2011 Reference & Bibliography Award Winners Announced

Daniel Scheide

The Research Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections Division of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) is very pleased to announce the winners of its 2011 Judaica Reference and Bibliography Awards.

In the reference category, the winner is The Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World, published by Brill. Edited by Dr. Norman Stillman of the University of Oklahoma, this 5-volume encyclopedia is the first English-language reference that deals with a part of Jewish history that is obscure and inaccessible for many readers. The Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World opens a new window into this world and will inevitably generate more research and interest in the field. An online version is currently available as well. More information on the Encyclopedia can be found at http://www.brill.nl/default.aspx?partid=227&pid=26005.

An honorable mention has been awarded to The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism, edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. It is an essential reference in a field of study that has rapidly expanded in recent decades. More information on the Dictionary can be found at http://www.eerdmans.com/shop/product.asp?p_key=9780802825490.

In the bibliography category, the winner is The Bibliography of Jews in the Islamic World, published by Brill. Edited by María Angeles Gallego, Heather Bleaney and Pablo García Suárez, this bibliography is an important contribution to the study of Jews in the Islamic World due to its thematic and geographical scopes, especially considering the difficulties in covering such a diverse field and multitude of languages. More information on the Bibliography can be found at http://www.brill.nl/bibliography-jews-islamic-world.

Thanks to Our Sponsors: We would like to thank Dr. Greta Silver of New York City and Eric Chaim Kline of Los Angeles, who respectively sponsor the annual Judaica Reference and Bibliography Awards. The 2011 awards will be presented at the AJL 46th Annual Convention banquet, which will take place on Tuesday evening, June 21, 2011 at the Marriott Montréal Château Champlain in Montréal, Québec.

For more information about AJL’s Judaica Reference & Bibliography Awards, including past winners, please visit http://www.jewishlibraries.org/main/Awards/ReferenceBibliographyAwards.aspx.

Awards Committee: The Reference & Bibliography Awards Committee includes Michlean Amir (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), Yoram Bitton (Columbia University), Rachel Leket-Mor (Arizona State University), Daniel Rettberg (Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati), Pinchas Roth (Hebrew University), Rachel Simon (Princeton University), and Daniel Scheide, chair (Florida Atlantic University).

AJL Online


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Dear AJL Reviews Readers,

I am very glad to share with you our second digital issue. Since the publication of the first issue in February, I got many positive comments and a very few negative ones. The negative comments dealt with the technical aspects of scrolling, font size, and printing; all of these issues are easily manageable within the Adobe Acrobat software. If you have any questions or further comments, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at kolodney@austin.utexas.edu or phone at 512-495-4399.

In this issue you will find 82 adult reviews (fiction and non-fiction) and 35 children and teen reviews. This is an increase of 17% since last issue. One of the benefits of the digital format is that it allows us to review and post a large number of reviews with no additional cost. We also have a spotlight for adult titles that deal with the Holocaust (Holocaust Remembrance Day – Yom ha-Shoah – was May 1st), and an extensive review for three titles about the Cairo Genizah that happen to be published simultaneously.

I would like to take this opportunity and urge you to read the AJL News; it is not too late to learn about the forthcoming AJL convention in Montreal! I wish you all a cool, pleasant summer, and a lot of reading time!

Uri Kolodney

Don’t Forget to Read AJL News

The May/June 2011 edition of AJL News is chock full of information!

Look for:

• More information about the 2011 Convention, and the wonderful city of Montreal.

• More AJL Award Winners! Sydney Taylor Manuscript, Life Membership, Fanny Goldstein Merit Award

• An extensive edition of Chapter Chatter - news from all over!

• A visit to Britain’s Hebraica and Judaica Libraries with Stephanie (Sarah Leah) Gross

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In The Spotlight


Peter and his family were “Volksdeutscher,” bi-lingual Germans who lived in a part of Poland that Germany was hell-bent on recovering after it had been taken from them in punishment for starting World War I. Peter had suffered in Poland because of this and from his perfect Aryan looks. The bullies among the Polish boys call him “Adolfki,” and truthfully, Peter and his father were not unhappy when the Germans invaded. Because his parents died in an auto accident just before the Germans reached their farm, Peter was sent to an orphanage. There, the “race” doctor termed him to be a perfect Aryan after measuring his nose, forehead chin, etc. (The Nazi “scientists” kidnapped “Aryan-looking” Polish youth for adoption by Aryan families in Germany. This was part of their Lebensraum program.) Peter is so perfectly Aryan that - after sufficient indoctrination - the doctor offers him to an important friend in Berlin, Dr. Kaltenbach. Peter is excited and looking forward to being adopted by this family, but in time, he is made uneasy by the narrow Nazi philosophy, their rituals, the expected total submersion of one’s feelings for those approved by the Nazis and their proscriptions about the the untermenschen (others). He finds a friend in the Hitler Youth who seems for a while to share his reservations— and a beautiful girl, who with her family, appears on the surface to be high in the Nazi hierarchy: the father is an officer of the Wehrmacht (the German army). At this point, dear reader, one’s heart might start to race as the danger mounts and . . . well, I don’t want to give away anything. There are some surprising revelations. Read it, please do. Not only is it the perfect book for teens but it has the facts down straight. Everything I know about Germany during the war, and that is a lot, figures in the story so naturally and so true to the facts as they are known. It is even better than The Book Thief by Zusak. In writing good historical fiction, the author must be true to the facts, to the thoughts and emotions of the characters, the ambience, the physical surroundings and the dialogue; all this, without making the whole enterprise seem like a list of events hung on a manipulated story and two-dimensional characters. Dowswell has succeeded in doing all of this. The story is followed by: Fact, Fiction, Sources; Teacher’s guide; and a bibliography.

Marcia Weiss Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY


The fanciful stories about the Shoah currently being published are quite different from the heart-wrenching stories written by survivors and their families, or from historical fiction which endeavors to replicate historical events. What do we make of a film like Life is Beautiful directed by Roberto Benigni, or titles like The Book Thief by Markus Zusak, or The Boy in Striped Pajamas by John Boyne, or Once and Then by Morris Gleitzman? Are they fantasy or fiction? Or perhaps myth or legend? Or, maybe even truth?

Upon first reading Once (Holt, 2010), I thought it was implausible that Felix, the child left by his parents in the Christian orphanage, would not realize what was happening, but upon reflection I understood that his misinterpretation through Once (and continued in Then) was really on target. He represents normality and innocence. After all, what parent or child could possibly fathom the evil that was to befall them, or of which human beings were capable? The children epitomize innocence, while they are almost totally surrounded by evil. In Then, the two children, Felix and Zelda jump off a train on its way to a Nazi death camp; their friend Chaya is killed in the process and the children bury her, leaving little 6 year-old Zelda with her short legs and wearing only slippers, less strength to keep up with Felix as he drags her up the hill and into the woods beyond, before a Nazi train, carrying Jews to camps, comes with machine guns on the roof and soldiers who would shoot at them. He also has to worry since Zelda has a bad habit of yelling obscenities at Nazis. Felix, who is ten, adores her as if she was his little sister, and does his best to save both their lives and to keep her quiet, telling her stories about finding kind homes in the wood. Instead, they find a pit in the ground with the tangled up bodies of children, some younger than Zelda. Zelda sobbs loudly and the Nazi soldiers glare up the hill and start shooting.

For the rest of the book, they have encounters with various characters, including the son of the matron who ran the former orphanage and now lives in the woods, part of the Resistance. Felix, in his naiveté, is trying to find his parents, in order to warn them not to buy Jewish books because the Nazis don’t like them. The reader must accept Felix’s and Zelda’s naiveté to accept the premise of the book, which has several topsy-turvy events that defy the reader’s expectation. Throughout all their adventures, Felix compares their plight to what happens in a favorite book of his, but this isn’t fiction, it is their lives. The wife of a German soldier becomes

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their surrogate mother; her husband, a German soldier, becomes a deserter who hides in the hole in the barn floor that Felix had dug for Zelda to hide. The menacing man in the truck, obviously a Nazi sympathizer, is not—he hides Jews. Their adventures are impressive and frightening; the dangers are real; the innocence of the children will draw the reader into worrying about them; and the suspense is structured to increase throughout the story, which culminates in a startling finale. I say “Cheers” for both Then and its predecessor, Once. Marcia Weiss Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY


Bob Dylan was born Robert Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota in 1941. Like many future performers, his work was influenced by his childhood: he loved listening to the radio, performed for his family, and enjoyed the outdoors. Being Jewish made him and his family outsiders of a sort, and he developed a keen eye for observation. The biography chronicles this early life and the many musical styles which influenced him. Despite his parents’ wishes, he patterned himself after his idol, Woody Guthrie. When Guthrie was sick in the hospital in 1961, Dylan hitchhiked to New York to play at his bedside. Delighted by Woody’s approval, Bob Dylan forged his own career as a folksinger. An author’s note and quotation notes follow the story.

The book is yet another work of “biographical fiction,” where real life events are combined with creative conjecture by the author. The realistic illustrations are done in acrylic and oil paper mounted on board, and they enhance the “folksy” aspects of the story with vibrant blues and oranges, a crackled texture as background to the text, and details like shade pulls and doilies on the furniture. Quotes from Dylan are dispersed throughout the book, “to bring us closer to Bob’s own thoughts and feelings.” Grandparents of the target audience will be more familiar with Dylan and his contemporaries, but the idea of having a dream and working hard to achieve it, as well as meeting an idol or role model, will resonate with all readers. This book is highly recommended for all libraries.

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ, is a former chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.


The awkward title says it all. This book is artlessly down to earth in showing children how they can help people in need. Its double page acrylic and oil pastel paintings are large, loose, colorful and unfussy. Bold, offbeat, secondary colors in generous, easygoing shapes are unrestrained. The figures extend beyond the edges of the page. There is a quality of plenty about these full and busy pages. Everything about these children is large: eyes, noses, smiles, bodies. They are growing children, not pretty or perfect. Readers with long memories may be reminded of the children in Tell Me a Mitzi (1970), by Lore Segal, with illustrations by Harriet Pincus. Mitzi and Jacob, going out for a ride in their stroller were called ugly by the book’s detractors. But we saw real children, like our own, not idealizations. Dalia and Yossi, their classmates and teacher are in that tradition. The only part of this book that doesn’t ring quite true, to this reviewer, is big sister Dalia’s selfless ways as her little brother’s teacher. If only siblings were always so generous!

What this slim story shows us by example is that tzedakah does not have to be a fancy or expensive project. It only has to be given, to show love and caring. What school or home does not have an elderly or lonely person living nearby, who would be comforted by a class visit? A big yellow comforter as a gift would be heaven. This book is a natural to read before embarking on a tzedakah project, or to read without an immediate goal in mind. The seed will have been planted. There is an information page at the back of the book about the history of the tzedakah box. Charming and inspirational in its modest way, How Dalia Put a Big Yellow Comforter inside a Tiny Blue Box, and Other Wonders of Tzedakah is highly recommended for synagogue schools, day schools, and public school libraries. Its audience centers on children from about 4 – 8.

