

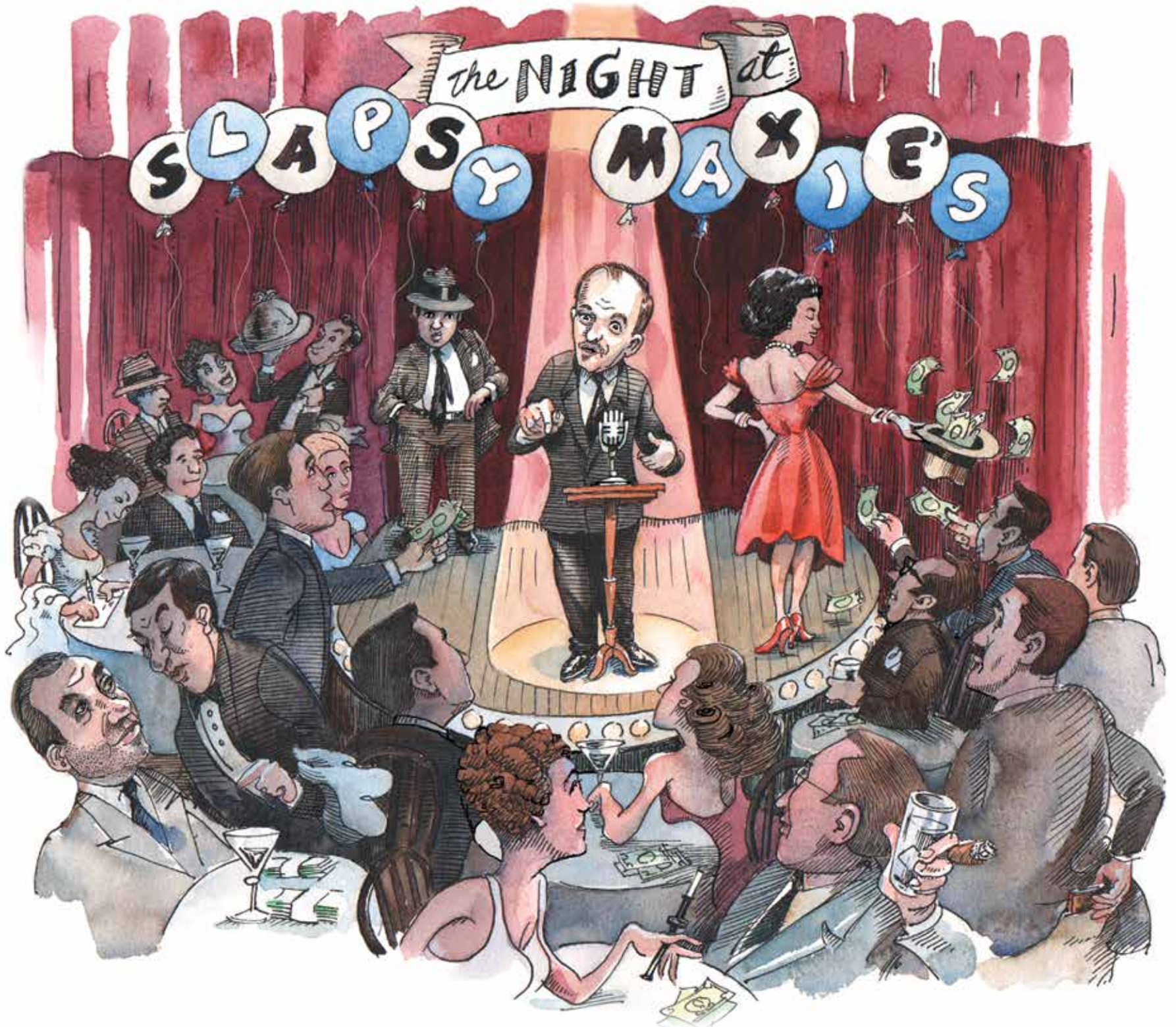
The New Balaboosta, Khazar DNA & Agnon's Lost Satire

JEWISH REVIEW

OF BOOKS

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1 SPRING 2014

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The Screenwriter & the Hoodlums

Ben Hecht with Stuart Schoffman

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Spy vs. Spy

Laura Rosenzweig's gob-smacking discovery of an anti-Nazi spy network financed by Hollywood moguls in the 1930s raises several interesting questions. ("Hollywood's Anti-Nazi Spies," Winter 2014) Among them: Was Leon Lewis really underwriting the whole operation on his own until Louis B. Mayer and his colleagues stepped in? How instrumental was Lewis' information in the conviction of home-grown Nazis like William Dudley Pelley? And did the writers of Warner Brothers' *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939) really have some inkling of this?

Harold Cohn
Chicago, IL

Secular Myths

Don Seeman unpacks the confusing nomenclature of the recent Pew survey, rightly arguing that "religion is (still) the key." ("Pew's Jews: Religion Is (Still) the Key," Winter 2014) However, embracing the Jewish religion in our secular age is easier said than done. I'm familiar with the formidable challenge, as I was one of Pew's "Jews by religion." To find my own way back to the Jewish tradition, I needed to overcome several secular ideas—secular myths actually—such as that Judaism entails some archaic theology and that revealed truths are unreasonable. Overcoming these secular myths is what it may take for many unaffiliated Jews to find their way back to Judaism.

Curt Biren
Santa Monica, CA

Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

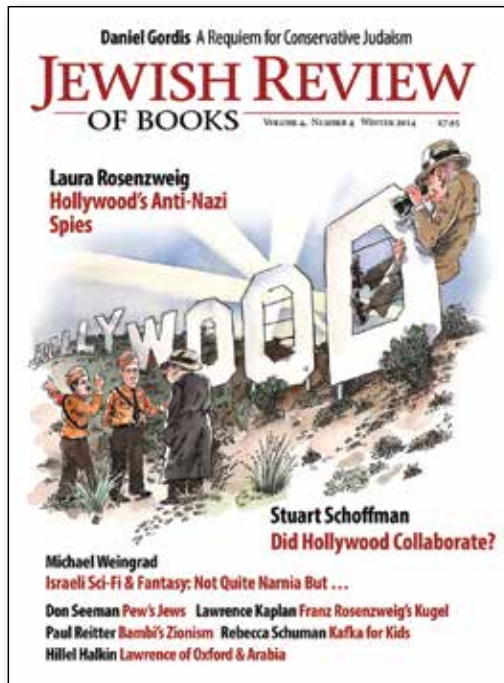
What a great historical essay. ("Wisdom and Wars," Winter 2014) I have been reading Mr. Halkin's work for many years and each time come away enlight-

ened and uplifted—not only by his evident scholarship but also, very centrally, by the sparkling wisdom and the uncommonly elegant literary style of his writing. This piece probably started as a book review but grew so much broader and deeper than one. Delightful.

Sirgei Nirenburg
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

Gordis' Requiem for Conservative Judaism

Having served as an Orthodox rabbi in Atlanta for 40 years, I witnessed Conservative Judaism both at its heyday and its descent. Although I was an ideological opponent of the Conservatives—albeit with



friendly personal relationships with the Conservative community and its rabbis—I felt myself sympathizing with Daniel Gordis' brutally honest and poignant requiem at the impending demise of the movement. ("Conservative Judaism: A Requiem," Winter 2014) It is a genuine cry from the heart, coming from a very sincere belief in what he, the scion of one of the landmark families of the movement, once hoped was the potential of Conservatism. He decries the triviality within the movement that set out to conserve authentic Judaism and on which he had placed so much hope for the revival of Judaism in America.

Gordis registers a litany of errors, failures, and miscalculations on the part of Conservative Judaism: They did not teach the "rigors of Jewish living," did not "speak with spiritual seriousness" or deal with "the deep existential human questions that religion is meant to address," ignored the fact that "meaningful life is about demands and duties and the call of God, otherwise we are trivial," failed to "make demands that root people in the cosmos," and "ignored content and Jewish substance." He adds that all these were offered by the Orthodox "and the results are clear." But though he admires Orthodox rigor and its demands, he is not yet ready to toss his yarmulke into the Orthodox ring, apparently because he prefers a Judaism "committed to the rigors of Jewish living without a literal (read Orthodox) notion of Revelation at its core." Thus, Orthodoxy is "intellectually untenable for many." At the same time, he would never consider "a liberal Judaism incapable of transmitting content and substance." He yearns for a religious address for

American Jewry, a movement that realizes that "human beings do not run from demands."

Beyond the question of labels, it is unclear why the concept of Sinaitic revelation (Gordis does not use this term explicitly, but clearly implies it) is intellectually untenable, while "demands that will root people in the cosmos" are intellectually tenable. Can one be rooted in the cosmos without demands that are similarly rooted in the cosmos? Once, observing the Sabbath and the dietary laws and *mitzvot* brought meaning and substance to life. But today, the argument would go, I get my meaning and substance from playing golf on Saturday morning, eating bagels and lox on Sunday morning, and playing poker on Wednesday nights. Who is anyone today to tell me differently? Rabbi Gordis would surely agree that such activities are trivial only when held up alongside the marker of what genuine Torah really is. And genuine Torah, I suspect that he would further agree, is not simply a collection of tribal rules and practices concocted by my ancient *bubbes* and *zeiddes*, but contains echoes and reverberations of the Divine within it.

But Gordis is enmeshed in a snare of his own making. For if he is suggesting that the intellect is our final arbiter, and that before I commit my life to something, it must be intellectually tenable, then how is a divine Torah intellectually tenable? For that matter, how is a belief in a God Who listens and Who sees and to Whom one prays (what Gordis himself calls "the call of God") intellectually tenable? Intellectual tenability is at bottom an untenable construct on which to build a religious way of life.

Gordis' dilemma is palpable. In addition to the anguish he experiences at the implosion (his word) of his Conservative movement, he is caught in an even more painful vise. He longs for the rigors and transcendence of Orthodoxy, but without the transcendent authority that gives Orthodoxy its legitimacy and its power. I would respectfully suggest a way out for Rabbi Gordis. Let him put aside theology for now; stop taking the pulse of intellectuality and toss aside the thermometer of tenability. Let him eschew all labels entirely and instead offer a lifestyle under any nomenclature he chooses, a life that stresses *mitzvot*, insists on solid Torah study, makes rigorous demands, is relentless in its pursuit of Godliness and spirituality in daily life, and that spurns trivialities. Let not notions of revelation or *Torah min ha-shamayim*, literal or not, stand in the way of living a complete Jewish life (which I am sure he is in any case already doing).

In a remarkable and mysterious rabbinic insight, Jerusalem Talmud (Hagiga 1:7) posits that at the sin of the Golden Calf, God Himself said, *Halevai oti azavu ve-torati shamaru* . . . "Would that even though they abandon Me, they would observe My Torah—for the divine light within the Torah will bring them back to the Good." The key to Judaism today is not so much what we believe as what we do, not our theology but our daily practice.

As Rabbi Gordis writes, millions of American Jews will respond to a message that is serious and speaks to their *neshamot*, their souls. Later on, many miles down the road, we can discuss theology.

Emanuel Feldman

Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem

(Editor's Note: Rabbi Feldman is the former editor of *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*.)

(continued on page 50)



A Stone for His Slingshot

BY BEN HECHT, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY STUART SCHOFFMAN

Tucked amid the Ben Hecht Papers at the Newberry Library in Chicago is an undated typescript of 21 pages, with a penciled heading: “Speech at dinner at Slapsy Maxie’s, L.A., financed by Mickey Cohen.” Hecht was, of course, a fabled writer for stage and screen, Mickey Cohen was the notorious Los Angeles gangland boss (recently portrayed by Sean Penn in the movie *Gangster Squad*), and the speech, which has never before been published, is one of the most riveting and remarkable Jewish fundraising speeches ever delivered. What gives?

The outrageously prolific Hecht—writer of reportage, novels and short stories, Broadway theater and Hollywood movies, and eventually Jewish propaganda—was always attracted to outlaws. The first of his six or seven dozen produced (though not always credited) screenplays was *Underworld*, a 1927 silent film directed by the Austrian-Jewish immigrant Josef von Sternberg. In his freewheeling autobiography, *A Child of the Century*, Hecht wrote:

I made up a movie about a Chicago gunman and his moll called Feathers McCoy. As a newspaperman I had learned that nice people—the audience—love criminals . . . It was the first gangster movie to bedazzle the movie fans and there were no lies in it—except for a half-dozen sentimental touches introduced by its director.

Hecht won an Academy Award for *Underworld*, at the very first awards in 1929. (He was nominated five more times but never won another.) In 1932, he wrote *Scarface* for Howard Hawks, proudly claiming that “two Capone henchmen” showed up after midnight demanding assurance (which he disingenuously provided) that *Scarface* was not about “the great gangster.”

Meanwhile, Hecht had established his own reputation as a literary outlaw, notably with his novel *A Jew in Love*, a rapier-sharp vivisection of a contemptible book publisher named Jo Boshere, né Abe Nussbaum. Published in 1931, it sold some 50,000 copies and was voted best novel of the year by the senior class at New York’s City College, but influential Jews accused Hecht of self-hatred. *The New York Times* quoted Rabbi Louis I. Newman, of the Reform Congregation Rodeph Sholom, as saying that the book was “an atrocious malignment of the Jew.”

In *A Child of the Century*, Hecht tossed off the fictional Boshere as “this worthless fellow, who cost me much trouble with Jews who do not like the word ‘Jew’ used in a title.” Not quite. Hecht described one

character as having “a face stamped with the hieroglyphic curl of the Hebrew alphabet” and elsewhere wrote of “that glandular degeneration that produces the Jew with the sausage face.” Writing for *The Sentinel*, a Chicago Jewish weekly, Bertha Loeb Lang wondered if Hecht was deliberately pandering to

visionist leader Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who had died in New York exile in 1940. He enlisted Hecht in a campaign to fight Hitler and promote militant Zionism in America. Hecht churned out caustic newspaper ads about American and British indifference to the plight of the European Jews. He crafted the 1946

“I addressed a thousand bookies, ex-prize fighters, gamblers, jockeys, touts and all sorts of lawless and semi-lawless characters; and their womenfolk.”

anti-Semites. Hecht, she wrote, “should seek something inspiring to wing his thoughts to higher realms.”

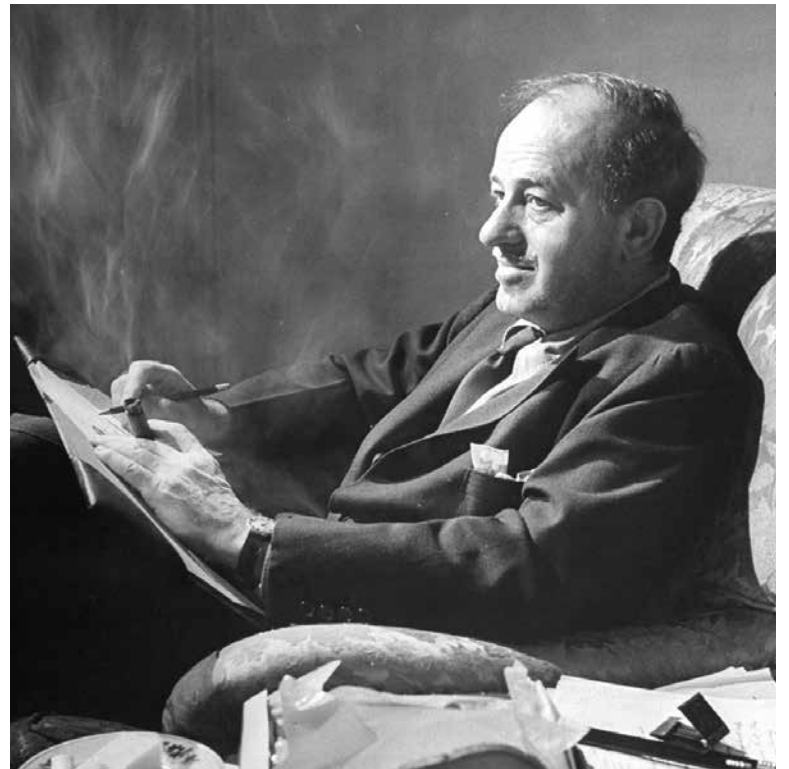
Such inspiration hit him hard in 1939, when Hecht, as he put it, “turned into a Jew.” As he recalled: “The German mass murder of the Jews, recently begun, had brought my Jewishness to the surface. I felt no grief or vicarious pain. I felt only a violence toward the German killers.” He put his furious pen to work in a daily column for *P.M.*, the liberal New York newspaper, chastising “Americanized Jews” for their silence in the face of the growing massacre. In 1941 he wrote a column called “My Tribe Is Called Israel”: “My angry critics all

Zionist stage play *A Flag Is Born*, which drew large crowds and made so much money for the right-wing Irgun that they named a ship for him. (While illegally transporting 600 Holocaust survivors to Palestine, the *S.S. Ben Hecht* was intercepted by the British in March 1947; the refugees were detained in Cyprus, and crew members were jailed in the Acre prison.)

Hecht’s advocacy for the outlawed Irgun reached a brazen climax with a broadside that ran in the *New York Post* and elsewhere in May 1947, called “Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine.” “My Brave Friends,” he began, “the Jews of America are for you. You are their champions. You are the grin they wear. You are



Above: Gangster Mickey Cohen, Chicago, ca. 1950. (© Bettmann/CORBIS.) Right: Screenwriter Ben Hecht, ca. 1943. (© George Karger/Pix Inc./Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.)



write that they are proud of being Americans and of wearing carnations, and that they are sick to death of such efforts as mine to Judaize them and increase generally the Jew-consciousness of the world.”

Hecht’s two-fisted polemic caught the eye of a young Palestinian Jew living in America: Hillel Kook, a nephew of the great Rav Kook who went by the *nom de guerre* Peter Bergson, so as not to embarrass his family. Bergson was a disciple of the late Re-

the feather in their hats . . . Every time you blow up a British arsenal, or wreck a British jail, or send a British railroad train sky high, or rob a British bank, or let go with your guns and bombs at the British betrayers and invaders of your homeland, the Jews of America make a little holiday in their hearts. Not all the Jews, of course.” The dissenters, Hecht went on, “unfortunately” included “practically all the rich Jews of America, all the important and influential

ones, all the heads of nearly all the Jewish organizations whom the American newspapers call ‘The Jewish Leaders.’ They’re all against.” Ben’s big finish: “Hang on, brave friends, our money is on its way.”

Hecht’s fierce embrace of Zionism is a by-now familiar story of Jewish return, akin to the classic trajectories of Herzl, Heine, and Moses Hess. But it also suited Hecht, the perennial contrarian, to poke a stick in the eye of “Jewish respectables,” as he called them. It seems almost inevitable that the next stage in his evolution as a Jew was a fundraising partnership with Mickey Cohen (1913–1976). Cohen “took to burglary and violence as a duckling takes to water,” as Hecht wrote of him in the 1950s. He was a prizefighter, armed robber, occasional killer, extortionist, and bookmaking czar; he was also a germ-phobic dandy who shunned alcohol, hobnobbed with Hollywood stars, and craved publicity.

Mickey and Ben were both tough Jews, born in New York to immigrant families, but their commonality ran deeper: “Story-telling is the chief social activity of the underworld,” wrote Hecht in his Cohen piece (published posthumously in 1970 as “The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen” in the short-lived *Scanlan’s Magazine*). “Nearly every heister and gunman I have known was eager to play Scheherazade.” As Cohen told the story in his autobiography, Hecht contacted him in 1947: “At first I thought the guy was conning me—playing on me being a Jew kid.” The gangster and his bodyguard Mike Howard went for dinner at Hecht’s house in Oceanside, north of San Diego. Also present, says Cohen, was a representative of the Irgun:

This guy got me so goddamn excited. He started telling me how these guys actually fight like racket guys would . . . And then I threw a big affair to raise funds for the Irgun at Slapsy Maxie’s, which I had a piece of. There were judges there, people from all walks of life—every top gambler that was in the city or nearby.

Cut to Slapsy Maxie’s Café, a popular nightspot on Wilshire Boulevard, east of Fairfax, operated by a Hollywood haberdasher called Sy Devore and his brother Charlie. It was at least partly backed by Cohen and fronted by the eponymous Maxie Rosenbloom, a onetime light heavyweight boxing champion and B-actor (he played himself in the 1941 comedy *Harvard, Here I Come!*). The date of the big Irgun affair is not to be found in Cohen’s memoir, nor in Hecht’s version in *A Child of the Century*. As Saul Bellow deadpanned in his *Times* review of the book: “Hecht is a rather difficult man to pin down.” Cohen’s biographer Brad Davis says it was “in June 1947, just prior to Bugsy’s murder,” but incorrectly places Menachem Begin in the room that night, “on the lam for the King David Hotel bombing.” Elements of Hecht’s speech clearly point to 1948, shortly after the establishment of Israel.

Hecht described the scene: “I addressed a thousand bookies, ex-prize fighters, gamblers, jockeys, touts and all sorts of lawless and semi-lawless characters; and their womenfolk.” Imagine a huge smoky nightclub out of *Guys and Dolls* with Ben, still shaky after gall bladder surgery, reading out an impassioned 45-minute pitch for the soldiers of the Irgun. (He even has a good word for the rival Haganah.)

Hecht is fast and loose with facts about the Warsaw ghetto, FDR, refugee ships, Lord Moyne, and more. He slides into hyperbole, soars over the heads of his audience, but also hammers home a core concept of classical Zionism: “A Jewish nation will remove our mystery and give us origins and permit us to thrive in the world—on an equal footing with other nationals.” And his grand peroration still stirs the Jewish soul, if only as nostalgia: “A David stands against Goliath. I ask you Jews—buy him a stone for his slingshot.”

The hat was passed. The Hollywood demimonde ponied up with cash and pledges. Cohen shoved

Jimmy Fratianno, later said it was a scam and Mickey kept the money. Then again, Fratianno tried to kill Cohen in a shootout on Sunset Boulevard only a year later, and his nickname was “The Weasel.” For his part, Cohen claimed in his memoir that it was he who urged the Irgun to hang British soldiers in Palestine in revenge for the hanging of Jews: “If you don’t, that’s going to be the end of my involvement . . . And they done it.” (Indeed so: in Netanya, on Begin’s orders, in July 1947, though whether he was heeding Cohen’s advice is another matter.)

Hecht made another, much shorter speech in November 1948, at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan, at a big banquet in honor of Menachem Begin. This speech, too, may be found at the Newberry: “For some of us who are present here tonight,” Hecht began, “this fine scene is the ending of a story.” The Irgun, by the fall of 1948, had ceased to exist, along with its American arm, the American League for a Free Palestine. “Tonight,” said Hecht, “we scatter, we who rang doorbells, passed the hat, put on rallies, cheered the spectacle returned to Palestine of David standing against Goliath—we go back to smaller things.”

For Hecht, who had recently written *Spellbound* and *Notorious*, “smaller things” included Hitchcock’s *Rope* and the film adaptation of *Guys and Dolls*, both as an uncredited “script doctor.” He published *A Child of the Century* in 1954, which, until now, together with Cohen’s memoir, constituted the only published evidence of the night at Slapsy Maxie’s. In 1961, he published *Perfidy*, a denunciation of Labor Zionist treachery that remains canonical in some right-wing circles.

Hecht’s last, unfinished project was a book called *Shylock, My Brother*, whose manuscript I also examined at the Newberry. “I have felt sorry that so many Jews . . . fail to recognize Shylock as their brother, and turn their backs on him,” he wrote. “I have never found Shylock to be the villain against whom Jews keep protesting as a libel of their kind. To the contrary, he is one of the few heroic Jews in classic literature, perhaps even the only one.” Jabotinsky, Hecht reported, had argued “that Shylock was a valiant vindicator of Jewish grievances.” But for the timid Jews who fear “unfrightened Jewish voices,” Hecht scoffed, “the silent Ben-Gurion of Israel and not the cantankerous Shylock of Shakespeare is their idol.” He would have approved of Al Pacino’s recent aggressive portrayals of Shylock.

To the end, Hecht was out to provoke. Speculating on Shakespeare’s motives, he concluded that the Bard was a crypto-Jew. Hecht died suddenly in April 1964, at the age of 70, in his apartment on West 67th Street in New York. Rabbi Louis I. Newman, his erstwhile antagonist, officiated at his funeral at Rodeph Shalom, and Menachem Begin flew in from Israel to deliver a eulogy.



Slapsy Maxie’s on Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1945. (Courtesy of hollywoodphotographs.com.)



Maxie Rosenbloom on *The Ring*’s cover, ca. 1930s. (©*The Ring Magazine*/Getty Images.)

Mike Howard to the stage, ordering him to demand that everybody give double. “Quit crabbin,” Hecht reports Howard as replying, before he took the microphone, “We raised two hundred G’s. Furthermore, we been here three hours and nobody’s taken a shot at us.” The take for the night, according to the journalist Sidney Zion in *Scanlan’s*, was “\$230,000 and no welshers.” Cohen’s rival mobster,

EDITORIAL NOTE: Ben Hecht's typed speech has been modified here only slightly in matters of punctuation and spacing to enhance its readability. Some idiosyncrasies have been left in order to retain the feel of the original document.

I AM GOING TO SPEAK OF UNHAPPY THINGS TONIGHT, things you will not be pleased to hear—and things I shall find no pleasure in saying. But Menachim Beigen [sic], the Commander of the Irgun and military leader of the embattled Jews in Palestine, has cabled me from Tel Aviv asking of me a favor. He asks that I do what I can to arouse among the Jews who are not fighting in the Holy Land, the knowledge that without them the Holy Land will be lost. And with it will be lost forever the hope of the Jews taking their place as equals in the human family.

“We are fighting against great odds,” the Irgun commander says. “The enemy outnumbers us and is better equipped. His resources are unlimited. Great Britain is supplying him with its millions, its munitions, and its manpower. We have only ourselves. No nation will come to our side as ally or give us aid. We have only our brave soldiers and the long-dreaming soul of the Jews of the world. Speak to that soul wherever you can. If it can be awakened, we shall win.”

I shall speak to it tonight as well as I can. The soul of the Jew is an ancient and complicated business. It has been trained by disaster and calumny to live in caution, to hide itself cozily behind good deeds, to overlook insults, to charm its enemies, and to avoid getting its enemies angrier than they are. Thus hidden, thus full of cunning modesties and suicidal graces, it has remained nevertheless a brave soul—when destinies other than its own are at stake. It has fought and died valorously in defense of every cause but its own. Yes, it has the courage to fight and die for others. But it has hardly the guts even to *speak* in its own behalf. I know this soul of the Jew because I am part of it. And when the Irgun commander asks that it be wakened, he asks for a miracle. Awaken Jews into espousing their own cause—into believing in themselves—into grasping the battles of Palestine as their own bid for freedom; awaken them to knowing that victory in Palestine is a victory over anti-Semitism in every corner of the world. Commander Beigen asks for this miracle because he is a part of this miracle himself. He is the leader of an army of liberation that all the military power and political bedevilmings of Great Britain were unable to dislodge.

While all the other Jews of the world and all their various synods and agencies cooed and hobnobbed with the British betrayer and usurper of their home-

land; while all the other small Jews of the world let themselves be hornswoggled out of their honor and their hopes, the fighting Jews of the Irgun and their brave youthful allies named the Stern Gang—stood undaunted and uncompromising and battling as heroically as the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto. With one difference. They did not lose—not yet. The British lost.

For twenty-five years the mighty nation of Great Britain sought to steal Palestine—and failed. Because of the Irgun. Because Irgun soldiers died in battle. Because Irgun soldiers went singing to

We have only our brave soldiers and the long-dreaming soul of the Jews of the world.

the British gallows—to hang where all the world could see—and did see—not a terrorist punished for crime but the look and sight of a Jewish patriot dying for his country. Now the Irgun asks for more miracles. It asks for us.

Let me remind you—who we have been. A few years ago in the days when the Germans were burning six million Jews in their lime pits and incinerators—a great and historic thing came to our ears. Thirty thousand Jews waiting in the ghetto of Warsaw to be taken off in the cattle cars to the German furnaces cried out to the world and to us, the Jews of the world—that they were not going to yield like sheep to the German butcher. They proclaimed



The Alvin theater's marquee announcing Ben Hecht's A Flag Is Born, which promoted the establishment of a Jewish state, New York, 1946.

that they were going to die in battle rather than let themselves be taken naked and unresisting to join the garbage pile of the Jewish dead. News of this event came over the radios of the world. It appeared in all the headlines. Thirty thousand Jews armed with pike poles, old guns and bombs made out of

tin cans were giving battle to the German army in Warsaw. The German army marched upon the Warsaw ghetto with tanks, cannon, and flame-throwers. Outnumbered as in a nightmare, the Jews of Warsaw fought for twenty days, fought with wondrous valor—and with one eye on the sky.

They were waiting for help, for planes to appear and parachute weapons and supplies to them. No planes appeared. No weapons or supplies came out of the sky. No nation, fighting those same Germans, sent even a token pat on the back to these doomed warrior Jews. And from all the Jews of the world—from all of us—came not a single plane, a single gun, or a single loaf of bread to the thirty thousand who were battling not for their own survival—there was never any hope of that—but who were battling to bring a glow of human dignity to the pitiful and humiliated name of the Jews; our name as well as theirs.

They were all killed—these men and women of Warsaw who fought for the honor of their kind. And the last of them who stood in the wrecked streets of their ghetto with their ammunition used up—and the German tanks and flame-throwers wiping them out—the last of them shook their fists at the sky; not at the Germans, but at the friendless sky.

Let me tell you why the sky under which the thirty thousand Jews died remained empty—why there was not a single package to fall from a single plane. Let me tell you also why none of the nations fighting for democracy—not even our own country—spoke up as a government officially, spoke out officially as a nation to offer aid, hope, or even that recognition of valor for which the Jews of Warsaw fought and died. The reason is this. The Allies fighting for democracy had a policy toward the Jews, a very definite and strategic policy. This policy had one basic objective—a refusal to recognize the existence of the Jews of Europe whether they died in the Warsaw ghetto fighting or were burned by the millions in the German lime pits and incinerators.

It is unpleasant to hear this. It is unpleasant to say this. But it is the truth.

I am going to name a date and a fact. Write it in your Jewish memories. This is the Moscow conference of the Allies in 1943. A great document is being drawn up by Great Britain, Russia, and the United States. This document is called officially “Statement on the German Atrocities.” And it states that the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union have received from many quarters evidence of atrocities and cold-blooded mass execution done by the Germans. And in this Statement the Allies pledge themselves to avenge these monstrous deeds. They list—in their Statement—the wholesale massacres of Polish, French, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian hostages. They list the peasants of the island of Crete—as German victims. They list sixty-two different categories of German victims. Every name is listed but the name of Jew.

There is no reference in this Statement to the bloody fact that three million Jews have been murdered—for no other crime than that they were Jews—and that another three million are waiting to

*5 speaks at dynnes at slavery - Menachim Beigen & A
promoted by the Irgun Cohen.*

I am going to speak of unhappy things tonight, things you will not be pleased to hear - and things I shall find no pleasure in saying.

die in the German ovens. At the time this statement is being written—a genocide bloodier than any in history is taking place—a race of people is being exterminated. And this fact has been proclaimed by the German exterminators—who stand red-handed before the world boasting of their deed—that the Jews are being wiped out—because they are Jews.

This Statement ignoring the killing of three million unarmed Jews, and turning its back on the impending murder of three more million, was signed by Prime Minister Churchill, Premier Stalin, and President Roosevelt. I know of no political gesture in history as bold and inhuman as blissful silence. A silence that was like a door closing furtively and surreptitiously on the murderer and his victim—our Jewish people.

Let me tell you why this door was closed—why the word Jew was erased not only from the eyes of the world but from its own tomb. You will believe me when I tell you . . . because on my honor, I tell you the truth. And it is a truth you will recognize because it has always been in your mind—as well as my own—whether you spoke it or not. The truth was that Great Britain did not want any official recognition of the Jewish massacre to be put in the record. It did not want the desperate status of the Jews recognized officially. It did not want the conscience of the world stirred up by the foulest crime in history. It did not want this done because there was only one place for the doomed Jews of Europe to go—only one place eager to welcome them—Palestine.

Great Britain did not want the world's attention called to the spectacle of a good and noble race being exterminated. This might undermine their shabby little plan to steal Palestine for themselves. Official acknowledgement that Jews had been killed and their killing would continue until they were a race reduced to bones and ashes might startle even the befogged mind of the world of 1943 and set it crying out for a remedy. And what might this remedy be? Only this—to open the ports of Palestine given to the Jews twenty years before—and let in the Jews not yet slaughtered. The British were opposed to this remedy. British policy preferred that all the Jews of Europe be murdered—and that they die incognito in the German furnaces rather than that a single Jewish refugee enter Palestine.

