that have ensured Jewish survival. They reveal how these beliefs and values have precipitated universal antisemitism by rendering the Jews, and now the Jewish state as well, outsiders — challengers — to other people's Gods, laws or national allegiances. Thus, the authors argue, antisemitism is the unavoidable, though of course immoral, response to distinctive ethical values.

The American Jewish Experience. Edited by Jonathan D. Sarna. New York: Holmes & Meier. The editor presents a range of the liveliest and most informative writings on Jews in America. The collection brings together a substantial body of material that will meet the needs of teacher and student. Covering American Jewish history from colonial times to the present, the volume focuses on the impact of the American Revolution on Jews, the influence of German-Jewish immigration to this country, conservative Judaism in America, the Jewish labor movement, Zionism in America and the revival of American Judaism. Each selection is preceded by a headnote that discusses its historical context and contemporary relevance. A brief annotated bibliography follows each selection.



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