Naomi Morse, of Silver Spring, MD, retired after many years as a children’s librarian heading both public and day school libraries children’s departments. She has a particular interest in the visual arts, and recently enjoyed serving on the ALA’s Caldecott Committee.

God determines that the world needs rules, and He decides to “speak” from a mountain. But which mountain should it be? Mount Carmel is beautiful, Mount Hermon has three peaks, Mount Tabor is majestic, and Mount Gilboa has flower-filled meadows. According to the *Midrash Rabba* (Bereshit 99:1), God chooses “little” Mount Sinai because idolatrous worship had been performed on the tops of all the others, and Sinai’s unassuming and humble bearing is deemed the perfect spot. Barb Rosenstock’s story expands the “conversations” between God and the mountains, as well as the decision making process. Melanie Hall’s vibrant color illustrations give each mountain a distinct “personality.” The story follows the Midrash closely, though some may still find fault with the anthropomorphism: God talking, and mountains talking, moving and dancing. But the eye-catching pictures, age appropriate language and subject matter make this appropriate for Shavuot and the Torah portion with the Ten Commandments (*Yitro*). It can be easily adapted for Readers’ Theater, and it is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

*Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ, is a former chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.*


She was a little woman, less than five feet tall, but if height were measured by courage, heart and spirit, she would be a giant. Sendler, a young Catholic social worker, did her best to tend to the wounded and bring bread to the hungry; but as soon as Poland surrendered to Germany, she joined Zegota, a resistance movement that helped rescue Jews. Infiltrating the ghetto disguised as a nurse, she saw starvation and sickness, and as the Nazis began to empty the ghetto, she began to smuggle out the children. Her story is told in an oversized illustrated book, a column of generous-sized black text against a white background placed adjacent to the dark, doom-laden paintings. The few hopeful images have a lighter background – for instance as Sendler gently teaches a little Jewish girl her new name and the Catholic prayers she must learn to save her life; and also when Sendler buries the jars containing the assumed Polish and Jewish names of the children under a tree in a friend’s yard, looking forward to the future—when the names will be turned over to a Jewish Zionist organization. Only an artist as fine as Farnsworth could manage to represent the damage and doom of the ghetto, the horror of the Nazis seizing Sendler, and the Warsaw Uprising; and only an author as talented and knowledgeable as Rubin could tell a story like this in a way that will be understood by children from grades 4-6, without diminishing its impact. Irena’s story remained untold for many years, because the Soviets who took over Poland regarded her as a traitor since Zegota was supported by the anti-communist Polish government in exile. Sendler says that she was taught by her father that when someone is drowning, you don’t ask if they can swim, you just jump in and help.

The author has a distinguished history of writing children’s picture story books about the Holocaust, among them: *Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezin; The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin* (with Ela Weissberger); *The Anne Frank Case: Simon Wiesenthal’s Search for the Truth*; and *The Flag with Fifty-six Stars: A Gift from the Survivors of Mauthausen*. Ostensibly for ages 6-10, books of this type are best used with children from 9-11 and may also serve as an entry point for older students. Bill Farnsworth has worked with Goldman on *The Flag with Fifty-six Stars*, and with David A. Adler on *A Hero and the Holocaust: The Story of Janusz Korczak and His Children*.

*Marcia W. Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY*


Rubin’s well-written biography covers Leonard Bernstein’s life and his passion for music from his childhood growing up in Boston through his brilliant conducting debut at age 25 with the New York Philharmonic in 1943 at Carnegie Hall. As all the famous conductors of classical music at that time were older Europeans, the young, American, Jewish “Lenny” created a tremendous sensation when he stepped in at the last minute to substitute for a conductor who had become ill.

Lenny realized from a young age that “music was IT,” that music was what his life was going to be about. The author writes humorously of the resourcefulness Lenny had to use to earn money for his musical studies because his father, Sam, did not support a career in music for his son. Sam felt that musicians would always be poor, like the *klezmers* in the old country. He wanted Lenny to join the family beauty business, or become a rabbi. Rubin’s lively writing captures Bernstein’s larger-than-life personality and transmits the great joy he found in music throughout his life. She handles the subject of his sexual orientation...
tactfully in the epilogue, writing that “In his personal life Lenny felt attracted to both men and women and had many romantic relationships.”

The book is well designed, with a cover picture of young Bernstein characteristically conducting with his whole body rather than a baton. Engaging black and white photographs combine with the text to highlight his tremendous contributions to the music world through conducting, composing, and writing classical music, as well as composing for musical theater such groundbreaking masterpieces as West Side Story. As a teacher he communicated the joy he felt about music through his innovative televised lectures, the Young People’s Concerts. These are now available on DVD so that new generations may learn from them. Rubin writes that Leonard Bernstein felt that life without music was unthinkable. He was one of the most recorded conductors in history, and the book is organized with a discography of selected performances, a timeline, an extensive bibliography, quotation sources, and brief biographical sketches of important people in Bernstein’s life. Music Was IT compares well with Leonard Bernstein: In Love with Music by Caroline Lazo (Lerner, 2003) and The Life and Times of Leonard Bernstein by Jim Whiting. (Mitchell Lane, 2005). An excellent purchase for synagogue, school and public libraries, Music Was IT: Young Leonard Bernstein would be great for reports on famous Jewish people and musicians, and is highly recommended.

Andrea Davidson, has been the librarian at The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Cleveland for 12 and1/2 years. She is a former member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee and reviews for both Jewish Book World and AJL Newsletter, often trying out many of her review book on Tifereth Israel classes.


Interesting non-fiction is always in demand in classrooms and libraries. Liberty’s Voice is an outstanding picture book biography of Emma Lazarus, author of “The New Colossus,” the well-known poem on the base of The Statue of Liberty. The story of Emma Lazarus needs to be shared because her contributions to American history as well as the Jewish community deserve to be celebrated. The author’s impeccable research brings Emma to life for young readers. A gifted young poet, Emma becomes a student of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emma’s connection to her Jewish community is also well established. Emma writes political columns about the pogroms in Europe and poverty in America. Although raised in a wealthy family, Emma reaches out to those less fortunate in numerous ways. As a leader of social causes and a passionate humanitarian, Emma Lazarus is a perfect subject for school projects. The text is well written and full of interesting details, including Emma’s initial refusal to write a poem for The Statue of Liberty. She replied to the request with “I am sorry. I cannot write to order. Poetry must come from the heart.” Later, she is inspired and her creative process is beautifully described in the text: “And if the statue spoke to the world, what would she say? Emma listened. And wrote…” Emma’s humility and passion make her an appealing and inspiring character for young students.

The deeply hued illustrations have a magical quality with just enough historical detail, including a newspaper with the heading “Russian Jews Flee Homeland,” to transport readers to back in time. There is a current surge of interest in Emma Lazarus. Another excellent picture book, Emma’s Poem by Linda Glaser and Claire A. Nivola is more specifically focused on the writing of “The New Colossus,” and would be an excellent companion to Liberty’s Voice. Liberty’s Voice is highly recommended for Judaic and public libraries.

Barbara Bietz, Oak Park, CA, is current Chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

BIBLE


Tomie DePaola, the author/illustrator of more than 200 children’s books and the recipient of a Newbery Honor and a Caldecott Honor, was influenced by the folk art embroideries of the Otomi people in Puebla, Mexico in this latest work introducing aspects of Creation to a decidedly youthful audience. Easily-recognizable images of celestial bodies, topographic features, flora, fauna, and people are drawn using transparent acrylics on tea-stained watercolor paper. The words are hand-lettered and done in all capital letters, with each brief sentence ending with either the phrase “Praise God” or “Bless God.” While the actual text and illustrations reflect a broad nondenominational interpretation of thanking God for all Creation, curators of Judaic libraries should be aware of the wording in the “Author’s Note” preceding the title page. DePaola says he received inspiration for this book from “two pieces of Old Testament Scripture … the Canticle of the Three Young Men, also known as the Benedicite, from the Book of Daniel [and] Psalm 148, which is known in monastic circles as the Laudate.” These obvious Christian references, while not evident in the main part of the book itself, may cause Judaic librarians to pause and then to pass over this particular selection in favor of other books.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel Library, Akron, OH
BIOGRAPHY


Although sub-titled “The Life of the Great Escape Artist,” this very brief biography focuses on Houdini’s escapes and contains very little about his actual life. Missing is any mention of the famed magician’s birth date and place, family, or marriage. The text also lacks an adequate account of Houdini’s career and rise to fame. An endnote recounts the circumstances surrounding Houdini’s death, and a glossary, bibliography, and index are appended. While the graphic novel format, with dark, sepia-toned drawings, might attract readers and whet their appetites for more comprehensive biographies such as *Houdini* by Clinton Cox (Scholastic, 2001) and *Escape: The Story of the Great Houdini* by Sid Fleischman (Greenwillow Books, 2006), young readers interested in a more satisfying introduction to Houdini and his magic (and at least a mention of his Jewish background), will be better served by picture book biographies like *Harry Houdini: A Magical Life* by Elizabeth MacLeod (Kids Can Press, 2005) or *Houdini: World’s Greatest Mystery Man and Escape King* by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Eric Velasquez (Walker & Company, 2005). This is an unnecessary purchase for most Jewish libraries.

Rachel Kamin, Director of the Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL, and Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.


A workhorse illustrated biography introduces another Jewish sports hero. 19th century baseball star Lipman Pike is first generation, son of Jewish Dutch immigrants. The time period expands Jewish American and sports chronologies for picture book readers. The story details Pike’s personality and athletic attributes. Prowess does not overwhelm good manners while helping his shop keeper father. Pike’s parents are shocked that a man would make a game his career, but they want their children to assimilate to succeed. Pike goes directly from Bar Mitzvah bima to ball field. Paralleling his personal career is the game itself. Paid to play for the Philadelphia Athletics, he is deemed the first professional baseball player. In an anti-Semitic move, Pike is voted off the team. He returns home to Brooklyn, plays for many local teams, including one run by Boss Tweed. “The Iron Batter” is famous for his gentlemanly manners (biographee as role model), speed (he once outran a race horse) and homerun record. Pike retires to retail where his reputation brings in customers. The illustrations portray a warm family rather than a solo star. Characters have stereotypical big noses. In other sources Pike’s visage shows a straight nose; without photos, which is accurate? Pullen is faced with the problem of visually defining a Jew when the character is not being observant. To be fair, non-Jewish Tweed is also drawn with a big nose, though photos show his really was. Dialogue embroiders the historical record without much pizzazz. This fictionalized biography continues to chronicle the contributions of American Jews, recommending it for purchase by Temple and school libraries.