Here is another fact to keep in your memories. During the height of the German massacres, two ships carrying several thousand such refugees arrived at the Palestinian port of Haifa. A man named Lord Moyne, the British governor of Palestine, looked on the thousands of men, women, and children who had come crawling out of the pogroms, blackened by the smoke of massacres; looked and refused to allow these two ships to land, and their passengers to disembark. Lord Moyne ordered the two battered refugee ships—called the *Struma* and the *Patria*—to sail off. They sailed away. He sent them back into the Mediterranean. They were blown up by English or German mines. Every human being aboard them was killed. Lord Moyne had stood at the breach. He had kept British policy intact.

And where was American policy during those wild days of a people's extermination? Let me tell you. It stood firmly, grimly, side by side with Great Britain. Mr. Roosevelt concurred in this British plot to lock the Jews away with their German murderers—and ignore the deed—and let them all be killed rather than let the ports of Palestine be opened. President

Roosevelt concurred on the *Struma* and the *Patria*.

And here is another fact to hold in your Jewish memories. Let me tell you of another secret American agreement—of President Roosevelt's and his State Department's concurrence in the murder of three hundred thousand Jews of Roumania [sic]. This is also not a pleasant thing to hear, nor yet to say. For Great Britain and the United States are both honorable countries—dedicated to honorable aims. And so far as it is possible for human masses to be kind and good, such kindness and goodness are to be found in the peoples of England and America. But—as always in history the Jews are the wrong yardstick with which to measure the virtues of nations, or of their leaders. But it is the only measure a Jew has—who kills him, who lets him live.

It was early in the war. Roumania was not yet overrun by German troops and officials. The Rou-

not to fear an influx of Roumanian Jewish refugees into Palestine. These letters assured the Arab leaders that the United States would secretly quash the rescue of the three hundred thousand Roumanian Jews—among them fifty thousand children.

And it did. It held the breach—with Lord Moyne. It stood firm for five months—till the Germans swarmed into Roumania. And then our State department relaxed. For the Germans took care of the rest of the job of keeping the Roumanian Jews—including their fifty thousand children—out of Palestine. They were all slaughtered.

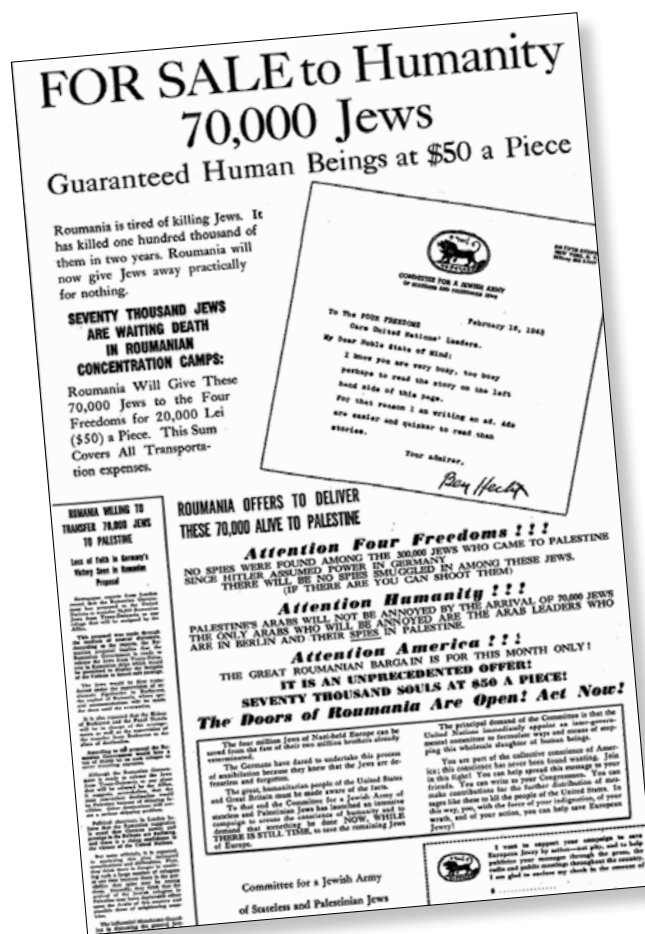
All these unpleasant things I have said to you not to arouse futile angers against villainy past and gone. I have said them only to point out the danger in which the Jew stands today. In his hour of destruction the Jew of Europe was without friends. Today in his desperate hour of rebirth the plot is still the same. The Jew is still without friends.

He fights alone in Palestine—against great odds, against increasing odds. And if we Jews whose souls are being fed and strengthened by his courage—whose status in the eyes of the world—is being forged by his valor—if we dreaming Jews of the four winds believe that any nation will ride to his aid—we are fools.

There will be no help from governments. The governments will continue to play their immemorial and secret games of sabotage against the Jews. In Palestine the outnumbered Jews battle today against an enemy officered, armed, and financed by the British. And like the Jews of Warsaw these Palestinian heroes battle with one eye to the sky. They wait for us. We are their arsenal. Not the Four Freedoms, not the good old U.S.A.—but we, the Jews of the four winds. But this you know, or you would not be here. And it is not to awaken you that I speak. You are awake or you would not be here. It is to arm your wakefulness and help you to waken others that I speak.

You will be asked—and you may even ask yourself—what is the stake of the American Jew in Palestine? What has he to gain by the birth and triumph of the new nation of Israel? I will answer this question, first, with another question. What did the American Jews lose in the mass murder of the six million Jews of Europe? That which he lost—he will never lose again if there is a nation in Palestine called Israel. For only a Jewish nation sitting among the other nations of the world will be able to prevent ever the mass executions of Jews that have been going on since the year Four Hundred.

In the fifteen hundred years of their wooing of Europe, the Jews have never been able to halt a pogrom. In fact, the more important, the more assimilated the Jews in a given country became, the more certain was their ultimate status in that country—disfavor and destruction. Out of this one fact—that they were a people who could be slaughtered with impunity—that there was even honor to be won in their slaughtering—has risen much of the anti-Semitism that hangs like an ever-darkening cloud over the world's Jewry. When the sky is clear above you, you may be sure the cloud is elsewhere. It shifts from nation to nation, from century to century. It does not go away. All the relationships made the Jews, all the honors won, all the medals hung on them have not been enough to move even our own most civilized of countries to raise a hand in their behalf—when the hour of doom struck in Europe.



Hecht and Peter Bergson placed this and similar ads in *The New York Times* and other U.S. papers, February 1943.

manian government sent out word that payment of fifty dollars a piece, it would release the Jews of Roumania before the Germans came in and started their extermination. The fifty dollars a head were to cover transportation expenses to Palestine. We published and advertised this fact, in a score of newspapers. The American State Department branded our information as a lie. Mr. Roosevelt branded the Roumanian government's offer as a myth. There were no such Jews to be saved. And we who tried to rouse the conscience of the world to save them—we were liars and sensation makers. Pressed to take action, our government informed us angrily that it was unaware of this Roumanian offer.

It was our government that lied—not we. The truth has come out in the published letters of the State Department. There was such an offer made by the Roumanians. And our State Department wrote secretly to Arab leaders—Ibn Saud among them—

Here is our record as American Jews—in that pogrom. We allowed ourselves to be bamboozled by the British policy in Palestine—which was also the American policy—of keeping the Jews out of the Holy Land. We went along with the delusion that the British and American governments were kindly governments and kindly friends of the Jews. We could not believe otherwise, being who we are and where we are, part of those governments.

We went along—cheering for those governments who with their mighty right hand were winning a war against the Germans—and with their sly left hand locking the Jews of Europe away with their exterminators—by closing the ports of their only refuge—Palestine. We cheered a war—and we cheered the extermination of six million Jews.

Behind the cloak of pretended military emergency, the British—and their American State Department concurren—plotted the future of Palestine—a Palestine to be held by the British as a military base—a Palestine to be handed over to an Arabian puppet king—already established in Trans Jordan [sic] by the British. And as a sop to what was known as Jewish world opinion the British explained that they could not let the Jews into Palestine during the war—and during their extermination—because German spies might come in with them—and German sympathizers.

These are the same British who whistled the Grand Mufti and his colleagues back from their Hitler honeymoon—and spread a red carpet for their re-entrance into Palestine. They were Nazis, they had fought on the German side in the war. But this was a minor facet of their natures—a peccadillo to be forgotten and condoned in the light of the more

important fact that they hated Jews and were willing to help the British drive the Jews out of Palestine.

Only one group of Jews in the world did not concur in these secret plottings and underminings of Jews. This was the Irgun Zvei Leumi—that fought and publicized with their blood each step of the robbery—whether it was robbery of honor, freedom, or land. And with their help, for they are now being forged into the fabric of the new Jewish state—the State of Israel will not, when the time comes again—be as daft and dizzy as we American Jews were. It will not be spun about by the fear of divided loyalties as we were. It will not be duped by the siren song of patriotisms that ignore the carnage of the Jews.

However muddled such a Jewish state of Israel may be, it will have a long memory—and a clear head toward Jews. And when the time of pogrom comes again—it will raise a clear voice, backed by a strong arm—for Jews. And this is the only weapon the Jews need to prevent another time of butchery. For the world is not a place of evil. The conscience of the world is a Godly and aspiring one. Its head is perpetually in a fog, but there is a light in its heart. A clarion voice such as will come from the nation of Israel—and such has never come from the scattered, duped, and bewildered Jews wooing their way in other lands—such a voice will halt the pogroms and mass executions of tomorrow.

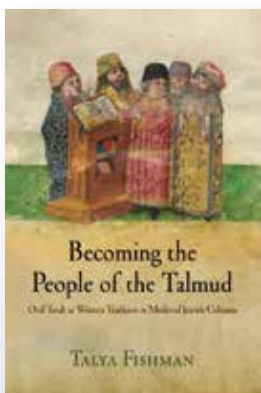
Tonight the battle rages in the land of Israel. Let us also look on our record as American Jews toward this present war. We Jews made this war possible. We concurred in it. Not only we American Jews who think only of America, but the Jews who were already planning the future of Palestine. They, too, concurred

in this war and abetted the enemy. They did worse. They blessed it—to win a smile of approval from the British, their good friends. I will explain: Twenty years ago when the British held Palestine under a League of Nations mandate—to prepare a Jewish homeland in Palestine—that was their assignment and their sworn task—twenty years ago the British in defiance of that mandate sliced off a major chunk of Palestine—called it Trans Jordan and handed it over to a puppet king named Abdullah.

There was an outcry from the Jewish patriots of Palestine—from the Irgun Zvei Leumi. But these were merely Palestinians. The great and important Jews who handled the future of Palestine were English citizens and American citizens. These accredited leaders of Jewry thought the rape of Palestine by the British and the lawless invention of an Arab state by the British—an unfortunate but an unpreventable thing. They protested—but never loudly enough to jeopardize their standing as British or American citizens. They protested—but they were good sports about it. And the warnings of the Irgun leaders that Great Britain was preparing a war against Palestine—the war that is going on now—were drowned in the polite concurrences of English and American Jews.

The British were able openly and lawlessly to finance this Arab state in Trans Jordan—on loans given them by the U.S.A. They proceeded openly to pour military equipment into the Arab state, to send thousands of British officers and strategists to King Abdullah's side, to ship him planes, tanks, and all their latest military gadgets—and to pay the salaries of his army. This is the army—the Arab

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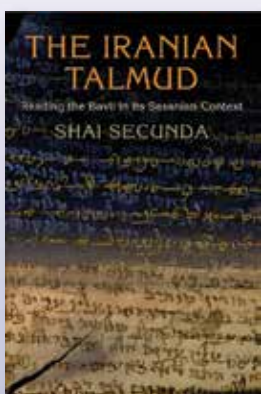
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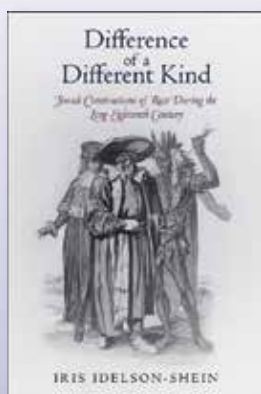
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Legion—that fights the Jews today. Not the Palestinian Arabs who have lived in friendship with the Jews—but this British trumped up Legion—fattened by British gold and British propaganda for a generation.

And why did the British do this? Why this long and foresighted plan against the Jews? The answer is that the Arabs make better British Colonials than the Jews. The answer is that the Arabs, do they win Palestine, will not harass British trade and prestige in the east by building up a thriving industrial nation. The answer is that the Arabs will create a nation content to live off Great Britain, content to be its not too civilized vassal, cohort, and uncompetitive ally. And the Jews if they win—will not be that—despite the fact that an English citizen sits today as the first president of Israel. This is a hope for the British—but a small one. The Jews of Palestine—being shot down today by British guns, blasted by British planes, will be Jews when they win—a nation and not a vassal suburb of Downing Street, London.

And what have we American Jews to gain by the triumph of the Jewish nation now battling in Palestine? We are a happy people in the U.S.A. But we are happy as Americans, not as Jews. Not entirely happy—as Jews. The slaughter of our kind in Europe has left a wound in our spirits that our victory as Americans in the war has not entirely healed. It is a Jewish wound kept always open by the fear of the future. And despite the honors and positions we have won in America, we are no different as Jews than our fathers and grandfathers in Europe. We are like them, as Jews—uncertain, despairing, disenchanted, and always singing ourselves to sleep with the happy news that we have friends in court.

The Jews have always had friends in court—but they have never won a verdict. They have been always a noise without power, a talent without roots, a homelover without a doorstep of their own. They have worn fine clothes—and remained a fine nobody. They have always been going somewhere—but they have come from nowhere. And a man who comes from nowhere is a lesser man than one who comes from a place. There is always mystery and suspicion about such a man.

The nationalized soul of every nation, however civilized, abhors instinctively the nationalistic vacuum out of which the Jew is perpetually emerging. Having no land of his own, the Jew is looked on as a man who would—if given the chance—usurp the land of his host.

This has been true even of our own melting pot—a pot in which every immigrant has fused away his antecedents—except the Jew. A man from Sweden, Ireland, Luxemburg, Hungary, Italy—as soon as he loses the accents of those places—can become an American without suspicion or hyphen attached to him. The Jew, with or without accent—can become only an American Jew.

This is part of our stake in Palestine. A Jewish nation will remove our mystery and give us origins and permit us to thrive in the world—on an equal footing with other nationals. We can paradoxically become American then—for we will not be carrying around in our souls the confusion of what we are—and spreading this confusion among our always easily confused neighbors.

And we will not seem like the remnant of some stubborn religious sect given to weird and alien reli-

gious practices. Without losing our religion we will lose our two-thousand-year-old dangerous identity as religious fanatics—an absurd identity, but an identity ready made for the devilish schemes of bigots and rabble rousers; an identity that has brought intolerance and disaster down on us. We will lose that identity, for the land of Israel will have a flag, an army, and a congress to prove we are like other people—and that we stem from a normal state and not be black magic out of a hole in the past.

But there is a stake beyond these stakes of convenience and aggrandizement that we Jews have in the battle for Palestine. Is that battle lost—we Jews, all of us, are lost for another seven generations. We

A man who comes from nowhere is a lesser man than one who comes from a place.

will have made our bid for human national status—whether we helped or hid our heads in a bag—and if this bid fails we will become a gabby and empty people, a gabby and defeated people—more so than ever in our history.

We will become losers. And this name will track us down in every city and village of America—and fasten itself to us. Not losers of a war—every nation has had that tag on it, but losers of the right to exist as anything but what we have been—the dubious guest in the house. If our bid for a flag and a homeland fails, we will all of us stand guilty before the world of an unworthiness. And this unworthiness we will, for a change, have deserved—if it comes to us. It is our duty to see that it does not come to us. It is in our power to prevent its coming. We will win—if the long dreaming soul of the Jew is awakened. Thus speaks the leader of the Irgun forces.

Let me remind you—once more—who this leader is and who these Irgun fighters are. Menachim Beigen and his troops are the Terrorists. That was what they were called when their stalwart hearts launched the battle against the British betrayers and invaders of their homeland. They are the same not-to-be-vanquished and not-to-be-silenced soldiers whose underground fight wrenched the Jewish situation out of the sly British hands; whose unceasing attacks and demands swept away the political fogs behind which the British were silently maneuvering the Jewish state into limbo.

These men and women of the Irgun stood alone. They had no friends in any court—not even the Jewish court. The common people of Palestine loved them, hid them, glowed with pride over them. But the accredited leaders of the long Jewish negotiations for a homeland looked with terrified eyes on this heroic spearhead of Jewish freedom—the Irgun. These leaders joined with all the other nervous, flag-frightened Jews of the world—in denouncing them. And for years the soldiers of the Irgun who fought with a British noose around their necks were called gangsters and terrorists, pirates and lawbreakers—as were the handful of intrepid folk who once rallied to the new flag raised above Lexington and Bunker Hill.

But this is past. The denunciations are done with. The accredited leaders of the world's organized Jewry survive now or die forever behind the army that has come out of the Palestinian underground. And

the Jews of the world who called names and were fearful, are proud today of these same Terrorists. For history has revealed them in their true guise—not that of Terrorists but of champions risen to restore the people of Israel to their lost estate as human beings. The Irgun is a dedicated army. It leads the fight. And beside it fights the brave army of the Haganah. They were political rivals of the Irgun. They are brothers in arms tonight.

Jewish money has poured into a thousand causes. But there was never any cause in Jewish history like this one. In Palestine, the ancient land of miracles—another miracle is happening; a miracle as sweet as any recorded in the Testament. A two-thousand-year-old dream of the Jews is coming true—a dream of manhood hidden away in the prayers and lamentations of two thousand years. [Two paragraphs in the original text crossed out by Ben Hecht.]

In these dark centuries that have never ended—the Jews carried the dream of Israel in their hearts. The Hebrew Nation of David and the Kings had been hammered to bits—but the bits refused to die. Every Jewish poet, every rabbi, and every worker at his bench kept alive this dream. In Spain after a thousand years of torment—the Jews still sang of their Jerusalem and their Holy Land. Jehuda Halevy [sic], the Hebrew poet of Spain, wrote of a homeland no Jew had seen for a thousand years:

Jerusalem, oh City of Splendor, oh bright home of the Jews—our spirit flies to you from many lands. In the East—in the far land of the cedar and the lemon trees our hearts lie. And our souls dwell beside the sun gone down on Israel.

The sun is no longer down. A champion fights in Palestine. He will not surrender. But he calls on us. He needs us.

If he loses, he will lose because we did not put a gun in his hand.

He will lose because we—and not he—were too small for the hour of Jewish destiny.

He will lose because the Jews of the world dreamed away the days of battle.

But these are only words I speak—words to wake up Jews if there are any asleep. He will not lose. No cause that had behind it the sweet and powerful dream of freedom—has ever lost. This dream does not stand on the battlefields alone. It stands in us.

There are twenty-eight million Arabs. There are British wealth and British officers—and British military equipment. There are eight hundred thousand Jews—besieged and encircled by this Goliath tonight.

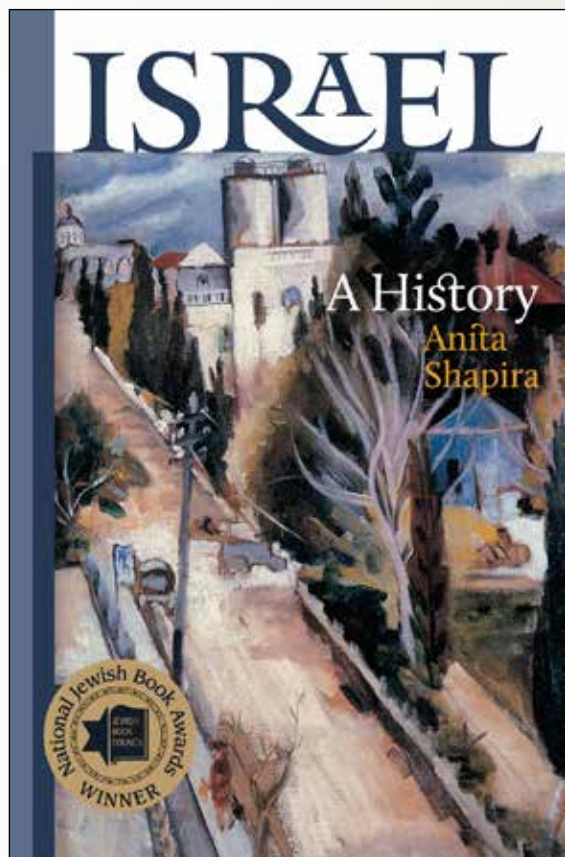
A David stands against Goliath. I ask you Jews—buy him a stone for his slingshot.

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Ben Hecht (1894–1970) was a noted journalist, playwright, novelist, and screenwriter. He worked extensively on behalf of Zionist causes and was the chairman of the American League for a Free Palestine.

Stuart Schoffman, a former Hollywood screenwriter, is a journalist and translator living in Jerusalem. His most recent piece in these pages was “Hollywood and the Nazis” (Winter 2014).

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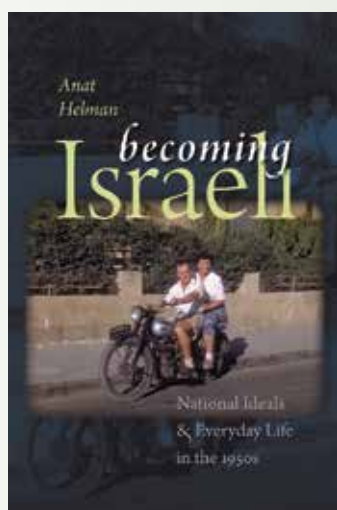
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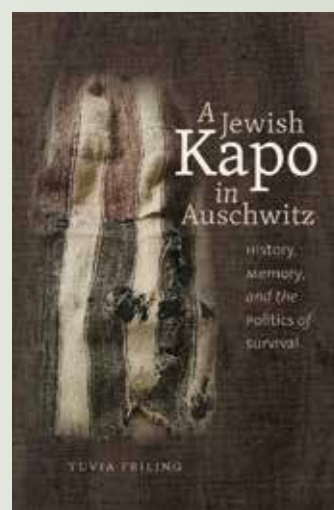
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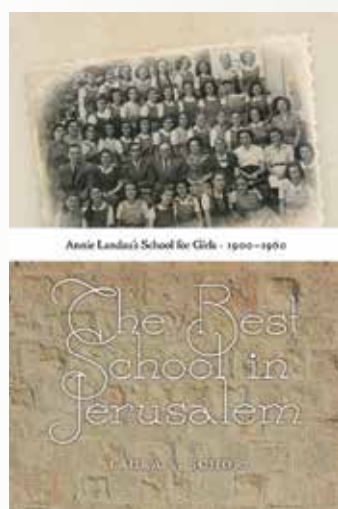
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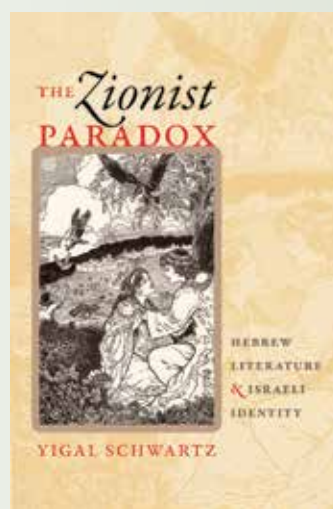
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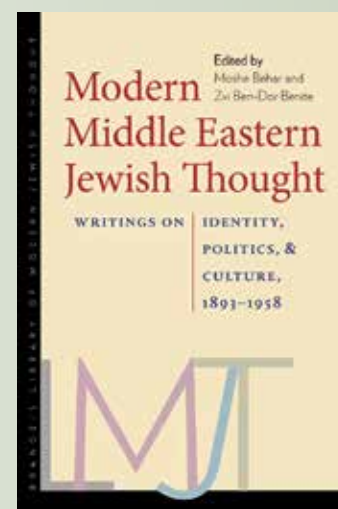
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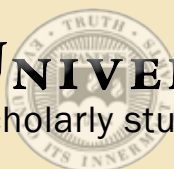
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Rashi

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The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 344 pp., \$64.50

I spent the summer after high school in the Poconos with a group of other recent graduates learning how to become a Camp Ramah counselor. One of our teachers was a remarkable young Israeli, a Jewish type none of us had yet encountered. He had a long, squared-off black beard, a high forehead crowned with a knitted *kippa*, khaki shorts, and army boots. He taught us “Chumash with Rashi,” effortlessly leafing through his well-thumbed Hebrew Pentateuch with the medieval commentators. Whether we understood it or not, he was making the case that Rashi was not just solving problems of biblical interpretation, he was also arguing that God’s love for the Jewish people was the main point of the Bible. For our teacher, Dov Rappel, who went on to a distinguished intellectual career in Israel, this was as true nowadays as when Rashi wrote it.

Jewish biographies are everywhere, but few if any subjects can lay claim to the importance of Rabbi Shlomo b. Isaac (1040–1105), commonly known by the acronym Rashi (on which, more later). Avraham Grossman, a distinguished medieval Jewish historian, professor emeritus at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and winner of the prestigious Israel Prize, is arguably the most learned scholar today writing about the life and works of Rashi. This biography originally appeared in Hebrew in a series produced by The Zalman Shazar Center, whose other subjects include classical figures such as 10th-century Baghdadi rabbinic master Saadia Gaon and Moses Maimonides, as well as iconic moderns like Theodor Herzl and the poet Leah Goldberg, all of them written by comparably distinguished experts for the general Israeli reader.

Rashi’s life, according to Grossman, can be summarized briefly since we know very little about it. He was born in Troyes, the center of the county of Champagne in northeastern France. After initial studies with his father, an otherwise unknown figure, Rashi went off to Mainz to study with Rabbi Jacob ben Yakar and his successor there, Rabbi Isaac ben Judah. Rashi left Mainz for the rising academy in nearby Worms where he continued with Rabbi Isaac ben Judah. Soon back in Troyes, he began his own academy while continuing to correspond with his former teachers in the Rhineland. He was not a professional rabbi—there were none until much later—and it is unclear how he made his living. One source implies that he did so by winemaking, a suggestion that has become part of his historical image, though scholars have questioned it. Grossman, who has examined the evidence, leaves the matter open.

Rashi had no sons, but his daughters probably

had more Jewish learning than most Jewish girls, as has been true for the daughters and wives of rabbinical figures well into modern times. (My wife’s maternal grandmother, the daughter, sister, and wife of Vilna rabbis, corresponded in Hebrew with family members and conversed in Hebrew with the great modern poet Chaim Nachman Bialik when

Riban), some of whose Talmud commentaries have been preserved. The third daughter, Rachel, married someone less famous, and there may have been a fourth daughter. Through his sons-in-law and grandsons, Rashi established a dynasty in northern France that rivaled and eventually supplanted that of his teachers, especially after tragedy struck the

We can overhear an active give and take between Rashi and his grandson Samuel in the latter’s biblical commentary.

they met in Tel Aviv.) In any event, his daughters’ learning and piety have entered into legend. They certainly married important rabbinic scholars: Yocheved married Rabbi Meir ben Samuel, and among their four sons was Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, known

towns of Mainz and Worms, as well as other German centers of rabbinic Jewish life in the spring and summer of 1096.

Pope Urban II’s call to the knights of France to mount an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem to fight Muslim Turks and liberate Jerusalem—the First Crusade—triggered a local massacre of Jews living in the German towns where Rashi had studied and other Jewish communities nearby. The frenzy that called for fighting one kind of non-Christian enemy spilled over into a series of riots in which armed Christians forced Jews living in German towns to choose conversion to Christianity or death.

Rashi never refers specifically to these horrific events, though Grossman believes that this may be because Rashi completed his commentaries before 1096. This is hard to prove because Rashi kept revising his glosses. Grossman also thinks that one *piyyut* (liturgical poem) seems to allude to the massacres and martyrdom of his former teachers and colleagues who remained in the Rhineland, but this is not obvious from the poem’s generic language about Jewish persecution. His very first comment at the beginning of Genesis quotes a rabbinic midrash that insists that God created the world to show that it all belongs to Him and that He could give the Land of Israel to the Jewish People. Was he aware that Christians and Muslims were fighting over the Holy Land at that very time? It is hard to prove one way or the other. Rashi continued to teach Talmud and Bible to his students in Troyes until his death in 1105.

For centuries, Jewish boys, and much more recently girls, have begun their elementary Jewish education by studying “Chumash with Rashi.” Indeed, the first dated Hebrew book to appear in print is Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch, in 1475. We call “Rashi script” the cursive smaller script printers designed for any commentary to the Bible because when we think of a Bible commentary we think first of Rashi’s, which itself generated some



Postage stamp of Rashi issued by the French government, 2005.
(Courtesy of The Leiman Library, New York.)

by the acronym Rashbam, an important Talmud and Bible commentator. We can overhear an active give and take between Rashi and his grandson Samuel in the latter’s biblical commentary. In his commentary to Genesis 37:2, Rashbam famously writes of his grandfather:

He conceded to me that had he enough time he should produce other comments in accordance with the plain-sense meanings that are being rediscovered every day.

Maybe Rashi said it and meant it. Maybe he was flattering his grandson or just putting him off (“Can’t you see I’m busy? I have no time for this!”). In any case, new approaches to the classical texts of Judaism were the subject of family debate and free expression between generations.

Samuel’s younger brother was Rabbi Jacob ben Meir, Rabbenu Tam, the most important tosafist commentator on the Talmud. Rashi’s daughter Miriam married Rabbi Judah ben Nathan (known as

two hundred “supercommentaries.” The exegete had himself become the text. How are we to understand his extraordinary shelf life? Did Rashi last because he made classical Jewish texts clear as never before? And what does it mean to make a biblical text “clear”?

Grossman’s *Rashi* tries to answer these questions and many others, and it is full of new ideas. Even Rashi’s familiar acronym gets a fresh treatment. If it refers to *R-abbi Sh-lomo b-en (son of) I-saac*,

How are we to understand Rashi’s extraordinary shelf life?

then, in standard rabbinic literary practice, it should have been, “Rashbi.” Grossman suggests that the name might instead be shorthand for a phrase his students used when they referred to him: *RA-bbeinu SHeYIhyeh* (our Master, may he live), which was later misinterpreted to refer to his name and patronymic, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki. Maybe. It’s a clever suggestion for a problem that most scholars pass right by.

Grossman also addresses the fundamental question of what Rashi was trying to do in his biblical commentary. Does Rashi comment only when the text itself has an ambiguity that, as it were, triggers a comment? Or, does he introduce comments that express his own point of view independent of any textual difficulties? In other words, was Rashi a conservative reader of text or an independent thinker who addresses both the text and the world in which his readers lived? Grossman’s answer is found in the structure of the book, which he divides into three main sections. The first section treats Rashi’s life and the “social network” of his intellectual circles. The second discusses his major writings, especially the Bible and Talmud commentaries. The third looks at Rashi’s views on such matters as the people of Israel and their relationship to God, Torah study, and human dignity. Each part flows from what precedes: the life to the types of writings to their religious content.

In this approach, Grossman agrees with the religious educator and scholar Dov Rappel and with the great historian Jacob Katz, who presented Rashi as not only a commentator but also a religious and social thinker in his own right, particularly with regard to his comments about “the nations” of the world. As plausible as this may seem, there have been others who have seen things differently. Among the most influential of them was the great Israeli Bible teacher Nechama Leibowitz, who always presented Rashi as responding to a specific textual problem. Of course, there is not really a decisive way to resolve this dispute, but it is useful to see Grossman’s approach in action.

Grossman shows three instances in which Rashi emphasizes that the world depends on Israel’s acceptance of the Torah. In his comment to Exodus 32:16, “the tablets were God’s work” (or “occupation”), he writes:

It is like a person who tells his neighbor that his sole occupation is doing such and such; so, here, the Holy One blessed be He’s sole occupation is with [giving the] Torah [to Israel].

The world was created so that Israel would accept the Torah. This central idea is re-emphasized in at

least two other key moments in the commentary. Genesis 1:31 speaks of “the sixth day” (*yom ha-shishi*). Rashi remarks upon the “the”:

The Lord added “the” to “sixth day” [the definite article *heh*, which, as the fifth letter of the alphabet also signifies the number five] at the conclusion of the act of Creation to state that He conditioned them [all that had been created] on Israel’s acceptance of the five books of the Torah.

Grossman also invokes Rashi’s commentary to Psalms 40:6, “The wonders You have devised for us,” which Rashi, perhaps surprisingly, explains by saying that “For us you created your world.” Here, and elsewhere, Grossman reads Rashi as underlining his central values even when there is no exegetical problem to solve.

