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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Summer/Fall 2013 no. 79

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During the Holocaust**

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## Authorities Without Power: The Jewish Council of Vienna During the Holocaust

A review essay by Alison J. Rose

***Eichmann's Jews: The Jewish Administration of Holocaust Vienna, 1938-1945* by Doron Rabinovici. Polity: 2011.**

How did a city known as the cosmopolitan center of the diverse and multinational Habsburg monarchy and for its large, vibrant and culturally rich Jewish population become the model for the extermination of the Jews of Europe? What roles did the Jewish "authorities" in Vienna play in the destruction of their communities? These are two of the many questions raised by Doron Rabinovici's new study of the "Judenrat" or Jewish Council of Vienna. Rabinovici, who grew up in post-Holocaust Vienna, has written this book to come to terms with a subject that has haunted him and many others: the Jewish councils' roles in the Holocaust and how they have been interpreted and often condemned for their supposed collaboration with the Nazi officials. He contributes new perspectives on this much-debated and sensitive topic by focusing specifically on the Jewish organizations of Holocaust Vienna. The focus on Vienna serves two purposes: first, the role of Jewish councils in Austria and Germany has been ignored so that this fills a gap in scholarship, and second, and more importantly, the function of the Jewish organizations in Vienna became the model for the rest of Europe. Therefore understanding the situation in Vienna is crucial to fully appreciate the issues of Jewish councils across Europe and their actions during the Holocaust.

Rabinovici's book sheds light on the ethical dilemmas that tormented the Jewish councils. While Jewish council members were initially judged harshly and often looked upon as collaborators who facilitated the Nazis in murdering the Jews, more recently there has been a growing awareness that these individuals were victims who had no control over the deportations or the fate of their communities. Rabinovici further supports this viewpoint, emphasizing that the Jewish council

members reacted as individuals and should not be judged as a whole. No matter what course of action or strategy they adopted, the outcome was the same because in reality they had no power. Rabinovici delicately handles these issues, which many have shied away from. According to some, this topic is taboo: we dare not discuss these questions; we are not entitled to because we cannot possibly understand what it was like, imagine what was known and not known, and therefore have no right to judge. Rabinovici recognizes this and states in his preface, "words alone are inadequate to do justice to the subject" (vii).

In order to avoid the tendency of moralizing and blaming the victims, Rabinovici approaches the topic from the vantage point of the "motives behind the accusations, reproaches, and denunciations" (11). He begins with the question of post Holocaust justice (or lack thereof), pointing out that Jews who "collaborated" with the Nazis were often given much more severe punishments by post war courts than the actual Nazi perpetrators. It should be understood that whatever their roles, the Jewish functionaries were victims, not be confused with perpetrators. Their responses to their roles as victims varied, but most were motivated by trying to use their positions to save any lives possible, and most turned down opportunities to get out and save themselves in order to serve their communities.

Beginning with an account of the 1945 trial of Wilhelm Reisz, one of the Jewish officials, Rabinovici shows that there was an imbalance in the judgments. Reisz was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, including three months' hard labor by the Austrian People's Court, five years more than Johann Rixinger, a Gestapo clerk for Jewish affairs, and significantly longer than most Austrian Gestapo officials. Reisz hanged himself in his prison cell the day after sentencing. The harsh sentencing failed to take into account that Reisz himself was a victim living under the constant fear of death. The verdict and sentencing of Reisz reflect a general attitude towards Jewish community officials, that they were motivated by selfish interests and that they identified with the Nazi perpetrators, when in fact they often believed they were acting in the best interest of their communities and that cooperation

with the Nazis afforded them the best chance of saving Jewish lives. While at first glance these beliefs seem misguided and in retrospect might appear naïve, it must be remembered that they lacked power and knowledge of the Nazis' ultimate goal of annihilation. Jewish officials made painful choices that they believed might help to save Jews. Again it must be remembered that each individual Jewish official, regardless of his or her actions and strategies, was first and foremost a victim, a tool of the Nazis.

Why were the Jewish administrators treated so harshly by the courts, looked down upon by Jewish survivors and universally condemned after the Holocaust? Rabinovici addresses this question as well, noting a failure to take account of each official's reasons for their actions. Blaming the Jews for their own destruction also served to relieve the responsibility and guilt of the perpetrators and bystanders.

The book, *Eichmann's Jews*, also highlights the particularly brutal nature of the Holocaust in Vienna and provides detailed evidence to illustrate how Vienna became a blueprint for the organized deportation of Jews later applied in other communities. The book provides details on the relationships between Jewish communal workers and Nazis (Eichmann figures prominently here but others emerge as well). An opening chapter (2) provides some background on the history of anti-Semitism in Vienna, as well as the strategies of the Jewish community in response to anti-Semitism, but more could be done to develop this and explain why the Austrian population so enthusiastically welcomed the Nazis and went beyond the demands of the Nazis in their persecution of the Jews. Rabinovici provides powerful descriptions of the overzealous reaction of the Viennese. For example, he writes, "Never again was the invading army to be greeted with such unflagging enthusiasm as it crossed a border" (26). And more to the point, "The uncontrolled terror of Viennese anti-Semitism, which had already started the night before the German army entered Austria, was not in keeping with the pseudo-legal and official veneer that the new authorities wished to give their Jewish policy. The victims were at the mercy of their persecutors' bestiality" (27). The Viennese public went beyond the Nazi

demands and the Nazis “had to appeal to the people to moderate their enthusiasm” (28). In his conclusion, Rabinovici returns to this theme, pointing out that the hostile nature of the non-Jewish population in Vienna made it impossible for any resistance or uprising to occur (201) but more could be said by way of explaining the Austrians’ fervent and eager embracing of Nazi racism. If anyone could be described as Hitler’s willing executioners, it seems it would be the Viennese.

Subsequent chapters provide a chronological overview of the familiar stages of the Holocaust — persecution, the November Pogrom, expropriation, deportation and annihilation — but through the lens of the Viennese Jewish administration and their activities, knowledge and relationships with Nazis. While the Nazis misled and deceived them every step of the way, Jewish functionaries understood that the situation was dire; still they acted in ways they imagined might save lives and relieve some of the Jews’ suffering. This often put them at odds with Zionists leaders and Jewish underground fighters. Rabinovici shows that like other strategies, the approach of working and cooperating with Nazis was adopted in order to save lives. Jewish officials were individuals and some perhaps acted more commendably than others. Some were heroic, courageous, and dedicated, risking their own lives for their people, while others might have been fighting primarily for their own survival, but all were victims.

Chapter 11 presents the key argument of the book by providing detailed accounts of individual members of the Viennese *Kultusgemeinde* and reflecting back on the earlier historical overview to analyze survival strategies (143). In doing so, it highlights the activities of some relatively unknown individuals such as Benjamin Marmelstein, Josef Löwenherz, and Franzilöw, who represent three different patterns of response adopted by Jews in administrative roles during the Holocaust.

Of all the Jewish functionaries, Rabbi Marmelstein is known as the most willing to cooperate with the Nazis and the least sympathetic. Born in Lemberg in 1905, he came to Vienna after the First World War. In the 1930s he served as community rabbi at a synagogue in the

Brigittenau district. From this position he spoke out publicly against antisemitism. In 1938, after the Nazi takeover of Austria, Murrelstein began his work in the emigration department of the Vienna *Kultusgemeinde* on the invitation of Löwenherz. In this capacity, he compiled statistics on emigration and appealed for foreign aid. He also wrote summaries and delivered lectures on Judaism and Jewish history for Eichmann, which Eichmann used to give the impression that he was an expert on Jewish affairs. With his authoritarian and cold personality and perceived lack of sympathy for his fellow victims, he created a bad impression. Although he saved many lives, "his demeanor and his imperiousness brought him into discredit" (76). He was despised after the war and accused of having facilitated the deportations, although as Rabinovici strongly asserts, "no Jewish functionary in Vienna, including Benjamin Murrelstein, was himself responsible for the deportation of a single Jew" (168).

