

Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

EDITED BY RACHEL KAMIN & CHAVA PINCHUK

BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH

Bower, Gary. *The Beautiful Garden of Eden. (Faith that God Built Series).* Illus. by Barbara Chotiner. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017. 32 pp. \$14.99. (9781496417435). Preschool - Gr. 2.

Bower, Gary. *A Patch on the Peak of Ararat. (Faith that God Built Series).* Illus. by Barbara Chotiner. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017. 32 pp. \$14.99. (9781496417442). Preschool - Gr. 2.

Using rhyme and repetition in the manner of “The House That Jack Built,” Bower retells the familiar Bible stories of Adam and Eve and of Noah. There is nothing overtly Christian in the text of *The Beautiful Garden of Eden* (although there is a quote from *Galatians* on the back page: “Christ has rescued us from the curse”). Much of the text is fine, such as “This guy is Adam, the very first man, molded from mud when creation began, Who ate of the fruit, so slurpy and sweet, that God warned His gardeners never to eat.” The description of Adam’s partner as “Gullible Eve, so comely and cute” is off-putting, but not egregious. However, some of the language and illustrations subtly provide a commentary that is not necessarily a Jewish one. The Christian idea of original sin is evident near the end when the following lines appear on the same page as an open Bible and a thorny bush: “This is the Book that shows the first sin, and what a mad mess that it left us all in. Caused by a crushing, calamitous curse that made the world wayward and woefully worse.” Nothing objectionable from a Jewish perspective is found in *A Patch on the Peak of Ararat*. The events described are true to the Biblical text, but are merely mentioned without any context of why they happened: “These are the animals, each in a pair – bighorn and buffalo, beaver and bear...”

These two books, from a Christian publishing house, will not satisfy the needs of Jewish libraries looking for a quality title about Adam and Eve, and excellent books about Noah’s Ark are already in abundance.

Marcie Eskin, Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL

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FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE

Goldstein, Zalman. *The Sultan's Trap: and Other Miraculous Tales of Faith & Wonder*. Brooklyn: The Jewish Learning Group, 2016. 242 pp. \$19.99. (9781891293641). Gr. 5–8.

Although Goldstein states that he has a passion for these stories, the telling is often flat and didactic. Each varies in length, from eight pages to 32 pages; therefore, a teacher or parent needs to be aware of the length before reading the story at school or at home (Would more than one sitting be required?). Furthermore, the stories are sprinkled with Ashkenazic words or pronunciation, even when the setting seems to be some vague Mideastern country. Thus, one feels a jolt of inauthenticity. For example, although a character was born in Spain, Goldstein gives him the name “Moshe” instead of “Moisés”, the Spanish equivalent. Another problem occurs that whenever a Hebrew term is used – and they are sprinkled generously throughout – the English is provided in parentheses. This device slows down the narrative and is unnecessary, since the author provides a glossary at the back.

Each story is preceded by the same illustration – three men on camels in the desert, heading to a distant town. This illustration has little to do with the content of the stories and, in fact, distracts. *The Sultan's Trap* contains many typos and grammatical errors which a good copyeditor would have corrected. Last but not least, only a scanty source note is provided for each story. (In most storytelling collections, the sources are given, often with additional comments).

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada

Oz, Galia. *Dog Trouble!* Trans. by Galia Oz and Gilah Kahn-Hoffman. New York: Crown/Penguin Random House, 2017. 136 pp. \$15.99. (9780399550201) HC; \$11.33 (9780399550225) eBook. Gr. 3–5.

Originally published as *Shakshuka Disappears* (2007), *Shakshuka Strikes Again* (2008), and *Shakshuka and the Awfully Dreadful Cat* (2011) in Jerusalem by Keter, Israeli author and filmmaker, Galia Oz, has now brought her series of humorous, realistic novels to an English-reading audience. Julie, the protagonist, has one main problem she must deal with in each book: Shakshuka, her dog, disappears after only two weeks; Julie's cousin, Effie, must get ready for a big track and field race against her rival, Donna Silver; Julie is jealous of Donna Silver's popularity when Donna moves to Julie's school. Interspersed with these problems is Danny, the school bully, who is making a nuisance of himself. Age-appropriate in tone and voice, Julie tells about her life at home and at school – her friends, her dog Shakshuka (great name!), and even her “evil cat with the ice-cold heart”. Exactly where Julie lives is vague – a city or town anywhere. The characters are deftly drawn, with enough nuance to give us a clear picture but without slowing down the action. By the end of each novel, Julie has more or less resolved her problems.

However, there is an undercurrent of “meanness” in these novels. For example, the kids make fun of Adam, their storytelling friend who stutters; Julie lies about Danny's destroying the lovely plant in front of the school and he gets unjustly punished for the deed. Little or no Jewish or Israeli content is evident in *Dog Trouble*. Julie's problems aren't resolved “Jewishly”, i.e. one doesn't get the sense that these kids are doing the right thing, like helping their friends or being kind to each other. The themes of loyalty and friendship are muddled in these novels. Will a child reader understand these mixed messages? Perhaps, with some guidance from a teacher or parent.

Anne Dublin, author of 44 Hours or Strike! (Second Story Press), Toronto, Canada



FICTION - TEEN

Attar, M.R. *Elisha Davidson and the Shamir*. (Elisha David Trilogy). Jerusalem, Israel: Menorah Books Limited, 2017. 194 pp. \$14.95. (9781940156721). Gr. 6 - 9.

The Elisha Davidson Trilogy had every opportunity to be among the classic Science Fiction/Fantasy titles, a Jewish *Narnia*, if you will, that depict a battle between light and dark, good and evil; take place over days, months, years with the involvement of many unique and talented characters; and end with an understanding of why the battle needed to happen in the first place, what role each character played in defeating the other side, and a feeling of triumph. The story unfolds over the Nine Days prior to Tisha B'Av, culminating in travel back in time to the epic war between the Jews and the Romans, and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Elisha Davidson is the *Yessod* (the one who connects, based on Kabbalah's ten Sefirot). He is supported by King David, *Mekubals* (Kabbalah Masters), a High Priest, *Lamed Vavniks* (the 36 Righteous People who sustain the existence of the world), the *Avarshina* (the Phoenix), the *Shamir* (the "tool" that carved the stone of the Temple) and many other magically powerful beings.

Unfortunately, while there is a lot of action and magic, in the end it is unclear exactly what the battle is about or why these particular players need to participate. After finishing the third book in this series, the feeling is exhaustion rather than triumph. Even Elisha's "Special Gifts" - alluded to since the beginning of this series - are not adequately explained. (Spoiler alert! He was kidnapped at an early age, and something unexplainable happened to his kidnappers.) The end of any series should provide the reader with a feeling of closure. Once again, *Elisha Davidson* only leaves unanswered questions and unclear resolutions.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC, Seal Beach, CA

Feldman, Ruth Tenzer. *Seven Stitches*. (The Blue Thread Saga). Portland, Oregon: Ooligan Press, 2016. 272 pp. \$14.95. (9781932010886). Gr. 8-12.

A mash-up of time travel, dystopian fiction, realistic fiction, Jewish identity fiction and fair housing polemic set in Portland, Oregon in 2058 immediately after the onslaught of "The Big One" - a massive earthquake and tsunami that destroyed most of Portland's housing and infrastructure. We follow Meryem, who is soon to be sixteen. She heads her household in the absence of her mother, Jessa, who most people, except Meryem, believe was killed in the tsunami. The household is a complicated mix of relatives (American-Asian grandmother and great aunt adopted by a Jewish family as children), housekeeper, and boarders assigned by the government. On top of all this, Meryem's life is further complicated by three visits from Serakh, a Jewish woman from the 16th Century, who engages Meryem's help to save a young Jewish girl in Turkey who is about to be sold into slavery. Meryem travels through the centuries with Serakh, and in this parallel story, is able to find a respectable placement for the orphan Izabel. The descriptions of Jewish life during this period are engaging. Finally, Meryem spars with Bender, a temporary boarder and proponent of the fair housing group, Calantha Corps. Bender and Meryem dance around developing a romance as Meryem becomes a mouthpiece for housing equality. In an ending that is a bit of a stretch, all the disparate elements of the story are tied together.

While Jewish elements appear throughout *Seven Stitches*, you almost need a scorecard to follow the personalities and their varied Jewish identities. More interesting are references to current failed social media. To be "zuckered" in 2058 is to have your personal information exposed. Tenzer is a creative, thoughtful author who misses the mark with *Seven Stitches*, the third novel in her *Blue Thread* series.

Rena Citrin, Library Director - Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago

Ioannides, Mara W. Cohen. *We Are in Exile: Estamos en Galut.* Hadassa Word Press (print on demand), 2016. 120 pp. \$11.90. (9783639794878). Gr. 7-9.

In her second novel for young reader, Ioannides reinforces much of the Rhodes Jewish community's closeness, and also tells the story of its fate before World War II. When the book opens, Dora's older brothers have already gone to America; her parents run a small neighborhood shop, leaving the grandmother in charge of the younger siblings. The story focuses alternately on Dora (who is about 14) and her parents, as they struggle to support the family. But the emotional heart of the story is framed by the Jewish year. We see the family celebrate Shabbat and other holidays and festivals, even as pressure from the Italian occupation increases. At the end of the book, the family is forced to leave their home; the epilogue finds them reunited, trying to rebuild life in America.

While parts of this story are well-known, the location -- the island of Rhodes -- is not. Mara Ioannides has built a real family for the reader to connect with, including customs and phrases specific to the "Rhodelisi" (the Jews of Rhodes) inside the touching narrative.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II

Freeburg, Jessica. *Fight for Survival: The Story of the Holocaust.* North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2017. 112 pp. \$6.95. (9781491484586). Gr. 5 - 10.

First person stories of Holocaust survivors and victims are told in short essays covering the time span of 1938 - 1945. The book opens with the story of Hershel Grynszpan, the Jewish young adult who murdered Ernst Vom Rath (the German Ambassador in Paris) precipitating *Kristallnacht*, and continues with stories of Jews in Germany, Holland, Poland, and elsewhere. Many of the stories are of people who were murdered by the Nazis. A few are about people who survived. Throughout, the feelings and experiences of each individual are portrayed in factual and disturbing language: Marta Munzer, standing at a pit awaiting the bullets that will kill her, praying they will not hurt; Udel Sadowski, hoping to survive Auschwitz to keep the memory of his family alive; Fred Spiegel moving from Germany to Holland to Westerbork saying goodbye to a friend "selected" for transport. The stories continue - life in the ghettos, in the camps, in hiding - to their inevitable conclusions. There are no happy endings, only those who died or those who survived. The writing is poignant and at times difficult; nevertheless, the voices of these individuals are clear and deliberate: "Remember us."