Ever since that summer with Dov Rappel in the Poconos, I have accepted this basic approach to reading Rashi. If the matter can be settled, and I am not at all sure that it can, one would need to conduct a systematic rereading of all the passages that the historians have pointed to as expressing Rashi’s specific theology. But it’s a subtle matter. Showing that some of the examples historians cite as Rashi’s expressing his own views may be grounded in the biblical text does not prove that all of them are. Moreover, we still have to account for Rashi’s rewriting or omitting earlier midrashic sources with differing views from those he included in his commentaries, as well as for his patterns of repetition. Until we have a thorough review of the data, it seems to me that the burden of proof is on the Bible scholars who deny the examples that Rappel, Katz, and especially Grossman have adduced to prove their case that Rashi was a thinker and teacher to his generation and, it turned out, to all generations. It is just possible that Rashi was so successful, especially in his Chumash commentary, because he made the text clear not only as a literary work but also as a religious survival manual for Jews living in a very Gentile world.

Given the importance of Grossman’s subject and book, we have to raise the question of the audience of this English translation. In light of the Hebrew words and other technical terms that are found throughout the book, a glossary would have been a good idea, as we find in the charming little volume Elie Wiesel wrote on Rashi for the Nextbook series, but this alone would not have done the trick, since Wiesel wrote with an American audience in mind, while Grossman wrote the Hebrew edition of this book with the educated Israeli reader in mind, which is not the same thing.

The Littman editors could have asked Grossman to adapt the book for the average American or British reader, but, admittedly, that would have been asking a lot, especially since Grossman had already produced three book-length treatments of Rashi. However, it becomes clear from reading almost any section of this admirable book that most English readers will lack the Jewish and scholarly literacy that the Israeli original took for granted. Educated readers who never heard of Rashi, or have only a very general notion of who he was, will quickly find themselves in a minefield of technical terms and learned allusions. What, such readers may wonder, is meant by the “covenant between the pieces,” Abram’s sealing of his covenant with

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The synagogue of Rashi in Worms, Germany, built in 1034 and destroyed in 1938. (Courtesy of Yad Vashem Photo Archive.)

God, in Genesis 15. Some key Hebrew terms, such as “*ma’aseh merkavah* and *ma’aseh bereshit*” (the first refers to Ezekiel’s terrifying vision of the divine chariot and esoteric mysteries of the divine

more generally, the second to the process by which the universe was created), are left untranslated, and Hebrew book titles abound. At one point, Grossman refers to the great 19th-century Judaica

scholar Leopold Zunz as “Zunz” without further specification, and his name is not in the index. The study of Judaism that Zunz pioneered is referred to as “*jüdische Wissenschaft*” but without explanation about what that was. All of this required editorial rethinking for an English-reading audience without broad Jewish learning.

In at least one instance such problems extend to the translation itself. As someone who has perpetrated enough howlers of his own over the years, I am aware of living in a glass house. Still, let the reader beware when he or she reads about “the edicts of 1096.” The Hebrew word *gezeira* does indeed mean a “decree” or “edict,” but the phrase *gezeirot tatnu* refers not to an edict issued somewhere in 1096 but rather to a divine “decree” that permitted, as it were, the horrific anti-Jewish riots or persecutions of 1096 in Germany that accompanied the launching of the First Crusade.

Such reservations, however, should not diminish the scholarly achievements of Avraham Grossman, to which this book attests on every page. A patient reading of *Rashi* reveals how its subject left “an indelible mark on Jewish culture . . . greater than that left by anyone else since the completion of the Talmud.”

Ivan G. Marcus is the Frederick P. Rose Professor of Jewish History at Yale University. He is the author of several books including *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press).

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Eden in a Distant Land

BY SOL STERN

The Rise of Abraham Cahan

by Seth Lipsky

Nextbook Schocken, 240 pp., \$26

In the 1950s I spent several summers at a Jewish children's camp called Kinderland located on the shore of Sylvan Lake, about 60 miles north of New York City. The camp, founded in 1924, was run by the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, a front group of the Communist Party USA. On the other side of the lake, about 500 yards away, was another Jewish children's camp called Kinder Ring, sponsored by the socialist Workmen's Circle. It was the middle of the Cold War and virtually no contact was permitted between the children of the two camps. Yet sometimes our rowboats passed each other in the middle of the lake. The kids from Kinder Ring called us "commies" and we returned fire by calling them "social fascists," a political term of art we learned from our elders. What the two camps had in common, though, was that the children were taught a smattering of Yiddish words and that each camp was connected to a daily Yiddish newspaper. Theirs was called the *Forverts* (Forward), and ours was the *Morgen Freiheit* (Morning Freedom).

It all seemed somewhat outdated and absurd, but what I didn't know at the time was that our battles at Sylvan Lake had their roots in a serious cultural and ideological conflict dating from the beginning of the last century. In one of the great mass migrations in history, roughly two million impoverished Jews arrived from Eastern Europe to build a new life in the United States. Half of these mostly Yiddish-speaking Jews settled in New York City, primarily on the Lower East Side. By their own efforts they created a democratic community life and a cultural renaissance. Great literature appeared in Yiddish and English, and a flourishing Yiddish theater emerged. In the 1920s, a half-dozen Yiddish daily newspapers, including the *Forverts* and the *Freiheit*, were regularly published in the city. From the grass roots, the new immigrants built a network of self-help social welfare organizations, militant trade unions, and political parties of the Left. It's no exaggeration to say that the cultural and political ferment in this one American city (and mostly in one neighborhood) not only profoundly influenced the history of the Jewish people but also had a positive impact on America's democratic institutions.

By far the most interesting and influential figure in this immigrant tapestry was the multi-talented Abraham Cahan. Cahan was 22 years old when he arrived on the Lower East Side in 1882 from the Lithuanian city of Vilna, then part of the Russian empire. Fifteen years later, he founded the *Forward*. Cahan became a highly acclaimed novelist in Yiddish and English, a friend of leading American writ-

ers, and one of the most influential leaders of the anti-Communist Jewish labor movement. Along the way he also managed to write a two-volume history of the United States in Yiddish.

Thus, there is cause for celebration that Seth Lipsky has now produced the rich biography Cahan de-

William Lloyd Garrison and Charles Dana. In his account of Cahan's political commitments, Lipsky relies on a deep knowledge of the ideological battles between socialists and communists, Zionists and Yiddishists that raged almost a century ago. Cahan's amazing life story encompasses all

It's intriguing to speculate on what role an eloquent leader like Cahan might have played in the Russian revolutions of 1906 and 1917.

serves. It's hard to imagine a better match of author and subject matter. Lipsky was a longtime reporter and editor for *The Wall Street Journal*, then became the editor of the revived English-language edition of the *Forward* in 1991 (the Yiddish-language *Forverts* still appears), and was the founding editor of *The New York Sun*. Like Cahan, he has printer's ink running through his veins.

Lipsky places Cahan in the pantheon of great American newspaper editors with a social justice agenda, alongside such historic figures as

of the vexing and often tragic aspects of the Jewish question in the 20th century—not the "Jewish Question" as understood by the leaders of Christian Europe, but rather the question of what was to be done about the Jewish plight in anti-Semitic Europe as it was debated by the Jews themselves.

Cahan received his early education in Vilna, a center of Jewish learning often referred to as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania." He attended a local *cheder*, yet also yearned for a broader secular education. At the age of 15 he began spending hours each day at the Vilna public library, reading the great Russian



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PROGRAM NOVÉ ČESKOSLOVENSKÉ... Fierlinger; Kopecký; Hájek (photog), et al, Prague: Vydavatelstvo Ministerstva Informací, 1945. First edition. Quarto. np. Illustrated wrappers. Manifesto of the newly formed post-war Czechoslovakian government. Profusely illustrated with 16 striking full-page duotone photomontages utilizing work by Hájek, Staněk, Pařík and others depicting Hitler's downfall, the Nazi threat, national defense, Czech brotherhood and elements of national advancement such as industrialization, food production and childhood education. The Kosický vládný program authorized equal citizenship for Czechs and Slovaks while revoking it from, and expelling, most Hungarians and Germans. It established constitutional rights, equality between men and women, and forbade racial discrimination. Graphic and historic. (11077) \$1750.

Svobodu nám vydobyla rudá armáda se spojenci, udržeti ji musíme všichni. (The Red Army with our allies has gained freedom for us and we must keep it). (detail)

novelists and dabbling in the fashionable philosophies of the day, including Marxism. “The Vilna public library became for me a temple of learning and inspiration,” Cahan later wrote.

Like many other young Jews facing a dismal future in Russia, Cahan was torn between the religious traditions of his parents and the allure of secular universalism and revolution. He couldn’t avoid responding to the rising violence directed against the Jews by the Tsarist authorities. At the age of 21 Cahan proclaimed himself a socialist and joined one of the clandestine underground groups plotting the overthrow of the monarchy.

It’s intriguing to speculate on what role an eloquent leader like Cahan might have played in the revolutions of 1906 and 1917 or which socialist party he would have aligned with had he remained in Russia. But after briefly toying with the Zionist ideal of building a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Cahan fell in love with America. “To go to America!” Cahan later wrote. “To re-establish the Garden of Eden in that distant land. My spirit soared. All my other plans dissolved. I was for America!”

The 22-year-old Cahan arrived in New York in 1882 and settled on the Lower East Side. Renting a room near the Bowery, he soon discovered that it would take lots of radical reform before his beloved America could qualify as a “Garden of Eden.” He could see and smell the grinding poverty into which the newly arriving waves of immigrants were thrown. Cahan himself found a job as a worker in a cigar factory, which also employed Samuel Gompers, the future leader of the American Federation of Labor. He immediately enlisted in the workers’ struggle to combat the exploitation and unsafe conditions in the workplace. As Lipsky recounts, Cahan gave speeches at workers’ meetings about Marx’s theory of “surplus value” and “the inevitability of the coming of socialism.” They were among the first socialist speeches given in Yiddish in America.

Lipsky shows how Cahan’s radical socialism emanated from his fears about the plight of the Jews—not only those who had made it to America, but also the vast number still suffering in Europe. Cahan believed that a socialist transformation of society would not only bring justice to all humanity, but would provide the only lasting solution to the endless persecution of the Jews. He was convinced that after the elimination of capitalism there could not be “an economic or political reason for anti-Semitism.” It would take almost half a century for Cahan to disabuse himself of this and other Marxist fantasies.

In addition to his socialist activism, Cahan honed his literary talents. Now completely fluent in English, he wrote articles about social and political issues for the official publication of the Socialist Labor Party, *The People*. As Lipsky nicely puts it, Cahan worked on creating socialism by day but dreamt of producing great literature by night. He began writing fiction for Yiddish newspapers and for English publications such as *Short Stories* magazine. One of his stories was noticed and praised by the great realist novelist William Dean Howells. In 1896, with Howells’s encouragement, Cahan brought out his first novel, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*.

All of Cahan’s diverse talents and political passions came together with the creation of the

Forward in 1897. Lipsky sees the founding of the *Forward* as one of the three events of that year that “changed the course of Jewish history”—the others being the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzer-

Below the agitprop headlines, Cahan was running serious critical journalism.

land (about which Theodor Herzl declared that “At Basel, I founded the Jewish State”) and the establishment of the socialist Jewish Bund in Eastern Europe.

Lipsky may be exaggerating here, but not in the way you might think. Herzl’s declaration at Basel would have been long forgotten were it not for the diplomatic efforts of Chaim Weizmann and the political leadership of David

The *Forward* was launched during the era of “yellow journalism” in which, according to Lipsky, “some fifty-eight dailies in New York alone jostled for attention.” To compete, Cahan blared out his paper’s mission with chutzpah that would make today’s tabloid editors blush. Best to let Lipsky, the admiring editor, describe Cahan’s first front page:

On April 22, 1897, the *Forward* jumped into this mix in full Marxist regalia, with the slogan “Workers of the World Unite!” at the top of its front page. The headlines of that first issue included “Blood Runs in Central Europe” (on the Turkish-Greek war), “Bravo Cubans!” (supporting the island’s resistance to Spain), and “From the Class Struggle: Locked-out Steamfitters are Holding Fast.”

The *Forward*’s combination of Marxism and sensationalism was meant to catch the working class Yiddish reader’s eye as he or she passed the newsstands or one of the hundreds of “newsies” who distributed the paper. But below the agitprop headlines, Cahan was running serious critical journalism. The paper’s editors and reporters were competing with figures such as Lincoln Steffens and Jacob Riis (both of whom had been early mentors of Cahan) in writing about the terrible conditions in the slums. Cahan himself contributed hundreds of articles on every imaginable social issue, from criticisms of capitalist economics to why it was acceptable for Jewish parents to allow their children to play baseball, which was one of

the first pieces in the paper’s popular advice column “Bintel Brief.”

Under Cahan, the *Forward* also became the place readers went to sample the greats of Yiddish literature written in America. Cahan regularly published popular writers such as Sholem Asch, Avraham Reisen, and Israel Joshua Singer, author of the best-selling *The Brothers Ashkenazi*. Eventually the younger of the Singer brothers, Isaac Bashevis, came on board in 1935. Some of the work that eventually won Singer the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978 originally appeared in the pages of the *Forward*.

While editing the *Forward* and continuing

to participate in socialist and labor politics, Cahan somehow found time to write more fiction. In 1919 he published his masterpiece, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, a novel of social realism which chronicles the life of a poor Jew who escapes from Russia and rises to financial success in capitalist



Top: The inaugural edition of the Forverts, April 22, 1897. (Courtesy of the Forward Association.) Bottom: Young “newsies” in New York waiting to sell the Forward, ca. 1913. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.)

Ben-Gurion to secure the Jewish State. The Bund was an important mass movement in Eastern Europe, but it failed in its quest to create a political foothold for Jewish socialism. By contrast, the *Forward* had an immediate, large, and lasting influence on Jewish and, as Lipsky shows, American life.

America, but loses his religion and his soul. The novel received widespread critical acclaim. H.L. Mencken wrote that “no better novel about the immigrant has ever been written, or is likely to be written.” After its publication, Cahan was pushed by some friends, including Mencken, to devote himself entirely to literature.

Instead, for the next two momentous decades Cahan worked relentlessly to make the *Forward* even more influential, not only in journalism but also in the wrenching debates among the Jews about how to respond to the three world-changing

democracies and was outraged by the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact. In a *Forward* editorial—written at a time when many Jewish leftists were still making excuses for Stalin—Cahan declared: “Stalin is Hitler’s partner in his setting the world in flames. Let us remember that. Let us pass it down to our children’s children.”

Cahan did not come to Zionism by theory but rallied to the Zionist cause out of a sense of Jewish solidarity. In 1925 he traveled to Palestine and wrote a long series of mostly positive dispatches for the *Forward* on the practical accomplishments



Abraham Cahan, 1937. From the New York World-Telegram and Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.)

political movements that emerged in the years between the two world wars: communism, fascism, and Zionism.

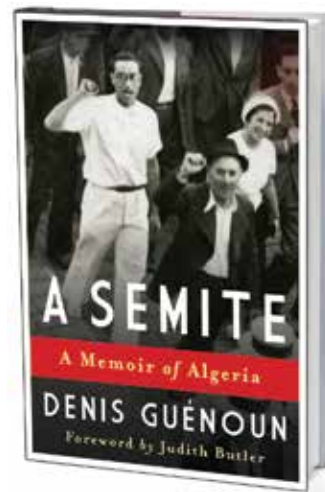
With other American radicals, Cahan initially greeted the Bolshevik revolution with sympathy. But Cahan soon grasped the nature of the new tyranny that the revolution had put in place (a fact-finding trip to Russia in 1927 helped). At a time when many on the Left, including the writers and readers of the *Freiheit*, were still moved by the romance of communism, Cahan increasingly used his paper’s enhanced resources and credibility—by the middle of the 1920s the *Forward*’s daily circulation figure had reached an astonishing 250,000—to describe the true nature of Soviet totalitarianism. He sent reporters to Soviet Russia and, ahead of most other daily newspapers, revealed details about the Siberian prison camps and mass starvation in Ukraine. In the estimate of the historian Richard Gid Powers (quoted by Lipsky) Cahan was “the most important Jewish anticommunist of the twenties.”

Cahan was just as prescient about the dangers of the emerging Nazi regime in Germany. He denounced the Munich agreement as a sellout of the

of the Jewish settlers in Eretz Yisrael. In 1929 the Palestinian Arabs revolted against the British Mandatory authority and carried out a massacre of religious Jews in Hebron. Cahan reacted with fury in the pages of the *Forward*, describing “savage Arab masses, incited by their own leaders and permeated with dark chauvinism—the root of all wars, of all misfortunes.” The paper also lashed out with scorn at the rival *Freiheit*, which, following the Soviet party line, called the Hebron slaughter a “revolt against British and Zionist imperialism.”

Working for the independence of Israel was Cahan’s last great cause. He died on August 31, 1951 at the age of 91. Ten thousand people turned out for the funeral on the Lower East Side. Eulogies were given by Ambassador Abba Eban, representing the young state of Israel; New York City’s Mayor Vincent Impellitteri; and other dignitaries. Representing President Harry Truman, U.S. Secretary of Labor Maurice Tobin told the mourners, “We should as Americans say ‘Thank God’ for the day Abe Cahan arrived in the United States.”

Sol Stern is a contributing editor of City Journal and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.



A Semite

A Memoir of Algeria

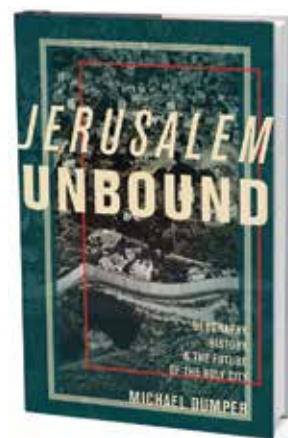
DENIS GUÉNOUN

Foreword by Judith Butler

Translated by Ann Smock and William Smock

“This is a complex engagement with the unique temporal, linguistic, and embodied qualities of family and cultural heritage. It is philosophically important and politically engaging, speaking to the necessities of repetition and distortion in the accuracies of memory, and historical truth. It is also a delicate prose work of exceptional literary quality, an important contribution to contemporary studies in trauma and testimony, and to the field of autobiography.”

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Dialectical Spirit

BY ALLAN NADLER

Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution

by Yehudah Mirsky

Yale University Press, 288 pp., \$25

Before his burial, while his body was still lying in state on the grounds of the Knesset—before his family even had the chance to begin mourning—the late Ariel Sharon was being vilified, not only in the Arab street, as a butcher and war criminal, but by some Israeli rabbis and parliamentarians, as a treacherous turncoat. Rabbi Baruch Marzel wrote that Sharon “will be inscribed for eternal damnation in the Book of Traitors to the Jewish people.” Orit Struk, a Knesset member from the Religious Zionist party, Ha-Bayit Ha-Yehudi (Jewish Home), went so far as to proclaim that Sharon’s 2006 stroke had been a “blessing,” Religious Zionist yeshiva students in Yad Bin-yamin mounted posters that read “Heartfelt Mazal Tov to Ariel Sharon on the Occasion of His Death,” and so forth.

One of the sickening ironies of this is that such sentiments came from ultra-nationalist Orthodox Zionists, commonly referred to in Israel as “*chardalim*” (an acronym for *haredim dati'im leumi'im* and a play on the Hebrew word for mustard), who claim discipleship of the saintly Rabbi Abraham Isaac ha-Cohen Kook. Kook was born in the Russian Pale of Settlement in what is now modern-day Latvia in 1865 and died in Jerusalem in 1935. He was the first chief rabbi of modern Israel and an irenic mystic who never once spoke ill of his religious and political adversaries, of which he had many who publicly defamed him for decades.

As Yehudah Mirsky documents in his luminous, learned, and uncannily timely new biography, even after Kook was burned in effigy by the youth of Agudath Israel on Purim 1932, denounced by his ultra-Orthodox rabbinical opponents as a demon, and defamed on billboards in Jerusalem that depicted him as “*Oto ha-Ish* [the rabbinic euphemism for Jesus], the *min* [sectarian, or heretic], hypocritical, flattering, like a pig rummaging in trash and raising a stink,” he remained magnanimous. As Mirsky writes, Kook “not only never responded in kind, but instead did favors, wrote letters of recommendation and fund-raising appeals, and arranged favors and benefits, for even some of his bitterest foes.”

Which is not to say that Rav Kook refrained entirely from expressing his disapproval of the Old World and Old Yishuv rabbis. One early and particularly stunning reproach documented by Mirsky earned him not only these anti-Zionist rabbis’ deep disdain; it led to the banning and public burning of the remarkable 1920 book *Orot* (Lights) in which it is found. In the course of praising the spirit of the young, Zionist pioneers of the New Yishuv, Kook had written:

The exercises with which young Jews in the Land of Israel strengthen their bodies so that they may be vigorous sons of the nation better the spiritual strength of the heavenly tzaddikim . . . This sacred service [of exercise] elevates the divine spirit higher and higher . . .”

There followed a torrent of what Mirsky terms “frontal attacks” on Rav Kook, including the accu-

Brenner concluded his critique with a complaint that will resonate with many who have tried their hands at reading Kook’s works: “Why all the verbiage, rabbi, why?”

sation that he was a demonic sorcerer. His rabbinical enemies proclaimed, “We are at war with A.Y. Kook!” True to his character, Kook never responded to their call to arms.

So, Rav Kook’s self-proclaimed contemporary dis-

Ben-Gurion, the Zionist enterprise was always pragmatic and political; the settlements were about strategically defensible borders, not the apocalypse.

Inspired by Rav Kook’s extensive writings about the mystical, if concealed, messianic significance of Zionism’s pioneers, his disciples insisted, as he had, that secular Zionists—however unaware—were nothing less than the leading protagonists in the great drama of the final redemption of Israel and the

world. These eschatological fantasies were faithfully and, it has always seemed to me, accurately received from the teachings of both Rav Kook the elder and his son. Mirsky’s rich and compelling presentation of Kook’s life and thinking is intended, at least in part, to prove otherwise.



Rabbi Abraham Kook, center, at Yeshiva D'Montreal during a visit to the United States and Canada, 1924.

ciples clearly have not inherited his generosity of spirit, but what of their mystical-messianic interpretation of Israeli political and military history? This ideology was powerfully articulated by Rav Kook’s son, the late Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook, particularly after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and it led his followers to hail Sharon as “the father of the settlements” and later, after the disengagement from Gaza, to damn him as one who had rejected God and his Messiah. The decision to disengage from Gaza was, in their starry eyes, immeasurably worse than an act of political sabotage; in reversing course Sharon was throttling the course of redemption. What they were incapable of understanding, let alone accepting, was that for Sharon, as for most of Israel’s secular leaders since David

Rav Kook’s embrace of secular Zionists was rooted in his conviction that they were the unknowing precursors of the messianic era and that their rebellion against the Jewish religion was, counter-intuitively enough, the very proof of the holiness of their enterprise. Secular Jewish socialists, atheists, anarchists, and especially Zionists played an essential role in the chaos and rebellion that, according to rabbinic tradition, will characterize the era preceding the final redemption. So while it seems entirely lost on today’s *chardalim* that their revered master was subjected to the same kind of

abuse following his death in 1935 that they heaped on Sharon—a sure sign that they have lost sight of Rav Kook’s ethics—it remains less clear that they have strayed all that far from his larger worldview.

But these two matters—Rav Kook’s personal ethics and his theology—ought not be separated. Mirsky makes abundantly clear that it was more than Kook’s innately peaceful character that allowed him always to rise above the political fray, regardless of how nastily *ad hominem* his opponents became, desisting from speaking ill of the living or the dead; it was also his theology, at whose core lies an overwhelming mystical monism, a pervasive vision of the unity, and the divinity, of humanity. Mirsky’s careful reading of Kook’s vast body of writings



Dairy cows.

yields a portrait of a truly unique rabbi and mystic, particularly in his radical, at times shocking, embrace of modernity and his ability to see those damned as “heretics” by most of his rabbinical colleagues as heroes in a redemptive epic that would usher in the end of days. In shaking the foundation of the Jewish exile and its ossified religious institutions, they were unconsciously preparing the path that would be trodden by the Messiah’s donkey.

As Mirsky writes of Kook’s view of the rebellious generation that gave birth to the New Yishuv in Palestine:

This is the generation that the Zoharic literature calls “good within and rotten without.” They are he [Kook] says, *chamoro shel mashiach*, literally, the donkey on which the Messiah will ride into Jerusalem, according to the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9).

This applied not only to the Zionists; Kook extended this embrace to include Jewish socialists and even anarchists:

‘The inner soul vivifying the socialist doctrine,’ he wrote, ‘is the light of the practical Torah.’ . . . Anarchism, he continued, is rooted even higher on high, in the very ideal of *devekut*, cleaving to God, and conversely is further today from its sacred self-consciousness, and wild. The struggles of modern heretics—principled, idealistic, antibourgeois, ethical nationalists willing to sacrifice themselves in the jails of the tsar and the harsh swamps of Palestine—make a new revelation all its own, dissolving the familiar division of religious and secular, the spectrum separating out the wavelengths of the divine light.

Which is not to say that Kook accepted modern secular Jewish ideologies’ own self-understanding; rather, he viewed them through his unique, radically monistic, kabbalistic worldview.

Kook’s embrace of heretics was, as Mirsky allows, provisional, and his engagement with them conditioned by his certainty that if not they them-

selves, these secularists’ descendants and followers would ultimately see the sacred dimension of their lives’ work and return to God and his Torah. Mirsky is, at times, perhaps a bit too indulgent of such dialectics. For example, at the conclusion of his treatment of Rav Kook’s famous decision allowing the sale of land in Israel during the sabbatical year so that it could be worked by Jewish farmers, he writes:

The *shemittah* controversy crystallized Rav Kook’s view of the New Yishuv and his place in it. The enterprise was sacred on its own secular terms. Its ultimately provisional secularism could, at the present historical moment, make its own claims as an essential feature of Israel’s rebirth, a rebirth that would free Israel and the world itself from the constricting notion of religion itself. And it was his responsibility to bring that secular revolution to self-consciousness, to accommodation, and, ultimately, to union with the tradition it was struggling fiercely to reject.

The problem with Mirsky’s formulation is that—like so much of Rav Kook’s own writings—it is self-contradictory. Secularism cannot be said to be sacred; it certainly cannot be both “sacred on its own . . . terms” or “essential” and, at the same time, “provisional,” lacking “self-consciousness,” and destined to become its very opposite, namely religious. Mirsky, of course, knows this. Late in the book’s final chapter, he writes:

He was, in characterizing the Old Yishuv and the New as root and branch of the same, sacred

élan vital, describing them in ways dramatically at odds with the self-perception of each.

Unsurprisingly then, the more perceptive among those heretics whom Kook valorized were not flattered by his provisional praise.

One of the most original contributions of Mirsky’s book is his adroit treatment of the dialogue which Rav Kook, alone among the rabbis of Palestine—or Europe for that matter—initiated with major secular Jewish writers and intellectuals of his day. His presentation of Kook’s meetings and exchanges with leading Hebrew literary figures, from Bialik and Ben-Yehuda to Brenner and Berdichevsky (to mention only those whose surnames happen to begin with the letter “B”), makes for riveting reading. While Kook’s exchanges with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda were the most acrimonious and his friendship with Chaim Nachman Bialik the warmest, the perennially mordant Yosef Chaim Brenner’s reaction to Kook’s warm assessment of his generation is the most riveting.

As Mirsky writes, “Brenner refused to be seduced” by the rabbi’s praise; he saw right through Kook’s paternalistic notions about his hidden holiness. And he had no patience whatsoever for Kook’s maddeningly verbose literary style and baffling, unsystematic dialectical thinking. Brenner described Kook’s writings as “riddled with confusion and contradictions,” and he derided Kook’s essay, *Derekh ha-Techiya* (The Path to Rebirth) as “essentially a path to nowhere, the fruit of the mind of a foggy, metaphysical soul.” Brenner concluded his critique with a complaint that will resonate with many who have tried their hands at reading Kook’s works: “Why all the verbiage, rabbi, why?”



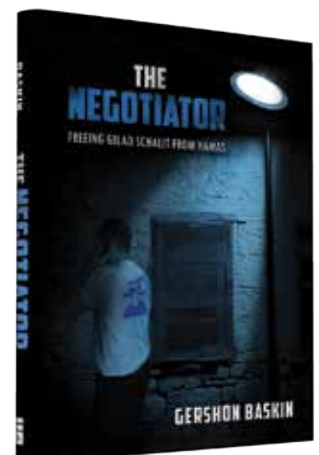
One man’s determination to succeed where official mediators had failed.



GERSHON BASKIN is a social and political activist. He served as the unofficial secret back channel between Hamas and the Israeli government to secure Gilad Schalit’s release from captivity.



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Brenner was particularly caustic regarding Kook's theological mix of kabbalistic monism and messianism with dialectical historicism, in which the end of days will witness the ultimate synthesis when "the old will be renewed, and the new will become holy." The latter part of this, Kook's most widely cited epigram, anticipates, clearly requires, the religious awakening, the *teshuva*, of the secular Zionist pioneers. Mirsky explains that Brenner faulted Kook for trying to unite what cannot be united, leading him to reject Kook's messianic synthesis:

The exalted . . . worldview expressed in all the "seedlings" of Our Master Rabbi Abraham Ha-Cohen Kook in this book is, for those of us *who stoop to live and look* [Psalms 113:6], nonsense. "Our resting place" is not "only in God," and what is more, we don't know a resting place and we don't even look for one anymore . . .

Brenner was brutally frank in his rejection of Kook's casting him and those like him ("souls of chaos," Kook called them) into his quasi-Hegelian apocalyptic drama: "with syntheses like these," he wrote, "we are better off wandering in the anti-theses of the dusk."

Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky evinced similar frustrations in reaction to Rav Kook's opposition to universal suffrage in a 1919 ruling that prohibited women from participating in the elections for the New Yishuv's governing council:

We've given in to clericalism at war with the equality of women . . . We've given in to the prohibitions of geniuses whom nobody in the world . . . knows who or what they are, or the scientific works of R' Kook, the typical literary production of some auditor-student, half-educated and undigested.

Kook remained as magnanimous towards his secular critics as he was with his Orthodox enemies. Mirsky points out that Kook knew what Brenner thought of him and records a conversation in which Kook conceded that "he spoke well, the one who said my soul is torn."

In addition to Mirsky's rich exploration of Rav Kook's exchanges with secular thinkers, the other original dimension of his book is his attempt to unpack the notebooks that constituted Kook's spiritual diaries during the second decade of the 20th century, to which he devotes the book's third chapter. Due to their discursive, subjective, spontaneous, and disorganized nature, this is a terribly difficult task. Unfortunately, it yields nothing even approaching a coherent worldview, let alone a systematic theology.

Mirsky cannot evade the pervasively inchoate nature of the notebooks, observing that, "Again and again Rav Kook returns to this question of election and the universal, and never really resolves it," and allowing that Kook's search for finding the divine light in all things constituted an attempt "to square a seemingly endless numbers of circles." Finally, he cites Kook himself despairing on account of the confusion generated by the flashes of feelings and torrent of thoughts that flow over him, overwhelming any possibility of coherence and clarity: "Why can't I write the depth of my thoughts straightforwardly, without confusion, without over-complication, but words as they are . . ."

Mirsky concludes that, "The deeper he plumbed

his own depths, the higher he vaulted toward God, and the further and further he went from that without which one cannot formulate law, theology, or even a simple sentence, namely structure."

In a marvelous article, the late Marvin Fox argued decades ago that Kook was neither a philosopher nor a kabbalist and is best appreciated rather as a mystical poet, whose thought and writings defy systemization. The one body of writings that, I would argue, is an exception to this basically correct assessment are Kook's halakhic responsa, as they reflect normative and concrete stances he took on historical matters facing the New Yishuv. Moreover, Rav Kook's theology can be



Stamp issued in honor of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, ca. 1930. (Courtesy of The Leiman Library, New York.)

seen undergirding many of his legal positions.

Mirsky deals with three halakhic controversies in which Rav Kook became embroiled as rabbi of Jaffa, then Jerusalem and as chief rabbi: his encouragement to use *etrogim* from the Land of Israel on Sukkot, his permission of sesame-seed oil on Passover, and, most famously, his decision to allow the sale to Gentiles of farming land in Israel during the sabbatical year. In all three cases, Kook emerges as a lenient jurist whose primary interest is enabling the New Yishuv to prosper economically. But Kook was hardly a consistently liberal halakhist. The controversial permission he issued regarding the sale of land to allow Jewish farmers to work during the sabbatical year did not originate with him, as Mirsky allows. What he fails to mention is that the religious leader of the Religious Zionist Mizrahi party, Samuel Mohilever, issued a far more thorough opinion, which allowed Jews to perform even biblically prohibited labors during the sabbatical year, something that Kook forbade, recommending instead that Gentiles perform them.

Mirsky does not discuss two other major halakhic decisions, both of which call into question the extent of Kook's universalism, as well as his celebrated embrace of secularists. In an extensive debate with the American Mizrahi rabbinic sage Chaim Hirschensohn and his Sephardic counterpart, Ben-Zion Uziel, Kook opposed Jewish farmers of the Yishuv milking cows on the Sabbath, as well as performing autopsies on the bodies of Jews. In both cases, Kook again advised employing Gentiles, while his interlocutors objected that the old *Shabbes-Goy* legal fiction violated the Zionist work ethic and was a regression to *galuti*, or exilic, ways. It is somewhat surprising that Mirsky recounts the cute and widely told apocryphal tale of Rav Kook's first visit to the New Yishuv's agricultural settlements, during which he looked into the fields and supposedly

declared, "Look! A Jewish cow!" but omits addressing his historical and more repercussive ruling about who should milk those Jewish cows on the Sabbath.