Josef Löwenherz, the head of the *Kultusgemeinde* and later the elder of the Jewish council of Vienna, has been judged somewhat more favorably. Still, questions are raised about why he did not inform the Viennese Jews of their impending doom. In truth, Löwenherz was repeatedly deceived and humiliated by Eichmann, but he hoped that by cooperating with the Gestapo he would be able to use his influence to help the Jews. For example, when he was ordered by Eichmann to create an office for Jewish emigration, he thought it would enable him to provide assistance and support for emigrating Jews when, in reality, the Office for Jewish Emigration would force Jews to emigrate and in the process robbed them of everything they owned. On several occasions, Löwenherz attempted to persuade Eichmann to discontinue deportations or tried to find out the fate of deported Jews. He dealt with his situation based on his individual personality and background as a lawyer and official, by trying "to establish the truth through official channels" (153). He showed courage by confronting Nazi officials about deportations and reports of mass killing. Such confrontations could have led to his own arrest and deportation.

Franzi Löw, a welfare worker for the *Kultusgemeinde* defied the Nazi



authorities in order to help needy Jews. She risked her life by performing illegal activities on behalf of children in her care, provided food and linen to Jewish prisoners, and sent packages to Jews in concentration camps. When the children in her care were being deported in 1942, she intervened to save those with one non-Jewish parent by obtaining proof of Aryan ancestry. In some cases she was able to save children with fake baptism certificates or by naming a non-Jewish man as the father when paternity was not known. She also helped Jews who were in hiding in Vienna by bringing them ration cards, food stamps, medicine and money with the assistance of some non-Jews. "Franzi Löw, the only Jewish welfare officer in the Council of Elders, ran all over Vienna with her Jewish star hidden, carrying forged documents and ration cards and hauling a heavy rucksack full of food, all of the time exposing herself to the suspicious glances of Gestapo officials and SS men" (139). Despite her heroic acts of resistance, after the war Paul Steiner accused Löw of responsibility for the murders of his wife and daughter at Auschwitz. Although not brought to trial, the accusation led her to resign from her position at the *Kultusgemeinde*. "Her achievements were never publicly acknowledged by the Jewish community" (186).

These three cases drive home some of the central message of Rabinovici's book: that the Jews were doomed no matter what they did. They were authorities without power. While one might conclude that therefore it matters not what they did or how they acted, Rabinovici also insists that the Jewish council members should be looked at as individuals and not universally condemned. Does this mean that some acted better and others worse? Why study the actions taken by Jewish officials at all if it does not matter how they behaved in the end? What lessons are to be learned?

In many respects, Rabinovici's book is a rebuttal to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which she portrayed the Jewish councils as complicit in the murder of the Jews and Eichmann as a soulless bureaucrat. On both counts, Rabinovici demonstrates otherwise. Based on historical documents, Rabinovici shows that Eichmann carried out

his work with enthusiasm and conviction. "Historically speaking, Arendt had chosen the wrong person for her tempting comments about the 'banality of evil'" (195). About the Jewish leadership, Arendt argued that without their cooperation, the Nazis would have been unable to carry out the murders so efficiently and the number of deaths would have been much less. In making these claims, Arendt and others attribute power to the Jews that in reality they lacked. In fact Rabinovici rejects the term "Jewish leadership" because it suggests that they had some real authority (although he still uses the term at times).

Along these lines, the discussion of Jewish councils and their behavior should take into account that the Nazi crimes defied logic. They went beyond the imagination of the Jewish officials who assumed the Nazis would keep the victims alive as long as they could be exploited for their labor. Arendt, in fact, said mass murder went beyond her own imagination in 1942. She attributes Eichmann's actions to a lack of imagination, but does not make the connection that if the crime was unimaginable, then it was natural that Jewish functionaries acted on the belief that they would be able to spare Jewish lives through cooperation with the Nazis. They simply couldn't have imagined that the Nazis would commit mass murder when it contradicted their own interests. In implicating the Jewish councils, Arendt contradicts her own analysis of totalitarian regimes.

This discussion gives rise to some basic questions about authoritarian regimes. Were the crimes of the Nazis really unimaginable? Were they unprecedented or are there other instances of regimes committing heinous crimes that violate their own self-interests? In the case of the Nazis, there was a conflict of beliefs and interests. Some Nazi leaders, for example, Heinrich Himmler, prioritized interests in the end and tried to negotiate deals to exchange Jewish lives for war supplies. Others such as Eichmann, Goebbels, and Hitler, were true believers to the end.

Related to this is the question of whether or not the Holocaust can be compared with other examples of mass murder. The insistence on

uniqueness, which rejects efforts to examine the Holocaust in the context of other crimes against humanity, precludes us from opportunities to enhance understanding of the common psychological mechanisms underlying the actions and beliefs of both victims and perpetrators. In other words, there would be much to gain by pursuing the issues raised in Rabinovici's study of the Jewish councils of Vienna as they relate to other cases of genocide and mass murder.

*Alison J. Rose is an adjunct assistant professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Rhode Island and a contributing editor.*

## Books in Brief: New and Notable

### ***Jewish Jocks: An Unorthodox Hall of Fame*, edited by Franklin Foer and Marc Tracy**

Twelve Books (Boston: Hachette Book Group)

This is a timeless collection of biographical musings, sociological riffs about assimilation, first-person reflections and, above all, great writing on some of the most influential and unexpected pioneers in the world of sports. Featuring work by today's preeminent writers, these essays explore significant Jewish athletes, coaches, broadcasters, trainers and even team owners (in the finite universe of Jewish jocks, they count!).

Contributors include some of today's most celebrated writers covering a vast assortment of topics, including David Remnick on the biggest mouth in sports, Howard Cosell; Jonathan Safran Foer on the prodigious and pugnacious Bobby Fischer; Man Booker Prize-winner Howard Jacobson writing elegantly on Marty Reisman, America's greatest ping-pong player and the sport's ultimate showman. Deborah Lipstadt examines the continuing legacy of the Munich Massacre, the 40th anniversary of which coincided with the 2012 London Olympics. Jane Leavy reveals why Sandy Koufax agreed to attend her daughter's bat mitzvah. And we learn how Don Lerman single-handedly thrust competitive eating into the public eye with three pounds of butter and 120 jalapeño peppers. These essays are supplemented by a cover design and illustrations throughout by Mark Ulriksen.

From settlement houses to stadiums and everywhere in between, *Jewish Jocks* features men and women who do not always fit the standard athletic mold. Rather, they utilized talents long prized by a people of the book (and a people of commerce) to game these games to their advantage, in turn forcing the rest of the world to either copy their methods or be left in their dust.

### ***Mossad: The Greatest Missions of the Israeli Secret Service* by Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissim Mishal**

New York: Ecco (HarperCollins Publishers)

The Mossad is widely recognized today as the best intelligence service in the world. It is also the most enigmatic, shrouded in secrecy. *Mossad: The Greatest Missions of the Israeli Secret Service* unveils the defining and most dangerous operations that have shaped Israel and the world at large from the agency's more than sixty-year history, among them: the capture of Adolf Eichmann, the eradication of Black September, the destruction of the Syrian nuclear facility and the elimination of key Iranian nuclear scientists.