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

FICTION


In 1959 Boston, Abby is a sassy eleven-year-old Jewish girl who has a knack for sketching fashion designs. Abby’s close-knit extended family follows old world traditions; they are wary of people of different ethnicities and faiths and, true to their Eastern European heritage, they regularly employ Yiddish words and phrases. (A glossary of the Yiddish vocabulary used is provided.) They also own a shoe business together which puts even greater strains on Abby’s parents’ already unhappy marriage. More than anything in life, Abby longs for a Barbie doll and a bra but her mother refuses to buy them for her because she will not acknowledge that Abby is growing into a young woman. Abby decides to earn her own money by selling her fashion designs to Jackie Kennedy, the wife of the presidential candidate who is a fellow Boston native. She writes to Mrs. Kennedy many times without replies, but still persists. The story is based on Amy Axelrod’s childhood dream of designing for Mrs. Kennedy. The final copy will include 25 fashion drawings created by the author during the period of 1959-1961. The story is gripping and Abby’s strong spirit makes her a likable protagonist. However, the plotline is a bit disjointed. The chapters jump from one scenario to an unrelated one, which can get confusing for the reader. Also, some of the narrative could have been cut out and the story would remain as effective. Still, this is recommended reading for Jewish libraries.

Heather Lenson, Librarian of the Ratner Media Center, Jewish Education Center, Cleveland, OH


Ellie Taylor loves to argue, and she’s good at it. So good, in fact, that she’s accepted to an exclusive speech camp at Benedict’s High School. Ellie is desperate to attend Benedict’s for school, too, but the only way her parents will let her transfer from public school is if she can find a way to pay Benedict’s tuition. Mrs. Yeats, a wealthy benefactor, offers a scholarship each year to the top student at the camp, and Ellie wants to prove herself. Unfortunately, Mrs. Yeats is anti-Semitic, and her grandson Devon advises Ellie to keep her Judaism secret if she wants to win the scholarship. As the summer progresses, Ellie’s oratorical
skills improve, as does her discomfort with the lying she does to keep her secret. Eventually, of course, Mrs. Yeats finds out, and she confronts Ellie; Ellie responds publicly in the final competition. Though she does not win Mrs. Yeats’s scholarship, a teacher helps her find another way to win a scholarship to Benedict’s.

Although Ellie’s Jewish-ness is the major plot driver, her connection to Judaism is mostly unexplored in these pages. She has no problem dating Devon, who is Christian, and for a long time is more concerned with being caught in her web of lies than she is about telling them. Along with their relief and excitement when Ellie finally stands up to Mrs. Yeats, some readers may be frustrated that it took her so long. Teens who are interested in the world of high school oratory will relish the descriptions of exercises and competitions, as well as the excerpts of the speeches.

Recommended for libraries serving readers who attend public school.

Marci Lavin Bloch, Silver Spring, MD.


Jewish readers’ favorite American Girl, Rebecca Rubin, is back for a page-turning mystery that will not disappoint. While babysitting her new neighbors’ baby, she begins to suspect that some children she meets in the park are involved in a string of kidnappings in her neighborhood. Rebecca’s overactive imagination at times sets her on the wrong path during her investigation, but she ultimately solves the crime. Relying on her Bubbie’s advice that like Queen Esther, “a lady is bold when she needs to be,” Rebecca creates a scene that attracts the police when she is threatened by the real kidnappers. Thanks to her heroism, the kidnappers are apprehended. Written by Kathryn Reiss, the novel captures the feel of the historic Lower East Side while providing an entertaining story. There is more Jewish content than in the previous Rebecca Mystery, Secrets at Camp Nokomis by Jacqueline Dembar Greene; in addition to being inspired by Queen Esther, Rebecca and her family observe Sukkot. Historical information included at the end of the novel provides insight into family life and traditions during the time period, explaining some of the Jewish and Italian customs mentioned in the story. Aimee Lurie is librarian of the Agnon School in Cleveland, OH and a member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.


After the suicide of Ruth, an eighth grade classmate, Kana Goldberg protests, “It’s not my fault. I didn’t do anything.” Her mother simply replies, “Exactly,” and proceeds with plans to send Kana to Japan for the summer to work in her family’s mikan (orange) groves. Kana’s mother was referring to how her group of friends bullied and ostracized Ruth. The group did not realize that Ruth suffered from bipolar depression. When Kana arrives in Japan, she is under the scrutiny of her stern grandmother, Baachan, who disapproves of her parents’ marriage. Kana’s Japanese mother married a Jewish man, and moved to the United States. Kana is pushed to learn Japanese traditions quickly including: preparing meals and serving guests and Buddhist ceremonial customs of honoring the ancestors. She also must attend a Japanese school and work long hours in the orchard. Throughout this rigorous routine, Kana cannot stop thinking about Ruth and feeling angry as well as guilty and ashamed for being nasty to her with the other eighth grade girls. The only time she finds peace is when she performs hard manual labor in the orchards, which coincidentally is where Ruth took her life. Kana begins to heal through making ceremonial offerings to Ruth. The narrative of Kana speaking to Ruth is written in a free verse format which flows like Kana’s stream of consciousness. The pages feature black ink-block illustrations of Japanese symbols, foods and origami along with light-grey Japanese designs around the borders. The Jewish content in this novel is minimal. Kana mentions her Jewish father and visiting Ruth’s family during the shiva (mourning) period. Also, Kana pledges to partake in tashlich during Rosh Hashanah, the ceremonial casting of bread crumbs as sins of the past year in an effort to let go of the feeling of responsibility for Ruth’s death. The story is recommended for all libraries, because of the author’s sensitive portrayal of a girl coping with tragedy.

Heather Lenson, Librarian of the Jewish Education Center’s Ratner Media & Technology Center, Cleveland, OH.

FOLKLORE AND LEGEND


If a chicken wanders into your kitchen, may you keep it? This is the Talmudic question posed by One Little Chicken. This book’s resounding answer is “No. Finders are not keepers. This chicken isn’t our chicken.” Here follows the tale of how the family of Mr. Bendosa, takes care of the chicken until – many months and many chickens, eggs, and goats later - his rightful owner shows up, collects a windfall, and leaves nary a chick behind as thanks. Meanwhile, Mr. Bendosa’s hungry child, Leora, never gets so much as a single egg or a schmear of cheese from all this bounty, because “finders are not keepers.” Mr. Bendosa and his wife are strict indeed about obeying the Talmudic law about returning an animal to its owner, and not profiting themselves. Although the Author’s note refers to the Torah, Israel, and Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, the text itself does not indicate the story’s origin as Jewish. There are, however, a Chanukiah and two tiny mezuzahs among the illustrations. In The Diamond Tree: Jewish Tales from Around the World by Harold Schwartz and Barbara Rush (HarperCollins, 1991), this agadah is retold in a more straightforward version as “A Tale of Two Chickens”. In that brief telling, there is no
hungry child, Rabbi Hanina's wife does not complain, and the merchant who returns looking for his lost chicken, and collects more than he lost, insists on thanking Rabbi Hanina with a gift of two goats.

Elisa Kleven's mixed-media paintings describe a flowery, summery world, full of beautiful patterns and textures. There are charming, sprightly details, such as borders of tiny cupcakes, goats, chickens, and vegetables that invite repeated looking and reading. The cheerful tone of these pictures suggests a folktale. And, as in many folktales, the characters in this story have taken a principle to its comic extreme. Does the humor of One Little Chicken help children to understand and value Rabbi Hanina's example, or not? Teachers might use this book as a basis for that discussion, and for comparing this with the other version. Suggested as an optional purchase for children's collections in synagogue and day school libraries for use with children ages 6-10.

Naomi Morse, of Silver Spring, MD, retired after many years as a children's librarian heading both public and day school libraries children's departments. She has a particular interest in the visual arts, and recently enjoyed serving on the ALA's Caldecott Committee.

**HISTORY**


Holly Littlefield's beginning reader, Fire at the Triangle Factory (Carolrhoda Books, 1996) about two immigrant girls - one Jewish from Poland, the other Catholic from Italy - who survived the horrific 1911 fire, is adapted here in a graphic novel format as part of the series "History's Kid Heroes." The original text was brief, with no more than 18 lines on each of the 48 pages, but still managed to be descriptive and dramatic, and the soft, water-color illustrations by Mary O'Keefe Young helped to paint a picture of life on New York's Lower East Side and the conditions of the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. While the dark illustrations with thick black outlines in the new graphic novel version are clear and expressive, they provide a pretty generic depiction of the setting. Also, the text is almost too condensed, relying mostly on short, pithy dialogue, and lacking in character development. With the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the fire this March, interest in the topic will be heightened and while it can be argued that the more contemporary and hip graphic novel will attract more attention, the original old-fashioned beginning reader provides more of a context to understand this historic event. Jewish libraries that own the 1996 edition (still in print) can pass on this version unless there is a high demand for graphic novels for younger readers.

Rachel Kamin, Director of the Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL, and Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

**HOLIDAYS**


Balsley and Richard, the author/illustrator team of *Let My People Go! And Maccabee!: The Story of Hanukkah* collaborate in a similar manner to put a playful dramatic twist on the familiar Purim story. The theatrically inclined will enjoy this read-aloud rhyming tale and can employ the color-coded dialogue for either a private or a public Purim performance. The five main parts include a Narrator, King Ahashuerus, Queen Esther, Mordechai, and Haman. The simple rhymes, some touched with humor, can be memorized easily. The budding costume designer and stage manager will get ideas and draw inspiration for their own production from the boldly drawn and brightly rendered illustrations. A fun addition to this holiday’s selections.

Allison Marks, Temple Israel Library, Akron, OH


Wherever Jews live, they celebrate the Sabbath, often incorporating the customs and foods of the diverse cultures by which they are surrounded. Before the Sabbath in Israel, many frequent the Machane Yehudah market to purchase delicacies for the Sabbath meals. In Argentina, the house is made ready for the Sabbath bride. The reader circles the globe to Australia, Turkey, Russia, France, America, Ethiopia, Germany, Canada, Morocco, Thailand, India, and back to Israel. The Sabbath progresses through the meals to quiet time with family and friends, and finally Havdalah. Beautiful, detailed illustrations accompany the text, and a glossary is included. Maps in the end papers show the countries described in the text.

While an interesting concept and an ambitious project, a smaller focus may have been more successful. There are a lot of words per page, and a lot of information hidden in the narrative, for example, the concept of lighting two candles – one to remember the Sabbath and one to guard the Sabbath. It is also not clear whether the premise is that everyone celebrates the Sabbath in the same way, or that everyone celebrates in a different way: the description of lunch in Casablanca includes foods like couscous and harissa, while a girl and her grandmother take a walk in Montreal and throw sticks in the water. “Traveling” through so many countries does not give the young reader ample opportunity to absorb all the details. Even so, the illustrations are wonderful, and the book can be used as a starting point for discussion and further research. Despite the publisher’s recommendation, the book is not for ages three to six. It is more appropriate for ages eight through twelve and is recommended for all Jewish libraries.