While throughout his book Mirsky emphasizes the universalistic impulses that constantly competed with Kook's passionate Jewish nationalism, it is quite evident that at the end of this dizzying dialectic, the latter emerged supreme. To be sure, Mirsky is not entirely uncritical of Kook. Among the most disturbing instances of Kook's Jewish chauvinism was his assessment of the carnage of the First World War—which he spent in England—as an historically necessary sacrifice whose most important product was the Balfour Declaration and the Jewish state it would finally realize. Troubled by this "deeply disturbing" perspective, Mirsky writes that Kook's "seeing a redemptive end in the terrible suffering of the war [is] a sentiment that would not have been much comfort to the dead and maimed in the trenches."

Mirsky notes with understandable disapproval the selective readings and consequent misuses of Kook's messianic Zionist theology by his contemporary disciples in the National Religious camp. Nonetheless, a strong argument can be made that their militant ideology, their disdain for Gentiles as well as their paternalistic perception of secular Zionists

and the institutions of the Jewish state, from the Knesset to the army, as unwitting instruments of redemption, are almost inevitable applications of Rav Kook's messianic nationalism.

In attempting to draw a clear distinction between Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, Zvi Yehudah, Mirsky depicts the latter as "unable or unwilling to maintain his father's exquisite dialectical balances," concluding that "Rav Kook had essentialized the nation, and Zvi Yehudah had essentialized the state." The problem is that, having died 13 years before there was a Jewish state, all Rav Kook had to contend with was the nation. Moreover, Kook's ideas about the nation were limited to the transitory moment of the "birth-pangs of the Messiah" in which he lived. It is eminently clear that the state about which he dreamed, and which he depicted as a return to Mount Sinai, would be a theocratic kingdom in and through which all of the messianic biblical prophecies would be realized.

Of the many in Israel today who claim his mantle, none can be fairly considered to be carrying on Rav Kook's legacy. And this is at least in part because it is almost impossible to discern what that legacy was. His mystically infused teachings are so radically idiosyncratic and deliberately—often maddeningly—unsystematic as to be entirely inhospitable to any ideological or theological categorization. Nonetheless, I remain unconvinced, despite Mirsky's erudite efforts in this excellent book, that Rav Kook's latter-day disciples among the *chardalim* have strayed all that far from their master's mystical vision.

Allan Nadler is professor of comparative religion at Drew University. Currently on leave from Drew, he is teaching Jewish studies at McGill University and is rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Montreal.

Original Sins

BY RONALD RADOSH

Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict

by John B. Judis

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 448 pp., \$30

The jacket of journalist John Judis' new book features a photo of Harry Truman, placed so that only one of his eyes stares out from the cover. This is probably meant to signify the president's failure to see clearly the morass into which his misguided Middle Eastern policy would ultimately lead the United States. But Truman is guilty, according to Judis, not only of a failure of perception. He deserves blame for lending his nation's support to a movement that was most unworthy of it.

Genesis isn't a rant, but it is a profoundly anti-Zionist book. Judis bitterly denounces Zionism as a "settler-colonialist" movement, employing an all-too-familiar term derived from what his colleague at *The New Republic* Leon Wieseltier rightfully terms "the foul diction of delegitimation, the old vocabulary of anti-Israel propaganda." The movement's fundamental and deplorable aim, he writes, was "to conquer and not merely live in Palestine." (Judis dedicates his book to "my colleagues, past and present, at *The New Republic*," not all of whom are likely to be touched by the gesture.)

With the Balfour Declaration, "the British and Zionists had conspired," as Judis crudely puts it, "to screw the Arabs out of a country that by the prevailing standards of self-determination would have been theirs." Judis doesn't deny that Jews had a right to settle in Palestine, but he reiterates many times his conviction that they should have been prepared to live there as a minority among an Arab majority. The only Zionists for whom he has any real tolerance are those who eschewed the idea of Jewish sovereignty and sought nothing more than a binational state. The Zionists who upset him the most are those who succeeded in the past and are still succeeding in obtaining the support of the American government for their supposedly unjust political aims.

It is above all to counteract what Judis regards as these people's nefarious influence that he has devoted years to writing his book. One can't help but wonder, however, why it took him so long. His overview of the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict and his account of America's part in this history are virtually devoid of original research and, for the most part, go over well-trod ground, covered by many writers over the years, including me. Nor is there anything new in his attack on Zionism, which echoes the arguments (as well as the deceptions) of the movement's many opponents over the past century. In fact, if *Genesis* were not the work of a staff writer and editor at *The New Republic* and put out by a major publisher, there would be no

particular reason to pay any attention to it.

Some of the book's many weaknesses are due to the fact that Judis doesn't really possess the command of his subject that he pretends to have. His narrative is full of the sort of errors and omissions that abound in polemics disguised as history. Some of them are relatively minor, such as his drastic reduction of the

fears about Zionist intentions." What Judis fails to note is, to quote Walter Laqueur's *A History of Zionism*, that "Jabotinsky wrote in his programme that in the Jewish state there would be 'absolute equality' between Jews and Arabs, that if one part of the population were destitute, the whole country would suffer." (One suspects that Judis is aware of

Judis pounces, when he can, on any reference on the part of a Zionist leader to the transfer of the Palestinian Arab population to some other territory.

number of First Aliyah settlers on hand in Palestine in 1884 from many hundreds to "about a score" and his postponement by two years of the date that Baron Edmund de Rothschild began extending financial assistance to these people. More revealing, perhaps, of his failure to do his homework is his statement that "Palestine was quiet during World War II." While he knows that the "Stern Gang" staged terrorist attacks against the British during the war, he seems to be utterly unaware of the Irgun's revolt in 1944 (or, for that matter, of any of its activities during the next couple

these things, for it is Laqueur himself who heads the list of people he thanks in his acknowledgments for supplying him with reading material.) While Judis pounces, when he can, on any reference on the part of a Zionist leader to the transfer of the Palestinian Arab population to some other territory, Judis makes no mention of the fact that Jabotinsky vociferously opposed any such notion.

It is Jabotinsky's people that Judis blames, too, for the descent of Palestine into violence in 1929. In the midst of a year-long dispute over the Western Wall in

Jerusalem, several hundred members of the Revisionist youth group "shouting 'The wall is ours!' and carrying the Zionist flag, marched to the mufti's home, where they held a large demonstration. That set off a succession of Arab demonstrations that degenerated into large-scale riots." What Judis conveniently neglects to describe fully, however, is the central role the owner of the house in question, the Grand Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, had in stirring things up. He didn't just convene international conferences, as Judis notes. Throughout the 1920s, he distributed *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and regularly taught hatred of the Jews. In 1929, as Efraim



President Harry Truman and Henry Grady at a dinner, October 1952. (Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)

of years, except for the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946, which he mentions in passing, without explaining in any way).

If Menachem Begin altogether escapes Judis' notice, his mentor, Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, comes in for more than his share of criticism. Jabotinsky's defense in the 1920s of a militant "iron wall" policy, which rested on the assumption that "the Jews would succeed in gaining Palestine only by defeating, or intimidating, the Arabs militarily," confirmed, he writes, "the Arab population's worst

Karsh has shown, he incited a youth rally to unleash "a tidal wave of violence." (Judis is consistent, one might note, in his protection of the Palestinian Arab leader's soiled reputation, touching only very lightly on his later collaboration with the Nazis, which seems to be deplorable in his eyes mostly because his "identification with Hitler's Germany had allowed these Zionists to reframe their own role in Palestine and on the world stage to avoid any taint of imperialism or settler colonialism.")

Judis is scarcely any friendlier to the Zionists of the Left than he is to those of the Right. In his thoroughly

tendentious overview of the movement's formative years, the only Zionists who earn his commendation are those who restricted their goals to the establishment of a Jewish cultural center in Palestine and were content with "being a minority in a binational state." He admiringly traces the efforts of Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and others to implement a non-statist Zionism, up to the last possible minute—May of 1948. He acknowledges, however, that everyone

But what does justice entail, in this case, in the eyes of a man who regards the very establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a profound injustice?

except a handful of Arab intellectuals ignored what he himself describes as their utopian proposals. Only before the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, he concludes, was it at all likely that the ground could have been prepared for "a majority Arab state with a vibrant Jewish minority." True, Judis cautiously notes, "Such a nation would not have been free of conflict." And at that anyone with knowledge of the fate of religious minorities in the Arab world in the 20th century can only laugh. The notion that a Jewish minority could ever have enjoyed security in such a polity is entirely ludicrous.

After devoting Part I of his book to the depiction of political Zionism as an unjust cause, Judis briefly recounts in Part II the history of the Zionist movement in the United States up to the end of World War II. In Part III, which constitutes more than half of the book, he deals with the "Truman years," during which, as he puts it, "the pattern of surrender to Israel and its supporters began."

Judis' narrative of this last period follows the same trajectory as my wife's and my recent book *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, which he credits with being "the latest and most complete blow-by-blow account of what happened" at that time. Yet I'm afraid that we see the same facts somewhat differently. We develop the story of how Truman came to accept the existence of a Jewish state in the making, while Judis writes of the tragedy he believes took place when Truman ignored those in the State Department who favored a more pro-Arab policy and yielded to Zionist pressure.

The greatest misdeed of the American Zionists, according to Judis, was their sabotaging of the so-called Morrison-Grady Plan. The outcome of joint British and American investigations and deliberations with regard to the Palestine problem, it called in July of 1946 for the division of Palestine into two partially self-governing provinces—one Jewish and one Arab—with a British-controlled central government. Jerusalem and the Negev would be under the direct jurisdiction of the British Mandatory power, which would maintain control over defense, foreign affairs, taxation, and immigration—following the admission of 100,000 Jewish wartime refugees into the country.

The Zionists rightfully noted that this plan gave them only 1,500 square miles under tight federal rule, less than what had been offered to them by the Peel Commission in 1937. President Truman, for his part, thought Morrison-Grady might solve the Palestine problem, but was quickly opposed by Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York and by

James G. McDonald, the former League of Nations high commissioner for refugees, who told Truman if he accepted this plan, "you will be responsible for scrapping the Jewish interests in Palestine." In the United States Senate, there was strong bipartisan opposition to the plan, led by Wagner and by "Mr. Republican," Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio.

Judis again and again blames the Zionists for having thwarted American support for the Morrison-

Grady plan. But how much would it have mattered if they had acted differently? The Arabs, for their part, not only rejected Morrison-Grady but refused to consider subsequent British proposals that were even more favorable to their position. When the British, at the beginning of 1947, "tilted markedly to the Arabs," as Judis puts it, and presented a plan that would lead in five years to what would have been a unitary state under Arab majority rule, "the Arabs, who were unwilling to compromise even on 100,000 immigrants, also rejected it unconditionally." They refused, in fact, even to enter into negotiations over the plan, since they refused to meet at that point with any Jews, from Palestine or anywhere else. It was their own leadership, no less than American Zionists, that stood in the way of their attainment of their goals.

Judis does lament the Palestinian Arabs' failure to take advantage of "genuine concessions," but he will not condemn them for it, for they were, in the end, holding out for what he believes was rightfully theirs: immediate and untrammelled sovereignty in their own land. Nor, in the final analysis, will he condemn Harry Truman for failing to create a binational or federated Palestine. He could only have done so, Judis says, "through credibly threatening and, if necessary, using an American-led force to impose an agreement upon the warring parties. And it might have taken years (as it has in the former Yugoslavia) to get the Jews and Arabs to accept their fates, and it still might not have worked."

More surprisingly, Judis won't even condemn the post-war Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion for being as resistant as he was to compromise.

He was, after all, still leading the Zionist movement in the shadow of the Holocaust. While the Nazi defeat discredited political anti-Semitism in much of Europe and in the United States, that was by no means evident in 1946. The Jews, as far as Palestine's Zionists were concerned, were still engaged in a war of survival.

With these comments, Judis seems to be belatedly and inconsistently opening the door to a justification of political Zionism. But if so, he doesn't open it very wide. However great the wrongs inflicted by Europeans and others on the Jews, he immediately insists, "the Zionists who came to Palestine to establish a state trampled on the rights of the Arabs who already lived there."

To Judis, this is the wrong that is most in need of universal acknowledgment. Not the decades-long war of Israel's enemies "to push the Jews into the

sea" (or in its modern equivalent, to "liberate Palestine from the river to the sea") but the Jews' desire to have a state of their own in territory representing less than 0.02 percent of the land mass of the Arab Middle East. To atone for this wrong, Judis believes, one of the principal guilty parties, the United States, should change its overall orientation. "If America has tilted in the past toward Zionism and toward Israel, it is now time to redress that moral balance" by making sure that the Palestinians "get treated justly."

But what does justice entail, in this case, in the eyes of a man who regards the very establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a profound injustice? Would enough justice be attained if a two-state solution were reached? Or does justice require, as some anti-Zionists and post-Zionists proclaim, the dissolution of the state of Israel and its replacement by a unitary state in all of Palestine as Judah Magnes once advocated? The last paragraphs of Judis' final chapter highlight the problem of the Palestinian refugees. Does he think that justice entitles all of them to a "right of return"? Does he look forward to the day when they, in their millions, together with the Arabs currently living in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza will constitute the large majority of the population of the unitary state that will replace Israel?

Genesis does not contain Judis' answers to these questions. In a piece published on the *The New Republic* website in January 2014, however, he is more forthcoming. If a "federated or binational Palestine" was "out of the question in 1946," he writes, "it is even more so almost 70 years later. If there is a 'one-state solution' in Israel/Palestine, it is likely to be an authoritarian Jewish state compromising all of British Palestine. What remains possible, although enormously difficult to achieve, is the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel." Thus, without ever acknowledging explicitly that a Jewish state has any real right to exist, Judis tacitly accepts Israel as a fixture on the scene. But he does so grudgingly. Indeed, in *The New Republic* piece he insists that Truman and his State Department were right to be apprehensive about the way things were unfolding in the late 1940s: "their underlying concern—that a Jewish state, established against the opposition of its neighbors, would prove destabilizing and a threat to America's standing in the region—has been proven correct."

Judis clearly regrets that a Jewish state was ever established. Whether Israel, in the course of its 65-year history, has any great achievements to its credit, or whether it has ever enhanced America's position in the Middle East, are not questions of any real interest to him. What he wants above all is to see his own country make amends for America's past support of Zionist settler-colonialism's sinister project of migration to Palestine, launched "with a purpose of establishing a Jewish state that would rule the native Arab population." He has now done his own little bit to make this happen by writing a book that often presses history out of shape and into the service of his aspirations.

Ronald Radosh is adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute and a columnist for PJ Media. He is co-author, with Allis Radosh, of *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, which won the Gold Award in 2009 of *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* as the best book on the United States and the Middle East.

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Politics and Prophecy

BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel

by Ari Shavit

Spiegel & Grau, 464 pp., \$28

Ari Shavit is one of Israel's most prominent journalist-prophets. The fact that his new book, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*, has been published first in English indicates that the audience in this case is less his countrymen than the English readers of the diaspora. If the subtitle of the book is banal, its title is suggestive, for *My Promised Land* is very much about Shavit: his family, his experiences, his views. The book has been received, if not as prophecy, with remarkable encomia: Leon Wieseltier called it "an important and powerful book" in *The New York Times*; Franklin Foer of *The New Republic* said "this is the epic history that Israel deserves"; Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic* described the book as "beautiful, mesmerizing, morally serious."

In fact it is a good book, very well written and punctuated with fascinating stories, though it does not provide brilliant insights. Its achievement is, rather, to remind the reader, and especially the left-of-center Western reader, of the astonishing achievement that is Israel and of the difficult challenges it faces. Denunciations of Israel are easy; Israel's choices, Shavit says, were and are very, very hard. For this reason alone the book is valuable. Shavit's own biases—he calls himself a left-wing journalist—do not diminish, but most likely broaden, the appeal of the book.

Shavit's own story is not unique in Israel, but it is rare: He is a descendant not of poor Eastern European Jews who fled pogroms or managed to survive the Nazis, nor of poor Sephardim who fled the Arab lands after 1948, but of a prosperous British lawyer named Herbert Bentwich who headed an Anglo-Jewish delegation that visited the Holy Land in 1897. Under the inspiration of this brief, dramatic visit, in which he traveled from the port of Jaffa through late 19th-century Ottoman Palestine for 12 days, most of his children would make *aliyah*, with Bentwich following them in the 1920s. In the 1980s, after army service and university, his great-grandson Ari Shavit began to write in Israel's leading left-of-center periodical, *Ha'aretz*, and once in what may be ours, *The New York Review of Books*.

There is an amusing article in the blog-based website +972 about Shavit's columns called "Ari Shavit: Apocalypse Now, Apocalypse Forever," that surveys his work since 2006 and contains more than two dozen lines like this: "Israel in the summer of 2006 faces a state of emergency no less grave than the state of emergency in the summer of 1967" and "2007 will be a critical year." In 2008, he wrote, "On

the Syrian issue, we are in the eleventh hour," a year in which he also wrote that "This is a time of trial. Israel is faced with unprecedented challenges," and also that "There is a high probability that in 2009 or 2010, Israel will face a national test." In March 2011 he wrote that by that fall "a torrent of rebellion will strike Israel" from the Palestinian areas. On Iran, where he has been a clear voice about the rising

ry, hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews immigrated to Great Britain." This is simply untrue and even bizarre. Jewish refugees from Hitler totaled about 90,000 in the United Kingdom between 1930 and 1945, and in the last half of the 20th century the Jewish population there declined (as Shavit himself writes elsewhere in the book). In other cases he offers a value judgment that underlines the particular

Shavit's batting average isn't worse than that of the average journalist-seer—it may even be better—but it is fair to note how often he has been wrong.

threat, Shavit wrote in 2012, "it's totally clear that for Israel, 2012 is a critical year." As Yogi Berra says, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

Shavit's batting average isn't worse than that of the average journalist-seer—it may even be better—

point he wishes to make but seems inaccurate. Thus, when he visits the small community of Karmeit Yosef, which is in a lovely location halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, he writes that on this site of a former Palestinian village the inhabitants now "live a life of affluence" in "lavish homes." I've been there.



Herbert Bentwich, great-grandfather of the author, Ari Shavit. (Photo, right, courtesy of Sharon Bareket.)



but it is fair to note how often he has been wrong. And how often, in *My Promised Land*, apocalyptic language reappears. He writes of "the disintegration of the Israeli republic," a "state in chaos and state of chaos," of "core values disintegrated," and a Zionist movement that has "gotten almost everything wrong in recent decades." "Turmoil," he says, "is inevitable." Right or wrong, this kind of thing tends to lose its impact after a while.

In this volume, however, Shavit is wrong on some things that cannot easily be dismissed, especially since the occupational hazard of writing newspaper columns under deadline is absent. One's confidence in his scholarship, for instance, is shaken when he writes that, "in the latter part of the twentieth centu-

Americans would be struck by the gorgeous views but few would call the *typical* home there "lavish." He's stretching to make a point, and it forces one to wonder if there are other such stretches.

Sometimes, Shavit allows others to stretch. An example is the frequent repetition of the claim that all of the Palestinians who left in 1948 had been there for "hundreds of years." He quotes one Israeli Arab activist as telling him, "We are not like you. We are not strangers or wanderers or emigrants. For centuries we have lived upon this land . . ." Four pages later another tells him, "For hundreds of years we were here. From time immemorial." Shavit simply accepts this narrative, but as Bernard Lewis

writes in his book *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice*:

Clearly, in Palestine as elsewhere in the Middle East, the modern inhabitants include among their ancestors those who lived in the country in antiquity. Equally obviously, the demographic mix was greatly modified over the centuries by migration, deportation, immigration, and settlement. This was particularly true in Palestine, where the population was transformed by such events as the Jewish rebellion against Rome and its suppression, the Arab conquest, the coming and going of the Crusaders, the devastation and resettlement of the coastlands by the Mamluk and Turkish regimes, and, from the late nineteenth century, by extensive migrations both within and from outside the region.

There are good arguments that the economic success of the Yishuv, the pre-state Zionist settlement, attracted many Arabs from what are now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and elsewhere who were looking for jobs and a better life. The Arab population of what is now Israel rose very quickly in the half-century before 1948, especially in the Mandatory period. The historical issues are complex, as are the political ones, and Shavit can not be expected to settle them, but he might have at least mentioned them, especially in a book whose main purpose is said to be the expression of his love for and defense of Zionism.

In other cases Shavit uses historical material to make points that appear designed more to congrat-

ulate himself on his own courage than to achieve his stated goal of defending Israel and Zionism. A good example is his account of the "Lydda massacre" in 1948, a still controversial and in many ways very ugly episode during Israel's War of Independence. It's clear that the many thousands of Arab inhabitants of the town left their homes amid considerable violence and that many—scores, perhaps hundreds—were killed. The controversy is over whether this was a planned Israeli massacre, using lethal violence to drive the inhabitants out, or a terrible product of wartime violence and confusion.

Shavit gives Lydda a long chapter but it is not a fair presentation. "Lydda is our black box," he writes, "In it lies the dark secret of Zionism. The truth is that Zionism could not bear Lydda . . . If Lydda was to be, Zionism could not be. In retrospect it's all too clear." This is at best ahistorical; would there have been a "Lydda" in Shavit's larger sense had the Arab states not decided to declare war on Israel and destroy the Jewish settlement there? In narrower terms, would there have been a "Lydda" had not its residents, who had surrendered to Zionist forces, been misled by false news of Jordanian military reinforcement into attacking the Israelis? The Lydda episode was complex and controversial, but not in *My Promised Land*. Shavit published his Lydda chapter in *The New Yorker* magazine in October, just before his book came out, which was an odd decision. If the book is meant as a celebration of Israel, however chastened and sober, why choose this chapter for a million American readers, few of whom will read the rest of the book?

The events at Lydda were reconstructed and recounted by the Israeli historian Benny Morris in his

book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*, whose account has often been used by those he has called "Israel haters" to attack the Jewish State. In a 2004 newspaper op-ed about the events of 1948, he wrote:

It was an ugly business. Such is history. How can what happened be justified? In November 1947, the leadership of Palestine's Arabs had rejected the United Nations' plan to partition the country into a Jewish and an Arab state—and instead launched attacks on the Yishuv . . . to prevent the emergence of the state of Israel. These attacks snowballed into full-scale civil war. In May 1948, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq invaded the country to support their Palestinian "brothers" (or simply to seize chunks of Palestine for themselves). It was three years after the Holocaust. For Israelis, it was a war for survival; had they lost, there would have been, they had no doubt, a vast slaughter.

Shavit takes a very different tack. How, if all this is true, can one be a Zionist? By bravado laced with self-esteem. For him, Zionism, not the Arab attacks, was the source of tragedy. "I see that the choice is stark: either reject Zionism because of Lydda, or accept Zionism along with Lydda." Shavit chooses the latter, arguing that those who conducted the Lydda massacre "were right to get angry at the bleeding-heart Israeli liberals of later years who condemn what they did in Lydda but enjoy the fruits of their deed . . . If need be, I'll stand by the damned," he writes, "Because I know that if it wasn't for them, the State of Israel would not have been born . . . They

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did the dirty, filthy work that enables my people, myself, my daughter, and my sons to live.”

Eschewing the historical context Morris adduces, he basically accepts the Palestinian counter-narrative of the “naqba,” adopting a condemnation of Zionism itself, to which he then applauds himself for bravely remaining loyal.

Shavit has no solutions, prophetic or otherwise, and he is no optimist, neither about the Israeli Arab population’s views of the Jewish State nor of the possibility of peace.

And yet, Shavit is not wrong when he calls himself a defender of Zionism or sees his book in that light. For he does take on many of the myths that Israel’s critics and enemies have propagated, and he does make the case for a Jewish homeland—and not only the case as it stood a century ago, but the case as it stands today.

My Promised Land is a chronological tour, beginning with his great-grandfather Bentwich’s arrival in Jaffa in 1897 and describing the Palestine he found then. Chapter by chapter and decade by decade, Shavit takes us through the early years of the Yishuv, with its pioneers working under impossible conditions to plant a presence in harsh stony landscapes; then to the founding of the state, the incessant Arab attacks and terror, all of the wars, and the disillusionment that set in after 1973. He shows us the new Israel of the 1980s and 1990s, when a million Russians arrived, settlements began to expand in the West Bank, and the economy surged and millionaires and nightclubs began to appear. And he brings the reader to the present day and its challenges of peace with the Palestinians and Iranian nuclear weapons.

Shavit also has an eye for drama. He describes in detail the building of the early kibbutz Ein Harod, which began in 1921. The conditions were brutal. The kibbutzniks suffered unbearable summer heat while living in tents and risked malaria clearing the swamps. And Shavit shows us the kibbutz slowly beginning to take shape. They clear the field of rocks, channel a small stream, sow wheat and barley, plant a vegetable garden, and build a communal dining hall and clinic. Storms and disease strike, but they persevere and the kibbutz grows year after year. One day in the spring of 1926, they stop working early to listen to a visitor: Jascha Heifetz. As Shavit explains,

the world’s most renowned violinist recognizes the importance of their endeavor by giving a concert in their remote quarry . . . the best that secular Jewish Diaspora civilization has produced is about to pay homage to their audacious attempt to create a new secular Jewish civilization in the valley. Heifetz is Heifetz, but he is also Jascha, one of us. One who rose from the misery and despair of the Jewish past . . . One who has escaped the hopelessness of Eastern Europe and chosen America. So when this brilliant cousin chooses to acknowledge his fellow young Jews who are escaping what he escaped in a very different way and in a very different place, even the toughest among the Labor Brigade comrades are beside themselves.

Throughout the book Shavit paints dozens of portraits of individuals, starting with his great-grandfather, but continuing on to representative and important contemporaries, all of whom he seems to have interviewed. These portraits are a great strength of the book, for he allows these men and women to speak for themselves, and they are

eloquent speakers indeed (though one suspects that perhaps occasionally Shavit helps). One theme that emerges in these stories, quietly but with great force, is Shavit’s insistence that Zionism was not an ideological choice but a decision to grasp at survival no matter what the cost. He quotes one of the pioneers: “We were on our own. We left the past behind. We have cut ourselves off from all we were. We have

distanced ourselves from our previous identity and from those dearest to us.”

Professor Ze’ev Sternhell tells Shavit of his life in 1941 in Poland: “Then came the Actions. The ghetto was liquidated in stages, and each time it was a different sort of hunt. I remember when we ourselves were hunted.” The writer Aharon Appelfeld tells him, “I heard the Germans torturing my beautiful mother. I heard my mother screaming. I heard the Germans murder my grandmother and my mother.” The jurist Aharon Barak tells him, “my first memory is of the Holocaust . . . I remember machine guns mowing down Jews. I remember the Jews of my hometown being murdered en masse by the Nazis.” Louise Aynachi is from Iraq, where an uncle was in parliament and her father was a government official. She tells Shavit that “On the holiday of Shavuot, hundreds of Jewish apartments were ruined and hundreds of Jewish businesses looted. Torah books were violated, synagogues burned. Altogether, seven hundred Jews were wounded and one hundred and eighty murdered . . . Women were raped, infants killed.” Shavit interviews an elderly acquaintance named Anna



Pioneers of the Third Aliyah working the land, ca. 1921. (Courtesy of Shoshana Olshtein.)



Arabs and Jews packing oranges together in Revohot, mid-1930s. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.)

Spiegel, of whom he writes that she “was born in the Carpathian Russian town of Svalava in 1918. When the Germans invaded in the spring of 1944 she was a twenty-six-year-old beauty. A knock on the door, a yellow Jewish star, the herding of Jews into the local brick factory”—then Auschwitz.

But of course the Zionist settlement in Mandatory Palestine did not save very many of Europe’s Jews. By 1942 it was clear to the Zionist leaders in Palestine that Erwin Rommel’s drive east across North Africa would not reach Palestine. But just at that moment the news from Europe arrived, and for the Zionist leaders, “the significance of the Holocaust,” Shavit writes, “is threefold.”

It is a human catastrophe on a scale not seen since the Middle Ages. It is a Jewish catastrophe on a scale not experienced since the destruction of the Second Temple. And it is a Zionist catastrophe unlike any other. . . . Gone are the great Jewish masses that Zionism was designed to save. . . . For even if Hitler is defeated, he might still leave behind him a defeated Jewish people. With no Eastern European demographic backbone, Zionism becomes a bridgehead that no reinforcements will ever cross, protect, or hold. But [the Zionist leaders] turn disaster into mission.

Shavit quotes the early Zionist leader Yitzhak Tabenkin: “Every Hebrew boy in the Land of Israel now weighs as ten, as we have lost Jewish communities ten times as large as the Jewish community of Palestine.” Of all this Shavit is justifiably proud, as he is proud of how the new and vulnerable State of Israel absorbed the survivors:

In the first three and half years of the newly founded state . . . the number of immigrants (685,000) surpassed the number of those absorbing them (655,000), a percentage comparable to what would happen if twenty-first-century America took in 350 million immigrants in three and a half years.

And the burden the immigrant survivors carried was immense, as Shavit shows when he describes one housing project, Bizaron, near Tel Aviv, in 1957: “The families are small—no grandfathers, no grandmothers, no uncles or aunts. . . . Behind every living family lurks the shadow of the larger family that has ceased to exist.”

Shavit’s pride in the achievements of Zionism leads him to react with scorn to the theatrics of many of his fellow Israeli leftists. In discussions with leaders of the peace movement, he is tough: “you and the peace movement were always *against* . . . Protests. Demonstrations. Unlike the old Laborites, you never built anything . . . you never accepted the heavy responsibility of dealing with the complexity of Israeli reality.” He writes this while acknowledging, “The peace story is also my story.” “For upper-middle-class secular Ashkenazi Israelis like me,” Shavit says, “peace was not only a political idea . . . Peace was our religion.” “But,” he writes:

only when I turned thirty and began listening seriously to what Palestinians were actually saying did I realize that the promise of peace

was unfounded. It played a vital moral role in our lives, but it had no empirical basis.

As he very sharply puts it, “Regarding the occupation, the Left was absolutely right. It realized that occupation was a moral, demographic, and political disaster. But regarding peace, the Left was somewhat naïve. . . . It assumed that because peace was needed, peace was feasible.” So it is no surprise to him that ordinary Israelis lost patience: “As buses exploded on the streets of our cities, we kept singing the hymns of our imaginary peace.” So Shavit urges the end of the occupation, but acknowledges that it will not bring peace. “There will be no utopia here,” he writes; “There was hope for peace, but there will be no peace here.”

Shavit has no solutions, prophetic or otherwise, and he is no optimist, neither about the Israeli Arab population’s views of the Jewish State nor of the possibility of peace with the Palestinians—nor for that matter about the “Arab Spring” or the threat of Iran. Indeed he worries that the combination of these pressures will be too much for Israelis. He also worries about the divisions in Israeli society and the maintenance of national unity and morale. And on top of all these problems he sees diminishing Jewish numbers in the West, flagging enthusiasm for Israel among Western Jewish youth, and the decline of the American and Western dominance in the Middle East. “I wonder how long we can maintain our miraculous survival story. One more generation? Two? Three?”

And yet, he concludes, “Past experience is encouraging. Time after time we rose to the challenge,” from the early days of Zionism to the Arab revolt of the 1930s, to Israel’s wars and the intifadas; “when we came here, we performed wonders . . . we did the unimaginable.” And as he looks around the Israel in which his children are growing up he sees “a truly free society that is alive and kicking and fascinating.”

In the end, Shavit abandons the effort to see the future and simply embraces the Israeli present in its vital extremity:

The Jewish state does not resemble any other nation. What this nation has to offer is not security or well-being or peace of mind. What it has to offer is the intensity of life on the edge. The adrenaline rush of living dangerously, living lustfully, living to the extreme. If a Vesuvius-like volcano were to erupt tonight and end our Pompeii, this is what it will petrify: a living people.

This celebration of the actually existing Israel is what is most valuable about *My Promised Land*. In the final chapter, Shavit abandons the politics and the prophecy and writes as a citizen and a father. He lays down his pen and looks in amazement and appreciation at the society around him.

Elliott Abrams is currently senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He served as deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser in the administration of President George W. Bush. He is the author, most recently, of Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Cambridge University Press).