Through intensive research and exclusive interviews with Israeli leaders and Mossad agents, authors Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissim Mishal recreate these missions in riveting detail, vividly bringing to life the heroic operatives who risked everything in the face of unimaginable danger. In the words of Shimon Peres, president of Israel, this gripping, white-knuckle read "tells what should have been known and isn't that Israel's hidden force is as formidable as its recognized physical strength."

***The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography* by John J. Collins**

Princeton University Press, 2013

Since they were first discovered in the caves at Qumran in 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls have aroused more fascination — and more controversy — than perhaps any other archaeological find. They appear to have been hidden in the Judean desert by the Essenes, a Jewish sect that existed around the time of Jesus, and they continue to inspire veneration and conspiracy theories to this day. John Collins tells the story of the bitter conflicts that have swirled around the scrolls since their startling discovery, and sheds light on their true significance for Jewish and Christian history.

Collins vividly recounts how a Bedouin shepherd went searching for a lost goat and found the scrolls instead. He offers insight into debates over whether the Essenes were an authentic Jewish sect and ex-

plains why such questions are critical to our understanding of ancient Judaism and to Jewish identity. Collins explores whether the scrolls were indeed the property of an isolated, quasi-monastic community living at Qumran, or whether they more broadly reflect the Judaism of their time. And he unravels the impassioned disputes surrounding the scrolls and Christianity. Do they anticipate the early church? Do they undermine the credibility of the Christian faith? Collins also looks at attempts to "reclaim" the scrolls for Judaism after the full corpus became available in the 1990s, and at how the decades-long delay in publishing the scrolls gave rise to sensational claims and conspiracy theories.

### ***The Unmaking of Israel* by Gershom Gorenberg**

New York: Harper Perennial

In this penetrating and provocative look at the state of contemporary Israel, acclaimed Israeli historian and journalist Gershom Gorenberg reveals how the nation's policies are undermining its democracy and existence as a Jewish state, and explains what must be done to bring it back from the brink. Refuting shrill defenses of Israel and equally strident attacks, Gorenberg shows that the Jewish state is, in fact, unique among countries born in the postcolonial era: it began as a parliamentary democracy and has remained one. Yet shortsighted policies, unintended consequences and its refusal to heed warnings now threaten its many accomplishments. Based on groundbreaking historical research and a quarter century of experience reporting in the region, *The Unmaking of Israel* is a brilliant, deeply personal critique by a progressive Israeli, and a plea for realizing the nation's potential.

### ***Jews and Words* by Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger**

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press

Why are words so important to so many Jews? Novelist Amos Oz and historian Fania Oz-Salzberger roam the gamut of Jewish history to explain the integral relationship of Jews and words. Through a blend

of storytelling and scholarship, conversation and argument, father and daughter tell the tales behind Judaism's most enduring names, adages, disputes, texts, and quips. These words, they argue, compose the chain connecting Abraham with the Jews of every subsequent generation.

Framing the discussion within such topics as continuity, women, timelessness, and individualism, Oz and Oz-Salzberger deftly engage Jewish personalities across the ages, from the unnamed, possibly female author of the Song of Songs through obscure Talmudists to contemporary writers. They suggest that Jewish continuity, even Jewish uniqueness, depends not on central places, monuments, heroic personalities or rituals but rather on written words and an ongoing debate between the generations. Full of learning, lyricism and humor, *Jews and Words* offers an extraordinary tour of the words at the heart of Jewish culture and extends a hand to the reader, any reader, to join the conversation.

***Seasons of Our Joy: A Modern Guide to the Jewish Holidays* by Arthur O. Waskow**

Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society

Circling the Jewish calendar from Rosh Hashanah to Tisha B'Av, this lively, accessible guide provides rituals, recipes, songs, prayers, and suggestions for new approaches to holiday observance. Rabbi Arthur O. Waskow explores the meaning of each holiday in relation to the history of the Jewish people and individual spirituality, examines how the place of each holiday in the cycle of the moon and the changing seasons affects the mood of the day, and suggests ritual and spiritual ways to prepare for each festival.

In his extensive afterword to this new edition of *Seasons of Our Joy*, Rabbi Waskow addresses the many changes Judaism has undergone in the last thirty years, as feminist Judaism, neo-Chassidic mysticism, eco-Judaism, and Jewish meditation have newly colored our understanding of the festivals.

***The Promise of Israel* by Daniel Gordis**

Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons

Israel's critics in the West insist that no country founded on a single religion or culture can stay democratic and prosperous — but they're wrong. In *The Promise of Israel*, Daniel Gordis points out that Israel has defied that conventional wisdom. It has provided its citizens infinitely greater liberty and prosperity than anyone expected, faring far better than any other young nation. Israel's "magic" is a unique blend of democracy and tradition, of unabashed particularism coupled to intellectual and cultural openness. Given Israel's success, it would make sense for many other countries, from Rwanda to Afghanistan and even Iran, to look at how they've done it. In fact, rather than seeking to destroy Israel, the Palestinians would serve their own best interests by trying to copy it.

***The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* by Nadia Abu El-Haj**

The University of Chicago Press.

This book analyzes the scientific work and social implications of the flourishing field of genetic history. A biological discipline that relies on genetic data in order to reconstruct the geographic origins of contemporary populations — their histories of migration and genealogical connections to other present-day groups — this historical science is garnering ever more credibility and social reach, in large part due to a growing industry in ancestry testing.

Nadia Abu El-Haj examines genetic history's working assumptions about culture and nature, identity and biology, and the individual and the collective. Through the example of the study of Jewish origins, she explores novel cultural and political practices that are emerging as genetic history's claims and "facts" circulate in the public domain and illustrates how this historical science is intrinsically entangled with cultural imaginations and political commitments. Chronicling late-nine-



teenth- to mid-twentieth-century understandings of race, nature and culture, she identifies continuities and shifts in scientific claims, institutional contexts and political worlds in order to show how the meanings of biological difference have changed over time. In so doing she gives an account of how and why it is that genetic history is so socially felicitous today and elucidates the range of understandings of the self, individual and collective, this scientific field is making possible. More specifically, through her focus on the history of projects of Jewish self-fashioning that have taken place on the terrain of the biological sciences, *The Genealogical Science* analyzes genetic history as the latest iteration of a cultural and political practice now over a century old.

***We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezin***

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

Prepared and selected by Marie Rut Krizkova, Kurt Jiri Kotouc, and Zdenek Ornest. Translated from the Czech by R. Elizabeth Novak

A National Jewish Book Award Winner

From 1942 to 1944, Jewish boys imprisoned at the model concentration camp Theresienstadt secretly produced a weekly magazine called *Vedem* (In the Lead). It contained essays, interviews, poems and artwork written behind the blackout shades of their cellblock. The material was saved by one boy who survived the Holocaust but was suppressed for 50 years in Czechoslovakia. It provides a poignant glimpse at the world of boys whose lives were turned upside down: separated from their families and ultimately, for the majority, killed. Includes black and white photographs, and color and black and white illustrations.

***The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism*  
by Eliyahu Stern**

New Haven: Yale University Press

Elijah ben Solomon, the "Genius of Vilna," was perhaps the best-known and most understudied figure in modern Jewish history. This book offers a new narrative of Jewish modernity based on Elijah's life and influence.