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ, is a former chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

Does your family’s Seder include young children? Are you looking for ways to liven up your Passover celebration? Try a little *Afikoman Mambo*. The catchy rhyming text in this brief, upbeat picture book is complemented by watercolor and ink illustrations of cheerful wide-eyed multiracial, multicultural children enjoying their Seder. The large family eats *charoset*, dips *karpas*, drinks the wine, and asks the four questions one by one. But “everyone knows the Seder’s not done until we taste the *afikomen*.” The bouncy rhyming text is set to music on the accompanying CD by Rabbi Joe Black and a chorus of children in a lively, Latin-influenced mambo, which will make you want to dance as you sing along.

This book and sing-along CD is another winner for Rabbi Joe Black, who also wrote the lively *Boker Tov!: Good Morning*. The bright full-page illustrations and repetitive text will make this picture book a hit for the Jewish preschool story hour. *Afikoman Mambo* is recommended for use as a fun addition to the Passover Seder for young children, and would make a great gift for the finder of the *afikoman*. Recommended for preschool-Kdg.

*Andrea Davidson, has been the librarian at The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Cleveland for 12 and1/2 years. She is a former member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee and reviews for both Jewish Book World and AJL Newsletter, often trying out many of her review books on Tifereth Israel classes.*


Focused on the youngest children, this new Kar-Ben easy book follows preschoolers in their own space, Shabbat Club, on Shabbat while their parents are in the synagogue. During this time they learn about celebrating Shabbat, take plush Torahs out of the pretend ark, read Bible stories and act them out, learn to say the blessings over challah and pretend wine, before going in to the sanctuary to sing “Adon Olam” on the *bima*, and then re-join their families. There is sweetness to the book which gives the Shabbat observance a special and positive sense.

Blessings over wine and bread follow the text in both Hebrew and English, in addition to transliteration. A glossary follows, defining some of the Hebrew words used in the text.

Lovely photographs of the children and the community by the photographer whose work enhanced Latifa Berry Kropf’s holiday books, provide the illustrations that add depth to the simple and age-appropriate text. Recommended for children ages two to four.

*Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood NJ.*


We first met charming bunnies Violet and Simon in *Hoppy Hanukkah*, (Albert Whitman, 2009). In this second book, they are preparing to celebrate Passover with their family. At their grandparents’ house, they get out the *Haggadahs*, help set the Seder table with the special Seder plate and Elijah’s cup, and put out pillows to express their freedom by resting. They enjoy saying the Four Questions with Papa’s help, eating the *matzoh* and special foods of the Seder meal, washing down horseradish with lots of Grandma’s “clay bricks” of *charoets*, searching for the *afikomen*, and watching his cup to see if Elijah has drunk any wine. They each tell what they like best about Passover. Grandpa likes Grandma’s matzoh ball soup, Mama likes the singing, Papa says that “Passover reminds us how good life is,” and the story ends with a big hug for Violet and Simon from Grandma because what she likes best about Passover is them!

The author writes with gentle humor. She includes Grandma’s simple *charoset* recipe, which uses a pawful of chopped walnuts as one of the measurements! Her brief, age-appropriate text is just right for introducing the concepts of the holiday to young children, who may be learning about Passover for the first time. Daniel Howarth’s endpaper illustrations of happy, hopping matzoh-holding bunnies set an upbeat tone, and his cozy paintings are a lovely complement to the sweet story. Glaser is the author of over 25 children’s books, including *Hoppy Hanukkah*, *The Borrowed Hauknkah Latkes*, and *Mrs. Greenberg’s Messy Hankaah*. Her warm portrayal of the loving bunny family teaching Violet and Simon about their Passover holiday traditions make this a fine choice for Jewish nursery schools, and a perfect Passover book for families to read with their children and grandchildren.

*Andrea Davidson, has been the librarian at The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Cleveland for 12 and1/2 years. She is a former member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee and reviews for both Jewish Book World and AJL Newsletter, often trying out many of her review books on Tifereth Israel classes.*


Every year there is a new addition to the large-format Hanukkah book collection. The 2010 offering comes from Feldheim, with this beautiful multi-faceted volume containing information, fun, and beauty for the whole family. Each of the eight sections contains several parts, including artwork by three artists (see above). Each section begins with the candle blessings and *Ma’oz Tzur*, followed by a page of brain-teasers and questions for young and old to ponder and discuss. This spread is followed by a chapter of the Hanukkah story, written in stylized print. After that there is a survival story; these come from various traditions (regrettably, the sources are not identified). The next spread...
is a chapter of a story of Holocaust survival, in which several Jewish boys were saved in a Catholic monastery in Austria. Following this, the family is invited to play a game, based on dreidel. Finally, there is a series of Hanukkah recipes (again, their origins are not included).

The book has lovely touches, including drawings of menorahs from around the world as headers for each day (with the origin of each version). Each of the three contributing artists provides a dramatically different aesthetic sense to the book, which gives the whole a wide appeal to all ages. And the information and stories all contribute to a greater appreciation of the festival and its meaning. While The Family Chanukah Book is primarily directed to a more observant audience, it should be of value to all families. The many elements are well presented and solidly grounded. It should provide a good balance with the more whimsical versions of the story, and is recommended for most synagogue libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


How can the animals at the zoo have their seder when their haggadahs have gotten worn out? Fortunately, Shai, the elephant, remembers all the words. He directs the others in the seder preparations, with Lion contributing his great Ma-Roar. This attempt to put a Jewish spin on the world mined so well by Judy Sierra in Wild About Books is not successful. It’s not clear what audience Guttman and Ratner intend for this work. Astute young readers will realize that farm animals and zoo animals are incongruously thrown together, and the inconsistent rhymes and meter inhibit smooth reading. Slightly older children may be reluctant to read a book that they perceive as intended for young children because of the animals and the rhymed couplets. The vocabulary and self-consciously irreverent humor are geared to adults, and will go over the heads of most children; despite the author’s insistence in the introduction that the book is for all children, or anyone who used to be a child, this is still likely to be deemed a “children’s book.” The children in my test audience thought the colorful illustrations were “messy” and “strange looking,” though adults familiar with Ratner’s work may appreciate them more. Not recommended.

Marci Lavine Bloch, Silver Spring, MD


Award-winning author Jacqueline Jules writes about children’s feelings and relationships in this lovely new book set in summer camp. Carly and Sara meet and become quick friends at a Jewish camp, sharing a love of music, among other things. A crisis arises which threatens to destroy the relationship when Sara mistakes Carly’s excitement over her last name as teasing, not giving Carly a chance to explain that their names give them something else in common. A surprise ending gives a great finale to the story, as Carly reveals her own secret. Well written age-appropriate language makes the book enjoyable, in addition to exposing the reader to positive Jewish lifestyle events, particularly the specialness of Shabbat at camp and the sharing of Jewish stories and songs. Illustrations are lovely and complement the story. Recommended for children ages five to nine.

Shelly Feit, Moriah School Library, Englewood, NJ


The Miracle of Chanukah Then and Now is a collection of short stories. The first eight chapters retell ancient Chanukah stories taken from the Midrash and the Talmud. Included are the legends of Chanah and her seven sons; Yehudis; Judah Maccabbi; the death of Antiochus; and the miracle of the oil. Hebrew footnotes provide the origin of each story. Interesting lesser known facts about the holiday are presented as an aside called “Did you know?” The second half of the book, consisting of six chapters, recounts poignant Chanukah related stories that took place during or immediately after the Holocaust. Chanukah in Bergen Belsen, Sugihara visiting a Jewish family on Chanukah, and a menorah that helps reunit a mother and son are some of the topics. A two page glossary at the end of the book explains the many Hebrew and Yiddish terms peppered throughout the book. Each story is accompanied by colorful illustrations that enhance the text and set the scene for each story. The Miracle of Chanukah Then and Now is appropriate for children ages 12 and up because of the references to the Holocaust and illustrations of inmates in a concentration camp. Recommended for all libraries whose patrons are familiar with Hebrew and Yiddish terms.

Ilka Gordon, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

HOLOCAUST

Fishkin, Rebecca Love. Heroes of the Holocaust. (9780756543914).
Skog, Jason Maurice. The Legacy of the Holocaust. (9780756543938).
Stille, Darlene R. Architects of the Holocaust. (9780756543921).

Like pamphlets with hard covers, the books in this series, described individually below, are highly condensed summaries that provide scant history or background. In fact, they read like some of those quickie simplified articles one gets from the Internet. The pages are skimpy with meager margins and tiny print with strangely large whitespace between sentences. Each book has photos with
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

sidebars in boxes, a timeline, glossary, additional resources, select bibliography, source notes and an index. Compared with other Holocaust series such as those by Lucent (The Holocaust Remembered Series - 7 volumes); Enslow (The Holocaust Remembered Series - 5 volumes); and Blackbirch (Holocaust - 8 volumes) these books are inferior in comprehensiveness, writing, quality of design and photographs, and depth of content. None of the titles are recommended.

In Heroes of the Holocaust, after the same preface used in all the books, the author reveals that despite hateful, negative propaganda, there were people who rescued Jews, risking danger to themselves and their families. Some were in the Resistance, some were anti-Nazis, some were religious and truly believed in the Golden Rule, and some Jews also saved themselves.

After a brief introduction to set the scene, Children of the Holocaust explores the plight of Jewish children, from their ostracism by friends and former playmates to their exclusion from schools, parks, sports, etc. The rescue of some Jewish children by non-Jews, including the Kindertransport program, is also discussed. Liberation begins The Legacy of the Holocaust and while it is noted that General Eisenhower made sure that the world knew about the horrors of the camps, there is no mention of the fact that years before, two escaped messengers who warned Allied government officials of what was happening in the camps were ignored. Information about the DP camps comes next and while much is omitted, the yearning of young couples to create new families is shown to have resulted in many marriages and many births. Art and music related to the Holocaust are covered in one and one half pages.

Architects of the Holocaust is a quick summing up of the history and causes of the Nazi takeover of Germany including: German dissatisfaction with Treaty of Versailles; public disaffection with the Weimar Republic; Nazi-manipulated fear of Communism; and terrible economic conditions. All of this made Hitler’s promises of economic stability, employment, and restoration of German pride compelling. A few pages are devoted to the murder of millions of Jews as part of the Nazi campaign of genocide.