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Muslims and Jews in France

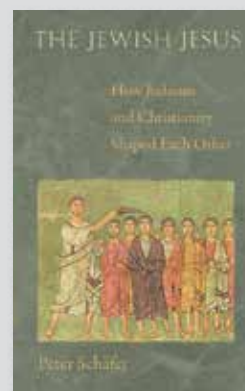
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Nation and Narrative

BY ALAN MINTZ

Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers Who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation

by Yossi Klein Halevi
HarperCollins, 608 pp., \$35

Now that the dust has settled on the enthusiastic reviews of Yossi Klein Halevi's account of seven paratroopers who helped liberate Jerusalem in 1967, we can better understand the nature of his achievement, as well as consider some of the troubling questions his story raises. *Like Dreamers* is a good read in the best sense. It wears its formidable research very lightly, and it has a brisk and compelling forward momentum despite the burden of crisscrossing back and forth among seven parallel lives. Indeed, because the story seems to tell itself, we are not likely to look under the hood, as it were, to identify the critical choices Halevi has made to make this narrative engine run. Those choices tell us a lot about what it takes to write seriously about Israel.

The decision to write a longitudinal narrative of seven figures, to begin with, is not self-evident and certainly not easy. When Anita Shapira wrote her magisterial books on Berl Katznelson and Yigal Allon, she had the advantage in each case of a single stable subject with a mountain of personal and public papers. Amos Elon had another kind of advantage when he wrote his authoritative *The Israelis: Founders and Sons*; he could range over the whole epic story of Israel picking and choosing his examples. Although Halevi's choice to write a limited collective portrait entails real challenges, the pay-offs are substantial. He has taken on the burden of making us care enough about the lives of seven men to keep track of their exploits as he tirelessly turns from one to the other. (His compositional craft in managing hundreds of these transitions is impressive.) In doing so, he has, I think, captured something fundamental about the dynamics of Israeli society. This is a society comprising citizens with contending backgrounds and visions who, like Halevi's paratroopers during the 1967 and 1973 wars, are capable of transcending their differences under conditions of national emergency. The book begins amidst the chaos and confusion of the battle for Jerusalem in '67 in which these men distinguished themselves not only by their willingness for self-sacrifice but also by their capacity for improvisation. After the euphoria of the unification of the city, the narrative tracks them in their separate but parallel civilian lives—each with his set of problems—until they are drawn together again during the trauma of the Yom Kippur War, only to return afterward to their separate spheres.

It is the lives of his citizen-soldiers that Halevi

keeps front and center rather than himself, and in an age of self-referential journalism this, too, is something to be grateful for as a reader. Halevi, whose first book was *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, undoubtedly has his own continuing story to tell. Yet once he briefly identifies himself at the open-

But even when his sympathies are evident, they are never given away to one side of the Right/Left, religious/secular divide. Yoel Bin-Nun, a former Mercaz Harav student who became a founder of Gush Emunim, is invested with as much legitimate sincerity as is Arik Achmon, a kibbutznik who helped

Does Halevi's capacity to understand both sides of the divide come from his position as an outsider, as an American immigrant?

ing of the book as an American Jew who settled in Israel in 1982 at the age of 29, Halevi occupies himself solely with his characters, keeping himself out of the frame. It is not too much to see a parallel between his paratroopers' readiness for sacrifice and his own renunciation of journalistic ego. Halevi has a gift for empathy that goes far beyond the requirements of professionalism, and his is a protean empathy. He is as capable of neutralizing our revulsion for Udi Adiv, the kibbutznik who traveled to Damascus in 1972 to help create an anti-Zionist terrorist underground, as he is capable of forestalling our judgment of Hanan Porat's tacit endorsement of the crimes of the settler underground. Yet if Halevi as a figure is absent from the story, the shaping will of his moral imagination is not. The sensitive reader can tell when Halevi has to screw up his nerve to help us understand unsavory behavior and when his empathy is given unstintingly.

lead the crossing of the Suez Canal during the Yom Kippur War and later led the move toward privatizing the Israel economy.

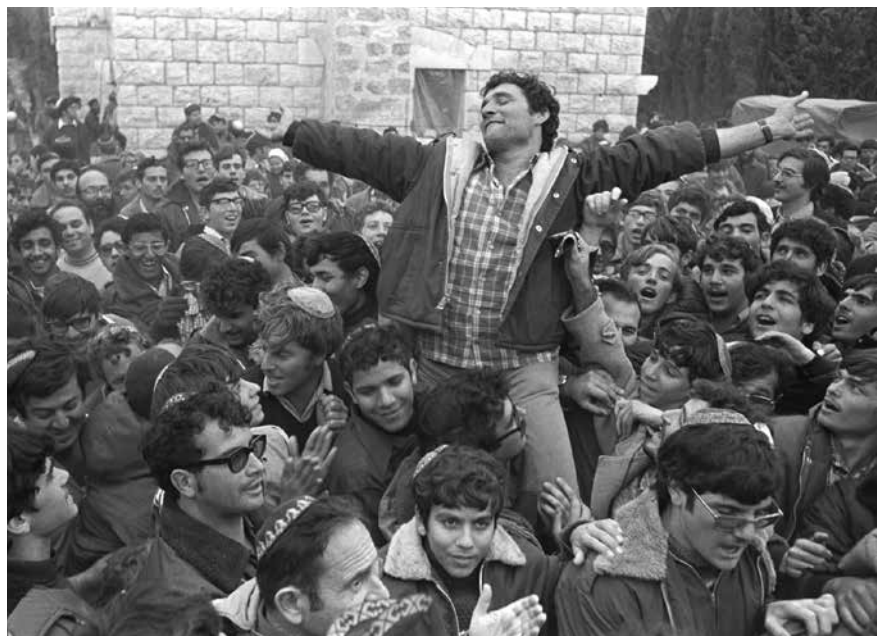
Does Halevi's capacity to understand both sides of the divide come from his position as an outsider, as an American immigrant? I think it makes a difference, as does the fact that he had an Orthodox upbringing. The greatest contribution of Halevi's Americanness is to open up for English readers the intimate codes of behavior and communication in Israeli civil and military life. Even for Americans who know Hebrew, read the newspapers, and spend time in the country, there is a dense texture of nativeness—the nicknames, the popular songs, the IDF slang—that can rarely be penetrated. This is doubly the case when it comes to the inner worlds of such total institutions as the kibbutz, the *hesder* yeshiva, and the West Bank settlement. In addition to its more evident accomplishments, *Like Dreamers*



Commander Motta Gur (sitting left of center) and his brigade on the Mount of Olives about to enter the Old City, June 7, 1967. Arik Achmon is sitting in foreground, left of Gur. (Courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)

performs this work of cultural translation unobtrusively without ever patronizing the reader. An untranslatable Hebrew term is introduced and deftly glossed, a government minister mentioned and identified, a stanza of a hit song woven in. Doors are opened, and we ourselves feel a little less like outsiders looking in.

The biggest risk Halevi has taken is to make his story read like a novel. *Like Dreamers* is constructed as a sequence of short scenes that, though they are narrated in the past tense, have a cinematic, you-are-there quality and rely heavily on word-for-word conversations. Halevi handles these materials very deftly; he avoids melodrama and cheap effects even as he deals with fraught events that can be easily tapped for stirring emotion. But the



Gush Emunim leader Hanan Porat and his followers celebrate the agreement, which allowed the settlers to stay in Sebastia, December 1975. (Photograph by Moshe Milner. Courtesy of the Government Press Office, Israel.)

scenes are nevertheless conspicuously staged and constructed. One has the sense that over the course of many years Halevi spent innumerable hours interviewing each of his subjects—who knows how many false starts he made with subjects who disappointed or withdrew?—and then sat down at his desk with these voluminous notes and tape recordings. The labor of crafting lean, dramatically coherent scenes out of such material must have been prodigious, a little like making a pint of maple syrup from vats of sap.

The difference between fiction and the kind of journalism Halevi is practicing lies less in narrative technique than in our expectations as readers. When it comes to journalism, as opposed to fiction, there is an implicit compact between writer and reader that the narrative faithfully represents events as they took place. It's fair play to use the writerly imagination to create a lively and persuasive simulacrum of reality as long as the tether to the historical truth remains intact. It all depends in the end on the trustworthiness we accord to the writer, and, in the case of Halevi, the good news is that our trust in him as an honest broker never wavers. But sometimes his commitment to truth-telling has to accommodate another bond: the personal connection with his subjects built up over years of visits and interviews. This requires Halevi to exercise exquisite

tact in dealing with inevitable human failings, and it puts the burden on us to pick up on the hints when they are left.

My only criticism of Halevi's recourse to novelistic techniques is that he does not take them far enough. I wish he had been a little more adventure-some in borrowing from the toolkit of modernist fiction so that his imaginative reconstructions would be a little edgier and more knotted and more challenging as writing. In his concern for the reader's experience, Halevi's wellspring of empathy is perhaps too generous, and this makes him favor a mode of storytelling, writerly though it may be, that is rather linear and conventional.

The strength of *Like Dreamers* lies in showing us how two antithetical elite institutions—the kibbutz and the religious-Zionist youth movement and yeshiva—produced exemplary soldiers who then went on to reshape Israeli society. With the kibbutz movement currently in disarray, it is useful to be reminded of its truly formative role in creating the leadership of the young state. Halevi is a good guide to the ideological differences that were fierce enough to make some kibbutzim break apart in the 1950s over their stand toward Stalin and the Soviet Union.

Despite the rigid adherence to principle, kibbutzim were also incubators of creativity, if we are to judge from the four kibbutzniks who are part of Halevi's band of seven. There is Arik Achmon, the intelligence officer and entrepreneur, and Udi Adiv, the anti-Zionist activist who was eventually convicted of treason. And surprisingly, there are two artists. Avital Geva, a member of Kibbutz Ein Shemer, became a leading conceptual artist whose ecological greenhouse represented Israel in the 1993 Venice Biennale. Meir Ariel, of Kibbutz Mishmarot, wrote a counter-anthem to Naomi Shemer's "Jerusalem of Gold" in 1967 and went on to become a Dylan-like figure and the leading poet-singer of his generation; Halevi's affinity for Ariel and for Israeli music in general is unmistakable and infectious.

The kibbutzniks and yeshiva students fought side by side in the battle for Jerusalem in 1967, yet the meaning of their experience was refracted very differently by each group after the war. The kibbutzniks fought to counter a threat to the existence of the state against the background of the Holocaust. But when the smoke had cleared, they became increasingly uneasy about the moral price to be paid for ruling over Arabs of the West Bank. The yeshiva students, leaders in the Bnei Akiva youth movement, were aroused by a similar conviction of national peril; yet for them the war yielded a miraculous restitution. With the return of Judea and Samaria and the uniting of Jerusalem, the

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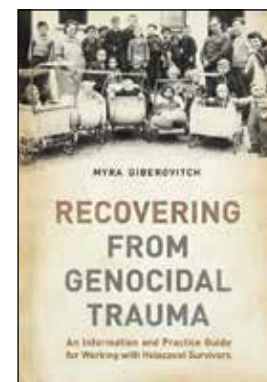
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severed limbs of the body of Israel had been reattached and a spark of messianic expectation ignited. Here too Halevi is a reliable guide to the authentic and fervent idealism that was rooted in the teachings of Abraham Isaac Kook, Israel's first chief rabbi, and his son Zvi Yehudah, the head of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, before the politicization of the settler movement and the seeding of the small but lethal underground. In addition to Yoel Bin-Nun, the Bible teacher who was a founder of Alon Shvut and Ofra, the central figure in this movement is Yisrael Harel, the founder of the West Bank settlements' umbrella organization, the Yesha Council, and its magazine, *Nekudah*. But Bin Nun—the settler-rabbi who had the respect of Rabin and eventually developed not-unreasonable plans for a West Bank with Jewish and Arab cantons—may be Halevi's most compelling subject.

The choice to follow the diverse lives of seven soldiers from an elite army unit enables Halevi to trace the origins of one of the great divides in Israeli society. Yet despite the richness of its yield, this focus inevitably means that other important stories can't be told. Israeli Arabs, Jews from Middle Eastern lands, women, Russian immigrants, Jews from Ethiopia, the ultra-Orthodox, high-tech innovators, shopkeepers, city dwellers, foreign workers—all these groups were significant

factors in the make-up of Israel during the period covered in *Like Dreamers* and became even more influential in the years since. Halevi is of course aware of them all, and the backdrop of his figure



Late Israeli singer/songwriter Meir Ariel, right, and Israeli singer Shalom Hanoch in an undated photo. (Courtesy of Moshe Shai/FLASH90.)

studies are flecked with references to new forces gathering strength in the wings.

Amidst all these changes, Halevi's book remains fixed on the fate of Zionist idealism. Devotion to realizing a vision of a Jewish nation on its ances-

tral soil is the moral engine that fascinates Halevi and that he identifies as the force driving both the kibbutzniks and the settlers in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. What *Like Dreamers* does so well is to document how this equivalence of principle shifts in the following decades. It is the young families of Gush Emunim that succeed in appropriating the charisma of the Zionist ethos; and even though their religious spirit was inimical to the Labor governments of the time, the fact that they were actualizing the old pioneering ideal won them covert sponsorship, and in the process enabled Israel to drift into becoming what Gershom Gorenberg has called an accidental empire. The call for secular youth to settle the Galilee and other places within the Green Line produced no similar results. Halevi's kibbutznik paratroopers became entrepreneurs and artists while their religious counterparts founded new settlements that grew into towns and cities. In the meantime, the officer corps of the IDF has become increasingly populated by Zionist-religious youth, for whom the defense of the Jewish state and the willingness for sacrifice are fueled by motives beyond patriotism alone.

Israel of the 21st century is, to say the least, a complex and shifting environment. One hopes that Yossi Klein Halevi, with his unique mix of acute observation and moral empathy, will stay on the job.

Alan Mintz is the author of *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford University Press). He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 2012.



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Life with S'chug

BY TALYA HALKIN

Balaboosta: Bold Mediterranean Recipes to Feed the People You Love

by Einat Admony

Artisan Books, 288 pp., \$29.95

Named after one of her two restaurants in downtown Manhattan, Einat Admony's *Balaboosta: Bold Mediterranean Recipes to Feed the People You Love* weaves together an eclectic collection of recipes with personal vignettes of growing up in Israel and of life as a professional chef, mother, and wife in New York City. Admony, who is now opening a third restaurant in the West Village, also cooks for her kids, wakes up at night to concoct elaborate sandwiches for her husband, and cannot hold back from inviting friends over for dinner in her family's Brooklyn loft several times a week. Apart from owning up to being unable to shed those extra 40 pounds, she seems capable of doing it all.

Having grown into a genre in its own right, the food memoir, complete with the prerequisite black-and-white photographs of elderly family members, poignant anecdotes, and nostalgic reminiscences, is only as entertaining as its protagonist. High-spirited, feisty, and down-to-earth, Admony is the kind of woman who comforts herself over heartbreak with a batch of *sufganiyot*, noting that "Revenge is always sweet, but all the more so when it's filled with jelly." Elsewhere in her narrative, she devises a "morning orgasm cocktail" to make up for the downsides of life with two small children. Her account of the sheer pleasure taken in cooking for, and eating with, her loved ones bursts with straightforward, no-nonsense enthusiasm for food and life.

Like Admony herself, the food she cooks is confident and exuberant—a combination of the quintessential Persian and Yemenite dishes she ate and helped her mother cook as a child in the religious town of Bnei Brak, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv—popular Israeli street foods and local Arab dishes—and the kind of recipes that appear on her restaurant menus—sophisticated, inventive combinations of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and North African flavors. In this sense, she is a prime representative of the group of Israeli-born chefs who have been stirring up a new wave of international interest in contemporary Israeli flavors. Casting herself as the latest incarnation of the Old World *balaboosta*, Admony is one of a group of culinary impresarios who may well be reinventing New York's Jewish food by shifting local tastes from Ashkenazi-style comfort foods to the fresh, bold flavors that define Israeli cuisine.

Infusing the Yiddish-derived term for a perfect housewife with a contemporary spirit, Admony

joins a long line of Jewish *balaboostas* who have been writing cookbooks in America since the late 19th century. She thereby continues a history of negotiating different visions of the ideal Jewish woman and the world she runs from her kitchen, while melding together culinary traditions and changing

Admony describes life as what happens while we are busy cooking.

ideas about Jewish food in America. Nor is Admony the first *balaboosta* to pride herself on elevating the Jewish housewife's penchant for feeding her family and guests to the highest professional level. As early as 1901, Hinde Amkhanitski, the author of the Yiddish *Ler-buch vi azoy tsu kojhn un bakhn* (Manual for How to Cook and Bake), assured her readers that "I have for many years in New York run restaurants that nourished the finest people with their capricious stomachs and all were satisfied with my food." And is Admony's preface to her recipe "One Big Steak for Two," which begins "Men love sex. And steak," really that different than the

observation made by "Balabusta" (the pen name used by Adelaide Ettenson Lowe), editor of the 1949 edition of the *Jewish Examiner Prize Kosher Recipe Book*, that "I have never known a good cook who had marital trouble"? (I take the quotes from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's excellent essay "Kitchen Judaism" in *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880–1950*, a collection edited by Susan L. Braunstein and Jenna Weissman Joselit).

Yet in contrast to the cookbooks written by, or for, successive waves of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, and later by their American-born successors, Admony's book is neither a search for the flavors of the past nor an immigrant's story about the quest for belonging in a new homeland. Rather, it is about living, cooking, and eating in a shifting personal and cultural world in which memories of preparing dinner on an Israeli army base are just as inspiring as a dish consumed on a terrace in Provence. Enticingly assembled together on the same table, the logic that brings her dishes together is above all Admony herself—the chef as curator of a moveable feast that tells the story not so much of a particular cuisine, but of a personal, ever-evolving amalgam of family roots, travel impressions, friendships, and the influences they bring into one's life.

Indeed, more than the recipes themselves, the most strikingly Israeli aspect of this book is the spirit of spontaneity, improvisation, and creativity it embodies. Israelis are not afraid of tinkering with their own culinary traditions, nor, for that matter, with anyone else's. So why not take a traditional Sicilian pasta sauce featuring cauliflower, pine nuts, and dried currants, and reinvent it as cauliflower patties with a white wine vinaigrette? (I can only imagine how horrified the Sicilian *balaboostas* I know would be at such sacrilege.) And why not experiment with *s'chug*, the Yemenite condiment made with hot chilies and plenty of garlic and cilantro, which Admony's father once carried with him to spice things up at a kosher Chinese restaurant, as the basis for a Thai curry?

Admony, however, takes this eclectic approach to cooking one step further and ends up presenting her readers with just about everything she likes to cook, from the homey meat and vegetable patties she makes her kids to creamy



Einat Admony serves family and friends. (Photo by Quentin Bacon. Courtesy of *Balaboosta* by Einat Admony, Artisan Books, © 2013.)

potatoes, lemon cheesecake, and Spanish-style shrimp invigorated by preserved lemons and cilantro. (Not all the recipes in Admony's book are kosher.) The result is a hodgepodge of recipes that seems, at times, close to losing its coherence.

And yet, this somewhat incoherent character is also what makes Admony's book so endearing—reflecting as it does the similarly disjointed nature of her readers' lives as we simultaneously struggle to feed our kids meals nutritious enough to ward off scurvy, comfort ourselves after a long day of work, or muster up the energy for a romantic dinner. A voracious eater by her own admission, Admony describes life as what happens while we are busy cooking: separations, slow reconciliations, small moments of joy, the warmth and pleasure of sharing a home-cooked meal.

Her fervent belief that cooking well is the best revenge is infectious—so much so that, with two sick children under the age of five and several looming deadlines, I decided to channel my inner *balaboosta* and head for Tel Aviv's Carmel Market. An hour later, I was back home with enough ingredients to cook my way through Admony's book. Dodging the more elaborate, time-consuming recipes in the chapter titled "Fancy-Shmancy," such as homemade spinach fettuccine with ricotta and walnut quenelles, as well as the slow-cooking dishes in the chapter "When Dinner Can Wait," I was drawn to the bold, smoky flavors of the salads in the chapter on the outdoor barbecue. I tossed a couple of steaks on a stovetop grill and threw some bell peppers, jalapenos, purple onions, and tomatoes on the gas burners in order to make Admony's spicy grilled



Einat Admony's parents, Ziona and Menashe, in an undated photo. (Courtesy of *Balaboosta* by Einat Admony, Artisan Books, © 2013.)

salsa. I then chopped red onion and parsley to make a salad spiced with sweet paprika and cumin. As the afternoon wore on, I whisked together milk

and heavy cream to make the custard known in Israel as *malabi*, sent it to the fridge to set overnight, and prepared the topping: orange marmalade stewed with brandy and sweet pistachios. By the time the kids were asleep, I had progressed to Admony's roasted fish, ceremoniously laid out on a bed of Israeli couscous. It was a simple, delicate, wholly satisfying dish in which the tanginess of yogurt, the acidity of whole lemon slices, and the freshness of chopped dill mingled with hints of rosemary, garlic, and thyme.

In the morning, the *malabi* was still a liquid mess redolent of rosewater. (Admony's instructions glossed over the crucial step of beating the mixture until it attained a pudding-like consistency.) Undeterred, I grabbed my son and headed back to the stove to bake a batch of Turkish coffee brownies spiked with a dose of cardamom. Over the next couple of days, driven by an unstoppable frenzy, I went on to make ceviche with raw beet, fennel, orange, jalapeno, and cilantro; sweet potatoes with honey and mustard seeds; and sunchoke soup with crispy chestnuts.

If *Balaboosta's* success can be measured in terms of its power to get its readers into the kitchen, I will be the first to vouch for it. Sometime in the near future, I'll be back in the market buying the ingredients for fenugreek fried bread.

Talya Halkin is a writer and translator in Tel Aviv.

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History, Memory, and the Fallen Jew

BY STEVEN E. ASCHEIM

The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History
edited by David N. Myers and Alexander Kaye
Brandeis University Press, 376 pp., \$40

The publication of most of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's lesser-known essays and smaller writings, competently edited and informatively introduced by David N. Myers and Alexander Kaye, provides an occasion to reflect more generally upon the man and his work. Yerushalmi, who passed away in 2009 at the age of 77, was a pre-eminent—and certainly most widely known—Jewish historian of his time. Enamored with the study of ruptures, crises, and fissures, he was bent on enunciating the dilemmas of “fallen Jews,” ranging from the *conversos* of the Iberian peninsula to Sigmund Freud and, indeed, scholars like himself. Yerushalmi was as much a sensitive product of his fractured time as he was a key expositor of its predicament.

Although he resisted the postmodern winds blowing around him and possessed an erudite command of the Judaic tradition, Yerushalmi was unwilling and, more probably, unsuited to write a flowing coherent historical narrative such as the one that his beloved teacher Salo Baron had attempted. There are those who claim that Yerushalmi, always a complex, enigmatic man, simply lacked the energy and initiative to undertake such a task. It is true that apart from some important essays, he did not really follow up systematically on the history of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry and the Sephardi diaspora after his first book. Still, this is uncharitable and probably misses the main point. For Yerushalmi believed that a unified, meaningful account of the pattern of all of Jewish life was no longer possible. Baron's monumental *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* was, he said, probably “the last serious attempt by a single historian to embrace the whole of Jewish history.” The time for overarching meta-narratives seemed to be over, even if, as he insisted, the search for discrete historical truths was not.

Yerushalmi thus not only famously formulated but urgently embodied the crisis of our modern constitutive belief in a fluid, disintegrative “historicity.” For this development resulted in what he took to be the irreconcilable clash between secular, myth-breaking Jewish historiography and identity-sustaining traditional collective Jewish memory. This was summed up in the title of his most famous book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. In that elegant little volume, based on the four Stroum lectures he delivered at the University of Washington in 1980, Yerushalmi explored the limits and possibilities in the tension between the biblical injunction to remember (*zakhor*) and the historiographical imperative to reconstruct profane human his-

tory. Rendering this tension explicit was, I believe, a creative act of transfiguration for Yerushalmi.

Almost from the beginning, there was something unusual, even exotic, about Yerushalmi's persona. When Jews were Americanizing their names, his transition from Joseph (Josephy) Hyman Erushalmy to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi emphasized alien origins. “Sad-eyed Joe,” his 1952 Yeshiva College

nale and Interminable, slim as they were, generated widespread discussion, including responses from Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, Amos Funkenstein, Harold Bloom, Pierre Nora, Richard Bernstein, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, to name just a prominent few. Pierre Birnbaum ended his major study of modern Jewish intellectuals, *Geography of Hope*, with Yerushalmi (from whom he had borrowed the

In retrospect, Yerushalmi's historical project throughout appears as a complex, valiant—if not always successful—attempt at Jewish reclamation.

yearbook says, “has claimed that he stemmed from such varied backgrounds as Turkey, Tagikistan, and Oxford.” Actually, he was born in the Bronx and already then his strangely intoned English—the yearbook called it “Cambridge-tinged”—was noted. (Academic wags would later say he hailed from “Bronxford.”) Perhaps this was a result of the fact that Yerushalmi's first languages were Hebrew and Yiddish (he didn't speak English until he was five), but it certainly added to his mystique. The yearbook entry, which is reproduced in a footnote by Myers and Kaye, erred however in predicting a future for Yerushalmi in law. He was first ordained as a rabbi at The Jewish Theological Seminary and then turned to Jewish history.

There was always something unashamedly existential, critically personal in Yerushalmi's writings. This dimension, combined with an unfailingly elegant literary style, endowed his writings with a certain charisma, an urgency and excitement rare in academic history. Determinedly cosmopolitan, a polyglot, the issues he raised proved irresistible to many leading intellectuals of the day. His later works, *Zakhor* and Freud's *Moses: Judaism Termi-*

title) as an exemplar of positive Jewish and scholarly commitment, and Sylvie-Anne Goldberg published a book-length series of interviews with the historian. (The French had a particular penchant for Yerushalmi.)

All of Yerushalmi's works, including his only full-length sustained historical monograph, the 1971 *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso, A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*, probed crises of consciousness and breaks in Jewish life. The fissures and ruptures of early and later modernity framed his concerns. Yet Yerushalmi was a determinedly engaged “Jewish” historian. If today, thankfully, Jewish studies has moved out of the ghetto and many non-Jews are centrally involved in this scientific endeavor, Yerushalmi unabashedly addressed ultimate Jewish concerns of identity and commitment. While always adhering to the canons of modern scholarship and objectivity, he admitted that he had devoted himself to Jewish history “for very personal existential reasons.” *Zakhor*, he announced, was “part history, part confession and credo.” The “lingering suspicion that a conscious responsibility toward the living concerns of the group



Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in an undated photo.

must result in history that is somewhat less scholarly or ‘scientific,’ he argued, was profoundly mistaken. It simply rendered the task more tangled, complex, and interesting.

It is certain that many contemporary Jewish historians write Jewish history as an expression of their post-traditional identity. As “fallen” Jews this is their surrogate faith (fallen they may be, but Jews they remain). Yet, many historians—Jewish and non-Jewish—would not accept Yerushalmi’s admonition that the “burden of building a bridge to his people remains with the historian.”

While the fissures, ruptures, and breaks of modernity underlie Yerushalmi’s quest, an additional, perhaps deeper impulse was also at work. In retrospect, his historical project throughout appears as a complex, valiant—if not always successful—attempt at Jewish reclamation. That impulse is obvious in his path-breaking examination of Marranism, that secret lingering form of Judaism practiced after the forced conversion of Spanish and Portuguese Jews to Catholicism in the late 15th century. Yerushalmi’s study focused on Isaac Cardoso, a prominent and well-placed Christian physician in 17th-century Spain who made a surprising “return” to a full Jewish life and undertook an uncompromising and bold defense of Judaism in Italy. Of Cardoso’s spirited defense, *Las excelencias de los Hebreos*, he asserted that, “Cardoso’s work may now also be reclaimed, to be read no longer as apologia but as the response of a great Jewish heart to a perennial hatred.”

The essays collected in *The Faith of Fallen Jews* reveal Yerushalmi’s understanding of both diaspora life and the ongoing nature of Jew-hatred. Exile in both the geographical sense and, more subtly, as an estrangement from collective memory informs many of these pieces. Although Yerushalmi was never simplistic or overwrought (“lachrymose” to use his teacher Baron’s famous phrase), a certain negative continuity runs through these pieces. He understood the relatively privileged, protected position of Jews within medieval struc-

wrote that, despite the short-lived Golden Age, “catastrophic elements were implicit in the development of Spanish Jewry from the beginning.” Intriguingly, in his 1982 Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, he found modern German anti-Semitism to be surprisingly close to the much earlier Spanish case, with its doctrine of the purity of blood and the notion of an inherent, biologically irremovable Jewish essence. In both cases, what inspired fear and hatred, he argued, was not so much Jewish separation as it was Jewish integration. Racist thinking arose precisely

What many found objectionable was his insistence that psychoanalysis really was a fundamentally “Jewish science.”

tures, their alliance with and protection by political elites, and he documented their manifold cultural and intellectual achievements. Yet throughout he insisted upon the continuingly vulnerable state of diaspora life, from Spain and Portugal through modern Germany and the Shoah, and—though the differences remain glaring—even to the America of today (or at least the day before yesterday).

The Holocaust, he declared in a lively 1970 graduation address that began with an exegesis of some apocalyptic lyrics from the musical *Hair*, “could happen again.” In the earliest collected piece, a 1966 review of the English translation of Yitzhak Baer’s *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Yerushalmi

when observable differences were less visible, when outsiders were becoming insiders.

This was a strong critique of successful “assimilation.” Indeed, like Hannah Arendt (although dissenting from her unfeeling judgment of the behavior of the Jewish Councils during the Holocaust), Yerushalmi was rather harsh regarding Jewish political judgment in general. Given their essentially providential view of history and lacking any sense of profane causality, Jews were entirely unable to make reasoned political judgments. This, he argued, applied equally to medieval and modern Jewry.

Such judgments may have expressed an ideological bias, but they also produced work thankfully devoid of apologetic strains. As Yerushalmi wrote in an essay on the political history of the Jews:

I believe that I have always been secure enough to study and teach Jewish history without glossing over the imperfections of the Jews. (Why, indeed must they be perfect? The Hebrew Bible did not think them so.)

Two examples of Yerushalmi’s unapologetic approach to Jewish history must suffice. He was convinced that the records of the Inquisition regarding the Judaism of the Marranos, their beliefs and comportment, were scrupulously accurate and not to be regarded as hostile propaganda. He also anticipated current historiographical fashion by documenting the manifold modes of Jewish hostility towards Christians, especially as it was expressed in prayer, a convenient outlet for a powerless group to vent its anger.

Nevertheless, it is the reclamatory impulse that stands at the center of Yerushalmi’s historical project. This was perhaps clearest in his study of Sigmund Freud. Yerushalmi argued that Freud possessed a far greater knowledge of, and familiarity with, Jewish matters than he ever admitted. His knowledge of Hebrew, Bible, and even some Talmud was a somewhat hidden but crucial dimension of Freud’s makeup. Of course, the psychoanalyst’s Jewish affiliation had never been in question, and Yerushalmi documents the many statements (some of them bordering on a kind of triumphal chauvinism) that Freud made to that effect. But he probed deeper and questioned Freud’s own self-presentation.

Here, Yerushalmi introduced a useful distinction between “culture” and “identity.” While the sources of Freud’s thought and much of his intellectual world could be traced to German culture, the Enlightenment, and scientific positivism, his sense of self, his core identity, was a different matter.

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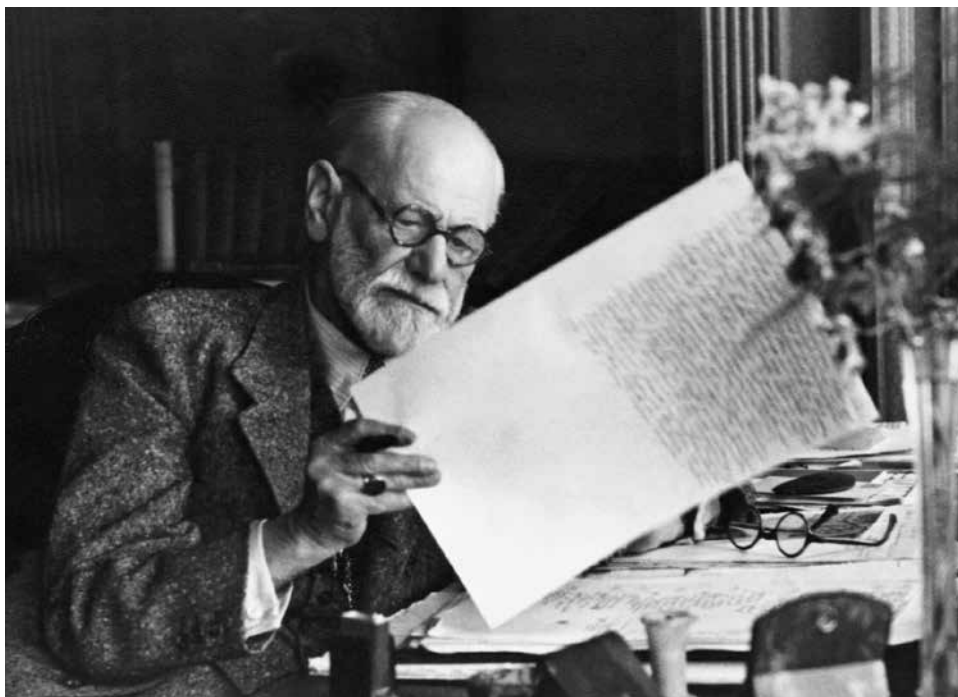
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Shorn of religion and traditional faith, it remained nonetheless determinedly, interminably “Jewish.” Not surprisingly, Edward Said took Yerushalmi to task for rendering Freud’s Jewishness too much of an “open-and-shut matter,” one which underplayed Freud’s openness and downplayed the master’s insistence that Moses, the founder of Jewish identity, was himself “a non-European Egyptian.” Identity, Said argued, could not “constitute or even imagine itself without that radical originary break or flaw which will not be repressed.” Yerushalmi resisted such postmodern strictures.