While the experience of Jews in modernity has often been described as a process of Western European secularization — with Jews becoming citizens of Western nation-states, congregants of reformed synagogues and assimilated members of society — Stern uses Elijah's story to highlight a different theory of modernization for European life. Religious movements such as Hasidism and anti-secular institutions such as the yeshiva emerged from the same democratization of knowledge and privatization of religion that gave rise to secular and universal movements and institutions. Claimed by traditionalists, enlighteners, Zionists, and the Orthodox, Elijah's genius and its afterlife capture an all-embracing interpretation of the modern Jewish experience. Through the story of the "Vilna Gaon," Stern presents a new model for understanding modern Jewish history and more generally the place of traditionalism and religious radicalism in modern Western life and thought.

***A Jew among Romans: The Life and Legacy of Flavius Josephus*  
by Frederic Raphael**

New York: Pantheon Books

From the acclaimed biographer, screenwriter and novelist Frederic Raphael, here is an audacious history of Josephus (37-c.100), the Jewish general turned Roman historian, whose emblematic betrayal is a touchstone for the Jew alone in the Gentile world.

Joseph ben Mattathias's transformation into Titus Flavius Josephus, historian to the Roman emperor Vespasian, is a gripping and dramatic story. His life, in the hands of Frederic Raphael, becomes a point of departure for an appraisal of Diaspora Jews seeking a place in the dominant cultures they inhabit. Raphael brings a scholar's rigor, a historian's perspective, and a novelist's imagination to this project. He goes beyond the fascinating details of Josephus's life and his singular

literary achievements to examine how Josephus has been viewed by posterity, finding in him the prototype for the un-Jewish Jew, the assimilated intellectual and the abiding apostate: the recurrent figures in the long centuries of the Diaspora. Raphael's insightful portraits of Yehuda Halevi, Baruch Spinoza, Karl Kraus, Benjamin Disraeli, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hannah Arendt extend and illuminate the Josephean worldview Raphael so eloquently lays out.

***The Status of Women in Jewish Law: Responsa* , edited by David Golinkin**

Jerusalem: Shechter Institute of Jewish Studies

This book is dedicated to the study of the halakhic status of women in the synagogue and in public life. Rabbi Golinkin deals with the tension which exists between Jewish Law and modernity, striving to bridge the gap between tradition and change. He looks for leniencies within the framework of Jewish Law in order to show that changes can be made in the status of women in Jewish Law. Rabbi Golinkin deals with questions such as women and tefillin, women in the Minyan and as Shelihot Tzibbur, aliyot for women, women and the mourners'Kaddish, women as halakhic authorities, the ordination of women as rabbis, and more.

***Boy 30529: A Memoir* by Felix Weinberg**

Brooklyn, N.Y.: Verso Books

This memoir tells the story of a child who at the age of 12 lost everything: hope, home and even his own identity. Born into a respectable Czech family, Felix's early years were idyllic. But when Nazi persecution threatened in 1938, his father travelled to England, hoping to arrange for his family to emigrate there. His efforts came too late, and his wife and children fell into the hands of the Fascist occupiers.

Thus begins a harrowing tale of survival, horror and determination. Over the following years, Felix survived five concentration camps, including Terezín, Auschwitz and Birkenau, as well as, by the skin of his teeth, the death march from Blechhammer in 1945. Losing both his

brother and mother in the camps, Felix was liberated at Buchenwald and eventually reunited at the age of 17 with his father in Britain, where they built a new life together.

*Boy 30529* is an extraordinary memoir, as well as a meditation on the nature of memory. It helps us understand why the Holocaust remains a singular presence at the heart of historical debate.

***Israel Has Moved* by Diana Pinto**

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Israel has changed. The country was born in Europe's shadow, haunted by the Holocaust and inspired by the Enlightenment. But for Israelis today, Europe is hardly relevant, and the country's ties to the broader West, even to America, are fraying. Where is Israel heading? How do citizens of an increasingly diverse nation see themselves globally and historically? In this revealing portrait of the new Israel, Diana Pinto presents a country simultaneously moving forward and backward, looking outward and turning in on itself. In business, Israel is forging new links with the giants of Asia and its booming science and technology sectors are helping define the future for the entire world. But in politics and religion, Israelis are increasingly self-absorbed, building literal and metaphorical walls against hostile neighbors and turning to ancient religious precepts for guidance here and now.

Pinto captures the new moods and mindsets, the anxieties and hopes of Israelis today in sharply drawn sketches of symbolically charged settings. She takes us on the roads to Jerusalem, to border control at Ben Gurion Airport, to a major Israeli conference in Jerusalem, to a hill overlooking the Dome of the Rock and Temple Mount, to the heart of Israel's high-tech economy, and to sparkling new malls and restaurants where people of different identities share nothing more than a desire to ignore one another.

***Tested by Zion* by Elliot Abrams**

New York: Cambridge University Press

This book tells the full inside story of the Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Written by a top National Security Council officer who worked at the White House with Bush, Cheney and Rice and attended dozens of meetings with figures like Sharon, Mubarak, the kings of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and Palestinian leaders, it brings the reader inside the White House and the palaces of Middle Eastern officials. How did 9/11 change American policy toward Arafat and Sharon's tough efforts against the Second Intifada? What influence did the Saudis have on President Bush? Did the American approach change when Arafat died? How did Sharon decide to get out of Gaza and why did the peace negotiations fail? In the first book by an administration official to focus on Bush and the Middle East, Elliott Abrams brings the story of Bush, the Israelis, and the Palestinians to life.

***What Does A Jew Want?* by Udi Aloni**

New York: Columbia University Press

In the hopes of promoting justice, peace, and solidarity for and with the Palestinian people, Udi Aloni joins with Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou and Judith Butler to confront the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their bold question: will a new generation of Israelis and Palestinians dare to walk together toward a joint Israel-Palestine? Through a collage of meditation, interview, diary and essay, Aloni and his interlocutors present a personal, intellectual and altogether provocative account rich with the insights of philosophy and critical theory. They ultimately foresee the emergence of a binational Israeli-Palestinian state, incorporating the work of Walter Benjamin, Edward Said and Jewish theology to recast the conflict in secular theological terms.

***Handbook of Jewish Literature From Late Antiquity, 135-70 CE* by Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn and Fergus Miller**

New York: Oxford University Press

From major seminal works like the *Mishnah* or the Palestinian and Babylonian *Talmuds*, to Biblical commentaries, translations of Biblical

books into Aramaic or relatively little-known mystical, liturgical or apocalyptic writings, here is a complete guide to the rich tradition of Jewish literature in the second to seventh centuries of the Common Era. Each work is described in a succinct and clearly structured entry which covers its contents, dating, language and accessibility (or otherwise) in print or online.

The aim throughout is to cover all of this literature and to answer the following questions: what Jewish literature, written either in Hebrew or Aramaic, has survived? What different genres of such literature are there? What printed texts, or translations into any modern language, or commentaries (either in Hebrew or a European language) are there? And, for those who want to enquire further, what are the manuscripts on which modern editions are based?

This handbook will be of value to scholars and students of Jewish Studies and historians of Late Antiquity, as well as scholars in neighboring disciplines, such as Near Eastern history or theology.

***New Heavens and a New Earth: The Jewish Reception of Copernican Thought* by Jeremy Brown**

New York: Oxford University Press

In this ground-breaking study of the Jewish reception of the Copernican revolution, Jeremy Brown examines four hundred years of Jewish writings on the Copernican model. Brown shows the ways in which Jews ignored, rejected or accepted the Copernican model, and the theological and societal underpinnings of their choices.