A short foreword provides the setting; an epilogue closes loose ends. The back of the book contains a timeline, glossary, questions for common core critical thinking, a list of websites, further reading, a selected bibliography, and an index. These individual stories, interwoven in time, provide a rather unique addition to Holocaust collections.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC Division, Seal Beach, CA

JEWISH LIFE & VALUES

Goetz, Bracha. *It Only Takes a Minute.* Illus. by Bill Bolton. Brooklyn, New York: Hachai, 2017. 20 pp. \$10.95. (9781945560026). Preschool-Kindergarten.

It will only take me a minute to explain why this short, charming book should delight its intended audience of Jewish children. Its message is clear: a child can strengthen his or her character by making the effort to think about what's important and try to improve. Some examples: saying thank you; saying a *bracha* (blessing); giving a smile to someone who needs one; paying attention at school; acknowledging God's beauty in the world. The *middot* (morals) are conveyed quite simply and lovingly, without preachiness.

Printed on heavy, laminated paper, the large full color illustrations portray an Orthodox Jewish little boy who is not always perfect but is always trying to do better. The adorable expressions on the characters' faces as well as the aptly drawn scenes of his daily life are certain to capture children's attention and keep them focused. The book could be used as a classroom read-aloud and discussion starter in Jewish preschools with toddlers on up, or as a parent-child snuggle book at bedtime.

Joyce Levine, retired children librarian (North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S.), North Woodmere, NY

Hauser, Julie. *The Gratitude Game*. Illus. by Robert Salanitro. Lakewood, New Jersey: Israel Bookshop Publications, 2016. 21pp. \$10.75. (9781600914416). Preschool - Gr. 2.

Hakaras hatov (gratitude) is a basic Jewish value that is introduced to children at a young age, and rightly so. Learning to be grateful and expressing gratitude is an essential element of a civil society. Written in rhyming quatrains (lines b and d rhyme) children are exhorted to recognize the blessings from God each day. They range from the mundane – finding a parking spot on an outing to the zoo; to the sublime – seeing a beautiful sunset. Hauser wants children to recognize that puddles to play in and cookies to smell, flying a kite and getting along with friends all merit their gratitude.

Aimed at the most observant set, the boys in the illustrations wear *yarmulkes*; the girls and women are in dresses. The story is particularly mother-centered, except in one scene where the father is "... making sure the ants we sprayed/ Never did come back!" *The Gratitude Game* would benefit from a few more males in the mix. The illustrations are computer-generated in primary colors. The children in the pictures lack definition, but the intention of each picture is clear and mirrors the theme of the book. While the message of gratitude is welcome in all school, synagogue and home libraries, the perspective of this picture book fits best in observant milieus.

Rena Citrin, Library Director - Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago

MEMOIR

Barakat, Ibitisam. *Balcony on the Moon: Coming of Age in Palestine*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2017. 224 pp. \$17.99. (9780374302511). Gr. 7 - 12.

Picking up where her first book, *Tasting the Sky*, ended, the author depicts life in Ramallah following the Six Day War. It is 1971, she is seven and a half years old, and her family has just moved from a beautiful stone house on the northeast side to an apartment on the upper north side of the city. Her family moves often, and each of the five parts of the book begins in a new home or neighborhood. In all ways, this is a typical coming of age story. Ms. Barakat is a strong-willed girl in a traditional Muslim family. Her one goal in life is to get through high school with grades that will earn her a college



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scholarship. Her greatest joy is writing, at which she is exceedingly good. She has no use for the social expectations that she should marry and become a good wife and mother. She wants freedom, the freedom that comes from education.

The author addresses the difficulties of growing up in an area that is restricted on all sides by a government not her own. As in her first book, she does not point fingers or assign blame. She simply writes about her feelings as a teenage girl growing up in a male-dominated world over which she has little control. Yet, she is astoundingly good at making a path for herself. She gets a job, much to the dismay of her parents. She manages to communicate with Ahmed Baha' El-Din (1927-1996), a respected Egyptian journalist, who takes great interest in her, sending her money for her education and encouraging her to write about her experiences. She passes the Tawjihi exam in the top 10% of the region – she will study science at Birzeit University on scholarship. Muslim or Jew, readers will identify with her struggles with authority (parental and governmental), religion and tradition.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President-SSC, Seal Beach, CA

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Blumberg, Margie. *No Naptime for Janie! A Hanukkah Tale*. Illus. by Renée Andriani. Bethesda, MD: MB Publishing, 2017. 48 pp. \$12.95. (9780990843061). Gr. K-2.

Cute illustrations, buoyant rhymes, and Yiddish terms cannot save this same old, same old plot. Once again a grandmother and granddaughter bake for a holiday -- an apple pie at Hanukkah. They bake because Janie cannot sleep at naptime. The happy twosome turns the kitchen into a mess which is cleaned in time for mom not to lose her sanity, for the family to celebrate the first night and for Janie to sleep at the wrong time. The words connected to Hanukkah arrive at the start of the picture book in a glossary with small pictures backing text definitions. Once the story starts, there are very few holiday images. Additional material provides instructions on playing the dreidel game and the order for lighting candles, two new songs referencing Hanukkah, lyrics by the author, and, of course, the pie recipe. The ingredients and method of making an apple pie dominate the story: a half-baked idea poured into holiday crust.

Ellen G. Cole, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA

Ehrenberg, Pamela. *Queen of the Dosas*. Illus. by Anjar Sarkar. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2017. 32 pp. \$16.95. (9780374304447). Gr. K- 2.

A serious young boy is annoyed and embarrassed by his little sister Sadie and her incessant climbing. He does not want her preparing for his family Hanukkah, neither shopping nor cooking. He shares his feelings in a first person narrative; we do not learn his name. We do meet the members of his warm, interesting household: Indian mother and grandmother (who wears a bindi), and a Jewish father. Their two traditions combine at the Hanukkah feast which incorporates fried foods, but not latkes. Their family and friends eat dosas (recipe included) made with rice and dal, fried in a tawa pan with coconut oil and devoured with mango lassi. The little sister joins them shopping at the Indian market, cooking and decorating. She never stops climbing. As the guests arrive an accidentally locked door needs someone little to climb through a window fortuitously opened to counteract the kitchen heat. Once inside, Sadie climbs the counters. Brother cajoles and sings until finally Sadie understands to jump off the counter to open the door. Dreidels and Jewish stars adorn the decorations. The cousins put candles in the menorah. Dad wonders if Judah Maccabee's big brother was surprised when Judah turned out to be useful. The picture book is for the initiated since the holiday, the historical players and the celebratory traditions referred to are unexplained. A familiar holiday and unfamiliar foods from an exotic culture combine in a warm story as full of humor and humanity as everyone's stomachs at the end.

Ellen G. Cole, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA



Grack, Rachel. *Hanukkah*. (Blastoff! Readers: Celebrating Holidays). Bellwether Media, 2017. \$25.95. (9781626175952). Kindergarten-Grade 2.

According to the publisher, *Blastoff! Readers* “are carefully developed by literary experts and combine standards-based content with developmentally appropriate text.” The “Celebrating Holidays” series includes the Chinese New Year, Christmas, Cinco de Mayo, Day of the Dead, Diwali, Kwanza, Ramadan, Easter along with other secular American holidays like Earth Day and Independence Day. The books are identified as Level 2 readers and incorporate full-color stock photography. The Hanukkah title covers all of the typical aspects of the holiday and depicts contemporary families lighting the menorah, playing dreidel, and eating *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts). An image of Jerusalem and a model of the Temple are also included. While the text, albeit oversimplified and vague, is serviceable, especially as a means of introducing non-Jewish readers to the holiday, two pages are problematic. The staged photograph on page 9 shows a father, mother, child, and grandfather seated around the table with a menorah. But why is the grandfather wearing a *tallit* (which is not worn to recite the Hanukkah blessings in the home) and why is there a plate of *matzah* (for Passover!) on the table along with a *kiddush* cup? The maps on page 9 are also problematic -- a simple outline of the world with a large arrow pointing to Jerusalem is shown with an insert also identifying Jerusalem. But, Israel is shown in green and the West Bank is shown in purple. The accompanying text simply states: “Jews celebrate Hanukkah. They remember their ancestors. They honor when the Jews dedicated a new temple in Jerusalem.” It is not clear why this type of map is relevant or important nor is the text accurate. Instructions for playing dreidel are appended along with a glossary, index, and suitable recommended reading. While it is always heartening to see Jewish holidays included in these types of series, clearly aimed at the public school and public library market, it’s unfortunate that these errors are present. Those looking for an introduction to Hanukkah would be better served by *Is It Hanukkah Yet?*, a “Step into Reading Step 1 Book” by Nancy Krulik (Random House, 2000) and *The First Night of Hanukkah*, an “All Aboard Reading

Level 2" book by Nicki Weiss (Grosset & Dunlap, 1992). Both offer beginning readers a more substantial and engaging Hanukkah story with error free illustrations.

Rachel Kamin, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL

Stern, Ariella. *Shavuot Guess Who?* Illus. by Patti Argoff. Brooklyn, New York: Hachai, 2017. 28 pp. \$9.95. (9781945560002). Preschool-Kindergarten.

This small lift-the-flap book concept (part of a series that includes *Pesach Guess Who?*, *Purim Guess Who?*, and *Chanukah Guess Who?*) has a worthy aim: to teach the laws, reasons and customs of the holiday of Shavuot to the youngest set. But the text is enough to make anyone who values poetry cringe. For example, the first page reads, "Seven whole weeks to count and wait, for Hashem to give the Torah so great!" The illustrations, in full color, are cartoonish and portray a traditional ultra-Orthodox world of children and adults with identical half-moon smiles at home, in school, and in shul. It also covers the story of Ruth, traditionally read on Shavuot, the *Beis HaMikdash* service, the choice of Har Sinai and the *Midrash* of King David's birth on that day. The flaps to lift for the answers to the questions or riddles are a bit small for little hands to manipulate, but one would assume they would be under the supervision of a parent.