Sigmund Freud edits his manuscript for *Moses and Monotheism*, Vienna, 1938. (© CORBIS.)

But this was hardly the most provocative part of Yerushalmi’s Jewish reclamation of Freud. What many found objectionable was his insistence that psychoanalysis really was a fundamentally “Jewish science.” He did this in the form of a “Monologue with Freud,” a chapter in *Freud’s Moses*. It was a scolding, if loving, one-sided conversation in which Yerushalmi dissented from many of Freud’s contentions in *Moses and Monotheism*. If the Jews had murdered Moses, he argued, it would “not have been repressed but—on the contrary—it would have been remembered and recorded, eagerly and implacably, in the most vivid detail, the quintessential and ultimate exemplum of the sin of Israel’s disobedience.”

On the basis of Freud’s repeated statement that “we are and remain Jews,” the core of Yerushalmi’s monologue was a critique of Freud’s deep reluctance to define not himself but analysis as a Jewish phenomenon. Had he had the courage to do so, this would have “marked the emergence of the full Jew within” him. Instead, Freud had internalized a debilitating and false modern distinction, one to which self-conscious Jews were (and remain) especially prey:

With all the talk of German science and French science, neither of which implied that its contents are not universally accessible or applicable, why not Jewish science, especially in the case of psychoanalysis? Why not say, with psychoanalysis in mind, “*Judaeus sum, nihil humani a me alienam puto*” . . . ? There was, in short, an opportunity to finally lay to rest the false and insidious dichotomy between the

“parochial” and the “universal,” that canard of the Enlightenment which became and remains a major neurosis of modern Jewish intellectuals.

Both friends and enemies of psychoanalysis—most prominently the Nazis who condemned analysis as typical of the Jewish tendency to reduce humanity to depraved sexuality—continued to see things in this light, Yerushalmi went on, so why didn’t Freud admit it?

Even more provocatively, in a finger-wagging admonition to Freud, he added that:

I think that in your innermost heart you believed that psychoanalysis is itself a further, if not final, metamorphosed extension of Judaism, divested of its illusory religious forms but retaining its essential monotheistic characteristics, at least as you understood and described them. In short, I think you believed that just as you are a godless Jew, psychoanalysis is a godless Judaism.

A resurrected Freud would probably regard this as counter-transference in a reclamatory mode.

In *Zakhor*, Yerushalmi posited a fundamental clash between collective memory and the critical sensibility of the modern historian. Since the Bible, Jews and Judaism have indeed been absorbed with the divine meaning of history, but this was mediated by ritual and liturgy (think of the Passover hag-gadah, a text of particular interest to Yerushalmi), while historical thinking of the non-sacred, casual kind we moderns take for granted played virtually no role at all. “We have learned,” Yerushalmi writes, “that meaning in history, memory of the past, and the writing of history are by no means to be equated.”

Today, the salience of “collective memory” has become commonplace. But its resonance was built on more than intellectual fashion. Yerushalmi put his finger on an ongoing scholarly and existential predicament: “I live,” he declared, “within the ironic awareness that the very mode in which I delve into the Jewish past represents a decisive break with that past.” This is certainly true, but wouldn’t the



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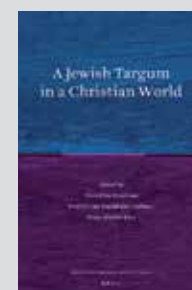


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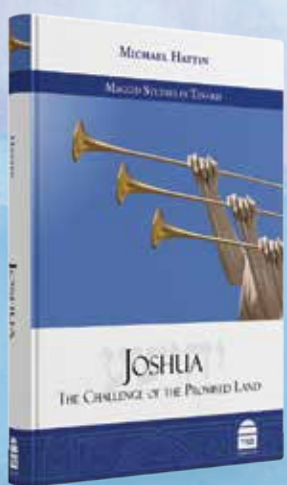
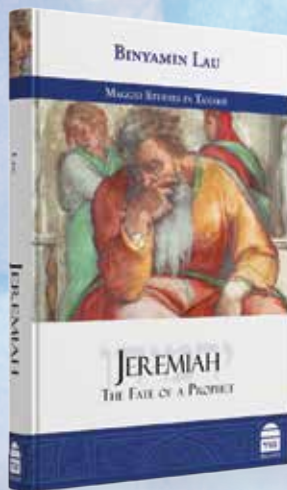
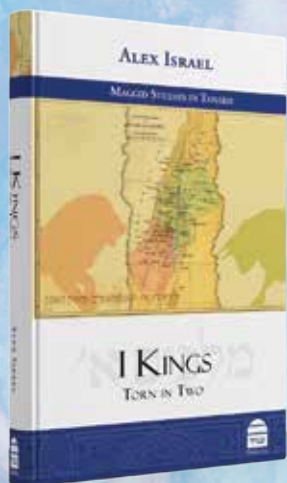
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same predicament apply to historians of almost all stripes? Most traditional societies rested on some kind of mythical schema of time and a sacred interpretation of life. The Jewish rupture with the past is not entirely unique.

But certainly consciousness of rupture constitutes the condition for any work of historical reclamation. In *Zakhor*, this is a complex balancing act. As the product of rupture, the historian is able to identify life-sustaining, necessary myths, while exposing other dangerous, destructive ones. In a 1987 essay, "Reflections on Forgetting," Yerushalmi wrote a quasi-rabbinic text that few professional historians would dare to imitate. History, he declared, could not provide what was essentially missing in modern Jewish life, a halakha, a guide, a path to walk. "The faith of fallen Jews" will not replace the complex of beliefs and rites that provide a people with identity and purpose.

Yerushalmi's reflections tended toward the melancholic, but he did deliver a short, pleading piece, included in this collection, on the history of Jewish hope. Interim Jewish hope—as opposed to messianism—allowed for the open texture of historical life. Although it underlay collective Jewish memory and identity, sacred history "often exacted a heavy price from the Jewish people by inhibiting it from grasping the realities of its struggle to survive in a profane world." Whatever its limitations, for Yerushalmi the modern historical vocation nevertheless possessed a certain dignity in standing guard against the debilitating mythologies of the past.

If loss and reclamation are inextricably tied in Yerushalmi's conceptual world, to some extent this mirrored the complex contradictions that, by all accounts, constituted his person. His study of Freud was hardly accidental given that twice over he was an analysand, a fact about which he was open. I learned this in a very surprising, highly public manner, in my only real encounter with Yerushalmi. In September 2005 I gave a lecture on Brit Shalom, the early binational Zionists, at Columbia University, which he attended. In the middle of the talk, I mentioned a disturbing dream that a member of the group, the philosopher Shmuel Hugo Bergman, had recorded in his diaries and related to his Haifa analyst, a certain Mrs. Schaerf. At that point, to everyone's amazement, Yerushalmi leapt up and in an emotional voice exclaimed that Mrs. Schaerf had been his analyst too! For some moments he provided intimate details about the frequency of his visits and other issues that I have now forgotten. Clearly, a sensitive nerve had been touched. After that Yerushalmi must have recovered his social self-awareness, for when question time came around, he eased quietly and quickly out of the room. It seemed a moment of perhaps unintended self-revelation, yet it was strangely moving, evidence of an innocent vulnerability.

Self-revelation is only thinly disguised in Yerushalmi's only work of fiction, a short story that was published posthumously in *The New Yorker* and which the editors have chosen as the last piece in *The Faith of Fallen*. In this story, entitled "Gilgul"—Hebrew for transmigration of the soul—Yerushalmi depicts a man desperately in search of spiritual peace, in need of coming to terms with the past. Yearning for a nurturing power from the past

to inform the present, he moves from therapy to a strange clairvoyant in Jaffa, named Gerda. Gerda reads Tarot cards and had once identified the spirit of an exiled Spanish-Jewish physician occupying the body of a modern-day client.

It is a dangerous pursuit to relate the nature and quality of a person's oeuvre to the contours and quirks of their personality. Indeed, in "Series Z: An Archival Fantasy," another essay on Freud, Yerushalmi perceptively warned about the perils of reducing creative work to biographical circumstances. There he not only questioned the ethics of transgressing the bounds of privacy, but also its relevance. Does such knowledge, he asked, enhance our understanding and appreciation of their work? Yet in his work on the Viennese psychoanalyst Yerushalmi too came perilously close to such an exercise. To be sure, he did not attempt to psychoanalyze Freud, but he did try to penetrate, on the basis of Freud's private correspondence, his father's Hebrew dedication of a Bible to him, the presence of kiddush cups in his study, and details of his family life, a judgment on the hidden springs of his work.

Would it be unfair to apply the same method to Yerushalmi? There is general agreement that he was an enigmatic and difficult man. Still, the countless stories and legends that still circulate about him in academic circles—stories of his egoism and insecurities, his care for his students together with his sometimes cutting criticism, his melancholy—do not take us very far. Yet it may have been his acute personal embodiment of conflicts and contradictions that reinforced his sensitivity to the dilemmas and tensions peculiar to his time and which made him so fine a historian.

The 1970 lecture mentioned here is an illuminating example of Yerushalmi's contained polarity between a lyrical, almost prophetic, vision and modern historical sobriety. The day would come, he proclaimed, that history would reach its fulfillment, its culmination, in which nothing of the past would be lost. "Then the laughter and the tears of all the ages shall be gathered together, history shall become saga, and with a polite bow the historian will yield, then and only then, to the poet . . ." Nonetheless, in the here and now, he said, "we are, for better or worse, somewhere in between, in the midst of history, where nothing is pure or clear, where good and evil, joy and suffering, hope and despair, coexist and commingle. It is therefore in the midst of history that we must know ourselves as Jews and build a Jewish future, slowly, often painfully."

Our notions of memory and history, tradition and rupture, existential commitment and scientific objectivity, and of what it means to live "in the midst of history" were deeply enriched by Yerushalmi's work. He did not transcend his time—who can?—but he scrupulously mapped its complex contours and horizons. The tautness of his formulations, I wager, will endow his writings with an ongoing relevance and immediacy.

Steven E. Aschheim is emeritus professor of history at The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He is currently a Straus/Tikvah Fellow at NYU's Straus Institute for the Advanced Study of Law & Justice. His most recent book is *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (Palgrave Macmillan).

The Living Waters of History

BY AMY NEWMAN SMITH

The Mapmaker's Daughter

by Laurel Corona

Sourcebooks, 368 pp., \$14.99

On a late Friday afternoon in 1432 Sevilla, a young *converso* girl named Amalia stops to wash off the ashes her mother has purposefully smeared on her to make her look dirty, before sending her out to the butcher. After throwing the pork sausages and ham she has bought into some tall grass, she begins to scrub herself in the natural spring her mother, a secret Jew, calls *muyyim hayyim*, “Living water,” though it makes the girl’s “fingers look as pale as the dead.” This finely crafted scene, rich with layered meaning, opens the latest historical novel by Laurel Corona, *The Mapmaker's Daughter*. After whispering the Hebrew blessing recited upon washing one’s hands, Amalia, six, begins to clean off the grime.

When my hands are so clean they squeak, I splash water on my face to come home looking fresh for Shabbat. I imagine the sausage hidden in the grass, and since there is no blessing for throwing forbidden meat away, I whisper the words I often hear my mother say. “Please accept that we honor you the best we can.”

Corona has chosen to write the story of Amalia Riba in the first person present, a device that lends immediacy and emotional resonance to much of the story, but sometimes clangs with a disconcerting falseness. The book follows Amalia from her girlhood in Sevilla, across the kingdoms and duchies of Spain and Portugal, to Muslim-held Granada and on to Valencia in 1492 where, as an old woman, she is being chased out of Spain by the edict that expelled all Jews unwilling to convert.

Moving through the narrative with Amalia is a famous atlas, a copy of one made for the king of France at the behest of a Spanish monarch, for Amalia is not just a mapmaker’s daughter, but the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of mapmakers to royalty as well. Corona inserts Amalia into history as the grandchild of Jehudà Cresques, son of the atlas’ creator, who converted after the persecutions of 1391, changing his name to Jaume Riba. “It was too terrible a thought never to see our work again—may the Evil Eye not punish me for such pride—so we secretly made this copy, which we’ve kept all these years,” her grandfather Jaume tells her as they pore over the atlas one Sabbath afternoon. The atlas (which now resides in the National Library of France) serves as a touchstone for Amalia, a reminder of her roots, a guide to her future, appearing at intervals in the narrative, staying with her through the turns of plot and fate.

Corona’s Amalia is also anchored by her association with other famous figures of pre-exilic Spain, a tool that at times is enlightening, but more often than not so grandiose as to be a distraction. Amalia becomes a creature as fanciful as the mermaid that follows a ship in her grandfather’s atlas, serving as her father’s translator and aide at the court of Prince Henry the Navigator. Her father has, conveniently for the story, been struck deaf, and Amalia is felicitously gifted at languages, mastering Castilian, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, and Portuguese by the time she is 10, in addition to inventing a system of signs she uses to communicate with her father.

If she had crossed paths with one or two names we know from our history books, it would have remained felicitous rather than forced. But Amalia



Detail of Italy and Spain from the Catalan Atlas by Abraham and Jehudà Cresques, 1375.

catches the attention of one of Prince Henry’s most important captains, marries him, and bears him two children before a flick of Corona’s pen sends the captain to the watery deep, leaving his wealthy widow to return to her faith and raise her surviving daughter as a Jew. The family that takes her in, teaches her, and provides a husband for her daughter from their sons is none other than the illustrious Abravanel clan, Iberia’s most famous Jews. Leaving them, she becomes a tutor to two grandchildren of the Muslim caliph of Granada, and then to Isabella—the future Isabella I of Castile who would one day expel her and all her kind—via a childhood friendship at Henry’s court with the future queen’s mother.

Corona’s narrative whirlwind is as breathtaking as it is unbelievable. Are we to believe a Catholic queen would say to a *converso*-turned-Jew, “I can’t say I like what you’ve done, but it is up to God to judge, and no one here need know you were ever anything else”? Would the Abravanel, as urbane and educated as they were, have encouraged Amalia to undertake an intimate relationship with a Muslim, hampered as she is by a genuine Zoharic tradition that warns men who marry widows will die prematurely? Would a Muslim caliph hire a Jewish woman to tutor his grandson? Corona’s bravura tale begins to quake under the improbabilities and impossibilities.

In an interview printed alongside the book, Corona says, “These women existed, despite the fact that we must now invent them, and because they existed, I feel compelled to do what needs to be done so that their lives can be celebrated.” Amalia is certainly celebrated, then inflated, amplified, and magnified. The words of Simone de Beauvoir could easily be Amalia’s: “I am too intelligent, too demanding, and too resourceful for anyone to be able to take charge of me entirely.” Amalia lives within the “sisterhood” Gloria Steinem says every “woman who chooses to behave like a full human being” needs. With her sisterhood she faces down Tomás de Torquemada, taunting him with verses from the Psalms. With her sisterhood she adopts a *converso* child whose parents have been killed in the Inquisition and invents new immersion rituals to recognize bravery.

Such celebration speaks to our zeitgeist, but it undermines the real stories of the women of that time and place, whose risk-taking and courage have been described by Renée Levine Melammed in *Heretics or Daughters of Israel?: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile*. It belittles the strength it took to keep the laws of Moses when being caught meant unspeakable punishment; the strength it took to remain calm and loving, raising up the next generation of Jews to an indeterminate future; the strength it took to leave Spain for the long journey into the unknown. “The glory of a princess is on the inside,” say the words of the Psalms, or as Corona writes, “the best things must always remain the darkest secrets.” Corona has a real narrative gift, but her novel ultimately tells us more about the 21st-century market for historical fiction than history as it was actually lived by such women. That would require a very different historical imagination.

Amy Newman Smith is the associate editor of the Jewish Review of Books.

The Anti-Jewish Problem

BY STEVEN T. KATZ

Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition

by David Nirenberg

W.W. Norton & Company, 624 pp., \$35

David Nirenberg has set out to investigate the way in which “Jewish questions” have shaped the history of thought.” His book is not, then, a study of historical anti-Semitism, though, of course, that dark topic is its necessary backdrop. “Judaism” is, in Nirenberg’s terms, “not only the religion of specific people with specific beliefs, but also a category, a set of ideas and attitudes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world.” Thus, the anti-Judaism of his book’s title is not only, or even primarily, about actual Jews and Judaism; it is about the conceptual building blocks of the Western tradition (taken broadly to include Islam). Nirenberg frames his sweeping study as “an argument for the vital role that the history of ideas can play in making us aware of how the past uses of the concepts we think with can constrain our own thought.”

The example of Karl Marx and his famous discussion of the “Jewish Question” (*Judenfrage*) is, for Nirenberg, illustrative. As he argues, Marx described Judaism not as a religion, but as the pursuit of money and property, which, in turn, produced “an attitude of spiritual slavery and alienation from the world.” To the degree that Christians pursue property, they too are “Jews,” and, therefore, to truly emancipate Jews and others from their political and existential bondage, capitalism—that is to say, Judaism—must be overcome. Until then, Marx says, Christian society “will continue to produce Judaism out of its own entrails.”

But Marx was far from the first for whom “Judaism” marked a negative conceptual/religious position that could be employed for social, economic, political, and religious goals. For two thousand years or more, thinkers had continually refashioned such conceptualizations creating an enormously powerful mythic representation of Judaism—one to which Marx was both consciously and unconsciously indebted, and one that had enormous consequences for real Jews (including Marx). Nirenberg writes:

Anti-Judaism should not be understood as some archaic or irrational closet in the vast edifices of Western thought. It was rather one of the basic tools with which that edifice was constructed.

Nirenberg’s book is a history of how individuals and groups have imagined and re-imagined Judaism for their own purposes.

Nirenberg begins his narrative in ancient Egypt with Hecataeus of Abdera, who was among

the first generation of Greeks to travel in Egypt after Alexander’s conquest. In 320 B.C.E., he wrote a history of the land that turned the biblical story of the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt inside out. In this version, the Jews were a pestilential menace who had to be driven out of Egypt. Hecataeus’ ver-

As Philo described it, Caligula mocked the Jewish delegation, interrupting them with instructions to his palace decorators.

sion was later retold by an Egyptian priest named Manetho in the early 3rd century B.C.E. Nirenberg goes on from these polemical counter-histories to

(from Philo’s point of view),” Nirenberg drily remarks, “Caligula was assassinated before he could decide the case,” and his successor Claudius was more forgiving.

Nirenberg concludes that criticism leveled against the Jews in Hellenistic Egypt and the violence against them in Alexandria (and elsewhere in Egypt) was an exercise in scapegoating. The Egyptians’ real grievance was against Roman domination, but Jews were a convenient target. They “assigned to the Jews a . . . largely . . . negative role in how they imagined the fate of their kingdom” and began to attribute to them “misanthropy, impiety, lawlessness, and universal enmity.” This reading of ancient Egyptian history is interesting, but it probably goes too far. There is, indeed, anti-Judaism in the Egyptian and Hellenistic authors Nirenberg discusses, but their writings do not justify his conclusions with regard to the centrality of anti-Judaism in Egyptian culture during more than five hundred

years of history. It is true, as Nirenberg writes, that the introduction of the “inverse Exodus” stories into a Greek source “gave them new reach,” but to what degree did such stories, repeated in Greek and Egyptian authors from 200 B.C.E. onward, actually influence the anti-Jewish rioters in Alexandria? The causal links are largely missing.

Nor are Nirenberg’s large claims with regard to the enduring impact of Hecataeus and Manetho supported by the extant library of classical literature. Indeed, one almost never finds Hecataeus cited by Christian authors, and Manetho is never cited by them, nor by any Greek or Roman historian as far as I know. In fact, in the centuries after the riots in Alexandria in 38 C.E., this earlier form of anti-Jewish xenophobic prejudice—what the Greeks called *amixia*—gave way almost completely to the new, theologically saturated themes of Christian anti-Judaism. Many individuals in Hellenistic Egypt, as well as Rome, did hate Jews, but I doubt they feared their power and influence in the way that Nirenberg suggests. He appears to be reading the ancient past through the prism of modern prejudice.

Nirenberg’s thesis is more properly grounded, as he fully appreciates, in the New Testament, especially Paul’s Epistles and the writings of the Church Fathers. Paul really is an authentic pillar of the tradition of anti-Judaism with which Nirenberg is concerned. Moreover, the reading and



St. Paul preaching to the Jews in the synagogue at Damascus. Byzantine mosaic, late 12th century, Duomo, Monreale, Italy. (©Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.)

describe the much-later 1st-century C.E. assault on Jews by Apion and an Egyptian mob and the hapless Jewish appeal to Caligula. As the philosopher Philo of Alexandria later described it, the mad emperor questioned them mockingly, interrupting their answers with instructions to his decorators about where to hang the pictures. “Fortunately

teaching of Pauline texts has been central to the continued propagation of anti-Judaism through the centuries. As Nirenberg writes with regard to the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul held that:

The Mosaic law and the Jewish people and polity that possess it . . . are not the heirs of God's promise to Abraham, but are condemned as "of the flesh," sentenced to slavery and exile . . . terrestrial Jerusalem is to be cast out, replaced by the spiritual Jerusalem, set free by faith in Jesus.

This is quite right, but Nirenberg goes on to soften Paul's position in ways that are questionable. "To the extent that Jews refused to surrender their ancestors, their lineage, and their scripture," he understands Paul to be saying, "they could become emblematic of the particular, of stubborn adherence to the conditions of the flesh, enemies of the spirit, and of God. *I say 'could become' because it is not clear that Paul intended to cast them as such*" (my italics). In addition, he tells us that:

Paul the Pharisee, writing before the destruction of Jerusalem and before the predominance of gentiles in the church, had never aligned the Jews with Satan, nor opposed their world of Temple and covenant to God's. He never declared the mission to them closed nor lost sight of their reacceptance, though he conditioned that acceptance on their conversion to Christ. Finally, he never rejected the practice of Jewish law and ritual by Jewish believers in Christ.

Paul's texts are notoriously difficult, but I think the traditional readings, though more troubling, are better construals of Pauline teaching in its totality. The "New Perspectives" approach (a term coined by the English New Testament scholar James D.G. Dunn), which Nirenberg follows here, may be laudable as post-Holocaust apologetics, but it remains unconvincing as textual exegesis. Nirenberg himself seems to recognize this when he refers to Paul as having thought that "misplaced attention to the word of law, letter, and flesh [i.e., Judaism] was exceedingly, even lethally, dangerous."

The root of Paul's fundamental critique is that by works of the law (i.e., Judaism), no one shall be justified. "If justification were through the law," he preaches in Galatians, "the Christ died in vain . . . For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse." (Gal. 3:10-14) This severe criticism certainly refers to Jews rather than Gentiles or, as Nirenberg at one point suggests, "gentile converts." In Paul's understanding, Judaism, with its regimen of commandments, does not lead to God but away from Him. To uphold the Torah is to be entombed in the flesh. And this conclusion is metaphysically inescapable for the law is of no positive import, "For no human being will be justified in his [God's] sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20) Judaism, Jewish law, Torah, Israel's covenant with God, are all, according to Paul, "a dispensation of death, carved in letters of stone . . . a dispensation of condemnation . . . which fadeth away." (2 Cor. 3:6-11) This is Paul's radical, fateful indictment of Judaism. Nirenberg's cautious rendition of Paul's message is not the kind

of local error of interpretation that is inevitable in any sweeping, synthetic history. Unlike the exaggeration of ancient Egyptian anti-Judaism, it is an error that distorts his narrative. For it is with Paul that the uncompromising alternation between a "Judaic" worldview and an "anti-Judaic" one becomes central to the Western intellectual tradition.

If Nirenberg is too generous in his interpretation of Paul, he is judicious in his account of the depiction of the Jews in the Gospels, especially

Anti-Judaism was the required negative core of classic Christian theology.

Matthew. The idea that the new covenant of Christianity has definitively succeeded the old one of Judaism is, as Nirenberg makes clear, the cardinal source, along with Paul, of later Christian anti-Judaism. Having committed the heinous crime of deicide, only sincere acceptance of Christ's passion can atone for Israel's sin. Although this basic and irreconcilable opposition remains shocking, it should not surprise us. In the competition that took place between Judaism and nascent Christianity, only one interpretation of divine revelation could be correct. Judaism had to be wrong for Christianity to *be*. Anti-Judaism was the required negative core of classic Christian theology.

Among the Fathers of the "Early Church" this understanding deepened and hardened. Indeed, intra-Christian conflict, such as that between Marcion and Justin Martyr, often came down to a competition as to who could be "less Jewish" than his "Judaizing" opponent. There is one major and decisive deviation from this trend that must be mentioned, namely Augustine's understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and between Jews and Christians. As Nirenberg carefully explains, Augustine saw in Jewish survival the witness of unbelief. Using the biblical paradigm of Cain and Abel, with Jews identified with the former and Jesus with the latter, he quoted Psalm 59:11: "Slay them not, lest my people forget, but scatter them in Your might." In their continued misery and dispersion, Jews testified to the truth of Christianity. This essentially became the normative position of the Catholic Church. Seven centuries after Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux protected local Jews from marauding crusaders by admonishing them "whosoever touches a Jew to take his life is like one who harms Jesus himself . . . for it is written of them 'Slay them not.'" In a cautious conclusion, Nirenberg writes that:

Some have seen in this anecdote proof that Augustine's teaching "saved Jewish lives," "facilitating the survival of the Jews in Christendom. It is never easy to assign a clear valence—good or bad—to the fate of an idea, and a different choice of anecdote might lead to a less positive conclusion.

In reviewing a book as sweeping and ambitious as Nirenberg's, one inevitably focuses on areas of disagreement, so I should note that his account of anti-Judaism in both Islam and the Christian Middle Ages is excellent. Against apologetic claims

that Islamic anti-Judaism is a late development, Nirenberg confronts the fundamental anti-Jewish polemic presented of Muslim scripture. "Jewish duplicity and enmity," he reports, "would become a basic axiom of Qur'anic ontology." This should not be surprising; it was necessary to diminish the claims of Judaism if the teachings of the Prophet were to have a justification. This led to the powerful Islamic tradition that Jews consciously falsified their own scripture in order to reject the prophetic claims of Muhammad.

In his account of anti-Judaism in medieval Christendom, Nirenberg emphasizes the central role of state (royal and princely) power, the practice and symbolism of moneylending and the Jewish role in the economy, and the charge of ritual murder. This is a complex topic, and Nirenberg, who is the author of an important study of violence against minorities, including but not only Jews, in the 14th century, is a sure guide. As he rightly notes, the breakdown of the relationship between monarchs and Jews is a key part of the story. The many medieval expulsions in the Jewish communities of Western lands after 1280 hewed to Augustinian theory: In exile Jews bore witness to the truth of the dominant religion. Meanwhile, as anti-Jewish themes were increasingly circulated, statesmen, politicians, churchmen, philosophers, and poets were all accused by their enemies of falling into the theological error of "Judaizing."

If Nirenberg is too generous to Paul, he is too critical of his great intellectual descendant, Martin Luther, who famously accused the Catholic Church of "Judaizing."

His lengthy and generally insightful analysis of Luther's hermeneutical revisionism includes a discussion of his advice on how to treat "living Jews." In setting out Luther's position, he cites Luther's infamous 1543 pamphlet, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in which he recommends both "sharp mercy" and "utter mercilessness" toward contemporary Jews. He quotes Luther's intolerant advice to:

Burn their synagogues . . . force them to work, and deal with them with utter mercilessness, as Moses did in the wilderness when he struck three thousand dead.

And "if all this still failed to contain their blasphemy," Nirenberg adds, then Luther advises, "away with them." Given the flagrant misuse of Luther by the Third Reich, this risks falsifying his actual view. Though Nirenberg mentions this issue, and repeats that "I am not interested in contributing to arguments . . . about whether Martin Luther was an anti-Semite or an architect of the Holocaust," his description will only make this erroneous link seem indubitable. Yes, Luther was a great hater, most visibly of Jews and Papists, but he was a late medieval hater. The most extreme form of anti-Jewish action that Luther calls for in his late work is the renewal of the policy of expulsion. At the same time, however, Luther advised his clergy that they should warn their parishioners to "guard against the Jews and avoid them so far as possible. They should not curse them or harm their persons, however."

Even in his ugliest discourses, those of 1542 and 1543, Luther prefaces his counsel to the German princes with an Augustinian exhortation, "We must indeed with prayer and the fear of God

before our eyes, exercise a sharp compassion towards them and seek to save some of them from the flames [of Hell]. Avenge ourselves we dare not.” Luther’s advice was followed. Jews were expelled from many German cities in the 16th century, but they were not massacred.

Anti-Judaism did not disappear with the advent of the Enlightenment. On the whole, Enlightenment thinkers agreed that Jews could and should be emancipated, but the price they had to pay was the forfeiture of their Judaism. Jews as individuals could be redeemed and refashioned; Judaism could not. It is with this debate that the modern “Jewish Question”—encouraged, even made necessary, by toleration and political emancipation—emerges, and, perhaps surprisingly, the tradition of “anti-Judaism” reasserts itself.

Nirenberg’s competent account of this period rests on the abundant scholarship about figures such as Kant, Voltaire, Abbé Grégoire, Fichte, Hegel, and Locke that has appeared in recent decades. I would quarrel, however, with his characterization of Immanuel Kant. Kant’s well-known utterance that

“strictly speaking Judaism is not a religion at all” must be understood in terms of his main concern, which was the conflict between heteronomy and autonomy, with both traditional Judaism and Christianity defined as heteronomous systems in which moral authority commanded the subject from without. The main target of Kant’s *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* is superstition and false teaching in both Judaism and Christianity. Kant was certainly anti-Judaic, as Nirenberg defines the term, but at the same time he was also anti-Catholic and anti-Protestant insofar as those faiths made transcendental claims to revelation and were centered on ritual rather than ethics. Hegel’s nonsensical charge that Kant had recourse to a “Jewish principle” of reasoning (itself an interesting case of rhetorical anti-Judaism) notwithstanding, I don’t think the bulk of Kant’s important writings show any consistent concern with defining himself or his system as anti-Judaic.

Nirenberg carries his narrative through the 19th and 20th centuries (it is easy to see where Goebbels and Nazism fit with their phantasmal notions of Jews and Judaism). *Anti-Judaism* covers an enor-

mous span of time and an extensive catalogue of thinkers and issues. It goes a considerable way in successfully writing a narrative history of Western thought that concentrates on the continuing evaluation of Judaism within this tradition. However, it does not always judge its subjects with complete accuracy. It is too kind to Paul and too hard on Luther, and it is insufficiently informative about all the details and subtleties of the revolutionary thinkers, who come from many directions and with varied interests, in the modern era.

Nirenberg’s basic thesis that the notions of “Jews” and “Judaism” are central building blocks of Western traditions—including Islam—is undoubtedly correct. He does not bring his narrative up to the present moment, but he is well aware that his story is not over and its implications are troubling.

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Are We All Khazars Now?

BY SHAUL STAMPFER

“The Missing Link of Jewish European Ancestry: Contrasting the Rhineland and the Khazarian Hypotheses”

by Eran Elhaik

Genome Biology and Evolution (2013) Vol. 5, pp. 61–74

Geneticist Eran Elhaik’s article on the Khazar ancestry of Ashkenazi Jews made a stir from the moment it appeared. Oxford University Press immediately notified the scientific community of its publication in the journal *Genome Biology and Evolution* through the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s “EurekAlert!” website. The story was soon picked up by *ScienceDaily*, and not long after Elhaik was the subject of somewhat breathless articles in *Haaretz* and the *Forward*. According to Elhaik’s website, it has been discussed on more than 50 news sites and at least 18 blogs. It is, in fact, now one of the most-read articles ever published in *Genome Biology and Evolution*. However, there has been little critical discussion of it outside the scientific community.