Throughout *New Heavens and a New Earth* are deft historical studies of such colorful figures as Joseph Delmedigo, the first Jewish Copernican and a student of Galileo's; Tuviah Cohen, who called Copernicus the "Son of Satan;" Zelig Slonimski, author of a collection of essays on Halley's Comet and contemporary Jewish thinkers who use Einstein's Theory of Relativity to argue that the Earth does not actually revolve around the sun. Brown also provides insightful comparisons of con-

current Jewish and Christian writings on Copernicus, demonstrating that the Jewish reception of Copernicus was largely dependent on local factors and responses.

The book concludes with the important lessons to be learned from the history of the Jewish reception of Copernican thought, and shows how religions make room for new scientific descriptions of reality while upholding their most cherished beliefs.

***The New Jewish Leaders: Reshaping the American Jewish Landscape, edited by Jack Wertheimer*** Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England (Brandeis University)

By the end of the twentieth century, a new generation of leaders had begun to assume positions of influence within established organizations. They quickly launched a slew of new initiatives directed at their age peers. Born during the last quarter of the twentieth century, these leaders came of age in a very different America and a different Jewish world than earlier generations. Not surprisingly, their worldview and understanding of Jewish issues set them apart from their elders, as does their approach to organizing.

Based upon extensive interviews and survey research, as well as an examination of the websites frequented by younger Jews and personal observation of their programs, *The New Jewish Leaders* presents a pioneering account of the renewal of American Jewish community. This book describes how younger Jews organize, relate to collective Jewish efforts, and think about current Jewish issues. It also offers a glimpse of how they re-envision American Jewish communal arrangements. What emerges is a fascinating exploration of Jewish community in America today — and tomorrow.

## Cry and Wail: Jewish Suffering in Documents From Ukraine, 1918-1921

A review essay by Brian J. Horowitz

***The Book of Pogroms: Pogroms in the Ukraine, Belorus and the European Part of Russia in the Period of the Civil War, 1918-1922*, ed. L. B. Miliakova, Moscow: Rosspen (*Kniga pogromov: Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorusii i evropeiskoi chastii Rossii v period Grazhdanskoi voiny, 1918-1922*)**

This volume of primary materials from Russian archives makes available a large bundle of documents about how people experienced pogroms in the Ukraine and Belorus. Although there are now a number of excellent books on the subject of anti-Jewish pogroms in this period — Oleg Budnitsky, Henry Abramson and the classic, Elias Tcherikover — this large tome devotes itself exclusively to reviving the voices of the time. Featuring 364 original documents (or in some cases, groups of documents) in more than 900 pages from Russian archives and rare newspapers, this book could be used as raw materials for writing a monograph. It is impossible not to be enthusiastic about this book and to celebrate the editor and her co-editors who have meticulously collected and published these rare materials.

To give you an impression of the kind of materials contained in the volume, I list a few of the sources:

- 1) Representatives of the Relief Division of the Russian Red Cross in Ukraine for Victims of Pogroms regarding the Second Pogrom in Grigor'ev, June 24, 1919
- 2) Record to the Representatives of the Kharkov Jewish Community of the Testimony of Witnesses on Executions by Units of the South Russian Army
- 3) A Request of the Rovno Jewish Community to the Head Ataman Of the Ukrainian People's Republic S. Petiura, and The Head Ataman of the Northern Group of the Armies of the Ukrainian People's Republic, V. Oskilko, on Measures to Stop Pogrom Agitation



4) A Report from *The Jewish Week* on the Pogrom in Novgorod-Seversk in the Chernygov Region in April 1918

5) A Report from a Witness, F. Krasnaia, to the Representatives of the Kiev Commission of the Jewish Committee on the Pogrom Committed by Robbers from the Town of Tetiev in the Kiev Region in April 1920

In their introduction E. Rozenblat and I. Elenskaia provide a review of the relevant literature and give a short introduction regarding the context. They discuss the conflagrations and break down of central authority that helped create ripe conditions for massive numbers of pogroms. While the editors repeat the claims of the overall killed of between 35,000-200,000, they describe how some places became true hellholes, where pogroms were visited upon the population many times. In Rovno, Uman or Zhitomir, the victim rates surpassed one out of ten. The editors make the claim that it is impossible to pinpoint responsibility since the roving groups of looters and rioters at times were only loosely associated with larger organizations. It is hard to say except in general terms who exactly committed pogroms and who should be punished. Even though the Bolsheviks committed many pogroms, the stringent punishment of pogromists in the Red Army won over the Jewish population and pogrom activity discredited the Whites and the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

The transmission of personal voices from the time composes the exceptional aspect of this volume. Here are the words of Enata Shteinberg about a pogrom in Gorodishche-Vorontsovo in the Kiev District from an unpublished document from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow — using the word “bandit” in the passage, the author apparently means members of the Ukrainian National forces:

*I was with my five children, the oldest was 13 and the youngest was a year old. We hid in an abandoned bathhouse with other Jews. We stayed there until the afternoon. At one o'clock a robber came demanding money. We gave him Soviet money that however he ripped up. The robber fled, after shooting wildly and killing one of the Jews with us, Movsha Burtov. We all ran from the hiding place, but were stopped on the road. My five-year-old boy ran away from us and, as it*

*turned out later, hid in a garbage can where he stayed until morning. We were brought to the commandant. On the way our shoes were taken. At the commandant's we joined a large crowd of Jews who were being held. They kept us until 5. The bandits, having returned from a raid, led the men separately to Prichepovka. Having settled the score with the men, they again turned to deal with us and, pointing at the chests of the executed bodies, said, 'That's what will happen to you.' My eldest daughter thanked God aloud the whole time that he saved at least one of her brothers who could say 'kadish' in mother's memory. We were brought out into a field, placed down on the ground. I covered all my children with my scarf and set on them. Shots broke out... we were alive. Suddenly I felt a terrible pain. A bandit had thrust his bayonet into me and cut through me. I began to cough blood and that is when the shots of a soldier broke out—the bandits scattered. I don't remember how I got to the hospital. I was carried from Gorodishe to Korsun. (421)*

The book is filled many similar tragic testimonies. Equally important, many of the documents contain statistical evidence about population size, breakdown by gender and age, and numbers of victims.

The flaws of this book are associated with the genre. One may ask why this document was included, but another not included. The choice depended, it seems, mainly on accessibility to archives — materials from Moscow archives dominate. In addition, the question of what the documents mean is not always clear. As Mark Bloch, the famous French historian pointed out, documents don't mean anything until we interpret them. Although the documents seem straightforward enough, a good deal more annotation would be needed to understand the intricacies below the general level. Finally, it is not clear what the volume wants to say to us now after the Holocaust.

These flaws by no means efface the amazing achievement that is this book. How many times does the historian wish that someone would publish documents in his/her area in order to provide students with primary sources? How many times does one wish that more docu-

ments were available so that the material basis of one's research was larger? The historian and reader (of Russian) interested in the subject of pogroms, this volume is a very welcome tool.

*Brian Horowitz is the Sizeler Family Chair Professor at Tulane University and a contributing editor.*

## Moreshet: From the Sources

Our rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor drink wine. Rav Joshua got into conversation with them and said: "My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine?" They replied: "Shall we eat flesh which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that this altar is in abeyance? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, but now no longer?" He said to them: "If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased." They said: "That is so, and we can manage with fruit." "We should not eat fruit either," he said, "because there is no longer an offering of first fruits." "Then we can manage with other fruits," they said. "But," he said, "we should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water." To this they could find no answer, so he said to them: "My sons, not to mourn at all is impossible, because the blow has fallen. To mourn overmuch is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure." *Talmud Bava Batra*

## Speaking of the Law

A review essay by Peter J. Haas

***Narrating the Law: A Poetics of Talmudic Legal Stories* by Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press**

The title of Barry Scott Wimpfheimer's book, which juxtaposes poetics, narratives and law, might strike some as a cobbling together of literary incompatibles. This would seem to be especially the case for those of us in rabbinic studies, for example, who are used to thinking of narration as "aggadah" and law as "halachah" and that the two occupy distinct epistemological universes.