The book concludes with the message, "Hashem had a special gift to give - His Torah that teaches the way to live. Each year, I am the *yom tov* when the Jews accept the Torah again!" And since this is the true meaning of the holiday, it would likely be a suitable purchase for the appropriate families with young children.

Joyce Levine, retired children's librarian (North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S.), North Woodmere, NY.

Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON

Afridi, Mehnaz M. *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017. 233 pp. \$65.00. (9781618113719).

What two subjects can be more sensitive to a Jewish audience than the Shoah and perceived Muslim and Islamic hostility toward Jews, Judaism, and Israel? The author is an observant Indian Muslim, reared in Pakistan, who received her primary education in Dubai and advanced educational degrees in South Africa. She is currently, and important to note, an assistant professor of religious studies and the Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Center at Catholic Manhattan College. Her approach to this subject is understandably a humanistic one, genuinely sensitive to both her own religious heritage and Judaism. She openly and admittedly condemns the Islamic world and many of its institutions, and especially the education sector, for portraying Jews, Judaism and Israel in a negative light. Relying heavily on stereotypes and in some cases outright Holocaust denial, Muslims fail to appreciate the Jewish history that forms the basis of the creation of Israel. Her approach to alleviate the disparagement is mutual community contact and educational programs in each community about the other's religion. Her position was reached by her interaction with Jews, the study of Judaism, and her professional task covering the Holocaust and Judaism. This is a highly recommended book for students of religion and discussion groups.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

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Allegra, Marco, Ariel Handel & Erez Maggor (eds). *Normalizing Occupation: The Politics of Everyday Life in the West Bank Settlements.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017. 229 pp. \$35.00. (9780253024886).

This book is the result of a workshop "Settlements in the West Bank (1967-2014): New Perspectives," held at the Minerva Humanities Center at Tel Aviv University. Here is a thoroughly fine collection of essays that takes the reader away from the emotional reaction to the subject of the settlements and offers a clear set of perspectives on the domestic political and bureaucratic role in the continuing expansion of Jewish housing in the occupied territory of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). This book, coincidentally, is a great companion to the recently released *The Writing on the Wall: The International Law of Occupation* by Aeyal Gross (NY: Cambridge University Pr., 2017). Divided into three parts, the essays in the first part concern themselves with how suburbia crept into the West Bank under the cover of privatizing much of the territory. Part Two discusses the heterogeneity of both the settler population and the settlements. The third part of the book examines the complex relationship between the dominant resident Palestinian Arab population and the encroaching Israeli settlers. A great deal can be gleaned from this work, especially for those who may not be familiar with the Israeli governing structure and the nature of its urban planning programs. An additional contribution is the reading list that is appended to each essay. This book is an essential addition to an academic library and ideal for researchers dealing with related Middle East subjects.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Birnbaum, Yoni. *Challenge and Continuity: Rabbinic Responses to Modernity, Science and Tragedy.* London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017. 96 pp. \$19.95. (9781910383407).

Rabbi Yoni Birnbaum, rabbi of the Hadley Wood Jewish Community, London, explores how Orthodox rabbis reached decisions in responding to the challenges of modernity, science, and the Holocaust. The longest section of the book contrasts the religious *responsa* of two of the leading halakhic authorities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Chatam Sofer and Moshe Feinstein. Here Birnbaum examines the role of tradition and innovation in their answers to questions such as the placement of the *bimah* (altar) in a synagogue, shaving during *Chol ha-mo'ed* (secular festival days), issues of copyright, banning smoking, and the requirements of a *mechitzah* (partition) for synagogue services. However, his attempts to untangle the role of tradition versus societal pressures on the rabbis' decisions are only partially successful. The third section of the book is the weakest. In just five pages Birnbaum outlines, in a superficial way, the range of twentieth-century Orthodox rabbinic approaches to the presumed challenges of science to religion, without giving his own position. The final section, drawing on secondary readings, argues that acts of religious martyrdom, and the ways in which Jewish life and organizations were preserved in the ghettos, can be viewed as resistance to the Nazis. Birnbaum examines the role of rabbinic leadership in the ghettos of Warsaw, Kovno, and Vilna. The most original contribution in this slim volume is the author's discussion of the sources used for making decisions, in which he refutes the idea that aggadic and kabbalistic sources were not used widely in making halakhic decisions.

The intended audience for this book is not clear to me. Modern Orthodox readers will learn some new things but the later chapters are not original. I would only recommend the book to yeshiva libraries or academic libraries that collect widely in Orthodox publications.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Cohen, Barak, S. *For Out of Babylonia Shall Come Torah and the Word of the Lord From Nehar Peqod: the Quest for the Babylonian Tannaitic Traditions.* Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017. 295 pp. \$147.00. (9789004347014).

Professor Cohen evaluates the rabbinic literature (Talmud, Mishnah, Baraitot, etc.) for evidence of halakhic continuity in the Babylonian community during the Talmudic period. Examining several models of rulings, such as the rulings of Shmuel, the Tanna (Mishnaic sage), Cohen highlights contradictions

between the halakha of the Land of Israel and Babylonia. Nevertheless, while he presents a very comprehensive analysis of the rabbinic texts, Cohen does not make any earth-shattering discoveries.

The research is impressive; with extensive footnotes that are sometimes longer than the text on the page, and a 28-page bibliography. Yet, readers will require a good knowledge of the Talmud and other rabbinic literature to penetrate the content. Recommended for Talmud scholars, academic libraries, and synagogue collections that collect academic publications.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Shalom of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Fine, Steven. *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel*. Harvard University Press, 2016, 304 pp. \$29.95. (9780674088795).

Steven Fine's book is about the Jewish Menorah and is an exploration of its history from biblical to modern times. The book is a cross between an academic work of history, iconography and visual image, and personal passion and pilgrimage. Fine centers the work on the Menorah as presented in the famous Arch of Titus which he visited in 2012 leading a team of experts to study the Arch armed with new technologies to better understand this important historical landmark. Fine then uses the Menorah depicted in the Arch of Titus as both a "starting" and "focal" point to look back and forward at the Jewish Menorah – not only in Jewish history but in Samaritan, Christian, and even Muslim history.

The book is divided into seven chapters representing the seven branches of the Jewish Menorah. Chapter 1 explores the Menorah from biblical times through Titus, showing how the Menorah was envisioned and viewed very differently through the millennia. Chapter 2 carries the history of the Menorah forward from Flavian Rome to the nineteenth century, describing in great detail how the Menorah had a prominent place in Jewish iconography. Chapter 3 focuses on Modernity, Zionism and the Menorah and how the Menorah became a symbol of modern religious traditions such as the Reform movement as well as the nascent Zionist movement. Chapter 4 tells the story of how the Menorah became Israel's national symbol and the voices both supporting and opposing the selection. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the search throughout history for the vessels plundered from the Jewish Temple by the Romans. The former focuses on general myths and the latter on the specific myth that these vessels, including the Menorah, are held in secret at the Vatican. Chapter 7 describes how the Menorah has been adopted in a polemical fashion by far-right Israelis, for example, by replicating the visuals from the Arch of Titus unto the evacuation of the settlements of Gaza.

The Menorah is a great read for those interested in Jewish symbols and general Jewish history. It is an accessible book that can be enjoyed by the general reader.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

Finkel, Evgeny. *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2017. 279 pp. \$29.93. (9780691172576).

In this fine book, Professor Finkel has a very clear goal. He claims that in numerous studies "implicit assumptions are made regarding the victims' generalized hopelessness and passivity," turning them into "a static and abstract element of the historical background." He, on the other hand, sets out to bring the victims "to front and center in the discussion, to take their agency seriously and to analyze the choices these people made and to present the entire gamut of their behavior." In this way, Finkel attempts to restore their humanity by analyzing exactly what they did in the different circumstances in which they found themselves. Finkel focuses on Jewish behavior in the ghettos rather than in the camps. Three ghettos - Krakow, Mintz, and Bialystok - are examined here, with each ghetto representing the different responses victims made based on several factors: the type of regime under which Jews lived before Nazi rule, and the extent to which the Jews were well integrated into the non-Jewish society. Depending on the answers to these questions, victims chose coping mechanisms, cooperation and/or collaboration with the Nazis, evasion or escape and finally resistance.

This book is very carefully documented with endnotes distinguishing between primary and

secondary sources. Finkel himself is of Eastern European Jewish extraction and that colors his study with a very personal and poignant aspect enriching the research but in no way detracting from its scientific approach. His writing is clear and very readable. He repeats the main themes frequently which aids the reader through the complex web of geography, politics, and human responses that make up this book. This book is recommended for all academic Judaica collections and for JCC libraries.

Marion M. Stein, retired librarian

Fishman, Jessica. *Chutzpah & High Heels: The Search for Love and Identity in the Holy Land*. St. Paul: Yotzeret Publishing, 2017. 317 pp. \$15.95 (9781592871414).

Fishman's memoir chronicles her decision to make Aliyah after graduating college, and her life in Israel, replete with arrogant men, surly taxi drivers, and other challenges involved in acclimating to Israeli culture. Full of Zionist fervor and idealism, Fishman arrives in Israel ready to make a difference by serving in the Spokespersons' Unit of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After dealing with a myriad of bureaucratic offices, including the army, she gets her dream assignment and is involved in the information dissemination for the Disengagement from Gaza in 2005. After her service, and through IDF connections, she lands a job at a top public relations firm, but reports to a moody boss. After all this, it seems as though she has hit the jackpot: Fishman lands a job at a high-tech company, gets a company car, lives in Tel Aviv with a friend, and has a boyfriend. But her story does not end happily ever after. Because the Israeli rabbinate does not accept her mother's conversion, despite the family's dedicated and active participation in all things Jewish and Israel-related, Jessica is not considered Jewish. Her boyfriend will not compromise on being married by the Israeli Rabbinate, and she finds the idea of undergoing conversion absurd and insulting. They break up, she is soon laid off from her job, and she returns to Minnesota.