Marcia Posner, Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, NY

ISRAEL


Ella’s journey attempts to attract preschoolers to Israel but seems ignorant of this crowd’s inability to grasp geography or nations. The story jumps directly into a warm story reinforcing the words ‘Israel’ and ‘Hebrew,’ but ignoring the word ‘Jewish’. An age appropriate text manipulates the repetitive phrase device, here the Hebrew “eyn ba’aya,” translation: ‘no problem.’ Ella and her toy monkey, Koofi the Kof, charm readers, who learn right away that kof is Hebrew for monkey. Warning: Orthodox parents may prefer their children do not read about a non-kosher animal.

Ella flies with her parents to visit Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Dead Sea and a Galili kibbutz. In each place Koofi is covered in something messy; adults rushing to the rescue clean the toy, without much luck, but with the phrase, eyn ba’aya. Illustrations in a sweet palette aim for adorable. The family is depicted at each stop on their trip but the generic wall, tall buildings, orchards and diaries could be anywhere. Unbelievable! The art, which delivers the message in a picture book, manages a story on Israel without any Jewish identity. The airplane is not El Al, no signs in Hebrew, not one Israeli flag, no one wears a Jewish star or kippah, no one floats on the Dead Sea, the brown stuff could be beach tar, the Wall’s perfectly even stones with unchipped mortar resemble a California housing tract. These insulting illustrations sink the message. Not recommended.

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


Five-year-old Yuvi flees Ethiopia with her aunts, cousins and grandmother. Despite several attacks by robbers, frightening hyenas, hunger, thirst, and bleeding feet, Yuvi’s grandmother repeatedly assures her: “We are going to Jerusalem. We have angels with us. We’ll fly home.” Yuvi dreams of an Israel filled with orchards of candy trees and pillows of bread. When the family finally reaches the Sudanese refugee camp and is airlifted to Israel, Yuvi thinks that the white women on the plane who provide milk, water, medicine, and bandages are the angels her grandmother promised her. And, when she sees the orange trees in Israel she realizes that her dream of candy trees has come true. Textured, double page spread oil paintings illustrate the harrowing journey and the joyous homecoming. An afterward provides information about Yuvi Tashome, the Ethiopian girl upon whom the story is based, Operation Moses, and the connection to the Passover story. While previous works such as Falasha No More by Arlene Kushner (Steimatzky, 1986), My Name is Rachamin by Jonathan Kendall (UAHC, 1987), When I Left My Village by Maxine Rose Schur (Dial, 1996), and On the Wings of Eagles by Jeffrey Schrier (Millbrook Press, 1998) provide more detailed accounts of the plight of the Ethiopian Jews for older readers, Yuvi’s Candy Tree, with its simplified text and sugar-coated ending, is intended for younger readers. Educators looking for an accessible story to introduce this topic will be pleased with this beautifully illustrated offering, but independent readers will need more background information in order to relate to Yuvi and put her story into a proper context.

Rachel Kamin, Director of the Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL, and Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

JUDAISM


A charming character, a clear goal, and charitable impulses put air under a light-weight, bouncy story. The protagonist, pogo stick addicted Jenny, attends a Jewish Day School. Said school is defined by the names of two teachers (Jacobs and Cohen), illustrations of boys in yarmulkes, one Israeli flag, some Hebrew on the black board, and an author’s end note. Jenny’s nameless teacher, a sharp blonde unlike Jacobs or Cohen, suggests a class mitzvah (the book’s Jewish word). They will raise funds for a poor Ugandan school while learning African traditions. Everyone is full of ideas but Jenny is only good at jumping. She goes home feeling sad and useless. Grandma comes to the rescue of her self-esteem. Jenny decides to use her talent: she will ask people to pay her per jump to raise money. She practices to reach her advertised goal of 1000 jumps. The day of the school African fair arrives. Will Jenny make it? Readers count the endless jumps until, hooray! one thousand are done; Jenny deserves her moniker of Jumping Jenny! This lesson of tikkun olam for young Jewish school children jumps on the bandwagon: aid to Africa is all the rage especially for rich and famous non-Jews. Are home town Jewish charities too lack-luster? The illustrations create an adorable Jenny. The plot encourages faith in yourself in a Jewish setting with mainstream characters. Recommended as a marginal purchase by Jewish day schools and synagogue libraries.

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


“What are the rules of keeping kosher?” Very simply, “milk and meat can never mix,” fish need to have both fins and scales, meat must be purchased from a kosher butcher, all fruits and vegetables are kosher, and packaged goods need a “kosher mark.” This is the strength of the book, as a girl shows her younger brother the different aspects of kashrut. The refrain through their play with a toy kitchen and a shopping excursion is “keeping kosher every day means eating in a special way.” At the end of the book are “The ABC’s of Kosher…eating in a special way!” These go up to the letter “M,” and provide a more detailed explanation suited for parents and caregivers.

The message would be most useful for children who keep kosher and frequently interact with others who do not, so Mommy would need to explain why they can’t eat certain foods or combinations of food. The illustrations suggest an Orthodox audience: the girl is in pigtails and the boy wears a huge kippa. Most of the men have BIG beards and some have their tzitzis hanging out. The only woman in the book is the mother (these are some girls in school uniforms in the pizza shop). Given this, the refrain is trite; for those who eat this way, they do it because God commanded it and don’t find it particularly special - it’s just the way it is. While it is nice to have a book that validates experience, this does not add anything to it. Acceptable for Orthodox readers.

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ, is a former chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

YIDDISH


It is easy to kvell over this delightful board book that will be a hit with toddlers and their families. Rhyming text, sprinkled with a bissel of Yiddish, combined with appealing pictures makes this the perfect addition to any Jewish home or synagogue library. Laurel Snyder does a commendable job bringing Yiddish to a preschooer in a way that the child will understand. Readers from the youngest baby to the oldest Bubbie who want to start a ruckus will wave their arms and shake their tuches after reading this terrific board book. Recommended for all libraries that serve children.

Aimee Lurie is librarian of the Agnon School in Cleveland, OH and a member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

PUBLISHING NOTE

A new picture book for preschoolers by the Israeli illustrator Ami Rubinger, has been published by Abbeville Kids, which published two of Rubinger’s previous books, *Big Cat, Small Cat* and *I Dream of an Elephant* (both reviewed in the Sept/Oct 2010 issue of the AJL Newsletter.) Entitled *Dog Number 1, Dog Number 10,* it features a playful array of pups that love to count. Children can follow clues given in the illustrations to discover the missing number and finish the rhyme. There is no Jewish content but libraries that purchase books by Israeli authors will be interested.

THESE TITLES, REVIEWED IN THE ADULT READERS SECTION, MAY ALSO BE OF INTEREST TO TEENAGERS.


Dorff, Elliot N. and Danya Ruttenberg, editors. *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices: Social Justice.*

McMath, Phillip H. and Emily Matson Lewis. *The Broken Vase, a Novel based on the Life of Penina Krupitsky, a Holocaust Survivor.*

In The Spotlight

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY -- MAY 1
WRITING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST


How future generations will know about the horrors of the Holocaust has been a question in the minds of survivors, scholars, artists, politicians and many others from as early as the war period itself. In the depths of the Warsaw Ghetto, Emanuel Ringelbum was concerned enough with this issue that he organized the collecting of the Oyneg Shabes Archive to document and describe, in every format possible, that which was witnessed in the ghetto.

Ruth Franklin realized, when she set out to write her book, that there are those who, like Adorno and Elie Wiesel, insisted that only a person who actually lived through the Holocaust could truly tell future generations about it and that in some way art and the Holocaust could not coexist. So it seems that the memoirs and oral histories of the survivors would be, to this school of thought, the only sources of acceptable evidence about those terrible, incomprehensible times. On the other hand, Franklin insists that “if we look to literature…to teach us about life, then it is no wonder that we desperately desire it to teach us also about the Holocaust… one of the most obscene catastrophes in history.” So the compromise must be “to find a secure place, somewhere between memory and imagination (Langer),” in order to properly remember the victims. Franklin accepts the premise that there really is no clear line, but rather a fuzzy one, separating memoirs and literature, truth and fiction, history and art.

The author thoroughly researched the literature, from classical to the most contemporary, for all that she could find on the tensions mentioned above. She then chose to study writers on the Holocaust, both witnesses and ‘those who came after’ and analyzed their works in a most brilliant manner. The first group includes Borowski, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Rawicz, Kosinski and Kertesz. In the second group are: Keneally and Spielberg, Koeppen, Sebald, Schlink and, of course Wilkomirski and other writers of very recent works.

It is regretful that she did not include Aharon Appelfeld as one of the authors to analyze, even though he was very young during the Holocaust. He would have been an excellent example of someone who could belong in either of the two groups and, as James E. Young stated: “If there is a line between fact and fiction, it may by necessity be a winding border that tends to bind these two categories as much as it separates them, allowing each side to dissolve occasionally into the other.” That is certainly true in Appelfeld’s body of work.

Any library, academic, high school or synagogue with a good collection of Holocaust works, fictional as well historical, should include this superb work of analysis of some of the most important and controversial Holocaust fiction.

Michlean Amir, Reference Coordinator, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC


Written as a novel, this is the true story of a Romanian Jewish woman from Czernowitz who survived the Holocaust by fleeing to the Soviet Union. Born in 1924 into an educated, cultured, middle class family, her life was dramatically changed by the invasion of the Nazis in 1941. Penina Krupitsky, whose parents died at the hands of the Germans, married, had a child and lived in Minsk after the war. In 1980 she immigrated with her family to the United States, settling in Little Rock, Arkansas. Written by her friend, a lawyer from Little Rock, her story is a powerful testimony to the tremendous will, courage and resiliency of the human spirit, a remarkable narrative of a woman who was determined to survive under the most harrowing circumstances. The second author spent a year interviewing Penina, gathering notes for the book. The final result is a well written, fascinating story that expands understanding of the situation that faced the Jews in Europe under
Nazi domination. The book includes descriptive notes, glossary, map and two photographs. It is an important addition to Holocaust collections in high school, public, community center, academic, Temple and synagogue libraries.

Susan Freiband, Library Educator (retired), Arlington, VA


A stunning debut novel that has already garnered much praise and landed a spot on the New York Times list of 100 Notable Books of 2010, The Invisible Bridge is an old-fashioned sweeping historical novel. It begins gloriously at the Royal Hungarian Opera House in 1937, concludes sorrowfully in 1945 (with a chapter titled “The Dead”), followed by an optimistic final chapter (“A Name”) and an epilogue set in America.

Andras, an impecunious young architecture student, travels from Budapest to study in Paris, carrying a letter for a mysterious woman, who becomes the love of his life. The first half of the novel is filled with fascinating discussions of architecture and difficult and intriguing romantic and family relationships. As the reader comes to know and understand the appealing characters, the shadow of the Holocaust looms over them. For complicated reasons Andras and Klara return to Hungary and fate closes in on them.