This literary and interpretational dimorphism has its roots, of course, in the rabbinic texts themselves and was solidified by the nineteenth century *Wissenschaft* scholars who used the distinction between aggadah and halachah as a foundational assumption for their formal critical analysis of rabbinic literature. In fact, it was assumed (or at least asserted) by the *Wissenschaftlers des Judenthums* that the literary bifurcation of aggadah and halachah reflected a difference in *sitz in leben*, in audience, in authorial intent and in everything else.

Wimpfheimer, in the book before us, wants very much, if not to entirely erase this literary division, at least to blur its edges. He makes it clear that he no longer regards this distinction as fully functional for modern literary analysis. To be sure, Wimpfheimer still recognizes that a difference can be made between aggadah and halachah on a general level, but he intends to demonstrate in this book that at times there are "narrations of law" that cross the divide and thus tell us about the law, or more precisely, about how a culture and its narratives produce certain legal assumptions.

As one might expect at this point, Pierre Bourdieu's thinking about social location, cultural capital and negotiations of social status come into play as Wimpfheimer deconstructs narratives about the law so as

to lay bare the social, cultural and psychological structures that can be adduced by reading laws as institutionalizing narratives and narratives as underpinning law.

Some scholarly context might be helpful at this point. In the development of the modern study of classic rabbinic texts (meaning here especially Mishnah and Gemara), this book very clearly situates itself methodologically in the post-Neusnerian period; that is, in aftermath of the revolution in reading rabbinic texts inaugurated and virtually institutionalized by Jacob Neusner and his students (full disclosure: I am one of those students). The revolution consisted at its core level in not reading either the halachah nor the aggadah as historically accurate portrayals of what really happened or what was really said, but rather in reading the rabbinic texts as a literature that was produced in a certain time and place and which consequently reflects in content, syntax and form a particular discursive community (namely some subset of "the rabbis") with a distinct agenda.

This new reading strategy meant the modern secular university scholar was now to read the texts through the lens of modern literary criticism; Neusner was heavily influenced by form-critical studies of the New Testament, for example. It was also a core principle of this new paradigm of scholarly analysis that "the rabbis" did not constitute a single, seamless, monolithic whole, but rather were an evolving estate of religious virtuosi with its own internal conflicts and institutional developments. There may not have been "earlier" and "later" in the rabbinic reading of the Tanach, but there certainly was an earlier and a later Gemara according to the Neusnerian and post-Neusnerian reading of the text.

In a curious way, the book can be read not only as addressing how the rabbis narrated the law, but also about how modern, post-Neusnerian scholars themselves can now create a new narrative about the rabbis as narrators. That is, the book claims that the legal narratives of the Talmud are in fact also windows into the behind-the-scenes workings of the rabbinic narratives themselves. Thus the example passages

discussed in the book are treated as cultural narratives that have been chosen precisely because they reveal how the rabbis situated themselves (their “habitus,” to use Bourdieu’s term) in their narratives about themselves. To achieve such analysis, Wimpfheimer is inviting us to perform a “thick description” (to borrow Geertz’ term) of the scenes described in the legal narratives so as to adduce the very human, social and psychological complexities of the interactions within and between late Amoraic rabbis and the Stam. What we discover, he tells us, is “Jewish law as it might be *lived*, rather than codified” (p.13). Although the Stam were intending to flatten out the traditions they received and smooth over the tensions and contradictions they found in Amoraic and earlier rulings, they left us instead with legal narratives which, if interpreted thickly and correctly, actually open a window to the messy social world with all its strains and ambiguities out of which the halachah emerged. So in a sense, this book also introduces us to a new way of reading the text, a new Talmudic hermeneutic, as it were.

It should be immediately stressed that Wimpfheimer is not advocating that we read legal narratives as some kind of historically accurate descriptions. Rather, the goal of his readings and their thick description is to uncover the presuppositions, tensions and contradictions that make the story “tellable” and which thereby also throw light on the how the rabbis related to each other, to their students and/or to the larger community in the world beyond the story. Thus the story in Qiddushin 32b-33b over a series of controversies of whether or not certain rabbis should remain seated while other rabbis stand or even serve them drink is not to be taken as a story about a particular wedding reception, but as an illustration of the kinds of social negotiations necessary for establishing a rabbi’s status vis-é-vis other rabbis, and by so doing gives us insight into the hierarchy of rabbinical status as understood by the Amoraim or the Stammaim.

Such an approach to the Talmudic literature of course produces a kind of literary analysis that replicates the multi-layered complexity of the Gemara itself. For example, a story dealing with a verbal exchange between a rabbi and his students turns into a discussion by Wimpfheimer

of the Greco-Roman concept of "Paideia" and how the assumptions of the student- master relationship assumed by that concept of learning generates particular tensions in rabbinic circles that need to be resolved by determining what constitutes proper behavior on the parts of both students and masters to each other (pp. 105ff). In the course of the discussion we gain insight into how rabbinic authority was established by charisma and maintained by enforcing (or at least expecting) signs of appropriate deference. The details of this hierarchy are then teased out by a reading of an encounter with R. Dimmi, related in Baba Batra 20b-22a (pp. 139ff). All this is located against the background of the gradual institutionalization of the rabbis from charismatic masters, to the "faculty" of structured institutions (namely, the Talmudic Academies). As we are lead through this process of reading and interpretation, we are also being shown, and this is the methodological point, that the old dichotomy between halachah and aggadah is too simplistic and that modern literary readings of the Talmudic texts can throw new and fruitful light upon readings that were once regarded as mere fables.

What we have at the end of these six chapters is a remarkable re-narration of some of the Talmudic narratives. Wimpfheimer puts together a plausible and compelling story of how the rabbinic estate came to establish and maintain its boundaries in the evolving Judaic society of Late Antiquity. One is left with the question, of course, as to whether or not the meta-narrative that is adduced is historically accurate or only an artifact of a certain method of reading the text. Are such narrations descriptive of actual practice (law), narrations of later commentators (aggadah), or poetic renderings of the modern scholar? Even the title of this book blurs those distinctions.

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## The Jewish “Success” Story?

A review essay by Steven Windmueller

***The Chosen People: A Study of Jewish Intelligence and Achievement* by Richard Lynn. Washington Summit Publishers: Whitefish, Mont.**

Richard Lynn’s book on Jewish intelligence joins a body of work designed to explain why a particular group seems to be identified as high achievers. At the outset I am uncertain what might be the particular value or outcome for such research. Texts of this nature are often designed to confirm or create particular theoretical understandings as to what leads a specific cohort to outrank their peers based on a variety of standards, including education, income, professional attainment and, of course, IQ. In this 350-page publication, Dr. Lynn seeks to define the distinctive character and success of the Jewish people by introducing his readers to a survey of countries and continents in which Jews have or currently reside. Armed with charts and statistics, the writer seeks to confirm within each of these case situations the intellectual, economic and cultural accomplishments of the Jews. For example, Lynn notes the number of bridge champions in France who happen to be Jews, while documenting the Jewish Nobel Prize winners within Israel, Switzerland, the United States and a half a dozen other nations, and the number of Jews who received the Lenin Prize in Russia, along with an array of other “measures” designed to identify Jewish prominence.