Most historians have assumed that the Jews of Eastern Europe are the descendants of Central European Jews who moved eastward in the Middle Ages or shortly thereafter. In 1976, Arthur Koestler popularized an alternative hypothesis. In *The Thirteenth Tribe*, he argued that most Ashkenazi Jews are descended from the Khazars, a Central

Asian people who ruled a large kingdom on the Black Sea and apparently converted to Judaism in the 8th century. This hypothesis has been taken up more recently by Shlomo Sand in a book called *The Invention of the Jewish People*. Koestler, one of the oddest and most extraordinary public intellectuals of the 20th century, wanted to weaken anti-Semitism by demonstrating that many Jews weren’t Semites at all. Sand, a self-avowed post-Zionist who teaches at Tel Aviv University, is apparently driven by the desire to prove that Ashkenazi Israelis are interlopers in the Middle East.

The Khazars certainly existed, though not much is known about them. However, the story (or myth) of their conversion to Judaism has seized the imagination of generations of writers, from Judah Halevi, whose 12th-century classic *The Kuzari* is a philosophical dialogue between a Khazar king and the rabbi who convinces him of the truth of Judaism, to Michael Chabon, who considered calling his 2007 novel *Gentlemen of the Road* “Jews with Swords.”

Neither Arthur Koestler nor Shlomo Sand based their iconoclastic, politically driven conclusions on serious research. Eran Elhaik, however, is an accomplished scientist who has apparently come to the same conclusion through sophisticated statistical analysis of the salient genetic data. In his view, this proves that most contemporary Jews are descendants of the Khazars. He also thinks that it solves a demographic puzzle. How, he asks, are we to explain “the vast population expansion of Eastern European Jews from fifty thousand

(15th century) to eight million (20th century),” particularly given “the severe economic restrictions, slavery, assimilation, the Black Death and other plagues, forced and voluntary conversions, persecutions, kidnappings, rapes, exiles, wars, massacres, and pogroms” to which they were subjected? I shall return to this puzzle, but first let us examine Elhaik’s solution.

Elhaik’s article has become rather popular in some anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist circles, but this proves nothing about its truth. However, Elhaik’s media appearances make it clear that he is far from naïve about the uses to which his findings have been put. Elhaik himself has summarized these findings quite clearly in the article’s abstract:

The question of Jewish ancestry has been the subject of controversy for over two centuries and has yet to be resolved. The “Rhineland hypothesis” depicts Eastern European Jews as a “population isolate” that emerged from a small group of German Jews who migrated eastward and expanded rapidly. Alternatively, the “Khazarian hypothesis” suggests that Eastern European Jews descended from the Khazars, an amalgam of Turkic clans that settled the Caucasus in the early centuries CE and converted to Judaism in the 8th century. Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman Jews continuously reinforced the Judaized empire until the 13th century. Following the collapse

of their empire, the Judeo-Khazars fled to Eastern Europe. The rise of European Jewry is therefore explained by the contribution of the Judeo-Khazars . . . We applied a wide range of population genetic analyses to compare these two hypotheses. Our findings support

In other words, while there was DNA from eight Ashkenazi males in Elhaik's study, there was no Khazar DNA at all.

the Khazarian hypothesis and portray the European Jewish genome as a mosaic of Near Eastern-Caucasus, European, and Semitic ancestries.

Elhaik's arguments did not go unchallenged. In a detailed review in the *Proceedings of the Russian Academy of DNA Genealogy*, Anatole A. Klyosov dismissed much of his analysis as mere acrobatics. However, since this article appeared in Russian, it got little attention. Recently, at least two studies have come to similar conclusions. A scientific team led by M. Metsapalu announced that it has found "no indication of Khazar genetic ancestry among Ashkenazi Jews" (the paper is forthcoming). Meanwhile another team led by M. Costa has argued both that there is strong evidence of the admixture of European women in the ancestry of Ashkenazi Jewish women and that there is no evidence for significant Khazar ancestry. On his website, Elhaik has argued that neither paper disproves his thesis. A third team, led by Doron Behar, has a paper coming out in the journal *Human Biology* whose title announces "No Evidence from Genome-Wide Data of a Khazar Origin for the Ashkenazi Jews." But Elhaik will, no doubt, maintain his position.

Can a non-scientist enter into this debate? Let us return to Elhaik's paper, which turns on comparing the genomes of individuals, especially males. "The complete data set," he writes, "contained 1,287 unrelated individuals of 8 Jewish and 74 non-Jewish populations." This is impressive, but it says nothing about the number of Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish males whose Y chromosomes are central to Elhaik's analysis. If one searches Elhaik's website, it turns out that there were exactly 12 Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews in the data set. How many were male? To find out, I had to turn to the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of Tartu. It turns out that there were eight males in the sample. As small as this is, however, it turns out to be huge compared to the data set on Khazar DNA.

The trouble with obtaining Khazar DNA is that no population group today is recognized to have descended from the Khazars. Elhaik acknowledges this difficulty and deals with it efficiently. According to him, "Caucasus Georgians and Armenians were considered proto-Khazars because they are believed to have emerged from the same genetic cohort as the Khazars." He bases this claim on "Polak 1951; Dvornik 1962; Brook 2006." This appears quite convincing unless one is familiar with the names cited—and the ones missing. Polak and Dvornik were important scholars, but their work is a half-century old and outdated, while Kevin Brook is a talented but amateur Khazar enthusiast who has no first-hand knowledge of Central Asian studies. In fact, no

contemporary scholarship supports this claim. Moreover, elsewhere in the article Elhaik himself refers to a study by Balanovsky et al., but fails to mention that it concludes that of all the national groups in the Black Sea region, the Georgians and Armenians were the *least* likely to have absorbed

significant populations from other national groups. In other words, while there was DNA from eight Ashkenazi males in Elhaik's study, there was no Khazar DNA at all. This makes it a bit difficult to come to significant conclusions about the Khazarian ancestry of Ashkenazi Jews. The problems, however, do not end there.

Following Koestler (whose *The Thirteenth Tribe* Elhaik has told interviewers he read as a child), Elhaik says that after the downfall of the Khazarian empire, "Some Judeo-Khazars were left behind, mainly in the Crimea and the Caucasus, where they formed Jewish enclaves surviving into modern times . . . [a] vestige of the Khazar nation is the Mountain Jews in the North Eastern Caucasus."

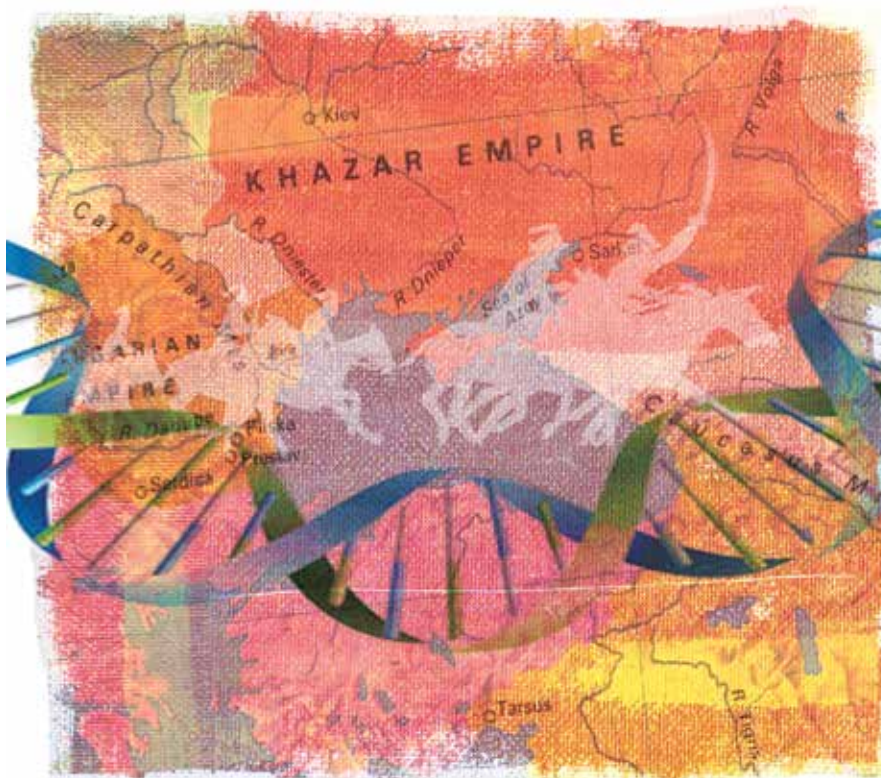


Illustration by Val Bochkov.

Unfortunately, Koestler had no evidence for this whatsoever. But there is a more serious problem, at least for Elhaik's argument. If the "Mountain Jews" are a "vestige of the Khazar nation," why bother with the Georgians and the Armenians? Elhaik could have just gone directly to these "descendants" and compared them with Ashkenazi Jews. The only answer I can see is that this is a case of the dreaded academic syndrome "Cut and Paste Disease."

Unfortunately for the readers of Elhaik, there are more problems with his research. One of the methods of genetic analysis that he employed is known as Principal Component Analysis (PCA). For present purposes, it is not necessary to describe the method. What is interesting is how Elhaik tested it:

To assess the ability of our PCA-based approach to identify the biogeographical origins of a population, we first sought to identify the biogeographical origin of Druze. The Druze religion originated in the 11th century, but the people's origins remain a source of much confusion and debate (Hitti 1928). We traced Druze biogeographical origin . . . Half of the Druze clustered tightly in Southeast Turkey, and the remaining were scattered along northern Syria and Iraq. These results are in agreement with Shlush et al. (2008) using mtDNA analysis.

The founder of the Druze religion, Hamza ibn 'Ali ibn Ahmad, was of Persian descent and was active in Egypt. His missionaries had their greatest success in present-day Lebanon and Syria. The religion never expanded into Turkey, a point made explicitly by Hitti, who is Elhaik's source. What can one say about a method that identifies the origin of the Druze in Southeast Turkey? To be fair, the developers of PCA warned that poor sample sizes can yield problematic results.

In his "Identity by Descent" analysis of the Ashkenazi DNA, Elhaik concluded that "the maternal analysis depicts a specific Caucasus founding lineage

with a weak Southern European ancestry . . . whereas the paternal ancestry reveals a dual Caucasus-Southern European origin." Elhaik explains these lineages as the result of "ancient migrations from Southern Europe toward Khazaria (6th–13th centuries) and more recent migrations from the Caucasus to Central and Southern Europe (13th–15th centuries) (Polak 1951; Patai and Patai 1975; Straten 2003; Brook 2006; Sand 2009)." Precisely *none* of the cited authors had or has direct familiarity with the primary sources of the history of the region. In fact, neither migration ever took place.

Elhaik might have been thinking of the claim of the 10th-century historian Ali al-Mas'udi that many

Jews fled from Byzantium to the Khazar lands during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Romanus Lacapenus, but there is no evidence for this in Byzantine sources. Moreover, a refugee population would have included similar numbers of men and women, which would have generated equal male and female levels of Southern European ancestry, giving Elhaik more problems rather than less. And there is no evidence whatsoever for any "more recent migrations from the Caucasus to Central and Southern Europe." Nor is it likely, or even possible, that "Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman Jews continuously reinforced the Judaized empire until the 13th century. Following the collapse of their empire, the Judeo-Khazars fled to Eastern Europe." The last Khazar capital was destroyed by

Sviatoslav of Rus before 970, and the empire never recovered.

Not only is there no evidence for the claim of significant migration to Poland from Khazaria, but such a claim flies in the face of basic facts that we know about Eastern European Jewry. The settlement patterns of the Jews in Eastern Europe suggest that large-scale settlement began in west-

ence of Eastern European Jews during those centuries, and their growth in numbers is not really that mysterious.

Populations do not grow arithmetically, they grow—not unlike credit card debts—exponentially. The Afrikaners in South Africa started from a group of about 2,000 settlers who came in the late 17th century. Today, roughly 13 generations later, they num-

The settlement patterns of the Jews in Eastern Europe suggest that large-scale settlement began in western Poland and not the parts closest to Khazaria.

ern Poland and not the parts closest to Khazaria. Moreover, there is no evidence of influence of Byzantine Jewish liturgy and customs on Eastern European Jewry and none of Central Asian languages on Yiddish.

The main appeal of a theory of migration is that it seems to explain the demographic puzzle I mentioned at the outset: How did we get so many Jews in Eastern Europe? How did we go from a population of 50,000 in the 15th century to eight million in the 20th, especially given all the depredations visited upon the Jews over those five centuries? In fact, Elhaik's litany of woe ("economic restrictions . . . assimilation, the Black Death . . . conversions, persecutions, kidnappings, rapes, exiles, wars . . . and pogroms") is a drastic overstatement of the experi-

ber about three million. A little over three hundred years ago, five thousand French immigrants came to Quebec; their descendants now number about 6.5 million. What needs to be explained is not why the Jewish population in Eastern Europe grew exponentially in the modern period but rather why the Jewish population of Central Europe did not grow. But that is a different question, and the Khazars are of no help in solving it.

How did a distinguished journal from Oxford University Press publish an article like this? Usually, it is difficult to check the work of the scholarly referees a journal employs. However, in this case, Elhaik posted the referees' reports on his website (they have since been taken down).

The first referee was aware that the paper would arouse controversy, predicting that it would be "highly cited," but apart from expressing some doubts about Elhaik's observations on Druze origins, he remarked only—and inaccurately—that Elhaik "has been more thorough than most (if not all) previous studies on the issue of Jewish ancestry."

The second referee recommended that M.I. Artamonov and his book *History of the Khazars* and L.N. Gumilev's *The Rhythms of Eurasia* should be cited. These two books (both in Russian) are exceedingly odd recommendations. Artamonov's was written under severe Soviet censorship, which, as current research has shown, prevented him from writing what he really thought. Gumilev's book is discussed in Vadim Rossman's *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* under the rubric "Antisemitism in Eurasian Historiography." It is a good example of contemporary Russian populist nationalism, but it is less than useful for unbiased research. The referee also noted that "currently Druze do not live at the border of Khazaria. They seem to have migrated. This should be explained." Indeed. Neither Elhaik nor his referees are apparently familiar with the work of Vladimir Petrukhin, who is the dean of Russian scholarship on the Khazars. There are also serious books in English that Elhaik ought to have cited, such as Dunlop's *History of the Jewish Khazars* or the works of Peter Golden.

Judging by the comments, neither referee seems to have been very familiar with the literature on genetics of the Jews or the issue of the genetic background of Ashkenazi Jews. The referees did not compare Elhaik's thesis to the findings of other researchers, nor did they seem to notice the internal problems raised here. They certainly did not ask about the size of the data set. In general, their comments tended to focus on style and presentation rather than technical details or the overall cogency of the argument.

What happened here? I doubt that there was an overt political agenda on the part of the editor. The key probably lies in the first reviewer's prediction that the paper would be "highly cited." Nonetheless, it remains to be explained how it seems to have evaded any critical scrutiny at all before being published. There is at least one virtue of Elhaik's article: It is a valuable reminder that despite sophisticated-looking methods, peer review, publication in a prestigious scientific journal, not to speak of media coverage, there is no alternative to critical reading.

When all is said and done, the accepted wisdom is still acceptable. There is no evidence that Ashkenazi Jews are descended from Central Asian "Jews with swords," and there is every reason to think that they simply came from Central Europe. The findings of other genetic researchers that the DNA of most Jews seems to link them with other Jews more than with any other group has not been disproven.

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The Good, The Bad, and The Unending

BY GAVRIEL D. ROSENFELD

The Monuments Men

directed by George Clooney

Columbia Pictures, 118 minutes

As the 75th anniversary of the start of World War II approaches this fall, the battle to determine its meaning continues. In Germany, writers such as Günter Grass and Jörg Friedrich have shifted attention from the Nazis' crimes against Jews and other Europeans to the suffering of German civilians at the hands of the Allies. In Eastern Europe, Poles, Balts, and Russians have battled over claims that Stalin was as responsible as Hitler for causing the war and committing comparable atrocities. In America and Great Britain, writers as ideologically varied as Nicholson Baker, Patrick Buchanan, and Norman Davies have blurred the line between the wartime behavior of the Axis and Allies. George Clooney's new film *The Monuments Men* is the latest salvo launched by the defenders of the "good war" against its revisionist critics. The film purports to tell a tale of American heroism in the face of Nazi barbarism, and in certain respects it succeeds. But like both sides in the ongoing debate, it has its blind spots.

In the summer of 1943, the Roosevelt administration hired a group of art historians, conservationists, and museum curators to staff a new Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA) within the U. S. Army and Allied forces to identify and protect historic works of art and architecture from wartime destruction. A 2009 book by Robert M. Edsel told their story, and *The Monuments Men* is adapted from it with a fair degree of license and more than a little Hollywood schmaltz.

Seldom have scholars in the humanities featured so prominently as the heroes of a Hollywood blockbuster. Clooney, who directed and co-wrote the screenplay, has assembled an all-star cast, including Matt Damon, Bill Murray, John Goodman, Cate Blanchett, and Hugh Bonneville (who is finally able to wear a military uniform into battle; Lord Grantham was stuck at Downton Abbey for World War I), but he also aspires to tell an important story about the need to preserve "the very foundations of modern society" from destruction.

Unfortunately, the film itself never fully engages. It should be a gripping narrative, but one is never entirely sure what is going on, or whether to care. In addition to inadequate character development and insufficient exposition, *The Monuments Men* has an odd hybrid tone that vacillates between farce and tragedy. This is a pity, for the staff of the MFAA really did perform heroic work in securing and eventually repatriating literally millions of cultural artifacts to their rightful owners.

In the film's trailer, George Clooney's character, an art history professor named Frank Stokes (based

on the conservator and museum director George L. Stout), intones: "They tell us: 'Who cares about art?' But they're wrong. It is the exact reason that we're fighting. For culture. For a way of life." The film shows Hitler, Göring, and even lower-ranking SS men stealing works by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Raphael, and others, which end up being crudely warehoused in underground mines throughout Germany to protect them from Allied bombing raids. Worse still, the Nazis violently destroy "degenerate" modernist art by painters such as Picasso and Klee. But making Nazi evil turn on cultural barbarism is not just an historical mistake, it's a philosophical one.

The film's juxtaposition of Allied civilization with Nazi barbarism is not entirely false, but it fails to answer the question of why Nazis went to such elaborate lengths to seize all of this art in the first place. The film's claim that Hitler "wants it all" for

Allies, explicitly targeted art; it didn't. Moreover, Albert Speer and other Nazis countermanded the scorched earth policy on numerous occasions. Viewers never learn that it was actually Austrian Nazis themselves (including SS general and RSHA chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner) who thwarted the nihilistic plan of local Nazi leader August Eigruber to blow up one of the Reich's largest art repositories, the salt mine of Altaussee. The Nazis, in other words, also rescued art from the Nazis!

This blind spot about the motives guiding the Nazis' treatment of art is echoed by the film's partial portrayal of the Holocaust. *The Monuments Men* mentions Jews sporadically. As Cate Blanchett's character plangently remarks of the owners of the looted art and valuables, they "are never coming back." Her point is underlined in a

macabre scene when Matt Damon's character discovers barrels of gold fillings. But such scenes also serve to obscure a less comfortable truth: While the United States worked to rescue art that was stolen (at least in part) from Jews, it was much less effective in saving Jewish lives.

The film ends on a Christian rather than a Jewish note. One of the running subplots involves the Monuments Men's pursuit of two priceless religious works: Van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* and Michelangelo's *Madonna of Bruges*. Near the film's conclusion, the team discovers both works in the Altaussee mine and spirits them out before the arrival of approaching Red Army troops. In the last scene, set in 1977,

an aged Stokes returns to Bruges with his grandson to gaze wistfully upon the statue.

In and of itself, the scene is unobjectionable; Stokes and his men were undeniably heroic in protecting the artifacts of Western culture, but the sense of closure this gives is a bit too perfect for what is still an open issue. One of the Nazi looters the real-life Monuments Men pursued was an art dealer named Hildebrand Gurlitt. Last year, more than 1,400 stolen works of art were discovered in his son's Munich apartment.



Michelangelo's *Madonna of Bruges* is recovered from the Altaussee salt mine, Austria, July 10, 1945. (Courtesy of the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.)

his Führermuseum in Linz, Austria reduces him to a conventional, if exceedingly successful, looter. In fact, as David B. Dennis shows in his recent book, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*, the Third Reich's leaders were not insensible to the riches of Western civilization, they just wanted to put their own ideological spin on its meaning. As George Steiner pointed out decades ago, the Nazis were perfectly capable of reading Goethe and playing Bach in the evening and then going out to gas Jews at Auschwitz in the morning.

Indeed, *The Monuments Men* fails to explain (as Edsel's more nuanced book makes clear) that the Nazi leadership was actually divided on these issues. The film misleadingly claims that Hitler's "Nero Order" of March 1945, which ordered the destruction of all resources that could be used by the invading

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Dangerous Liaisons: Modern Scholars and Medieval Relations Between Jews and Christians

BY ELLIOTT HOROWITZ

In the spring of 1942—which, as Mel Brooks noted, was “winter for Poland and France”—Salo Baron published a boldly revisionist article on “The Jewish Factor in Medieval Civilization,” based on his recently delivered presidential address to the American Academy for Jewish Research (AAJR). Baron, who was born in western Galicia in 1895, had earned his rabbinical ordination and various doctorates in Vienna, and served as the Miller Professor of Jewish History, Literature, and Institutions at Columbia University beginning in 1930. Although he was famously familiar with every period of Jewish history, Baron chose to devote his lecture to the Jews of medieval Europe with a somewhat startling thesis. “Any comparison with the legislation of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy,” he asserted, “will reveal that we are maligning the Middle Ages when we call the Nuremberg Laws a reversion to the medieval status.” He stressed that “medieval Jewry, much as it suffered from disabilities and contempt, still was a privileged minority in every country where it was tolerated at all.”

These comments, as Robert Liberles noted in his 1995 biography of Baron, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History*, continued Baron’s famous critique of the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history” that he had first expressed in his influential 1928 essay “Ghetto and Emancipation” and broadly translated into practice in his three-volume *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, published in 1937. There he had written that “the widespread belief that Jewish life in medieval Europe consisted in an uninterrupted series of migrations and suffering, of disabilities and degradation, is to be relegated to the realm of misconception,” adding that the Middle Ages were *not* “as dark for the Jews, in comparison with the rest of the population, as is still widely believed.”

The misconceived narrative that Baron boldly set out to overturn owed much to the great 19th-century German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz, who saw the history of his people, particularly in the Middle Ages, as having been “characterized by unprecedented sufferings, an uninterrupted martyrdom, and a constantly aggravated degradation and humiliation.” Graetz dramatically described German Jewry after the First Crusade as “cloaked in a spirit of sadness and walking in darkness all day long,” asserting further that “their appearance and manner expressed sorrow and subservience.” Baron clearly had such passages in mind when in a footnote to his 1942 essay he distanced himself from “the eternal self-pity characteristic of Jewish historiography.”

Of course, Baron was thinking not only of lachrymose Jewish historians but also of Europe’s new Aryan masters. In stressing the “the closeness of

social intercourse between medieval Jews and Christians,” he clearly alluded to Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws, which prohibited marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Aryans. And yet, in the Middle Ages, he wrote such closeness “often broke down the walls of segregation, even in the most obscure and outlawed domain of sex relationships.”

Furthermore, “intermarriage, and still more, illicit relationships, were far more frequent than is indicated by the sources.”

There may have been a more local impetus behind Baron’s AAJR lecture as well. A decade earlier he had succeeded the brilliant Johns Hopkins medievalist David Blondheim as corresponding secretary of the AAJR. Blondheim had been forced out of office, albeit not out of the Academy itself, after mar-



Salo Baron speaking at The Jewish Theological Seminary in the 1940s. (Courtesy of the Ratner Center Archives at The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.)

rying Eleanor Lansing Dulles, a Bryn Mawr graduate and minister’s daughter, whose older brothers were Allen and John Foster Dulles. The couple had met in Paris, where she was researching the French franc for her doctorate in economics and he was researching the vernacular French of medieval Jews. Their first kiss took place, as she later wrote, “in the shadow of Notre-Dame’s deserted moonlit square.” (One wonders whether Blondheim showed her the monumental sculptures of Ecclesia and Syna-

goga, personified as females, on the cathedral’s west façade, a vibrant and triumphant Church juxtaposed with a blindfolded and drooping Synagogue.)

Eventually, after a civil marriage, their union was re-formalized in a religious ceremony performed by Eleanor’s brother-in-law, a Protestant minister. The bride, as she later recalled, told him that he could “do

Salo Baron distanced himself from “the eternal self-pity characteristic of Jewish historiography.”

any kind of service he thought suitable, with Jesus included, but it would be nice to leave *Christ* out of it” (emphasis hers). Despite these efforts at accommodating the religious sensitivities of both sides, the marriage ended tragically less than two years later with David’s suicide, while Eleanor was carrying their first child. “I did not know the reason for his death. More than forty years later I still do not know,” she later wrote. Whatever the reason or reasons, Blondheim’s treatment by some of his colleagues in the AAJR, particularly its previous (and founding) president Louis Ginzberg of The Jewish Theological Seminary, could hardly have enhanced his nuptial life. Other colleagues were more understanding. “I cannot tell you how sorry I am that our pleasant and effective cooperation in the interest of the Academy cannot go on as heretofore,” wrote Alexander Marx, JTS’s learned librarian who had succeeded Ginzberg as the AAJR’s president. Marx, who had known Blondheim for decades, later encouraged and assisted Dr. Dulles in publishing the second volume of her late husband’s French monograph on the loan words in Rashi’s Talmud commentary.

Of course, whatever Baron’s personal and political agendas in writing it, his 1942 address was, above all, a call for a bold new historical research program.

In short, the entire realm of sexual interrelations, extremely important not only for the racial history of both groups, but also for their social coexistence, its impact upon mutual friendships or hatreds and the success of anti-Jewish propaganda . . . would merit much more searching investigation than has been given to it thus far.

But how could this be done? In a lengthy footnote Baron suggested that “a large, hitherto almost unexplored, body of materials for mixed amorous relationships may be culled together from medieval belles-lettres which, though fictional in nature, undoubtedly reflect life’s daily realities at least as much as the normative sources.”

Among the medieval sources Baron mentioned was the *Dialogus miraculorum* (*Dialogue on Miracles*) by the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. 1240), two of whose stories involve sexual relations between clerics and young Jewish women. In one of these a young English cathedral canon falls helplessly in love with a beautiful Jewish girl with whom he has sexual intercourse, at her invitation, on the night following Good Friday. After the canon confesses his guilt to his bishop, he is persuaded to renounce his Church career and marry the girl—after her baptism. In her excellent recent book *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century*, Nina Rowe writes that such medieval fantasies of “sexually provocative” Jewish women “were sometimes associated with the figure of Synagoga herself.”

Were there indeed “sexually provocative” Jewish women in medieval Europe, or only fantasies about

the river and mistook an untanned hide sticking out of his coat to be the body of a child. The servant, in Ephraim’s telling, knew that his lord “would rejoice” upon hearing the news, “since he hated a certain haughty Jewess in the town.” Upon hearing of the alleged incident the lord replied: “Now I shall take my revenge from that woman, Madame Polcelina.”

Were there indeed “sexually provocative” Jewish women in medieval Europe, or only fantasies about them?

But which local lord hated Polcelina, and why? In Graetz’s reading, it was not Count Thibaut who

Another former student and perhaps Baron’s leading disciple, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, suggested a more developed scenario in his now classic book on Jewish history and memory, *Zakhor*. In Yerushalmi’s version, “Count Thibaut was having an affair with a Jewess, Polcelina, which aroused the jealousy of the count’s wife, while other Christians resented the lady’s influence at court.” Although the Hebrew chronicler had referred to Thibaut by his actual name, he had assigned the count’s wife the archetypal name of “Jezebel.” Since the 1953 publication of Shalom Spiegel’s classic Hebrew article on the martyrs of Blois we know both her real name and her royal pedigree. She was Countess Alix, the second daughter of Louis VII by Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was born shortly before their divorce. By the time she married Thibaut (Theobald) V in 1164 his sister—also known as Alix—had become Louis’ third wife. The relationship between a local aristocrat who was so closely connected to the royal chamber and a Jewess was bound to become the subject of gossip among both Jews and Christians—and perhaps even between them.

Readers who have been sensing the dramatic possibilities of the story may not be surprised to learn that a Hebrew play was indeed written about Polcelina, Thibaut, and the Blois martyrdom of 1171. More surprising, however, is the identity of the playwright: Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900–1985), who along with Salo Baron must be counted as among the 20th century’s greatest Jewish historians. Goitein is best known today for his extensive and meticulous use of documents from the Cairo *Geniza* to reconstruct the social and economic history of medieval Mediterranean Jewry, but when his five-act play was published in Tel Aviv during the summer of 1927, Goitein had not yet inspected a single *Geniza* fragment, although he had recently earned a doctorate in Islamic studies at the University of Frankfurt. Having arrived in Palestine before The Hebrew University of Jerusalem opened its doors, Goitein spent his first few years in the country teaching at Haifa’s Reali high school. There one of his colleagues was the equally overqualified Shalom Spiegel. Of those two future titans of Jewish scholarship only Goitein was hired by The Hebrew University, joining its Institute of Oriental Studies in 1928. Spiegel made his way to New York shortly thereafter, eventually joining Louis Ginzberg and Alexander Marx at The Jewish Theological Seminary.

Polcelina was completed in Jerusalem early in the spring of 1927. It is likely that when he began composing the play, Goitein was considering the idea that he might support himself as a Hebrew writer like his friend the future Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon, one of the three friends he thanked in the play’s postscript. Another was Berl Katznelson (1887–1944), the founding editor of the Labor Zionist newspaper *Davar*. It was in the pages of *Davar* that Shalom Spiegel’s tripartite review of Goitein’s play appeared in October 1927.

Spiegel, an expert in medieval Hebrew liturgical poetry whose brother was Sam Spiegel, the great Hollywood producer, opened his review by quoting from a penitential prayer (*selicha*) composed by the chronicler Ephraim of Bonn after the burning of Blois’ Jews (he also quoted one from Ephraim’s brother Hillel). In one of the poem’s more wrenching passages, Ephraim wrote:



Ecclesia and Synagoga, Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris.



them? And were these fantasies harbored only by Christians? One Hebrew source dealing with the background to the 1171 ritual murder accusation in Blois, on the Loire, repeatedly mentions a Jewish woman named Polcelina, whose close relations with Count Thibaut apparently led to the outbreak of murderous hostility against the local Jews, more than 30 of whom were burnt as punishment for the alleged murder of a child whose body was never found.

This Hebrew chronicle, composed late in the 12th century by Ephraim of Bonn, was interpreted by Heinrich Graetz as suggesting that the mayor of Blois “bore a grudge against an influential Jewish woman . . . who was a favorite of his lord . . . and took this opportunity of revenging himself.” The opportunity presented itself, as we learn from Ephraim, when a local servant saw a Jew watering his horse alongside

now hated her, but the local mayor, who was jealous of the count’s relations with the “haughty Jewess.”—Although it is not clear that such a mayor existed, this questionable storyline, which sundered Polcelina’s erstwhile Gentile lover from the Gentiles who now hated her, was later followed by Baron, who wrote in 1957 that the local investigation into the servant’s suspicions “became entangled in Count Thibaut’s love affair with a Jewess . . . and the enmity of local officials toward the count’s exacting lady friend.”

From the 1960s on, however, a different historical reconstruction began to emerge: It was the count’s change of heart towards Polcelina that set the stage for the tragedy in Blois. In his *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, Baron’s student Robert Chazan asserted that Polcelina “had unknowingly lost her leverage with the eroding of princely ardor.”

I am stoned, I am struck down and crucified. I am burned, my neck is snapped in shame. I am beheaded and trampled on for my guilt. I am strangled and choked by my enemy

These lines are taken from T. Carmi's 1981 translation. Carmi, himself a poet, wisely did not seek to emulate the poem's complicated rhyme scheme, but neither did he seek to sidestep or soften those lines in Ephraim's poem that might grate on some late 20th-century ears. Not only did he include the poet's description of his coreligionists as "crucified" (Ephraim was not the first Hebrew liturgical poet to compare the fate of medieval Jews with that of Jesus), but he also included the poet's raw request for divine revenge:

May disaster strike all my evil neighbors! Woe upon them!
They have earned their own disaster by destroying me.

Spiegel had evidently first encountered this poem in Simon Bernfeld's recent anthology *Sefer ha-dema'ot* (Book of Tears, 1923–1926), where it followed an account of the Blois incident taken from Joseph Ha-Kohen's 16th-century history of Jewish suffering *Emek ha-Bakha* (Vale of Tears). Goitein had also read Bernfeld's anthology, to which he referred in the learned notes to his 1927 play. Unlike Bernfeld, however, Goitein also consulted the two original medieval chronicles of the Blois incident. Bernfeld, true to his anthology's title, was primarily

interested in eliciting tears, and for his purposes it was sufficient to include Joseph Ha-Kohen's later account of the events in Blois. Salo Baron, who arrived in New York during the late 1920s, had also been perusing Bernfeld's anthology, probably with some degree of irritation. His polemic against lachrymose history in "Ghetto and Emancipation" may be seen as a response not only to 19th-century historians like Graetz, but to Bernfeld's *Sefer ha-dema'ot*. In fact, as the literary scholar Yael Feldman has recently suggested, Bernfeld's title "may have . . . inspired Baron's ironic phrase 'the lachrymose conception of history.'" Goitein's play of the previous year can be read as another response to Bernfeld, albeit one which sought to humanize rather than minimize the subject of Jewish suffering.