For the most part, the book is very funny and those who have experienced the same things will enjoy laughing along as they identify with some of the ironies of Israeli life. Fishman includes several rants about the Israeli rabbinate and about how much she hates the Orthodox, calling them penguins and other not so nice names. While there is a lot of content about the many off-putting aspects of Israeli culture—the overly aggressive driving, the “wait-a-minute” hand signal—there is very little about the beauty of Israel, and Fishman does not express her own opinion about the Disengagement. Recommended for libraries whose patrons enjoy reading about Israeli culture; definitely not for libraries that serve Orthodox patrons.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Frisch, Yechiel & Yedidya HaCohen. *Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen: Between War and Peace*. Translated by Irene Lancaster. Jerusalem; New York: Urim Publications, 2017. 334 pp. \$39.95. (9789655243539).

Rabbi Eliyahu Yosef Shear Yashuv Cohen (1927-2016) had his feet in more than one world. He fought in the battle for Jerusalem in the 1948-49 war and was taken prisoner to Jordan when the Old City fell, hence the subtitle “Between War and Peace.” One chapter is his diary from the battle and his captivity. After the war, he was appointed chief chaplain of the Air Force. His brother-in-law Rabbi Shlomo Goren was the chief chaplain of the army. In 1953, he married Naomi Goldstein the daughter of Rabbi Herbert Goldstein of New York and grand-daughter of Harry Fischel.

As chief rabbi of the Israel Air Force and of the city of Haifa he had frequent meetings with Jews of many levels of observance and with Arabs and Christians. He even went to Rome to meet the Pope and address the synod of the Catholic Church. He was respected by religious leaders, heads of state, public figures and his own community in Haifa and Jerusalem.

This is an interesting book that introduces Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen to a new audience even though he died less than 2 years ago. The book is highly recommended for academic, synagogue, school, and personal collections.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Sholom of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Gilbert, Shirli. *From Things Lost: Forgotten Letters and the Legacy of the Holocaust.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017. 209 pp. \$26.99. (9780814342657).

The number of new books being published on the subject of the Holocaust continues to be staggering. Each one adds something to the attempt to understand that unfathomable chapter in human history. A few books, however, stand out because they enlighten the reader on small chapter in that history and then open the reader's eyes to a much wider picture.

Shirli Gilbert has written such an excellent work. In it she includes many quotes from the content of 4,000 pages of letters by and about a family with a long history in Hanau, Germany. In a very readable narrative, she tells that family's story, and by extension, the story of an important part of German Jewry. Finally this is the story of many Holocaust survivors who became refugees in strange lands and faced great difficulties adjusting to the new reality of their lives. In the new surroundings they attempted to continue to keep the old family's traditions while at the same time trying to become a part of new societies. It is by no means a unique story. Here the author focuses on the war-time and post-war life of the son of one family who after several attempts to find refuge in European countries, eventually ends up in South Africa where he makes a life for himself and his own family. Other family members found refuge in South America, the United States, and China and the many letters are from all those countries and include the responses, copies of which the writer saved. A very small percentage of German Jewish refugees found a home in South Africa, but their experiences were not very different from new comers to other countries.

Gilbert's narrative in *From Lost Things* flows smoothly in spite of the fact that it includes many quotes. Copies from the family's collection of documents and photographs enrich the story. Experts in specific fields of Holocaust studies are mentioned to add credence to some of the issues discussed. The Notes and Bibliography occupy almost a fifth of the book.

Although this is definitely a scholarly work by an excellent historian, it is recommended not only for academic libraries but also for synagogue and school libraries because it is a very good work, written in a readable style and most informative and enlightening.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Halbertal, Moshe & Stephen Holmes. *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. 211 pp. \$27.95.(9780691174624). Also available as an eBook.

The authors consider the Biblical book of Samuel to be the greatest Hebrew book ever written. While they are far from denying it is a rich book with many themes, they focus on it as "a profound work of political thought." If this strikes some readers as odd, given that it is a narrative rather than a formal philosophical work, all one need do is recall Thucydides' Peloponnesian War to realize how an historical narrative can be a vehicle for political analysis. Halbertal (Hebrew University) and Holmes (New York University) point out that the Book of Samuel relates the establishment of a continuous Hebrew government as opposed to the episodic governing described in the Book of Judges. They convincingly demonstrate that the anonymous author of the Book of Samuel offers a wide range of penetrating political insights (e.g. the temptation of those holding political power to make political power an end in itself rather than a means to implement a program or objectives, the tendency of political power to attract disinformation). This is a superb study of a superb book.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University

Halkin, Hillel. *After One Hundred and Twenty: Reflecting on Death, Mourning, and the Afterlife in the Jewish Tradition.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. 226 pp. \$19.95. (9780691149745).

In this important new book, Hillel Halkin explores Jewish attitudes towards death and the world to come. He charts their development from their origins in the response to surrounding pagan cultures

to the vague and ambivalent expressions of today. He notes that had he been born a pagan in ancient times, he would have held a concept of a concrete place where the otherwise “bored” spirits wandered aimlessly for eternity. Jews found such dismal predictions unappealing, and yet, we find that throughout their history they had a difficult time in defining what they did expect.

In addition to the physical, ritual aspects of mourning, Halkin is also keen on exploring the theological and spiritual dimensions. He discusses differences between the Jewish and the non-Jewish concepts of Hell, the development of the concept of resurrection, and about the concepts of reward and punishment in this world and the next. Halkin weaves into his discussion the expressions and opinions voiced by the various important rabbis (i.e., Maimonides, Ramban, and Sa’adia), as well as introducing some of his own insights into their opinions.

In the last third of the book however, Halkin moves from Jewish ideology, to a discussion of his own personal feelings and responses to his own approaching demise. Some reviewers have diminished this portion of the book, but in actuality, it appears that this was the end product for which Halkin was striving. As he explains, being on the far side of eighty, he “...saw a need to plan for the journey ahead” (to which a friend quipped that if he didn’t like his plans, he could always change them). This introspective examination reflects the ambivalence with which Jews have come to view the end of life crisis. Although much has been written in rabbinic literature, the expression most commonly evoked among most Jews today is that they would prefer to just not think about it. The focus is on today, and to the rewards it holds, and not on some unknown future.

This is a highly readable book which provokes reflection on an often uncomfortable subject. It would prove a valuable resource for all those involved in the field of pastoral care.

Randall C. Belinfante

Henshke, David. *מה נשתנה: ליל הפסח בתלמודם של חכמים = ‘Mah Nishtanah’: The Passover Night in the Sages’ Discourse*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2016. 650 pp. \$46.00. (9789654938709). Hebrew.

Despite its title and cover illustration from the Kaufmann Haggadah, this book is not a commentary on the Passover Haggadah. Rather, it is a scholarly tour de force that examines the Talmudic sources—Mishnah, Tosefta, Bavli and Yerushalmi—that served as the foundation on which the text of the Passover Haggadah was later built.

Henshke critiques a wide variety of scholars who have found in the Passover Seder all manner of ideas, influences and surprises. He relentlessly deploys textual criticism, contextual interpretation and terminological precision in order to strip these fascinating but unfounded suggestions away from the sources. The essence of Henshke’s approach is the distinction between different chronological periods, and between textual statements from different periods or different perspectives that were compiled together into the multi-layered corpus of rabbinic literature. To take one core example: Henshke claims that, during the Second Temple period, eating the Paschal sacrifice formed the focal point of Passover night. In the wake of the destruction of the Temple, different adaptations of the ceremony emerged. Rabban Gamliel moved other foods—matzah and maror—to the center to take the place of the sacrificial meat, while other rabbis placed their emphasis on learning and discussion the laws of the Festival. These conflicting positions are reflected in different places of the Mishnah, Tosefta and Talmud. The intricate process of untangling these different traditions and realigning them into their original conceptual contexts makes this work both magisterial and captivating.

Pinchas Roth



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Himmelfarb, Martha. *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: a History of the Book of Zerubbabel.* Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2017. 220 pp. \$39.95 (9780674057623).

Sefer Zerubavel is one of the most important early texts containing Jewish messianic narratives. Modeled after the biblical visions of Ezekiel, the text describes the eschatological conflict between Armilus, the Jewish equivalent of the Antichrist, and the Messiah son of Joseph. This analysis closely examines concepts in *Sefer Zerubavel* that strongly impacted later traditions such as the dying Messiah son of Joseph as well as aspects of the text that faded into obscurity such as the warrior mother of the Messiah. Himmelfarb places the 7th century Hebrew text in its historical context weaving in and out of Christian and rabbinic texts that influenced and were influenced by the book. Recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Hirschhorn, Sara Yael. *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement,* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017. 350 pp. \$39.93. (9780674975057).

It is a pleasure to read a book about Israel, the settlements, and the occupation that is neither an ideological cudgel nor a work of propaganda. Sara Hirschhorn weaves material from interviews, archival documents, historical periodicals, and government publications to examine the role of American immigrants in forming and molding Israeli settlements. In particular, she focuses on those who came to the territories in the wave of North American *aliya* that followed the civil rights movement in the United States and the Six Day War in Israel, as they founded settlements of Yamit in Sinai as well as Efrat and Tekoa in Judea.

The book effectively undermines the stereotype of American settlers as wild-eyed, gun-toting, fascist fanatics. There were, and certainly still are, a handful of such types, perhaps with outsized influence, but most of these American expatriate settlers saw themselves as alumni of the liberal American sixties, and who saw Zionism in general and the settlements in particular as part and parcel of a liberationist ideal. Freedom and self-determination for Jews in an ancestral homeland ties in with a desire for freedom and self-determination for other ethnic and racial groups.

In practice, American immigrants to the territories were in for a rude awakening, both because of a measure of naiveté about the complexities of Israeli politics and bureaucracy, and more importantly about the ways in which the settler movement became wed to profoundly illiberal actions and policies. The characters who occupy *City on a Hilltop* address these tensions in different ways, but they all face them. Hirschhorn presents them sympathetically and critically, but with a richness, realism, and honesty that are central for good scholarship about sensitive topics.

Yoel Finkelman

Holtz, Barry W. *Rabbi Akiva: Sage of the Talmud.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017. 223 pp. \$18.95. (9780300204872).

Though there is little actual evidence of Rabbi Akiva in the historical record, the available Jewish documentary evidence at our disposal makes it clear that he not only lived at the time of the formulation of the earliest rabbinic literature, but he was, as Holtz explains, "...the apotheosis of the deepest values of Judaism." In this book, Holtz argues that Akiva was unquestionably the most important figure in rabbinic literature, the pre-eminent molder of that vast body of literature, the "father of the world," as the Jerusalem Talmud relates.