In reviewing this and similar writings, one often finds a type of triumphalism associated with such assumptions related to intelligence and achievement on the part of a group. For Lynn and others, the posting of the “number” of Nobel Prize winners and other measures of attainment by Jews including their important social or religious values is interpreted here as somehow confirming a group’s success. This form of “counting” in my view proves little about the status of “the Jews” but rather tells us much more about the mind of the intellectual and his/

her personal accomplishments. One must assume that Dr. Lynn holds to the belief that this data has some form of universal value or maybe offers something definitive about an entire people. It is not difficult to recall how this type of data collection has been employed against Jews in the course of history, which must raise the question as to why Dr. Lynn is pursuing this form of research now.

Lynn also introduces what he terms as “three troubling conclusions”: all of which appear to be interlocked with one another. The first of these revolves around the issue that “the high Jewish IQ must have a generic basis.” The second outcome appears as follows: “...the high IQ of the Jews...seems to have been a eugenics success story. We have seen that there is a strong case that the eugenic customs and practices of Ashkenazim seem to have been a major factor responsible for the evolution of their high intelligence.” And finally, he concludes that “an ethnic group with a high IQ succeeds despite discrimination, and this raises the question of why other ethnic groups have failed to succeed.”

Not only does Dr. Lynn seek to analyze the nature of “Jewish genius” but then proceeds to determine the fate of the Jewish people on the basis of selective demographic data in his brief concluding section, where he notes: “For all these reasons, it is impossible to be other than pessimistic about the survival of the Jews as an ethnic group in the medium term.” He closes by offering his other sweeping commentary. “On the other hand, it will be good news for the Gentiles, who will benefit from an infusion of Jewish genes that have contributed so much to world culture.”

If one were looking to attract negative racial or religious responses to the “success story of the Jews” than this type of literature most assuredly offers such an opportunity. In turn, I can find little redeeming value in such a publication.

*Steven Windmueller is Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Service Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and a contributing editor.*

## The Power of the Word

A review essay by Daniel Grossberg

***Jews and Words*, by Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.**

Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger claim in their co-authored book, *Jews and Words*, that “Jewish continuity has always hinged on uttered and written words.” The father/daughter author team theorizes that there exists a Jewish textual continuum in which written words link the generations, one to another; “not a bloodline but a textline.” Jewish history certainly includes religious, ethnic and political lineages, “but they are not its prime arteries” insist Oz and Oz-Salzberger.

*Jews and Words* presents strong arguments that are never dry or dense. The first-person plural prose including digressions, exclamations and interjections, many of them packing a good measure of humor, lends a folksy tone to this volume. Nevertheless, learning, intelligent insights and sparkling writing appear on every page. The light writing style advances the line of reasoning and often tickles the funny bone at the same time.

Read, for example, the discussion of Hannah (Samuel I 1 and 2): “Hannah fervently prayed for a child and promised to give him up to the service of God. And she delivered.”

Or see the conclusion of their discussion of the Book of Job where Oz and Oz-Salzberger quote Scripture and add an interpretive comment of their own. “‘And in all the land no women were found so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them estate among their brethren.’” The fairytale ending of this stark morality tale involves individual recognition and equal property rights for women. Good Job.”

Here is a third instance of felicitous prose in *Jews and Words*. “The great story — passed from generation to generation on tablets, papyri, parchments, and paper. Today as we write this book, the historian

among us checks all our references on her iPad, and she cannot resist the sweet reflection that Jewish textuality — has come full circle. From tablet to tablet, from scroll to scroll.”

These examples and many others that could be cited are all the more striking when we note that the authors are not native English-speakers but native-born Israelis whose first language is Hebrew. Their facility with the English language is stunning.

The omission of all notes from the body of the work, in favor of a listing of books consulted and references to the quotations only at the end, is a brilliant editorial decision that provides a genial readability.

Many loose comments, critiques and interpretations, at first blush, seem to be random, digressive and therefore, dispensable. I suggest that they are indeed integral to the work. These apparent faults are reflective of the Jewish engagement with the textual legacy. Oz and Oz-Salberger demonstrate in their very medium the nature of Jewish textual study. The Jew constantly ponders, argues, endorses and refutes the texts under study by seeking and contrasting situations, issues, and by juxtaposing earlier texts. The student doesn't reject classical religious texts as much as he simply interprets them differently. Oz and Oz-Salzberger declare, “we remain committed to a view of Jewish texts as primarily and constantly conversing with previous texts.” Thus, the discursive style of *Jews and Words* reflects the tradition they are treating.

The father and daughter authors train their discerning eyes on telling aspects of Jewish culture and literature that are not often studied. They identify, and examine, for example, the Jewish penchant for questioning.

Oz brings his literary acumen to bear and Oz-Salzberger employs her research abilities in adducing numerous questions, rhetorical ones and others in the traditional literature. *Jews and Words* proposes that the abundance of interrogatives in the volumes of the Jewish library indicates the probing content of the literature. Furthermore, it bequeaths

an inquisitive literary posture to the heir of the tradition. The authors cite the following Scriptural questions, for example:

God to Adam: "Where are you"

God to Eve and later to Cain: "What have you done"

God to Cain: "Where is Abel your brother" and..

Cain's answer to the question with a question of his own: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

These four queries, among the earliest posed in the Bible, challenge, perplex and unsettle to this day. They are not the only ones. Questions are posed throughout the Bible, some brazen and perspicacious. And these too are formative of a Jewish posture toward the written word. Some examples:

Abraham to God: "Will the judge of all the world not do justice?"

Isaiah, on behalf of God, to the people of Israel: "Who asked this of you to trample my court?"

Ecclesiastes to his readers: "What profit has man of all his labor that he labors under the sun?"

*Jews and Words* doesn't stop in the biblical period. The authors argue that the Talmud continued and deepened the inquiring trend. The Classical rabbis even developed a legalistic inquisitiveness which became the very essence and style of the Talmud. The debate and dispute method ingrained a quizzical and questioning mindset. Lofty concepts as well as the seemingly trivial and mundane are scrutinized: there is no escaping the notion that some of the queries may have been included as brainteasers to amuse and hone the mind. There is, nevertheless, an edifying aim as well. One such inquiry quoted in *Jews and Words* is the following:

"What happens when a mouse enters a house that was already cleared of leavened bread, prior to Passover, with a bit of pastry in its mouth?"

Oz and Oz-Salzberger suggest that that the rabbinic inquiries show that “in God’s world, the tiniest things matter as much as the greatest. Delving into the intricate laws governing the most miniscule particles of human existence is an act of faith.”

Questioning and challenging the written word is paramount in Jewish study and a highly prized trait in a Jewish student. Our authors adduce the following biblical instance as reflective of a Jewish parent’s ideal, “If your son asks you tomorrow, What are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which the Lord our God had commanded you?” Oz and Oz-Salzberger assert that the key is “the pedagogical module of memory, harking back to the national cradle, the Book of Exodus. Please, son, ask me.”

The authors examine topics and personalities from all ages of Jewish history, from the Bible to contemporary times, clearly presenting and cogently arguing their thesis that “Jewish continuity, even Jewish uniqueness, depends not on central places, monuments, heroic figures or rituals but rather on written words and an ongoing debate between generations.”

Jews have reason to regard the tradition depicted in *Jews and Words* with pride and to endorse its analysis. But, the findings of the authors, alas, raise disquiet also. The study appears to be a survey of the past, treating earlier generations of Jews and not reflective of the current reality. For the vast majority of Jews today the thread of the literary tradition is badly frayed if not fully severed. Oz and Oz-Salzberger, both avowed secularists, prove their familiarity with the classical Jewish sources and their facility in bringing those sources to bear on their writings and their lives. They are among the dwindling numbers who are so fortunate. Surely, there are Jews today whose engagement with the texts still connects them with the literary riches of former generations. But, in Israel and in the Diaspora, increasingly this engagement is concentrated only in the Orthodox extreme of the Jewish population. A significant proportion of Jews today do not have the familiarity with the classical Jewish library to continue the tradition.