In the final scene of Act 1 the mayor of Blois—a figure of whose existence Goitein had apparently been persuaded by Graetz—soliloquizes about Polcelina's contemptuous conduct:

What did she say to me on that day? "Insolent goy!" "goy," "goy," cursed be the power of that word . . . "Goy" means you are not a person, your word does not insult, your blow does not cause pain . . . I will dispel that word from your mouths! . . . I will pursue you in anger and destroy you from under the heavens of France.

Unlike Graetz, who had depicted the mayor as jealous of the relations between the "haughty Jewess" and his own powerful lord, Goitein presented him



Shelomo Dov Goitein, ca. 1978 (Courtesy of Ayala Gordon.)

as understandably rankled by her insolent manner of addressing him.

Polcelina's imperiousness was evidently suggested to Goitein by Ephraim of Bonn's reference to her as *gevartanit*, a strong woman (perhaps even a "manly" one). This trait is depicted in the play's very first scene, which takes place on a Saturday afternoon during the spring of 1171. While strolling along the Loire, the mayor mentions the object of the visiting count's affection, to which the latter replies sardonically: "Oh, thank God, the subject of Polcelina has come up." Then, echoing Ephraim's chronicle, Thibaut refers to her as "that imperious woman," and acknowledges that she had once slapped "a certain nobleman" when he had allowed his hands too much freedom.

Goitein portrayed Polcelina as a wily widow aware both of the count's unrelenting desire for her and of the rumors concerning their alleged affair. His Polcelina continues to keep the count at arm's length even after realizing that she is thereby endangering her community. When Polcelina reluctantly agrees, after her coreligionists are accused of ritual murder, to meet with Thibaut privately she scoffingly challenges him to take her by force: "Yes, Polcelina is a piece of meat" (a learned allusion to a talmudic passage in Nedarim). When the count explains that he does not want her on those terms, she hisses back: "Take her, you dog! A carcass is permissible to you, goy!" In the play's second scene one of her coreligionists describes Polcelina as a cross between Esther and Vashti, treating both circumcised and uncircumcised with equal contempt. Another Jew comments on Polcelina's distinctive demeanor while leading the local women in prayer during the High Holy Days—looking, he claims, as if she were propositioning the Deity. "Were I God himself at that moment," he adds, "I would be afraid of her."

One character who definitely fears her is her adolescent son Tov-Elem. Spiegel noted in his 1927 review that Goitein had invented not only the name, but also the character. While acknowledging that he

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Commentary

“did not know of a historical work in our literature that so faithfully reflects research in all sources of the period,” he also praised the playwright for having the courage to occasionally improve upon historical truth—as in exchanging Polcelina’s two daughters for a single son, whom on one occasion she threatens to disown “if he does not become another Rashi, or at least something close.” One wonders if this improvement upon the historical record was not rooted in Goitein’s own youthful experiences as the scion of a distinguished rabbinical family.

A final “improvement” upon the historical evidence appears in Goitein’s dramatic depiction of Polcelina’s death. Both medieval chronicles dealing with the martyrs of Blois, as well as two of the liturgical poems, stress that while waiting to die they sang the Aleinu prayer, which (in uncensored ver-



David Blondheim in an undated photo. (Courtesy of the David Simon Blondheim Papers, I. Edward Kiev Judaica Collection, The George Washington University.)

sions) refers to both Jesus and Christianity in rather uncomplimentary terms. “As the flames mounted high,” wrote the medieval chronicler Ephraim of Bonn, “the martyrs began to sing in unison a melody that began softly but ended with a full voice.” He adds that the Christians reportedly asked: “What kind of song is this, for we have never heard such a sweet melody?” Although Ephraim, in his accompanying poem, depicted the Jews as joyfully offering themselves to God as a “burnt-offering,” his brother Hillel chose a different biblical allusion:

As they were being brought out to be burnt,
they rejoiced as a bride being led to her
wedding canopy.
Reciting alenu le-shabeah with souls full of
rapture,
“Behold thou art fair my love, behold thou art fair.”

That last line, as many readers will recognize, comes from the fourth chapter of the Song of Songs; Hillel has the martyrs of Blois serenading the divine beloved whom they hope soon to join in marital rapture. The link between martyrdom and Eros

already developed by Rashi in his commentary on the Song of Songs recurs later in Hillel’s poem, where the 17 Jewish women being led to the pyre are described as “each hastening the other to move ahead quickly . . . with joy and gladness they enter the palace of the king.”

Both poems seem to have shaped Goitein’s poetic rendering of Polcelina’s last words. As in Ephraim’s poem, she beseeches God: “Let this sacrifice be accepted as a sin offering on behalf of the Jewish people,” but then, using imagery from the Song of Songs she describes herself as God’s eager betrothed:

My beloved descended into his garden to
inspect his rose
and see if its time is ripe. I replied to him: I am
ripe.



Eleanor Lansing Dulles, ca. 1930s. (Courtesy of the Eleanor Lansing Dulles Papers, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University.)

Spiegel, who considered these lines to be “the best of all attempts at poetry in the play,” undoubtedly recognized the influence of Hillel’s medieval poem.

As it happens, Goitein’s play about love and death in the medieval Jewish-Christian encounter appeared in the same year in which the medievalist David Blondheim and the economist Eleanor Dulles were secretly engaged in Paris, and only a year before Salo Baron’s first attack on “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history.” As Baron would later write, “every generation writes its own history of past generations.” This, as theatergoers know well, is also true of playwrights. Perhaps our own generation is ready for one who will present David and Eleanor’s modern story of love and death as boldly and sensitively as Goitein presented that of Polcelina and Count Thibaut during the 1920s.

Elliott Horowitz is a visiting professor of Jewish studies at Johns Hopkins University and co-editor of The Jewish Quarterly Review.

mo•sa•ic

/mō zā' ik/

1. of or pertaining to Moses or the laws, faith, institutions, and writings attributed to him.
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At Professor Bachlam's

BY S.Y. AGNON

Introduction and translation by Jeffrey Saks

The anti-hero of S.Y. Agnon's posthumous novel *Shira*, Dr. Manfred Herbst, is a professor at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the 1930s. Born and educated in Germany, like so many of the actual faculty members at the institution in those days, Herbst tends his flock of index cards, tirelessly searching for the final footnote to complete his work on Byzantine tomb inscriptions, the one that will, he hopes, earn him tenure. Agnon, ever the witty Galician, skewers the dry, pedantic, Germanic personality of his leading man, whose very name, Herbst (German for autumn), telegraphs that his best days have fallen like so many dry leaves, while he is weighed down by domestic life, departmental bickering, and writer's block. And Herbst is by no means the only target on which the novelist sets his sights. Agnon, who lived in Jerusalem throughout the period during which the book is set and traveled a great deal in its academic circles, peopled *Shira* with many semi-ridiculous professors who bore suspicious resemblance to his neighbors.

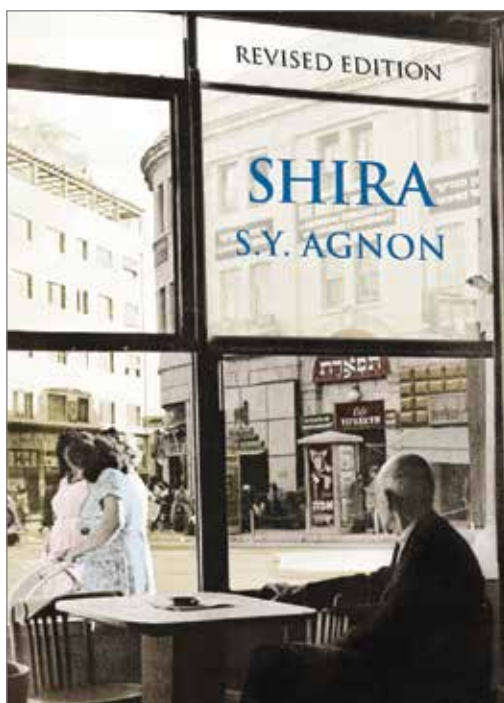
Although *Shira* was not published in its entirety until 1971, some chapters began appearing already in the late 1940s, immediately sparking attempts to unlock the presumed roman à clef, just as in the case of the recent Israeli film *Footnote* (He'arat Shulayim, reviewed in the Fall 2011 issue of this magazine), which explicitly drew on many elements of *Shira*. Many have argued that Agnon's pompous Professor Bachlam was based on Professor Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), a Lithuania-born Hebrew University professor, chief editor of *The Hebrew Encyclopedia*, and losing candidate in the first election for president of Israel. Agnon and Klausner were neighbors in Jerusalem's Talpiot suburb and had a famously chilly relationship, as documented by Klausner's great-nephew Amos Oz in his memoir *A Tale of Love and Darkness*.

The main plot of *Shira* revolves around Herbst's brief extramarital affair with the eponymous nurse Shira, whom he meets in a hospital while his wife is delivering their third child. His obsession with the rather unlikeable and unfeminine nurse further derails him from his work, but she disappears in the middle of the novel, leaving "Mr. Adjunct Professor Dr. Herbst" in the lurch. What happened to her? "I won't show you Shira, whose tracks have not been uncovered, whose whereabouts remain unknown," the narrator concludes the novel. But the author, whose work is replete with indeterminate endings, also left an alternate conclusion to the unfinished manuscript in his files. His daughter and literary executor, Emuna Yaron, published it posthumously: *Shira* had contracted leprosy (there are clues to this earlier in the novel) and was secluded in Jerusalem's leper colony, where Herbst ultimately finds her, condemning himself to the same diseased fate as the price for his obsession.

The main plot of *Shira* is tragic; the accompanying academic satire is tragicomic. The chapter before us is the epitome of that satire—so much so that the note Agnon left on the manuscript pages indicated that he thought it might need softening to be included in the final work. In fact, while it clearly belongs in the novel's Book II, between chapters 5 and 6, it was only included by Yaron as an appendix to the second posthumous edition of 1974. When the novel was first translated to English in 1989 by Zeva Shapiro, it was left out. We present it here for the first time in English, as an excerpt from the newly revised edition of *Shira*, which has just been published as the first volume of *The Toby Press' S.Y. Agnon Library*.

The visit with Professor Bachlam went well. He opened the door with a cold greeting, nor was he particularly cordial toward Mrs. Herbst. And quite right that he should offer a cold greeting, for Herbst had never praised a single one of Bachlam's books—and he'd authored over sixty books, and each and every one deserved sixtyfold measures of praise. And besides, Herbst was unliked by him, like all the other academics who were unliked by Bachlam. Some were unliked for one reason, and others for some other reason, but of all these reasons the bottom line was the unspoken praise they should have showered on him instead of remaining silent.

He began discussing the day's news as broadcast on the radio, and criticized the lead story in *Ha'aretz*, which was written in ink, not blood, like all the other articles, which don't contain even the tiniest drop of blood. After that he mentioned the lecture of a visiting professor, who had acquired quite a reputation in the scholarly world, despite never having innovated a thing. If one were to find something noteworthy in any of his books it would be that he hadn't mentioned that this had already been mentioned by Professor Bachlam in this or that book. Having mentioned his own books, Bachlam began listing them one by one, and their various editions in multiple translations, some having been translated into the same language by two different publishers. Even though the world's greatest professors have already declared that Professor Bachlam's insights are unparalleled among those of other scholars, here the world spins on with nary a



Shira. (Courtesy The Toby Press.)

mention, save for two or three lines about his newest book. But he pays no attention to such things, for these things don't interest him, and he has no spare time to dwell on such matters, for he is busy with his next great, seven-hundred page book, to say nothing of the footnotes and indices which will take up many printer's galleys. He does all this on his own, with his own hands, despite his many illnesses and pains and anguishes—quite literally every bone in

his body aches. But he overcomes his pains, just as he overcomes his adversaries, through his unnaturally great spiritual strength. Having mentioned his adversaries he began to disparage them. They work in Jewish studies, yet are ashamed to be known as Jews. So-and-so calls himself Ludwig, while another calls himself Wolfgang, this one Walter and that one Kilian. Oh, you scoundrels, shouldn't your first patriotic duty be to go by Hebrew names? It's the least you can do in the name of the Jewish people! Mrs. Bachlam had a very nice non-Jewish name, yet exchanged it for a Hebrew one. I say to you, madam and sir, isn't the nice Jewish name Hannah more suited for a Jewish woman than the name Janette, which Mrs. Bachlam had at the start?

Mrs. Bachlam rose and brought tea and cakes, and was praised for her homemade cakes—both the large and the small ones. In general, said Mrs. Bachlam, I enjoy doing things by myself. By myself I bake, by myself I cook, by myself I look after the house, and by myself I take care of the garden. The professor always asks, Hannah, how can you do so much all by yourself, with just ten fingers? And I answer him: Issacher, how can you write so many books with just ten fingers? And not just that—you also give so many lectures, and write essays, and travel to Tel Aviv to lecture at Ohel Shem, and at dinners for the Jewish National Fund, and conferences of Brit Rishonim, and at gatherings of the Veteran Zionists and at so many other conferences and committees, and he answers me, You're right Hanitshki, you're right, but since I'm so busy I have no time to think

about how I manage to do so much. But I worry that I won't be able to complete my *magnum opus* which I've been toiling at day and night for over twenty years. I tell him: Issacher, you'll finish it, you'll finish it, and he smiles his charming smile at me and says, Without you, Hanitshki, what would I do in these times which are so strange to me? I tell him, Issacher, don't be foolish. You say the world is strange to you, but the whole world is pressing to get near to you, and nothing happens in this world without you. Mrs. Herbst, there's no day that ten messengers aren't coming to see him—ten did I say? Really it's twenty or thirty. They come from the Jewish National Fund and the United Israel Appeal, and from the General Zionist Party and the Veteran Zionists and from Brit Rishonim, and from the Nationalist Student Union, and they all come and beg him to speak. He smiles, my professor, his good smile and says, Hanitshki, perhaps you're right. I shout and tell him, Issacher, you say "perhaps," and I say if I'm not right there is no right in the world! Since she mentioned "right in the world" Professor Bachlam begins discussing worldwide righteousness, as described by our Righteous Prophets and by the Greek philosophers, and on the phrase "flourishing of righteousness" as mentioned in the Prophets, a phrase we find in cuneiform inscriptions especially in the context of the Assyrian Kings, without diminishing the original Israelite meaning, for such is the way of intellectual trends, that nations and languages are impacted and nourished one from the next. There are turns of phrase in Bialik's poetry which everyone thinks are original, that he coined them, when in fact they appear in the poems of Pushkin. My dear Mrs. Herbst doesn't know Russian, so I will translate for her and she'll hear. Tchernichovsky is unique, he's completely original. We Jews can't fully appreciate this giant, who thanks to me has become a Hebrew poet, but originally wrote in Russian, lyrical poems in Russian, but through my influence began writing in Hebrew. Madam, you should take Tchernichovsky's poetry and read it day and night. Day and night! A poet like this in any other nation would be raised on high. Ah, but we are a downtrodden folk, with no need of poets—we need money. Money and more money! The national funds want money, more money! And what do we get in return? I asked Ussishkin this; what did he say? Nothing. He had nothing to say. I don't deny the value of money. Certainly the world needs money. I myself pay membership to forty different societies, and don't even remember their names. Even though I am a rememberer, that is, I have a phenomenal memory. I coined this word—"rememberer"—myself. One of my four hundred linguistic innovations. In two weeks I will mark the forty-seventh anniversary of my first publication, which revolutionized our world—and many of my linguistic inventions have entered our vocabulary, even though no one asks, who coined this phrase, or who came up with that word. So it is with all living things—they go about living without asking or wondering who birthed them. Madam, every day you use this ... or that ... new Hebrew word—did you ever consider who created them? If I were to count up all the words I coined I could write a book of twenty printer's galley-length—and that's just the words, aside from the footnotes which would take another thirty galleys. Twenty galleys plus thirty galleys—that's fifty printer's galleys. Tell, me, madam, how many professors from our university have produced books of that length? And that's nothing com-

pared to the books I've already published. Please, if madam will follow me for a moment I will show her something which will amaze her for the rest of her days. Does she see these binders? Seventy-one volumes, each containing an article I myself wrote. And if madam will just raise her head a bit to look up at the top shelf, she'll see the stack of newspapers my articles appeared in. When I gaze at the bounty of articles that have flowed from my pen I am amazed—how did I manage to write it all?

Mrs. Herbst rose from her chair while Professor Bachlam led her by the arm to the book shelf. While they stood there Bachlam said, Please, madam, stretch your arms out wide to each side. You see the books in that arm-span? I wrote them all, and still there are some that don't fit between your arms. I doubt that even our friend Adjunct Professor Herbst could encompass all the books I've written between his outstretched arms. I've invested my whole life—and that of my wife—and haven't gained a drop of benefit in this world from all these



Agnon and his daughter, Emuna Yaron, late 1940s. (Courtesy of The Agnon House, Jerusalem.)

books, while to *them*—pardon me Adjunct Professor Herbst that I include *you* with the German crowd—to them authoring one small footnote the size of a lizard tail qualifies a man as a scholar. I am not speaking of the Gentile scholars, who write, and print, and publish great fat books. Why just yesterday I received a book from Professor Meier—six hundred folio pages—folio pages, madam, not mere single-sided pages. If we count pages it comes to one-thousand-two-hundred, aside from the footnotes and references and bibliography which take another hundred pages. And you wouldn't believe your ears about what the book is about—it's about ... [Agnon had left these facts—the particular newly coined Hebrew words, and topic of Meier's 1,200 page book—blank in the MS., apparently planning on filling them in at a later point.] Hanitshki, is that the doorbell? Where's the maid? Go see who it is. Sit, madam, sit, you needn't go. The guests who have arrived are just neighbors. Allow me to introduce you, Mrs. and Mr. Kattakibo, this is Mrs. Herbst and Mr. Adjunct Professor Dr. Herbst.

Since the neighbors weren't intellectual folks the professor changed topics to news of the day, goings on in the country, and public affairs. He scratched the end of his nose, and rubbed his hands together, and said, From a reliable source, but of course I can-

not say who, I've heard the Allies already have plans in place for what to do with Germany after the war.

Mrs. Bachlam looked adoringly at her all-knowing husband, from whom nothing escapes, yet she grew bored by the political talk. Turning to Mrs. Herbst, who was known as an industrious housewife, she asked about her apricot preserves and what she does with grapes, if she makes puddings, and why hadn't she brought her small daughter along. Professor Bachlam loves small children like life itself. Having overheard something about children, Bachlam jumped up and said, Madam, madam, grownups are worthless, but the children are our hope—only through them will we build our nation ... Mrs. Bachlam chimed in detailing the professor's great love for children. He eyed her with resentment for having interrupted him, plotting to regain control of the conversation as soon as she let up, and when she paused to inhale a breath, he began speaking, but she again broke into his words. So unfolded their dialogue of praise, his-for-her and hers-for-him, until other guests arrived—neighbors, academics, and students. Bachlam greeted them, gave them refreshments, and had an interesting word for each and every one suited to his interest, until the day grew dark.

Professor Bachlam was a religious man. While he had sharp criticism for various Jewish practices, and wrote critically of various superstitious customs, he was strict about most *mitzvot* and never violated the Sabbath. Therefore he didn't put the light on in the room, but hinted to his wife that she might turn it on. When the light was lit the Herbsts got up to leave, but the professor detained them, first in the room, then in the hallway, and finally in the foyer. In the end he escorted them out, asking them to return soon for another visit. Outside there remained a bit of daylight, with cars carrying Sabbath travelers filling

the street. Mrs. Herbst wanted to walk back to town on foot, but along the way felt very weary and wished to take a taxi, which Herbst agreed to do, since while talking with Professor Bachlam he thought of various things he wanted to fix in his article, and feared the long walk by foot would cause him to forget.

Sitting in the car Mrs. Herbst remarked to her husband, This man we were visiting has no love in his heart, not for a single person in this world. Herbst replied, But he has great love for the greatest man in Israel. Mrs. Herbst asked, Who is the greatest man in Israel that Professor Bachlam loves? Herbst answered, He is the one! Professor Bachlam himself is the great man in all his glory. In any case, it's good that we made the visit. Perhaps on account of it he won't stand in my way, or at least he'll soften his objection to me. Mrs. Herbst sighed and said, *If only!*

S.Y. Agnon (1888–1970) was a Nobel Prize laureate whose work was central to the development of modern Hebrew fiction. Born in what is present-day Ukraine, he made aliyah in 1908.

Jeffrey Saks, series editor of The Toby Press' S.Y. Agnon Library, is the founding director of ATID and its WebYeshiva.org program. He lectures regularly at The Agnon House in Jerusalem.

Daniel Gordis argues that the Conservative leadership gave in to the masses who drove to synagogue etc. rather than holding the official line as did the Orthodox back when many of their congregants did the same. If that is a factor in the implosion of the Conservative movement, it is a minor one. The movement calls itself “Positive Historical” (going back to Zechariah Frankel). Although, though this ideology may lead to intellectual integrity it does not lead to piety. It may work for a select few who are willing to live with religious tension but it will never work on a massive scale. The post-war sociological realities that sustained the Conservative movement through the 1970s are finished. Now it is left with an ideology, of which most are ignorant, and which would not instill piety even if everyone knew and understood it. Conservative ideas will live on and nurture a small number of people, but, as Gordis argues, the movement as such is on life support and will soon cease to exist.

Rabbi William Berman
Dobbs Ferry, New York

Daniel Gordis wrote bravely and with great pathos about the failings of Conservative Judaism in America. Conservative Judaism sold American Jews a bill of goods—it supplied an artifice of Jewish life to make its congregants feel like good Jews but did not demand any learning or observance from them in return. Jews identified as “Conservative” not by behavior or belief,

but because they paid dues at a Conservative *shul*.

One painful, emblematic example is the “big lie” that most Jews, raised in Conservative synagogues, seem to believe, namely that “I read Hebrew”—by which they mean they can phonetically sound out words written in Hebrew with vowels. Would they say that they “read Latin” just because they can sound out the words? This is a deeply emotional self-deception with which the Jewish religious establishment conspired. One cannot fault children for justifiably understanding the unspoken message—that these Hebrew texts aren’t really important; that religious observance is more of a public performance or charade.

Seth Cohen
Mamaroneck, NY

There is an aspect of the history of the Conservative movement that Daniel Gordis did not mention in his cogent article. Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan proposed a reason for Jewish observance and continuity rooted in Jewish peoplehood. Kaplan was an important voice in Conservative Judaism but the halakhists could not deal with him. I remember Rabbi Gerson Cohen’s triumphal statement to the student body of The Jewish Theological Seminary that “the Reconstructionist element has been exiled from Conservative Judaism.” As a rabbinical student, I knew then that Conservative Judaism was doomed. Just telling people that they should be halakhic Jews without offering a coherent historical or sociological reason for it is worthless. Most people cannot accept the divine imperative of Judaism but still want to be serious about their Judaism. Daniel Gordis should be commended for his honesty.

Alan Londy
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

The Conservative movement for which Daniel Gordis provides an insightful requiem is probably best understood as a typical example of the American ethnic congregation. The old Jewish versions of this phenomenon were called Anshe Lublin, or the Polische shul.

The Conservative movement rose with the generation that moved out of densely ethnic neighborhoods to the suburbs. The synagogues they built were about faith, but they were also about ethnicity: familiar faces, familiar food, and jokes that only an insider could understand. Like Jews, second- and third-generation Catholic and Protestant immigrants moved to the suburbs from farming towns and city neighborhoods where congregations had formed around specific geographic/ethnic origins to somewhat bigger-tent congregations in the new suburbs—but they carried things only so far. Second- and third-generation Americans who had grown up in a church where almost everyone was a Norwegian Lutheran from the same valley in Telemark moved to post-war, suburban Lutheran congregations where people’s ancestors had come from all over Scandinavia. They would have understood the joke told in post-war Conservative *shuls* about the Galitzianer parents who were horrified to learn that their daughter was dating a Hungarian—including the fact that no one in such congregations was actually horrified by such a match.

Like Conservative shuls, Lutheran churches

are shrinking, as are Presbyterian (Scots), Congregationalist (Yankee), Episcopalian (English), Armenian, Greek, and European ethnic Catholic parishes. Christianity is flourishing. So is Torah Judaism. What faded was not religion, but ethnicity.

Diana Muir Appelbaum
via jewishreviewofbooks.com

More than 40 years ago, when I lived in rural Canada, the road I took home crossed a river on what was called a “Bailey Bridge.” I was told that this was an English term for a temporary bridge that looked permanent, had all the appearances of something intended to last forever, and often functioned for decades, but was really a temporary link during the transition time it would take to build a genuine structure. Apparently they were ubiquitous in Europe where bridges had been destroyed during World War II. I think of the American Conservative movement as a special bridge built to accommodate the needs of the massive immigration of Russian Empire Jews from the Pale of Settlement to America.

Michael H. Traison
Herzliya, Israel and Warsaw, Poland

Daniel Gordis Responds:

In addition to the online responses of Rabbis Bickart, Dorff, Grossman, Hauptman, Kalmanofsky, Starr, Tucker and Professor Sarna, I was gratified (and challenged) by the many, many thoughtful letters and online comments in response to my “Conservative Judaism: A Requiem”—not to speak of the responses in other publications. I have tried to respond to the main points in these responses, restate my critique of Conservative Judaism, and spell out its implications (constructive as well as critical) in a second article, “Cognitive Dissonance,” posted on the *Jewish Review of Books* website. I thank Rabbi Feldman and the other letter writers published here for their thoughtful responses and refer them to that second essay at <http://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/673/cognitive-dissonance>.

Purim Geography


Are your editors all sage *chachamim* from Chelm, or are some of you from Pipek? I see that your editorial address is on Mayfield Road in Cleveland. Moe Dalitz hailed from Mayfield. May he rest in peace this Purim.

James Richard Lucas
Las Vegas, NV

The Editors Respond:

We are indeed aware that before he became “Mr. Las Vegas” Moe Dalitz ran the Cleveland Syndicate, which he later merged with the Mayfield Road Mob, working with Alfred “The Owl” Polizzi and others not far from where we now sit. To paraphrase Isaac Bashevis Singer, “from the elders of Mayfield there are no secrets.”

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Jewish Culture. Cover to Cover.

Jokes and Justice

BY ALLAN ARKUSH

When I was a graduate student at Brandeis, I shared an apartment with two other 20-somethings, an American named Jeff and an Israeli named Yoni. Jeff was an indifferent student of sociology but very talented in the kitchen, where he prepared his own baba ganoush from scratch. Yoni, a kibbutznik who had been an officer in the tank corps on the Golan Heights during the recently concluded Yom Kippur War, was making up for lost time by trying to do his B.A. in computer science in three years.

The three of us were sitting together in our small living room one spring evening when one of our neighbors dropped in to say hello. Juan, a graduate student in philosophy, was from Spain, hadn't met many Jews before, and always had a lot of questions for us. I have forgotten all of them except the one he eventually posed to Yoni that night: "Why did you serve in the army?" Yoni looked up at him, clearly annoyed, and replied, "Juan, in my country *everybody* has to serve in the army."

"But why did you do it? Did you consider not going into the army?" I understood more quickly than Yoni, perhaps, that what Juan wanted to know was whether Yoni's decision was informed by philosophical reflection on his duties, the rightness of his country's cause, the value of human life, and so on. At first Yoni didn't get it, but finally he said, "Juan, some people like to talk philosophy, some people like to cook," he said, nodding in Jeff's direction. "And some people like to lie on the floor and read." That was for my sake. "Me," he concluded, "I like to kill."

I was sufficiently familiar with Yoni's rather juvenile sense of humor to laugh at this. (After all, I had seen him watching a Roloids commercial on TV with a prim graduate student in Judaic studies and spelling out what it was that gave him relief.) And I knew that he was at bottom a very gentle and considerate fellow who had no relish for war (and never talked about it). But Juan left quickly and never came back.

Yoni was better at computer science than he was at diplomacy but his patriotism was unalloyed. Not long after this bull session, he turned down a hefty offer from MIT in order to return to Israel, because he was afraid that if he didn't go back right away he might never return.

Yoni's devotion to Israel was unreflective and his understanding of its significance was entirely conventional. In this, if in little else, he resembles most American Jews. But someone else I knew briefly, even before I met Yoni, has now made a film devoted to shaking such Jews out of their complacent ethnocentricity. Bruce Robbins, the Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, has put together a documentary entitled *Some of My Best Friends Are Zionists*. It's a movie about how some American Jews "came to change

their minds" about Israel, and it stars Tony Kushner, Judith Butler, and other like-minded luminaries as well as lesser-known folk who now understand that the Jewish state isn't the utopia their parents cracked it up to be. Over the past year, Robbins has been screening and discussing it with audiences from Brooklyn (where there are more minds that need to be changed) to Beirut (where one might think there wouldn't be, but where it is apparently necessary to let the good people know that there are at least a few American Jews worthy of their respect).

John Judis, another recovering Zionist whose new book on Truman and Israel Ronald Radosh reviews in this issue, now thinks that the policy initiated by the Balfour Declaration represents a British and Zionist conspiracy "to screw the Arabs out of a country that by the prevailing standards of self-determination would have been theirs." Crude, offensive, and ahistorical as this statement may be, it contains a grain of truth: the regnant, if inconsistently implemented, standard of the post-World War I world—the standard of self-



Illustration by Mark Anderson.

determination famously associated with Woodrow Wilson—would in theory have dictated that the people of Palestine (by themselves or together with their neighbors) vote on their own future. And in 1917 the vast majority of those people opposed the creation of a Jewish national home, much less a Jewish state, in the territory they inhabited.

But, one has to ask, were the prevailing standards the only legitimate standards that could be applied in this situation? Judis, who quickly dismisses all justifications of Zionism as mere rationalizations, clearly thinks so, and so does, to all appearances, Ari Shavit. The difference between them is that while the former condemns the injustice done to the Arabs of Palestine, the latter, as Elliott Abrams shows in his review of *My Promised Land*, sorrowfully en-

dorses it, since it was the inevitable precondition for his own people's salvation. Shavit is preferable to Judis on these matters, but his thinking is almost as simplistic. Neither man pauses to consider whether Zionism was in the final analysis a just cause.

This is not the kind of job that is best performed by journalists, or even by historians. It is the task of political philosophy. Is it a necessary one? Why, after all, should Israel be the only state in the modern world continually required to justify its own existence? It's a reasonable question but students at Wesleyan and other places who see Bruce Robbins' movie should know that there are more sophisticated justifications for Israel's existence than the ones the Jews he presents are so pleased to have outgrown. And Zionists in general need to know that they needn't feel as guilty as Shavit does.

On a level that far surpasses the thinking of Judis and Shavit (to say nothing of Robbins), Israelis such as Amnon Rubinstein, Alexander Yakobson, Ruth Gavison, Yael Tamir, and Chaim Gans have been engaged for years in a philosophical discussion of the grounds on which the existence of the Jewish state can be justified. Of course, they disagree on a great deal. Where they do agree, however, is in believing that Wilsonian ideals aren't the only standard to be applied to the question of whether the Jews deserved a stake in Palestine in modern times.

In his recent Hebrew volume *A Political Theory for the Jewish People*, Chaim Gans, a professor of law at Tel Aviv University (whose *A Just Zionism* was reviewed in these pages by Gideon Shimoni) makes a lot of arguments that many Zionists will find unpalatable. He denies, for instance, that the Jews' historical connection with Israel alone entitles them to ownership of the land. But he does present a cogent justification for Jewish statehood "based on equal division among the nations of the right to self-rule, the implementation of this right in territories with which a national identity is connected, and the need that came into being as a result of the persecution of the Jews." Gans is, to be sure, strongly critical of the current state of affairs in Israel, but it is impossible to imagine him comparing the barrier that runs across the West Bank to the wall around the Warsaw ghetto, as Robbins does in an online trailer for his film.

The political-philosophical discussion of the justness of Zionism is largely in Hebrew, but much of it has been translated and more is on the way. I wouldn't recommend this literature to my old roommate Yoni. Unless he has changed a lot in the 30 years since I last saw him, he doesn't need it. Nor do I think that it would make much of an impression on the producer or stars of *Some of My Best Friends Are Zionists*. This kind of political thought is neither for the unreflective patriot nor the uncharitable outsider; it's for the rest of us.

Allan Arkush is senior contributing editor of the Jewish Review of Books.



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