Historically accurate, carefully detailed, filled with well-developed characters and a lively plot, the book occasionally feels too long at almost 600 pages. However, while the reader is swept up by the protagonists’ story, s/he also learns much about the struggles of the Jews in Hungary, the munkaszolgalat (forced labor brigades), routes of escape to Palestine and the tragedy of the ship the Struma. It was a pleasure to read a novel constructed in chronological order with no flashbacks, for a change. The author’s well-written, mordant short stories (How to Breathe Underwater) hinted at her skill, but now she also exhibits the ability to construct an epic and hold the reader’s interest. This book is recommended for all Jewish fiction collections and should be popular with book discussion groups.

Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)


Rather than calling this book a novel, it might better be described as a meditation on God and man, on the Holocaust, and on life and death. Poetically written, this short book was produced from the papers left after the death of the author and published posthumously by his widow Simone. Set in the year 3000, after a nuclear holocaust that has destroyed planet Earth, this book takes us back to the Nazi Holocaust, viewed from the perspective of one thousand years later. This device does not work well; the pendulum swinging between past and future appears to blur rather than blend these two. What results is yet another look at the Holocaust which Schwarz-Bart treated magnificently in his powerful earlier novel The Last of the Just, published in English in 1960.

It is clear that André Schwarz-Bart wrestled with the memory of the Holocaust throughout his life, writing and destroying over and over, until at his death in 2006, it was left to his widow to bring forth this work out of the notes he left behind. Of the few flaws in the English text, some may be attributed to the author, others to the translator. The misuse of the verbs “lie” and “lay” is irritating. The term hachsharah, meaning a training farm for Jews preparing for immigration to Israel, is rendered erroneously as harmcharah.

While this brief, belated sequel to his earlier novel does not reach the heights of his former work, it is a moving legacy from a gifted writer, whose tortured, life-long search for meaning in the Holocaust ended with a resounding yes to life, to human dignity and to God as expressed in the Kaddish. Recommended for synagogue libraries.

Susanne M. Batzdorff, Librarian, Retired, Celia Gurevitch Library of Sonoma County, Congregation Beth Ami, Santa Rosa, CA.
NONFICTION


God still answers Job from the whirlwind (Job 38:1) in Robert Alter’s new translation, but Qohelet’s (Ecclesiastes’) “vanity of vanities” is gone, replaced by “merest breath … merest breath. All is mere breath” (Eccl. 1:2). The translation of this phrase is appealing in its simplicity and its attempt to stay close to the root meaning of the Hebrew, something that characterizes Alter’s translation enterprise as a whole. The Wisdom books, three of the most difficult texts in the biblical corpus, present many challenges to the translator. Job, which tackles the issues of good and evil, reward and punishment, and divine providence, is renowned as a particularly difficult text that often defies understanding, let alone elegant translation. Proverbs is a collection of practical wisdom, delivered in short pithy phrases. Qohelet contains the somewhat cynical reflections of a world-weary thinker. It probably only barely made it into the canon, saved by the pious epilogue of an anonymous editor. Alter brings to the task of translation the well-honed literary sensitivity of a lifelong student of literature, and an obvious appreciation of the artistic ability of the authors of these works. Coupled with his intimate knowledge of the biblical corpus, which he has been studying, translating, and writing about for decades, the results are a translation that comes closer than most to capturing the poetry of the original. Combined with helpful introductions and illuminating commentary this volume is a welcome addition to the ever-growing corpus of English renditions of the Book of Books. Translation is a fussy business and no translation will please everyone in all its aspects. Nevertheless, Alter can be recommended as a reliable guide to these instructive, but at times impenetrable, volumes. Recommended for academic and synagogue libraries.

Barry Dov Walfish, Judaica Specialist, University of Toronto Libraries, Toronto, Canada


The editor explains her intention to collect testimony from children who were hidden by non-Jews during the Second World War. Originally published in France in 2004, this book offers some consolation to students of the Holocaust in that we meet survivors and many ordinary people who risked their lives to protect Jewish children. Ms. Bailly includes the stories of eighteen survivors; some are in narrative form, but most consist of a dialogue with the editor. Reading the transcripts, I was not convinced that the editor was always as patient as necessary. There are a number of cases where the narrator was cut off in mid-sentence. I do not think that these survivors are fully representative as the group is very homogenous. Most of the narrators are first generation French, born of immigrants from Eastern Europe, non-religious and a significant percentage of these survivors joined the Communist Party at some stage in their lives. This book does make a contribution to our knowledge of the Holocaust.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


Mendel Balberyszski’s riveting account of the Vilna Ghetto and Klooga concentration camp describes his work for the housing department in the small Vilna Ghetto; the politics of Ghetto administration; relationships among Jews, Nazis and Lithuanians, and daily conditions. Amidst the hunger, “actions” and the desperate struggle to secure documentation, the author honors Jewish resistance and heroism, addressing agonizing moral questions related to survival. Balberyszski’s harrowing narrative provides a powerful reading experience suitable for academic and general audiences. Recommended for academic, synagogue and community libraries, and for collections specializing in Holocaust Studies.

Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, Librarian, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library


William Berkson’s new translation (in collaboration with Menachem Fisch) and commentary to *Pirke Avot* presents three perspectives of *Pirke Avot*: traditional Jewish, historical, and contemporary-comparative. Mainly, Berkson aims to familiarize non-observant Jews and non-Jews with the wisdom and practicality of the Sages’ *Ethics of the Fathers*.

Berkson follows the text in English and Hebrew and analyzes each topic separately in the order that they appear in the *Mishnah* (Jewish oral law). In plain and clear English, Berkson relates and expands his thoughts on the application of the topic to modern life. Indeed, *Pirke Avot* is a guide to every human being who wants to lead a moral, satisfying life, as it is said: ‘Who is wise? One who learns from every person.”

Berkson contributes to the accessibility of *Pirke Avot* beyond the observant Jewish community. The book includes the full text in Hebrew and English, commentary topics, and subject index. This book will enhance any adult Jewish collections, synagogue and high school libraries, theological libraries, and adult sections of academic and public libraries.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL

As a college student, Cheryl Berman took a philosophy course and was hooked on the analytical process. As she pursued her studies, she began to question what was once a steadfast faith in God. One day, while walking back to her dormitory, she was hit by a taxi. Not only was her knee shattered, but also her concept of good and evil. By delving into a philosophical study of the paradox of theodicy (a loving God despite the existence of evil), she was able to appreciate that “faith is a process” and “a deeper faith is one that has been challenged.” While she chronicles her research and thought process, the book alternates chapters with a story of Elihu, a sixth century BCE Jewish exile in Babylonia who is writing The Book of Job. (This is a creative tactic. There are various opinions as to who wrote it.)

Similar to When Bad Things Happen to Good People in terms of an exploration driven by personal grief, the author’s sense of humor and intelligence are evident. What was an internal dialog that moved from frustration to consternation to acceptance makes for an interesting excursion. Through a gamut of arguments from luminaries including Maimonides, Kant, Descartes, Spinoza, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and Viktor Frankl, as well as a reading of The Book of Job, Berman is able to come to terms with the questions that had perplexed her. Short biographies of the philosophers and rabbinc sources, as well as a bibliography of works cited would have been helpful. Highly recommended for libraries whose patrons are interested in philosophy, otherwise a solid optional purchase.

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ; Secretary, School Synagogue and Centers Division. AJL; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, AJL


“Lo bashamayim” (It is not in the heavens) is the punch line to one of the most famous pieces of Talmudic aggadah. In this thought-provoking book, Professor Biale (University of California, Davis) uses it as the foundation of his investigation into Jewish secularism.

The volume begins with a quote from Isaac Deustcher: “The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition.” From here Biale examines the history of non-religious Jewish thought over the past two hundred years. Each chapter explores the history of a concept. In chapter 1 -- “Pantheists, Kabbalists, and Pagans” -- Biale examines the work of Solomon Maimon, Einstein and Gershom Scholem among others, as they have progressively removed God from Jewish life. Chapter 2 -- “Torah: the Secular Bible” -- explores the effects of the holy writings on Heine, Freud, Ahad Ha’Am and Ben-Gurion. Chapter 3 -- “Race, Nation, or State” -- traces the concept and reality of Israel in the work of Mendelssohn, Zangwill and Herzl, Bialik and Kaplan. Chapter 4 -- “Israel: History, Language and Culture” -- focuses on the use of Hebrew, beginning with Heine and moving through Ahad Ha’Am, Bialik, Joseph Brenner and Zhitlowsky. Weaving these writers and concepts together, Biale develops the powerful thesis that, even in their apparent absence, Jewish religious concepts are critical to the growth of secular ideas in Jewish life.

While readers may have been exposed to many of the ideas presented here, they may not be aware of their origins. For that reason, the book is a significant contribution to Jewish scholarship in many disciplines, most notably history and philosophy. While the text is serious, it is not ponderous, and the author takes time to explain the concepts. It should be purchased by academic libraries. The book should also be of interest to serious lay readers, and is recommended for larger synagogue libraries. Includes notes and index.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Recent decades have seen the emergence of ‘masculinity’ as a term of social and academic significance. Men’s studies follow in the wake of feminist criticism and investigates the various constructions of male social identity. At the same time, greater female involvement in Jewish religious
and communal activity has left many men on the outside, and has subsequently led them to re-examine their own connection to Judaism.

Brother Keepers is a collection of articles discussing different aspects of masculinity with a specific emphasis on Jewish men. Many of the articles are written from a personal perspective, chronicling the lives and deliberations of contemporary American Jewish men. They are very frank and moving. The other articles in the volume are mostly sociological or historical studies of Jewish masculinity in different contexts. These include several discussions of Jewish masculinity in recent American and Israeli cinema and fiction, as well as studies of masculinity in the Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) and Herzl’s Zionism. The variety is wide, and stems from the origins of the volume in several different ventures to publish a book on Jewish masculinity.

At the same time, the kinds of Jewish masculinity discussed are fairly limited – primarily heterosexual American Jews of Eastern European descent.

Some of the articles are deeply moving, others are fascinating. The collection as a whole is too eclectic to give a good sense of what is going on in Jewish men’s studies. But for academic collections on contemporary Jewish identity and for synagogue with an interest in men’s concerns, it is a worthy addition.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem.


Facing serious illness and loss is difficult. The Jewish healing movement attempts to help people deal with these issues spiritually. This book of papers from a 2009 conference at the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health addresses the use of Jewish texts in a clinical setting as a vehicle for helping both patients and practitioners. The editor is an emeritus professor at Hebrew Union College. The authors are rabbis, physicians, psychotherapists, and social workers. They examine topics such as coping with illness, loss, aging, suffering, community, bioethics, and psychotherapy. The papers are uneven, but the purpose is important. The contributors are trying to find a way to integrate spiritual healing using Jewish texts into clinical practice. Rabbi Julie Pec Adler proposes a new Mi Sheberakh (healing prayer) for those living with chronic illness who will never achieve refuah shlemah (full recovery). Others speak of learning to tolerate uncertainty and of using music, poetry, and psalms as a way to encounter the divine. Although the contributors’ affiliations and credentials are not provided, there are notes on their sources. This book belongs in academic libraries supporting religious studies, psychology, and the health sciences.