I recommend *Jews and Words* as an informative book and a pleasurable read. I also express my hope that *Jews and Words* prove inspiring enough to bring a greater number of Jews back to the written word. Only then will the Jewish textual continuum indeed endure.

*Daniel Grossberg is a professor emeritus at University at Albany, State University of New York, and a contributing editor.*

## Two Poems by Richard Sherwin

### ***NOTHING STOPS***

what will stop, what stops indeed  
the time seas drowning us

what blows the currents sideways making room  
eternity more fragile than foam

the lord has bought us caught us  
out of darkness slaves to desert stone

built a way of faith indeed a faith road  
thru the sea the death builders drown in

the children of Israel walking its frozen walls  
deep time creatures stare thru glassy

each step planting its promised life tree  
promised land together

erupting volcanoes and holy tremblings  
firing the fragile futures of

tabernacles now eternal  
prows dividing currents

faring any every where  
harboring in the lord



nothing stops

***SABBATH SHARDS***

in my courtyard move  
from house to house the sabbath  
shards humpty dumpty  
couldnt put back together  
again tho maybe Gd could

im not sure my minds  
eruv is ever kasher  
enough for scraping  
my muddy memories off  
the years come to carelessly

all the fragmented  
pieties attempted dumped  
in one trash heap old  
i scrabble thru hoping one  
will recall one clean praying

what will i do with  
the rest when swept asea in  
the clattering ebb  
the undertow of judgment  
what use for anyone then

where was rava when  
i trudged those market years all  
that muck all alone

and where was i becoming  
peddler of such these my shards

which of all my sins  
saved my soul from brink to brink  
of death to this day  
the levels Gd works my clay  
baked in an infinite sun

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Ilan University, Israel, and a contributing editor.*

## Unearthing Buried Treasures: Reading Leah Goldberg in Translation

A review essay by Philip Hollander

***And This is the Light.* New Milford, CT: The Toby Press**

***With This Night.* Austin: University of Texas Press**

**By Leah Goldberg**

Don't try to keep up with the times,  
They don't need you kind.  
The times are headed elsewhere  
And you are not welcome there.

Don't try to keep up with the times,  
They don't need your kind.  
The times, they want to bury you,  
And leave, for others, your share.

Poet Avraham Shlonsky greeted Leah Goldberg with a copy of her just-published Hebrew poetry collection *Smoke Rings* when she arrived in Palestine in 1935. Implicit in this gesture was an invitation to join the modernist literary circle he headed. Goldberg's frequent presence throughout the late thirties, forties, and early fifties, in Tel Aviv's Café Kasit alongside him and the masterful neo-symbolist poet Natan Alterman reflected the invitation's enthusiastic acceptance. Goldberg's circle membership provided her with a modicum of celebrity and aided in acclimation to her new home. Grateful to the circle and feeling a sense of affiliation, she soon adopted the metrical patterns, rhyme schemes, and imagery, typical of the verse of Shlonsky and Alterman, the circle's leading poets.

Unfortunately, by the early fifties, when Goldberg assumed a teaching

position in comparative literature at the Hebrew University, a new generation exemplified by Natan Zach and Yehuda Amichai revolted against the Alterman-Shlonsky circle's poetic norms, and, as part of a struggle for stylistic hegemony in the new state of Israel, Goldberg's poetry came under attack. This struggle didn't always prove pleasant, and, despite her beloved status amongst Hebrew readers, young critics dismissed her as a glorified children's writer whose outmoded verse proved clichéd and lacking in the rhetorical flourish of her more successful contemporaries.

The early sixties poem provided above from a cycle entitled "Portrait of the Poet as an Old Man" initially seems to express an aging artist's sense of besiegement similar to one that Goldberg must have felt in the fifties and sixties, but closer examination reveals a focused artist confidently prophesying the longevity of his work unconcerned about passing trends. While a contemporary generation might label his poetry outdated and look to bury him and his work, such a burial process parallels the burying and temporary abandonment of a treasure. If contemporaries prove unable to recognize the merit of the poet's work, future generations will not prove so foolish and will inevitably work to attain a share of this treasure.

This poem's faith in quality writing's ability to overcome the vagaries of reception has found confirmation nearly fifty years after its composition. Goldberg's oeuvre has achieved a central position within the Hebrew literary canon thanks to critics attentive to the specificities of Hebrew women's writing. Read on its own terms, rather than exclusively through the lens of the Alterman-Shlonsky circle's modernist poetics, Goldberg's work reveals an independent and compelling artist soberly tackling personal, national, and universal concerns. Nowhere is this more evident than in previously marginalized works such as Goldberg's 1946 novel *And This is the Light* and her 1964 poetry collection *With This Night* that showcase her unique talents. Skilled translation of these works by Barbara Harshav and Annie Kantar respectively offer English readers an opportunity to judge for themselves.

*And This is the Light* tells the story of a young Jewish woman's return home to Lithuania for summer break while studying abroad between the two world wars. When it was initially published, it failed to excite critics and readers who viewed it far afield of contemporary concerns. Yet careful examination reveals this lyrical novel making an important statement about contemporary Jewish life. Uncomfortable with East European Jewish life, its protagonist Nora pursues study in Germany and affiliates with Zionism. Selection of archaeology as her course of study reflects her desire to unearth a life free of the stagnation and sickness she feels overwhelming her in her provincial petty-bourgeois home. Yet her temporary homecoming will push her to address this seeming stagnation and sickness.

Her father Jacob embodies what Nora desires to escape on both a personal and national level. Following his arrest in 1919, during which the Bolsheviks line him up to be shot ten days in a row, Jacob Krieger suffers a nervous breakdown and never fully recovers. His mental illness raises problematic questions. Was it the consequence of his wartime experience or does it constitute part of an inescapable legacy Nora directly inherits from her father? Is this unavoidable legacy tied exclusively to her father's family or does it validate contemporary racial scientific views of all Jews as sick?

These questions clearly trouble the aspirational protagonist and her difficulty addressing them finds poignant voice during her temporary homecoming. Consequently, when Arin, a parental friend who has spent decades in West, arrives for a visit, Nora falls madly in love with him and envisions him a potential lover and sane paternal replacement. Yet events reveal the delusiveness of her infatuation, as well as her desire to free herself from her past through foreign study and Zionism.

Rather than attempting to abandon or negate her heritage, Nora finally comes to terms with it. The novel's penultimate scene portrays this reconciliation. Troubled by her father's mental illness, Nora avoids meeting with him, but, shortly before her departure, they get together.

She quickly notices his “tall, sturdy, and handsome” appearance, and, when he calls upon her to take care of herself and caresses her as he departs, Nora recovers a viable and long obscured part of her legacy. Accepting her inability to transcend her reality, Nora arrives at her calling — sublime expression of nuanced reality. Through the Hebrew language’s employment, her seemingly dark existence can be converted to light. Even in translation, such light fills Goldberg’s text.

Written during the interregnum between the Holocaust and the State of Israel’s establishment, a reading public conditioned by the abysmal sorrow of near genocide and impending national redemption’s euphoria failed to recognize the novel’s subtlety. Yet more than sixty years later Hebrew readers tired of literature typified by intense emotion or exclusive national concern have rediscovered this novel and Goldberg’s poetry and revealed treasures. The present translations enable English readers to share them.

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