Holtz reflects on the nature of a biography drawn from rabbinic sources. He considers how to approach the "biographical" fragments scattered through the literature. He describes his work as "imagined biography" based on modern scholarship and an understanding of the historical context of Akiva's world.

Using a close and comparative reading of the texts he weaves together the rabbinic sources on a variety of topics seeking to understand the individuals and issues significant in Akiva's world. The concern is

not with the factual accuracy of a story but with why it was preserved and what meaning was intended.

Rather than imagining conversations, Holtz uses the rabbinic arguments in retelling the anecdotes. In the discussion of the four rabbis (including Akiva) who entered *Pardes*, Holtz presents the texts describing it, as well as laying out the interpretations drawn by the commentators. Likewise, in the debate over whether to include the *Song of Songs* in the biblical cannon, Holtz presents the rabbis' own arguments regarding the relevance and importance of the book. With extensive notes and several indexes, this work is a significant study of one of the most important figures in rabbinic literature.

Randall C. Belinfante

Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence A. (ed.). *More than Managing: The Relentless Pursuit of Effective Jewish Leadership*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 250 pp. \$27.99. (9781580238700).

Among the vast number of publications on the subject of management and leadership, many books have examined Jewish views of the topic, from Moses to the contemporary scene. In this volume Rabbi Hoffman, in conjunction with the Harvard Center for Public Leadership and the Wexner Foundation, has collected essays precisely on this theme.

The fifty essays here are divided into two parts. Part One, "What Leaders Need to Know," first examines the current state of leadership in general. The authors include Harvard faculty, and also several leading Jewish voices: Larry Moses of the Wexner Foundation and Rabbi Aaron Panken of HUC. Having laid the groundwork, the second section analyzes the general topic of "Jewish Models of Leadership." The writers here include Ruth Calderon, Rabbis Ed Feinstein and Avi Weiss, and several members of the Wexner staff. The second part of the book, "The Jewish Condition," divides into three sections. The first, "The Global Condition," contains essays by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Deborah Lipstadt, and others; they discuss the history of Jewish leadership and its significance today. The second covers "Challenges in Israel," with six essays on diverse aspects of leadership in the State. The final section "Challenges in America," focuses on how various American institutions and organizations are demonstrating leadership today. The conclusion contains comments by Charles Bronfman and Leslie Wexner, and a statement by Rabbi Hoffman.

Despite its short-essay format (almost all of them are just 4 or 5 pages), this is not a collection of simplistic statements. The authors assume that the readers know the basics of Management and have significant Jewish knowledge. Nonetheless, it contains enormously valuable and useful content. It should be purchased by synagogues and academic libraries. In addition, it should be recommended to Rabbis and administrators for their personal collections.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Junginger, Horst. *The Scientification of the "Jewish Question" in Nazi Germany*. Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religion. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 456 pp. \$156.00. (9789004341074).

This is a thoroughly researched book. Horst's study of the scientification of the "Jewish Question" in Nazi Germany examines the ways in which German academics countered the waning influence of religious prejudices due to secularization by exploring and advancing new anti-Semitic racial ideas. This new, purportedly more objective and scientific approach was quickly employed to justify the "longest hatred" of the Jews. Thus, in the 1930s, during the period of the Third Reich, a new research discipline known as *Judenforschung* (Jew research) emerged in which respected professors synthesized racial and religious hypotheses to confirm the existence of an everlasting "Jewish problem" and to offer plans for its solution. Their pseudo-scientific academic discourse based on racial biologism and the study of Jewish physiognomy enabled the use of euphemisms such as 'special treatment of human materials' when referring to the transportation of Jews to extermination camps. Thus, in Nazi ideology it became a virtue to murder Jews and they used the pseudo-scientific study of the "Jewish Question" to support their brutal logic. Recommended for Jewish libraries, Holocaust libraries, and University libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC

Kalman, Julie. *Orientalizing the Jew: Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France.* Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, [2017]. 172 pp. \$25.00. (9780253024220). Also available as eBook.

This slim book focuses on how the Jews of the Orient (the Near East) were encountered and perceived by nineteenth-century French travelers, and how those travelers' accounts influenced views of Jews at home, as well as subsequent attempts to "Orientalize" them. The work draws on contemporaneous fictional accounts, narratives, and correspondence, and it is divided into three main chapters: Pilgrimage to the Holy Land within; Travel and intimacy; and The Kings of Algiers. The first chapter traces the journeys of French Catholic pilgrims as they followed in the footsteps of the Crusaders and then Chateaubriand to the Holy Land. In chapter two, the largest of the three, the author mines the oeuvre of Theophile Gautier (1811-1872), a French writer and critic for his views on Jews in the Orient and secondarily in France. The third chapter uses the diplomatic correspondence regarding the French debt with the Sephardi Jewish trading House of Bacri and Busnach in Algiers before the French conquest of Algeria. Chiefly for academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.

Kaminsky, Sarah. *A Forger's Life. Photographs by Adolfo Kaminsky.* Translated by Mike Mitchell. Los Angeles, CA: Doppelhouse Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$26.95 (9780997003406).

Adolfo Kaminsky, a master forger, honed his craft in World War II while working for the French Resistance. This biography, written by his daughter, was based on a series of interviews which led to its publication in her native France. For her it was a way "to understand his choices . . . his desire to build a world of justice and freedom."

Ably translated, the prose carries the tension of a spy novel. The book begins in 1944 with Adolfo's narrow escape from the police on the Paris Metro. It then covers the early years – his family's immigration to France, his first job at a factory, and his encounters with interesting characters. Following the Nazi invasion, he became an apprentice dyer; at the transit camp of Drancy, he befriended a professor who tutored him in math and science. Although his Argentinian nationality saved his life, Adolfo went underground, applying his acquired skills among a clandestine network of rescue organizations. Sights and smells of laboratories are vividly rendered, along with the nuances of photoengraving and careful interactions with strangers and colleagues. The latter half of the book is devoted to Adolfo's largely left-wing postwar activities – producing fake ID cards and documents to the Haganah, to Algerians during their war of independence, to African liberation movements, and to Greeks during their civil war, in 1969. There are also photos of his early handiwork, as well as artistic Paris scenes.

This is a fascinating tribute to a humanitarian and a glimpse at the nuts and bolts of covert operations. The secular and adult content makes this book more suitable for a public library or possibly one with Holocaust/World War II collections.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY

Katz, Ethan B., & Lisa Moses Leff & Maud S. Mandel (eds). *Colonialism and the Jews.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017. 359 pp. \$40.00. (9780253024503). Also available as eBook.

The book is divided into three parts, each one of which revolves around a central question. The essays in part one, "Subjects and Agents of Empire," proceed from the question: in their various roles in colonial empires, are Jews best understood as subjects or agents of empire? In the second part, "Jews in colonial politics," the essayists ask: politically, how did Jews become defined and define themselves in the colonial venture and in anti-colonial struggles? The book's final section tackles the vexing question of Zionism's historical relationship to colonialism, republishing an essay of Derek Penslar on Zionism, adding two critical responses to Penslar's piece and a response from Penslar. The French zone of influence in North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) features prominently in these fourteen

articles, and it is the chief focus in at least six of them. All of the articles attempt to re-assess the history of Jews in colonial societies in the light of modern post-colonialist studies. For all academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD.

Kunis, Rabbi Mark Hillel. *Dancing with God: How to Connect with God Every Time You Pray.* Jerusalem: Menorah Books, 2016. 346 p. \$24.95. (9781940516653).

“What one’s prayer experience can and should be is an intimate dance with God...” Rabbi Kunis hopes to give the reader an “understanding and appreciation for connecting with God with every prayer experience.” In the introductory chapters, he discusses the functions of prayer and its importance in the world. Chapters Five through Ten discuss the Shema in intricate detail, from the meaning of the words to the overall themes. The remaining chapters discuss many aspects of the central Jewish prayer, the *Amidah*, and there are three supplements that discuss the individual blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. Rabbi Kunis provides excellent exercises and meditations to prepare for and enhance the prayer experience, which can also be found at <http://www.dancingwithg-d.com>. Commentaries are gleaned from a variety of sources.

While there are tidbits of valuable information, inconsistencies detract from the book’s usefulness. Some chapters discuss the words of the prayers, others include esoteric commentaries from the Talmud and noted rabbis, and others include stories or folktales. There are short biographies of Rashi and Maggid of Mezrich, but a biography section could have included information about all the personalities mentioned (*Minchat Yitzchak*, Moshe Chaim Luzzato, etc.). Beginners will be unimpressed with Talmudic references and those more involved in prayer will be bored with explanations of what a *mezuzah* is and simple translation. It seems like there is filler, with the almost 500 endnotes spaced out over 25 pages and the inclusion of Hebrew text, the English translation, and then a word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase translation and explanation. The poor index makes it hard to refer back to the material. Most Jewish libraries, however, may benefit from owning a copy, just note that the catchy title belongs to at least 20 other books including: *Dancing with God: Everyday Steps to Jewish Spiritual Renewal* (HarperCollins, 1997) and *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (Chalice Press 2006).

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Mayzlish, Shaul. *The Rabbinate in Stormy Days: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac HaLevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel.* Translated from the Hebrew by Tanhum Yoreh. Jerusalem; New York: Gefen Books, 2017. 253 pp. \$27.25. (978965229835).

Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog was a powerful figure in the history of Israel not just in his role as a religious leader, but also in his ability to connect with the British Mandate authorities and later the Israeli government. He personally saved many physical and spiritual lives. His grandson, Issac Herzog, an Israeli politician who bears his name, was a moving force to get the book translated into English so that the message would reach a wide international audience. He was born shortly after his grandfather died and never met him. Isaac’s father, Chaim Herzog, was president of Israel when the original Hebrew edition was published, but died before this English edition.

Part of the book is a narrative about the life and deeds of Rabbi Herzog and part is background material about the times and events surrounding his life. The book incorporates photographs and documents to help illustrate the people and events in his life, and with its size and weight, it resembles a typical coffee table book. Lacking footnotes and a bibliography, however, means that it will be hard for interested readers to verify the facts and follow up on them.