Barbara M. Bibel, oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


Professor Davis, an anthropologist at Georgetown University, makes use of more than 120 Palestinian Arab memorial narratives describing the demographic transformation that took place in over 400 villages in mandated Palestine and whose community character was altered during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The author carefully examines the role of village life and the agricultural economy among Palestinian Arabs, who lost what they considered an essential component of their communal identification when they lost their plot of land. The sociological context is meant to serve as a basis to appreciate Palestinian historiography as well. The study intertwines ethnography with anthropological theories, concluding with an examination of the role of memory in writing history. The author links the geographic places and the residents who provide their stories to family and clan associations which provide an important basis for their identification. The conflict that occurred once Israel declared itself a modern state resulted in the displacement of both Arab and Jewish residents. An added bonus to the book is the extensive bibliography that will serve the serious student well for further study.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Professor, Department of History and Politics, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This work is a psychological reading of Jewish apocalyptic texts regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. According to the author, the apocalyptic texts are a response to this crisis and the associated trauma. The core of the book is an in-depth analysis of three texts, Ezekiel, 4 Ezra, and 3 Baruch, in which the author interprets their symbolism as a response to the national trauma of the destruction of Zion. The author devotes a chapter to each of these texts and emphasizes their themes of loss and mourning. Daschke explains that the texts are an expression of mourning, as interpreted through a psychoanalytic model of mourning based on the work of Sigmund Freud.

This book is not easy to read and is appropriate for academic scholars interested in psychological interpretations of biblical and apocryphal texts.

Yoram Bitton, Hebraic Manuscript Cataloger, Columbia University, New York


Betty Friedan’s classic 1963 manifesto, The Feminine Mystique, is the starting point for this wide-ranging collection of essays on American Jewish women since 1945.
Although there is no dearth of papers and books challenging Friedan's conclusions and/or adding nuance to her picture of the constrained domestic life of American women, the editors state that there is an absolute lack of literature on women and gender in the scholarship on Jewish women.

The first group of articles focuses on women who worked as activists addressing social problems. Of these essays, several focus on Jewish organizations and the women active in them and others are mini-biographies of individual activists. The second group of articles examines Jewish immigrant women in this period, whose lives bore no resemblance to those of comfortable suburban women. The third group focuses on the image of the Jewish woman and those who challenged the gender expectations. The raunchy comedienxes Belle Barth, Pearl Williams and Patsy Abbott are the focus of “The Bad Girls of Comedy.” Separate essays are devoted to the career and politics of Judy Holliday, the image and accomplishments of Jennie Grossinger and “Reading Marjorie Morningstar in the Age of the Feminine Mystique and After.” The penultimate essay is devoted to the feminist movements since the 1960s and the final essay is a reflection on Betty Friedan’s life. The role of Judaism in developing these women’s interests and independence and the later conflicts that arose in the feminist movement between Jews and non-Jews, is addressed.

This book is well-indexed with footnotes and like many volumes comprised of collections of papers from a conference, this title is for academic libraries.

Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)


In our post-9/11 world, Americans find themselves thinking more and more about war and national security. Yet as Jews, we know from our religious texts as well as our textbooks, that Israel has considered these topics from ancient times. With centuries of antagonistic relations with neighboring countries comes centuries of ethical debate on how one should deal with neighbors. Elliot Dorff, co-editor of the first 4 volumes of Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices, and Danya Ruttenberg, esteemed author, editor and senior Jewish educator at Tufts University Hillel, have edited an academic work valuable to both academic as well as synagogue libraries.

In War and National Security, as in previous works, four case studies are presented to the readers. And, as in past volumes, these case studies are tweaked in a manner to make the reader question their original assumptions. A beautifully done example of this is the case study on the conduct of war. How does a young individual conduct himself/herself in an ethically charged situation...if the commanding officer directs them to break into militants’ homes? If the commanding officer directs them to bomb a school? Torture and rape?

I fully recommend this text to synagogues holding open and frank talks on ethics, as well as academic libraries collecting in ethics, political science, Middle East studies, peace studies, and Jewish studies.

Rachel Minkin, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Lansing Community College; Congregation Kehillat Israel, Lansing, MI


Just published in Israel (2010) as Shorshe ha-Chilun and translated as The Origins of Jewish Secularization in Eighteenth-Century Europe, this latest book by Shmuel Feiner focuses on “several perceptive individuals” who left fascinating testimonies. These individuals did not create a secularist mass movement as there was “no such thing as an organized sect that united all those who rejected religion.” They lived in far-flung places, mostly in large cities in Western Europe: Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Frankfurt, or Breslau. Feiner states that “conditions did not yet exist that would enable a Jew to have a secular Jewish identity” thus the ‘origins’ in the title of his book. Furthermore, the term secularization itself did not exist until the mid-nineteenth century. Following a clear chronological framework, Feiner integrates the process of Jewish secularization in the general trends of European modernization then taking place in the Eighteenth century. He excels at presenting primary sources on the ‘doubt’ and ‘sin’ among eighteenth-century European Jews and the polemic conducted against deviant
individuals by the rabbinical elites.

Recommended for all academic libraries with a Jewish studies program.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


We have recently been blessed with a number of important biographies of medieval Jewish thinkers, particularly, Maimonides (by Joel Kraemer, Sara Stroumsa), and Judah ha-Levi (by Hillel Halkin). Seymour Feldman has now introduced the English reader to one of the giants of medieval Jewish thought, Levi ben Gershon (also known as Gersonides or Ralbag; 1288-1344). This volume is more of an intellectual biography, since we know little about the subject’s personal life, but have access to a massive corpus of his works. (Incidentally, an engaging portrait of Gersonides is given by Iain Pears in his wonderful novel, The Dream of Scipio [2002]). Gersonides lived a quiet life in Provence. He apparently was an independent scholar who did not head a Talmudic academy and did not serve as a communal leader. He devoted his entire life to scholarship and produced important biblical commentaries, mathematical, and scientific treatises and philosophical works. He is best known for his magnum opus, The Wars of the Lord, a philosophical treatise, which Seymour Feldman previously rendered into English (1999). In the book under review Feldman traces the contours of Gersonides’ thought, showing him to be an original thinker dedicated to reconciling philosophy and religion without sacrificing reason. It is a daunting task, one that Maimonides also attempted and Judah ha-Levi felt was impossible. Ralbag does not hold back and does not speak in cryptic allusive language, but reveals all in the belief that reason is not a threat to religion. To give but one example of his radical thought, Ralbag argues against the belief in creatio ex nihilo, claiming instead that what the Torah is describing is creation out of some primordial, shapeless mass. After the introduction, which outlines Gersonides’ life, works, and philosophical environment, chapters are devoted to: the story of creation, God and his attributes, divine omniscience, divine providence, divine omnipotence, prophecy, humanity and its destiny and the Torah. Feldman’s synthesis of Gersonides’ thinking will be welcomed by all serious students of Jewish thought. It is not a light read, but definitely worth the effort. Recommended for academic libraries.

Barry Dov Walfish, Judaica Specialist, University of Toronto Libraries, Toronto, Canada


Martin Fletcher is a special NBC News correspondent who for over thirty years had covered major events in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and at the time of writing lived in Israel with his Israeli wife and three sons. In order to examine what Israel is like under the surface which he regularly reported on as a foreign correspondent, Fletcher embarked during the summer of 2008 on a two-week walk along Israel’s Mediterranean coast from the Lebanese to the Egyptian borders, intending to meet and talk with Israelis from various walks of life. He describes his meetings during this period as well as some complementary ones later on, discussing issues of personal and national character, expressing his views and those of the interviewees. He thus deals, among other topics, with the condition of Palestinians in Israel, Holocaust survivors, Jewish immigrants, urban youth, kibbutz life, and attitudes towards serving in the IDF. The description and exchanges are very personal and subjective and will be of interest especially for those whose main source of information on Israel are media reports on political and military developments.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

Freeman, Aaron and Sharon Rosenzweig. The Comic Torah: Reimagining the Very Good Book. Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2010. 112 pp. $35.00 hc (9781934730539); $19.95 pbk. (9781934730546).

As Jews, we are supposed to study Torah and find meaning in our interpretation of it. This book is a unique piece of midrash. Aaron Freeman, a comedian and NPR commentator, and his wife Sharon Rosenzweig, an artist, have created a series of 54 cartoon panels, one for each weekly parashah. They tell the stories as no one has ever told them. Some readers may find them irreverent, but the approach is both humorous and thought-provoking. The portrayal of God as a woman and the use of celebrity caricatures for biblical characters (Cheech and Chong as Nadav and Abihu, Elliot Spitzer as Laban) are original. Telling the story of the Jewish people as a romantic relationship between Moses and God with elements of Family Feud added puts a different spin on it. The authors encourage readers to la’asok b’divrei Torah (immerse oneself in Torah), depicting themselves diving into a Torah scroll on the title page. This is a true invitation to study because, as the celebrity Joshua character says, “Yes we Can-aan.” This will be a great source for discussion in Torah study groups and book clubs in non-Orthodox congregations.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA; Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


In the six chapters of Why We Pray What We Pray, Rabbi Freundel gives historical analysis and background information on these prayers: Keryat Shema, Nishmat, Birkat ha-Hodesh, Anim Zemirot, Aleinu and Kaddish. You can read the entire book, but each chapter stands alone. In the introduction, the author writes, “The approach of this book is scholarly and not anecdotal.” It is different from many books on prayers in that it gives detailed information on the biblical, Talmudic and other sacred sources. Rabbi
Freundel, who serves as an Orthodox rabbi and professor of religion, gathered the material that he has taught at a university level and distilled it into book form, providing the Orthodox view. Lines of prayers are given in Hebrew and English and footnotes are provided. This is a valuable source of information for the scholar and anyone seeking to understand prayer. The book could be of practical use and help answer questions of the rabbi, cantor, prayer leader, gabbai, and worshipper.

Freundel addresses such questions as how many months should mourners recite the Mourners Kaddish, who should recite the prayer, should the mourner stand during the prayer, and hiring someone to recite for the deceased.

The book is an outstanding contribution to the history of prayer and is recommended for rabbis, Torah scholars, Orthodox synagogue libraries, and special libraries with Judaica collections.

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


The Ben Ezra synagogue in the old part of Cairo was built in the ninth century and apparently rebuilt in the eleventh century. Orthodox Jews regard worn-out religious texts with respect and either store them in a Genizah in a synagogue or bury them. The Genizah in the Ben Ezra synagogue accumulated “sacred trash” over a period of some 1,000 years; material not only of a religious nature, but also including secular poetry and commercial letters and other documents.