Nonetheless, this is an interesting book to read because it gives a view of the chief rabbinate that is missing today. Some people objected to the appointing of a chief rabbi who had a doctorate from a secular university. His doctorate was from the University of London and he also had masters from the

Sorbonne in Paris. His mastery of the rabbinic and general worlds is what allowed him to be at home while talking to members of all communities in Israel and the world. The book is recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Shalom of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Mehozay, Yoav. *Between the Rule of Law and States of Emergency: The Fluid Jurisprudence of the Israeli Regime.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016. 205 pp. \$80.00. (9781438463391).

The security of the state is a primary consideration of every government. All states also have contingency plans and threat assessments for emergency situations. The author, an assistant professor of criminology at the University of Haifa, makes an argument that the Israeli government uses its emergency powers for political ends. In fact, the sense of emergency given the latent threats Israel faces on a daily basis is merged with real threats so that the governing process has melded the two conditions into a common core. Because Israel does not have a written constitution, but relies on its Basic Law which has been amended numerous times, it also is affected by layers of British, Jordanian, and Ottoman law intertwined into Israeli legal reactions to its own set of conditions. As can be expected, the examination of the relationship between politics and law is drenched in laws and court decisions, all of which points to the recommended audience, namely those whose special interest is Israeli law and how it relates to connections to regional ties, human rights, and the relationship to the Palestinian population.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Mersky, Rabbi David M. & Abigail Harmon. *Successful Synagogue Fundraising Today: Overcoming the Fear of Asking for Money.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2016. 183 pp. \$19.95. (9781580238564).

Every Jewish institution needs to raise money today. This timely book contains both general strategies and concrete recommendations about synagogue fundraising in the 21st Century.

The authors bring a wealth of fund-raising and consulting experience to the task. They begin by noting that the traditional methods of asking for money no longer succeed. Instead, they point to the growing focus on fee-for-service organizations, and the search for deeper meaning that synagogue members are now seeking. They ask how fund-raisers can meet these challenges. Part 1, "What can Fundraising help you achieve?" discusses the potential of both annual and Capital campaigns. Part 2 identifies a range of people who should be involved – clergy, volunteers, and consultants – and explores each group's role. Part 3, "Tools for donor engagement," describes the world of donors, frames the "Case for Giving," and analyzes the components of an "Effective Annual Fund." Part 4, "Why it's okay to ask for a donation" presents a path for volunteers and leaders as they move from the "Culture of Giving" to the "Individual Ask." Part 5 explains how great fundraising can improve Synagogue culture. The text contains several charts and lists to help with the practical issues. The Appendices include a statement on Donor Recognition Policy, and several practical worksheets to use during a campaign.

While professional fund-raisers and consultants are well-versed in these techniques, this book is intended to build the confidence of congregational leaders. It is written for those directly involved in the Development process. It should be purchased by all synagogue libraries. But don't be surprised if it lands on "long-term loan" to the Rabbi, or in the hands of the Campaign Chair for years on end. It may in fact be useful for all members of Boards and Campaign committees to own.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Perkul, Debbi. *Winds over Jerusalem: The Story of Rae Landy: Pioneer Nurse of Hadassah.* Elstree, U.K.: Vallentine Mitchell, 2017. 240 pp. \$24.95. (9781910383421).

The book is a combination of social history, political history and biography which tells the story of life in Palestine in 1913-1915 through the eyes of a Hadassah nurse, Rae Landy, and her nursing partner, Rose Kaplan. *Winds over Jerusalem* relates the impact their work and how their determination did so

much to improve health, hygiene, and child care in Palestine. They played a crucial role in helping to eliminate trachoma which was epidemic in Palestine at that time.

Winds Over Jerusalem describes the cruelty and mistreatment of the Jews by the Turks which included the expulsion of Jews from Palestine under the pretense that they were not loyal citizens. Utter starvation and lack of food along with the invasion of a plague of locusts made living in Palestine a daily fight for survival.

Parallels could be drawn between this book and *Raquela* by Ruth Gruber. While the time period of Gruber's book is different, the suffering of the Jews under the British and the lack of food is similar to the experiences suffered by Landy. Both books describe the total commitment and dedication of these nurses who managed with very limited resources to effect change in the health and well-being of people living in the Holy Land.

I would highly recommend *Winds over Jerusalem* for a synagogue library. It would make a good gift book for anyone going into the medical profession and it is also a good choice to buy for a young adult.

Ellen Share, Librarian, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.

Porat, Oded. ספר ברית המנוחה = *Book of Covenant of Serenity*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2016. 601 pp. \$50.00. (9789657755310). Hebrew.

Berit Menuhah is one of the most cryptic and mystifying works in Jewish mysticism. It contains elaborate names of angels, esoteric interpretations based on the *nikkud* (symbols of Hebrew punctuation), creative acronyms, mythical images and practical magic. First printed in 1648, it is found in a number of manuscripts, which often differ widely from each other and contain unique passages that may or may not have been part of the original work. Oded Porat, an accomplished young Kabbalah scholar, has prepared a critical edition that attempts to present this work in all its complexity. Besides a critical text (including editorial emendations) and textual variants, this new edition includes extensive footnotes that compare the themes and images in the work with similar concepts throughout and beyond the Kabbalistic corpus. The edition is preceded by an extensive introduction that places this work into a historical and phenomenological context.

The breadth of Porat's familiarity with kabbalistic literature, in print and manuscript, and with the huge scholarly literature that has grown around it in recent years, is nothing short of breathtaking. While the book remains cryptic and challenging, it can now be studied with all the assistance that the best of modern scholarship can provide.

Pinchas Roth

Reiss, Dr. Fred. *The Jewish Calendar: History and Inner Workings*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (print on demand), 2017. 289 pp. \$14.95. (9781544723822).

Reiss' self-published book describes the history of the Jewish calendar, starting with its precursors during Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Gregorian times. Each of the nine chapters contains a review and exercises, and the work includes 42 tables, as well as figures, footnotes, formulas and numerical procedures. In addition, Reiss supplies three appendices (Calippus' Correction to the Calendar, Molad Worksheet, and Year Equivalents within a Cycle), as well as answers to selected chapter exercises. The author is a retired public and Hebrew school teacher, administrator and university adjunct instructor. He has also written *The Standard Guide to the Jewish and Civil Calendars*. The layout of the text facilitates ease of reading; however, the author's technical and mathematical approach to the subject makes this book more appropriate for Jewish educational institutions at high school, college and university levels.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator; Volunteer, Temple Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia



Rosenblum, Jordan D. *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 193 pp. \$99.99. (9781107090347).

Jordan Rosenblum, Belzer Professor of Classical Judaism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, states in his introduction that this book will explore how ancient authors understood and interacted with the Jewish food regulations enumerated in the Bible. In the first chapter, Rosenblum describes in detail all the biblical food laws including which animals, birds and fish may be eaten and which may not be eaten. He includes the prohibition of eating a limb from a living animal, sending the mother bird away from the nest before taking the eggs, cooking a kid in its mother's milk and the prohibition against eating blood. In the following chapters, Rosenblum discusses how Romans and Greeks tried to make sense of the peculiar Jewish laws, but they did not focus on what to them was a curiosity. During the Hellenistic period, Roman and Greek attitudes toward Jewish food prohibitions changed. Eating pork was used as a loyalty test for Jews in Palestine and there are many pork-related martyr stories in Talmudic literature. In subsequent chapters Rosenblum discusses how in Tannaitic, Amoraic, and Rabbinic periods dietary laws were interpreted and elaborated upon. Rosenblum states many times throughout the book that Jewish sources did not try to explain the "why" of dietary laws, but just the "how." An important element of Rosenblum's thesis is that the dietary laws were important in regard to commensality: "Commensality with non-Jews was seen as a slippery slope, a downward spiral that leads to idolatry." One of the final chapters discusses the early Christian attitude toward the dietary laws. Their teachers taught that the laws were allegories and therefore did not need to be followed. The prohibited animals exhibited improper behavior and the permitted animals exhibited ethical moral traits that man should emulate. *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World* is exhaustively documented, and it provides a 14-page bibliography and comprehensive index. Recommended for academic libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Ross, Sarah. M. *A Season of Sing: Creating Feminist Jewish Music in the United States*. HBI Series on Jewish Women. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016. 296 pp. \$40.00. (9781611689600).

In clear and concise language, Sarah Ross creates a history of the development of feminist Jewish music. This book should be understood as a survey of major theoretical issues of Jewish feminism, not just about an "outlier" subject of music. Jewish feminism challenged normative Jewish gender roles, and also sought a new theology based in feminist critique. The author focuses on core values of contemporary Judaism and how music transformed them. She sees this musical transformation as central to American Jewish development in this period.

Ross argues that feminist Jewish music was closely related and paralleled musical and social developments of American counterculture and women's liberation movements. She demonstrates that feminist Jews started using music as a way to connect women to Jewish communities, and to build a platform for a new American Judaism. Jewish women helped transform Jewish liturgy by re-conceptualizing the meaning and structure of Jewish liturgical music to reflect Jewish feminism. Her thesis is that Jewish women singer-songwriters in the 1970s and 1980s created a very powerful medium that spearheaded many changes in United States' Judaism.

Ross includes biographical sketches of several musicians and focuses on what motivated them. For example, Debbie Friedman and other singer-songwriters are seen writing music of their time, not a repertoire intended to connect Jews over time and place. Ross' book includes many specific musical examples. An appendix provides a listing of selected feminist Jewish songs arranged by categories such as "Healing Songs," "Rosh Hodesh," and "Shechinah Songs and Songs Using Gender-Neutral God-Language."

Judith S. Pinnolis, Berklee College of Music/Boston Conservatory of Music at Berklee

Saar, Ortal-Paz. *Jewish Love Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. 297 pp. \$121.00. (9789004347885).

“For Love. Take a bat and slaughter it with a piece of glass and bury it in the eggshell of an egg born on Thursday, and dry the blood and touch whomever you wish.” Love in its myriad forms has always been a complicated and frustrating affair and people have taken to desperate measures to find favor in the eyes of others. Saar meticulously examines the extant Jewish texts and artifacts pertaining to love magic, comparing them to their non-Jewish analogues and attempting to ferret out what was unique and what was universal about the methods employed and the results desired. While on the surface, *Jewish Love Magic* is a highly technical, esoteric study, it treats the reader to a fascinating glimpse into a rarely explored facet of Jewish life. Recommended for academic libraries, but it is not recommended that you try these techniques at home.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Sacks, Elias. *Moses Mendelssohn's Living Script: Philosophy, Practice, History, Judaism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 316 pp. \$60.00. (9780253023742). Also available as an eBook.

Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was one of the principal progenitors of Jewish Enlightenment thought. Dr. Sacks (University of Colorado) examines and tries to explicate three of the issues that Mendelssohn confronted, taking into account the historical context and using both his Hebrew and German writings. First is Mendelssohn's claim that Judaism was open to philosophical developments (without falling prey to passing trends) because Jewish practice encourages reflection upon the truths of God's existence and providence and the immortality of the soul while avoiding the rigidity of creeds that might stultify philosophical progress. Secondly, Dr. Sacks considers Mendelssohn's claim that Judaism works for the wellbeing of the nations in which Jews find themselves. According to Mendelssohn, Jews can do this through the self-perfection that Judaism encourages thus inclining them to distinguish what is good and beneficial from what is bad and harmful. In other words, Judaism encourages an active, intelligent, and benevolent civic engagement. Thirdly, the book examines Mendelssohn's defense of religious authority by his arguing for the truth of the revelation at Sinai and, against a certain type of Biblical criticism, for the reliability of the received Masoretic text of the Bible as well as the reliability of rabbinical exegeses of the Bible. This is an interesting excursion into Jewish intellectual history marred a bit by a certain repetitiveness.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University.

Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan. *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible: Numbers: The Wilderness Years*. Jerusalem: Koren, 2017. 432 pp. \$24.95. (9781592640232).

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a world renowned and highly respected Judaic scholar who served as chief Rabbi of England from 1991-2013 and has authored over twenty books on Jewish thought. He has written commentary on Jewish prayer texts and has published “The Jonathan Sacks Haggadah,” “The Koren Sacks Siddur,” and a set of Mahzorim (Orthodox). His latest work, *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible: Numbers* is the fourth book in Rabbi Sacks' series on the five books of the Jewish Bible. The book is comprised of five to six essays on each of the weekly portions in the book of Numbers. According to Rabbi Sacks, the theme of Numbers (Bamidbar) is the Jewish people's journey from slavery to freedom. His thesis states that there is no short cut to liberty. The forty years spent in the desert was not just a physical journey, but also a psychological, moral and spiritual voyage. Rabbi Sacks discusses all these ideas in his erudite and thought-provoking essays. Included in each essay are quotes from Jewish and non-Jewish important thinkers both modern and ancient, such as Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, Adam Smith, Friedrich Nietzsche and many others too numerous to mention. Although the essays are scholarly they can be easily read, appreciated and understood by all readers. Highly recommended for all libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio

Schreier, Joshua. *The Merchants of Oran: A Jewish Port at the Dawn of Empire.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. 199 pp. \$49.29. (9780804799140).

In his second study on the Jews of Algeria, Joshua Schreier, who teaches history at Vassar College, focuses on the Jews of the western Algerian city of Oran. He challenges several concepts regarding Algerian history, including the notion of “indigenous Jews” and the process of opening and modernization of the region and the Jewish contribution to it. The study is based on extensive French and British archival documentation (including much from Gibraltar), contemporary media, and published studies. Schreier examines life in Oran in the context of Mediterranean politics and economics, stressing the important role of Jews in the development of the town. He shows how Jews, especially Moroccan Jews who solidified their position in Gibraltar, played a major role in developing Oran as a commercial junction between Africa and Europe, mainly through Gibraltar, and how Jews contributed to the growth of Oran prior to the French occupation. The study focuses on several Jewish merchants, especially on Jacob Lasry, originally from Morocco, who towards the end of his life was appointed by the French to head the Jewish Consistory for the Province of Oran, with the aim of regenerating the indigenous Jews, many of whom were in fact immigrants. Schreier examines how these Jews, who had been originally viewed by the French as Moroccans or Jews from Gibraltar, were gradually being defined as “Algerian Jews” and finally as “indigenous Jews”. He shows how French policies changed the social and political hierarchies in Oran as well as in Algeria as a whole, with severe implications for Jewish-Muslims relations in the twentieth century and during Algeria’s struggle for independence. The book is an important contribution to the study of Algeria, French colonialism, and Jewish social, economic and political role in the western Mediterranean.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton NJ

Shoham, Hizky. *Israel Celebrates: Jewish Holidays and Civic Culture in Israel.* Translated by Lenn Schramm (*Jewish Identities in a Changing World*; 28). Leiden: Brill, 2017. 276 pp. \$96.00 (9789004343870).

In *Israel Celebrates*, the author examines the history and modern Israeli practice of four holidays: Passover, Tu Bishvat, Yom Kippur and Yom Ha’atzma’ut (Israeli Independence Day). Each chapter opens with a short history of the holiday as practiced in various Jewish cultures in order to shed light on the motifs of continuity, change, and innovation. The second part of each chapter traces the evolution of the holiday within the context of one hundred plus years of modern Zionism: who celebrated it, when, with whom, where, and how? The third part of each chapter explores what Israelis do while re-appropriating and adapting these holidays within a modern grassroots context, and what this means for Jews living in Israel today.

In chapter one, with the modern practice of Passover being strongly orientated towards families and themes of freedom from slavery, the author considers the Seder ritual as it is practiced within larger settings such as Kibbutzim and hotels, and what this tells us about the Jewish extended family in Israeli public culture. In chapter two, he examines how Tu Bishvat became more than a Hebrew version of Arbor Day in expressing important environmental and ecological concerns as Jewish Green Day and a celebration of nature and the outdoors. In the third chapter, the author asks how and when did Yom Kippur become a carless day on Israeli highways with widespread observance of the fast? In chapter four he asks, “What is the significance of the cookout barbeques and picnics becoming mandatory in celebrating the Israeli Day of Independence?” Thus, the author inquires why particular holidays acquired particular significance in modern Israeli culture while other holidays less so. The final chapter examines how Jewish culture has been nationalized and what that means for Jewish identity within Israel. The ethnographic sources employed are drawn from mainstream Israeli popular culture (popular music, TV, theater, cinema) as it is reflected in print media, newspaper columns, commercials, and advertisements, as well as in lifestyle, food, fashion, and sports sections of newspapers. Recommended for Jewish Libraries, Israeli Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnographic studies.

David B Levy, Touro College, NYC

Stuckenbruck, Loren T. *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017. 427 pp. \$50.00. (9780802873156).

The author is a scholarly writer in the area of biblical and historical literature. In this volume, a focused analysis is made of stories from the Hebrew Bible, Christian scriptures and non-biblical literature with regard to spiritual beings such as angels, demons, giants, and mythical creatures. In addition to Hebrew and Christian scriptures, study is made of the Book of Enoch, Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and many others. The common focus of all fourteen chapters is the relation of all these sources to the myth of rebellious angels, particularly as it was understood during the period of the Second Temple. This book would be a good addition to an academic library.

Arthur G. Quinn, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL

Troen, S. Ilan and Fish, Rachel. *Essential Israel: Essays for the 21st Century.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017. 423 pp. \$35.00. (9780253027115).

Essential Israel is just that: an essential collection of essays to understand contemporary Israel. The editors, both associated with prominent Israel studies programs, have brought together an outstanding group of well-respected specialists in their field who author a nicely coherent set of thoughts on Israel. Hence the reader is offered a well written and easily read treatment of Israeli geography, its demography, and economy. The book covers delicate subjects such as the current nature of Zionism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the somewhat related subject of the settlements in the occupied territory of the West Bank. Political topics covered include the nature of Israeli citizenship and its relationship to Judaism, and the question of who is a Jew? The role of Christianity and Islamic perceptions of Jews and Israel is treated with certain care. For the humanist, there is also an essay on Israeli literature with an annotated suggested reading list. A definite contribution is a glossary of terms and a suggested reading list that is appended to each essay and an elementary glossary follows all. This clearly is a needed read for any and all audiences interested in understanding today's Israel.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Weitzman, Steven. *The Origin of the Jews: the Quest for Roots in a Rootless Age.* Princeton, NJ & Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2017. 394 pp. \$35.00. (9780691174600).

Weitzman, professor and the director of the Center for Advanced Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, explores numerous interpretations of Jewish origins from the theological, psychological, historical, archaeological, linguistic, and sociological points of views. He begins by explaining that the concept of "origin" is not easily definable: most people cannot trace their genealogy back more than a few generations and very few can claim lineages back to the Middle Ages. Weitzman critiques the work of major historians and philosophers such as Julius Wellhausen and Sigmund Freud and finds them to be misguided and misleading on the issue of origins, concluding that there is no single origin story or theory that can explain who we are and how we became 21st century Jews. Thus, the author does not offer any easy explanation as to why Jews are variously considered a religion, an ethnic group, and a nationality, but rather encourages the reader to look again more critically at some of the existing ideas. I found the information presented in an easy-to-read narrative, and I could hardly wait for the conclusion. Recommended for academic, synagogue, and personal collections.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago and Temple Shalom of Chicago, Chicago, IL



Yafia Katherine Randall, *Sufism and Jewish-Muslim Relations: The Derekh Avraham Order in Israel*. (Routledge Sufi Studies, 10). London & New York: Routledge, 2016. 256 pp. \$145.00. (9781138914032). Also available as an eBook.

Yafia Katherine Randall offers an alternative approach to the study of conflict transformation, taking the Jewish-Muslim relations as a case study by examining the involvement of Jews and Muslims in Sufism, with special reference to the *Derekh Avraham* (Way of Abraham) Sufi order in Israel. Randall's study is based on various studies on Sufism as well as on interviews she conducted with several Jewish and Muslim members of the order. The interviews are included in the appendix and selected parts are cited throughout the text. As a background to current activities, Randall examines previous Jewish-Muslim inter-religious encounters, mainly in medieval Spain and Egypt, showing Jewish involvement in Sufism and mystical life. The *Derekh Avraham* order started in 2000 and continues to the time of the study, but with diminishing numbers, most of the remaining ones being Jewish (who do not consider conversion to Islam). Several of the Jewish members are academics studying Islam or from families deriving from Muslim countries, claiming better understanding of Muslims and Islam. The participants meet on a regular basis, practice Sufism, and discuss religious issues, building better understanding among themselves. Yet, this group is small, with less than twenty members, most of them Jews. Thus, while continuous inter-religious encounters can build better understanding among members of different religious and political backgrounds, this is but an example of a small and hardly representative group. This book adds to the writings on contemporary role and practice of Sufism as well as on Jewish-Muslims encounters and mutual understanding, but while the topic is important and interesting, I find the exposition very meandering and difficult to follow.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University, Princeton NJ

Reviews of Literature Titles for Adults

Batshaw, Karen. *Hidden in Plain Sight*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (print on demand), 2016. 251 pp. \$11.99. (9781530782482).

When thinking of the Holocaust, Greece rarely comes to mind. The Jewish population there, especially the large, important community in Thessaloniki (Salonika), was annihilated by the Nazis. There were, however, a number of brave Greek Orthodox citizens and clergy who came to the aid of the Jews, hiding them at great personal risk. This historical novel gives readers a taste of that era.

Anna, a Jewish doctor who trained in America is home with her family in Thessaloniki when the Germans invade. Her parents send her to live with a Greek Orthodox family in Athens. She must pretend to be an Orthodox Christian, going to church and working as a nurse at a hospital because practicing medicine would be too dangerous. She finds herself falling in love with Alexander, the son of the family hiding her. He is also a physician. The couple must deal with religious issues as well as the brutality of the Nazi occupation. Their story will keep readers turning the pages as they learn about a little-known piece of history. This will appeal to historical fiction readers. It will also be a good choice for book clubs.

Barbara M. Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA.

Eisenstadt, Jill. *Swell*. New York: Lee Boudeaux Books, 2017. 272 pp. \$26.00. (9780316316903).

This novel has an engaging story line: Sue Glassman's father-in-law Sy agrees to buy Sue, her husband Dan, and their two daughters a new home by the beach as long as Sue in return agrees to convert to Judaism. What follows is a dark, humorous story about a cast of characters, a much-resisted conversion, a strange new life in a haunted, ramshackle house, and the return of its former owner: a murderess escaped from an assisted living facility.

Eisenstadt's writing style is concise, sparing the reader from having to trawl through lengthy

descriptive passages. However, she sometimes goes to the other extreme using half-words, like *sec*, *bro*, *fave*, and *mag*. And to further cement the casual tone and to give a sense of character, she employs cruder substitutes for the more courteous ways of indicating someone's identity: so we have *Chink*, *goy*, and *yid*, as well as other colloquialisms, obscenities, and profanities.

Who should read this book? Certainly, with its rough-cut lingo, some may hesitate before considering it as a gift. Teenagers may enjoy it for a chance, vicariously, to say and do things they know are forbidden to them. Also, adult readers who have grown impatient with detailed descriptions of setting and physical appearance, the long interludes and asides typical of the old classic novels, may find this author's brisk, informal style refreshing. Eisenstadl's *Swell* offers good strong plot movement and dialogue, but not description, on every page.

Jane Wallerstein, West Orange, NJ

Kass, Linda. *Tasa's Song, A Novel*. Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2016. 241 pp. \$16.95. (9781631520648).

This first novel, by a former journalist, was inspired by events from her mother's life. It takes place in World War II Poland. The story begins in 1933, when Tasa is a girl, and ends in 1947 when she and her parents, who have survived the War, leave for the United States. It celebrates the power of music to bolster the human spirit. Tasa is a violinist whose music is the center of her life. The novel describes the dramatic changes in her life and that of her family as Germany invades and takes over Poland. The themes of devotion, love and loss make the novel an absorbing, powerful reading experience. The book includes a song playlist and musical reference, as well as a reader's guide. It is recommended for Jewish high school, public, community center, temple and synagogue library collections.

Susan Freiband, Retired Library Educator; Volunteer, Temple Librarian, Alexandria, Virginia

Levi, Jonathan. *A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2016. 339 pp. \$17.95. (9781468314540).

There is speculation, among many historians, that Christopher Columbus, long credited for having discovered the American continent, was a *Converso*, a Jew who had converted to Catholicism in medieval Christian Spain and that his 1492 excursion (the same year that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled Jews from Spain) was, in part, an attempt to rescue Jews by sending them to the New World, safe from the Inquisitors' racks and pyres. What if it had been a Jew, other than Columbus, say, a cartographer, of sorts, who actually discovered America (Florida, in particular) and whose fragile familial collective memory and the story of the discovery of North America, lay in bound papers found in a musical instrument?

Two travelling women, Holland, a British documentary filmmaker, in search of the story of an acclaimed violinist, and Hanni, an older, American woman, in search of her son and her family's Esau Letters, written by an ancestor some 500 years earlier, cross paths in a rudimentary airport in Spain. After the cancellation of their flight and the start of an airport workers strike, the two share their stories with a young violinist, Isabella. The three discover that their stories are intertwined and that their meeting was more than mere coincidence and that their beloved travel agent, Ben, had more than a hand in their travels and in their stories.

Levi's book was originally published in 1992 when travelers still relied on their travel agents, rather than today's online self-service travel websites. Levi's unconventional narrative form (telling his story through the correspondence that the travelers send to Ben) is delicious and his literary time-travel is always explained in great detail, to the relief of the reader who is, often perplexed. Levi writes as if he is writing for *Conde Nast*. His storytelling is exquisite and his characters are interesting, well-developed and colorful. Readers of conventional fiction may not appreciate Levi's complexity but others, such as historical fiction fans and historians, will find this book a treasure.

Joseph Gremillion, Librarian, Broward County Library

Sandler, Boris, et al. *Red Shoes for Rachel: Three Novellas*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017. 224 pp. \$ 19.95. (9780815610878).

Red Shoes for Rachel brings together three unconnected short stories about the Jewish experience in the post war era, in the United States and Israel. Each of the main characters is either a descendent of Holocaust survivors or a survivor themselves. Originally written in Yiddish, all three stories tell the tale of how each character undergoes his/her journey from birth country to a new land and a new life. The survivor experience is an important thread in all three stories and plays a large role in the development of the main character. The first story, "Halfway Down the Road Back to You", tells the tale of a Holocaust survivor from Moldavia, who is forced to emigrate to Israel with her family and how, as an old woman, she is not able to keep her past straight from her present. The second story, "Red Shoes for Rachel", centers on Rachel, who after the passing of her father, has returned to take care of her aging mother, and encounters a recent divorcee, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, and they develop a relationship based on their shared experiences as the children of survivors. The final story, "Karolina Bugaz", is about an older immigrant couple living in New York, who on the eve of their 30th wedding anniversary, are recounting the story of how they met. While the wife is frantically making plans for an anniversary party, the husband is beginning to reevaluate his life choices.

A richly written collection, I recommend this compilation to academic libraries, school libraries and public libraries, as well as libraries with existing Yiddish collections.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Nathan and Doris Liebman Memorial Library, Uniondale, NY, AJL Publications Chair

Tidhar, Lavie & Rebecca Levene (eds). *Jews versus Aliens*. Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2016. 155 pp. \$12.95. (9781934730621). Also available as an eBook.

Have you ever looked up at the stars while sipping your Romulan ale and pondered the universe? Wondering perhaps why a four-gendered alien would want to convert to Judaism? Or maybe how you could convince your future in-laws that celebrating your wedding on a ritzy space-station is a great idea? Or maybe your political activism has led you to learn the secrets of the prophet Deborah in order to call the inhabitants of the planet Meroz to earth to help fight injustice.

I don't know if these issues were on the minds of editors Tidhar and Levene when they asked authors from around the world to imagine what it would be like when Jews encountered aliens or vice-versa. But this collection offers funny, thought-provoking, imaginative stories. Highly recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Senior Associate Librarian, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.

Tidhar, Lavie & Rebecca Levene (eds). *Jews versus Zombies*. Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2017. 124 pp. \$9.95 (9781934730638). Also available as an eBook.

Taking advantage of the current popularity of zombies, Tidhar and Levene bring together in a single volume a collection of incredible writers presenting an unusually wide range of entertaining shorts stories with different styles, tones, and topics which explore interesting situations that intersect Jews and zombies.

Stories include; "Rise" by Rena Rossner, "The Scapegoat Factory" by Ofir Touche Gafla, "Like a Coin Entrusted in Faith" by Shimon Adaf, "Ten for Sodom" by Daniel Polansky, "The Friday People" by Sarah Lotz, "Tactrate Metim 28A" by Benjamin Rosenbaum, "Wiseman's Terror Tales" by Anna Tambour, and "Zayinin" by Adam Roberts. This book was originally published by Jurassic London in 2015 as an eBook and then in paperback (titled *Jews Versus Omnibus*) in England before it was published in the United States by Ben Yehuda Press.

Recommended for teenage readers and anyone who likes short stories about zombies. This book continues the ground-breaking work of books about Jews and Science Fiction, such as *Wondering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy & Science Fiction* (1998, edited by Jack Dann) and *Stars of David: Jewish Science Fiction* (1996, edited by D.J. Kessler).

Nathan Rosen, New York, NY

Credits and Contact

Association of Jewish Libraries

P.O. Box 1118
Teaneck, NJ 07666
(201) 371-3255

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Editor-in-Chief

Uri Kolodney
University of Texas Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin
One University Station S5400
Austin, TX 78712-8916
generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

Adult Review Editors

Daniel Scheide	Dr. Rebecca Jefferson
S.E. Wimberly Library	Head, Isser and Rae Price
Florida Atlantic University	Library of Judaica
777 Glades Road	539, Library West
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6424	George A. Smathers Libraries
561-297-0519	University of Florida
dascheide@gmail.com	Gainesville, FL. 32611-7010
	Phone: (352) 273-2650
	Fax: (352) 392-8118
	jefferson@ufl.edu

Please send adult books for review to D. Scheide

Children and YA Review Editors

Rachel Kamin
1054 Holly Circle
Lake Zurich, IL 60047
rachelkamin@gmail.com
and Chava (Kathe) Pinchuck
kpinchuck@gmail.com

Please send children's and YA books for review to Rachel Kamin

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Copy Editing and Page Layout

Karen Ulric
Golda Och Academy
1418 Pleasant Valley Way
West Orange, NJ 07052
ajlcopyeditor@gmail.com

Please send requests for membership and dues information to:

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