In the late nineteenth century, some of the material was sold by an antiquarian and reached Solomon Schechter at Cambridge University. He realized its importance and traveled to Cairo, returning with some 200,000 fragments. The rest found its way through different channels to a variety of different libraries and private collectors, with the result that one text could be split up among a number of libraries.

The pioneers, who worked on the Genizah, emphasized the religious texts, finding among other things the lost Hebrew text of the Apocryphal Ecclesiasticus, previously unknown responsa and Talmudic manuscripts, etc. The Genizah was especially rich in liturgical poetry. Later, Professor Goitein specialized in the commercial side of the Genizah and medieval Jewish life in the Mediterranean area. In short, the Genizah revolutionized our knowledge in many fields of Jewish scholarship. The first two texts offer popular introductions to the Genizah, using slightly different approaches. Mark Glickman’s book is a personal odyssey. He endeavors to convey his enthusiasm and traces his own discovery of the Genizah. Adina Hoffman remains more in the background.

Glickman dedicates more time to the personalities of the people who researched the Genizah, while Hoffman concentrates on the Genizah’s contributions in different fields of scholarship. Both authors are to be complimented on their use of illustrations. The sheer mass of material made research a long term project. As Hoffman, ironically points out, much of the material lay in a new “Genizah” for decades before it was rediscovered. One example is the case of a cache of fragments in the University Library of Geneva, which was acquired by a scholar specializing in Greek papyri and deposited in the University library. It was only recently rediscovered and examined.

David Rosenthal’s text is academic and is divided into two parts. The first part is a lavishly illustrated catalog of the fragments. The second part contains seven articles about the material, including a separate article on a palimpsest. A palimpsest is a piece of parchment which has been re-used and in many cases the original older text is also legible. The original text may well be of more interest than the new text. Both introductions are good and I enjoyed them both, although the Hoffman book lacked an index. The importance of all of the books is to appreciate the richness of Jewish culture and history. Even the most superficial study of the Genizah material must leave one with a feeling of pride to be an heir to such a heritage.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Eleven essays describing and analyzing simchas (life cycle events) have been selected by Professor Greenspoon from the Proceedings of the 21st Annual Symposium of Studies in Jewish Civilization, 2008. The essays’ authors include professors at both secular and religious universities, rabbis and a cantor. The subtext of this collection is that Judaism needs to better deal with groups whose needs have not been adequately addressed by expanding and enhancing current ceremonies. New and modified rituals need to be constantly revised to better connect us with the past generations and to our fellow family and co-religionists.

Three of the article focus on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, one on the wedding, one of gaining semichah (rabbinic ordination), as well as other topics such as being Jewish in very non-Jewish environments and the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish ceremonies.

The readability, quality and usefulness of the essays vary widely. This book is recommended for academic collections and large synagogue collections.

Nathan Aaron Rosen, New York, NY


Young Tel Aviv is a worthy addition to the growing literature on the garden suburb that grew into a metropolis. From its beginnings, Tel Aviv was a middle-class city that stood in stark contrast with the “hegemonic pioneering ethos” of the Jewish Yishuv (settlement). The “two cities” alluded to in the subtitle are “Tel Aviv as it was and Tel Aviv as it seemed” during the 1920s and 1930s. The author discusses the city’s public sphere, especially its commercial exhibitions, Purim carnivals, and residents’ Sabbath promenades. “The outdoors did not just serve as functional role – it was a widespread cultural preference,” she writes. Young Tel Aviv also includes chapters on consumer culture, entertainment and leisure-time activities, and ethnoreligious and class-based subcultures. For the non-Israeli reader, perhaps the most eye-opening chapter is “Portrait of a City.” This was a densely populated (160,000 inhabitants packed into two-and-a-half square miles in 1939), noisy, unkempt, and smelly environment. (Tel Aviv lacked sewers until the 1940s.) Utilitarian tenements and shantytowns flanked the gleaming, Bauhaus-inspired facades of the commercial center, demonstrating “a disparity... between the ambitions of the city’s leaders and many inhabitants and reality.” Behind its (Hebrew) public face, “Tel Aviv culture blended West and East, Jew and Hebrew, the Diaspora and the Land of Israel, the cosmopolitan and the local.” And the “integration of materialism and idealism” yielded a highly distinctive urban mix that distinguishes Tel Aviv to this day.

Zachary M. Baker, Assistant University Librarian, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA

Hoberman, J. Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film between Two Worlds. Updated and expanded edition with DVD documentary The Yiddish Cinema. Published in association with the National Center for Jewish Film, 2010, Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, University College Press. 416 pp. $39.95 (9781584658702).

J. Hoberman’s classic 1991 work on Yiddish film remains essential, enhanced by a new foreword, final chapter and a DVD of the documentary film The Yiddish Cinema. This excellent, engaging book is required reading for anyone interested in Yiddish and Jewish film and theater. It is sophisticated and accessible, providing a comprehensive overview of Yiddish film and its social and artistic context. Hoberman’s detailed research and rich commentaries are accompanied by wonderful pictures. It includes an index. Recommended for academic, synagogue and community libraries, and for collections specializing in Jewish Studies and Film Studies.

Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, Librarian, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library


In Every Generation includes the complete Hebrew text of the traditional Haggadah in an easy-to-read and clear font with English translation, some transliterated passages, and instructions on performing the Seder. The Haggadah begins with an informative forward by inspirational author, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin. Journalism professor and author Ari Goldman provides historical background on the work of the JDC as well as personal and poignant anecdotes told by Jews assisted by the JDC. What makes this Haggadah unique and very moving are the more than 100 black and white and color photographs from The JDC’s archives which range from 1914 to the present. Each photograph relates to the Haggadah text. The Maggid section of the Haggadah, which begins with the “breed of affliction,” is accompanied by a picture, photographed in the Berlin-Mariendorf DP camp in 1946, of a smiling young girl holding two large handmade matzot supplied by the Joint. Accompanying the Hallel, a prayer of praise, is a photograph of a Rumanian choir taken in 1988 and two young boys, singing in a music class in Odessa, both activities made possible by the Joint. The photographs and anecdotes included in this Haggadah add a modern dimension to the biblical story of the rescue and redemption of the Jewish people. The JDC Haggadah is...
highly recommended for all libraries, especially synagogue and school libraries. It is also a meaningful Bar or Bat Mitzvah gift.

Ilka Gordon, Librarian, Siegal College of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH


This well footnoted, well written, impressive book, by an attorney best known in America as Deborah Lipstadt’s attorney in the infamous libel suit, and author of an excellent study of T.S. Eliot’s Judeophobia, takes its title from the epigraph of Roth’s Operation Shylock.

Julius traces medieval persecutions punctuated by the 1190 massacre in York. The Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and allowed to return by Oliver Cromwell at the urgings of Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, in the mid 17th century, but the “image of the Jew” exists in England’s literary traditions. Analyzing the “image of the Jew in English literature” is the strongest part of Julius’ book. Julius insightfully negotiates the many grotesque vicious portrayals of Jews in England’s literature i.e. (1) Chaucer’s blood libel (Priores’ Tale), (2) Shakespeare’s Shylock (Merchant of Venice), warranting comparison with Marlowe’s farcical Barabas (The Jew of Malta) to (3) Dicken’s Fagin in Oliver Twist. Julius subpoenaes the cases of stereotypes of money grubbing, greasy, socially uncouth, subversive Jews in a number of other modern writers.

The last section examines the political dimensions of how anti-Semitism is today recast as anti-Zionism. Examples of this include holding the government of Israel to a double standard, media bias, the Durban Conference, and British boycotts. Although different, Julius fleshes out further Phylis Chesler’s The New Anti-Semitism. Recommended for all libraries.

Dr. David B Levy, Touro College, New York


This volume is based on a conference held in 2004 at Yeshiva University marking the 900th anniversary of the death of Rashi and the 800th anniversary of the death of Maimonides.

The lives and work of Rashi and Maimonides were very different. Rashi concentrated on exegesis of the Bible and Talmud whereas Maimonides dealt with Jewish law and philosophy. However, a Jew who studies his heritage continues a centuries-old dialogue with these two figures and they are both still very relevant to the Orthodox Jew’s life. The essays are varied and they include the philosophical approach, examination of specific themes in one or both of the subjects and some history.

Of the fifteen essays, I found three essays of special interest. Goldberg and Sokolow discussed educational theory: how did Rashi and Maimonides teach? The essay was fascinating and I hope that they will expand it in the future. Today, negative criticism of Rashi is rare, but Eric Lawee describes criticism of Rashi by contemporaries in his essay. Michelle Levine has a perceptive essay about Nachmanides’ treatment of biblical dialogue. All in all a good collection of essays, but this is a book for the specialist rather than the general reader.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


This collection of essays in Hebrew deals with the legal status of Jewish women during the British Mandate in Palestine (1917-1948). During this period, there was a strong women’s organization called Hitahdut Nashim Ivriot le-Shivui Zekhuyot be-Erez Yisrael.

Women were enfranchised in the internal elections of the Jewish Yishuv (settlement). The laws against bigamy were strengthened. There was considerable effort to solve the problem of agunot, women whose husbands had abandoned them without a divorce or any means of support and the organization, of course, tried to intervene against violent husbands. Of interest is the alliance between the Hitahdut and the Chief rabbinate in many of the issues.

There are introductory surveys of women’s status and of the legal situation. The last essay is a contemporary survey of the status of Palestinian women. Each of the essays, usually about 30 pages long, is comprehensive, well-edited and relevant. The standard of the Hebrew is high.

If I had to choose one essay for translation into English, I would choose Zvi Trigger’s essay on Golda Meir, Israel’s first prime minister. She always claimed to be against feminism and to have succeeded on her own merits.

I learned a lot from this book which is a first-class survey of its subject. Many of the essays are certainly worth translating into English.

Chaim Seymour, Director, Cataloging and Classification Department, Wurzweiler Library, Bar-Ilan University, Israel


In this scholarly book, the author, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, examines the efforts of the State of Israel and North American Jewish organizations to use tourism as a way to increase and motivate the young Jewish Diaspora’s relation with the country. In recent years, one of the preferred methods for this engagement has been through the offer of free tours to Israel for hundreds of thousands of young adults. Kelner aims to study how different governments

This book is a joy to behold. Not only is it physically beautiful but it is informative as well as moving. Ms. Keshet has taken texts from Torah, Talmud, Midrash and the Siddur as well as from traditional ‘techno’ that women have been saying for centuries in different parts of the Jewish world and has created illuminations for them. Each entry is accompanied by an English translation and a thoughtfully written commentary or explanation of both the text itself and the remarkable illumination. The Hebrew is clear and has thoughtfully been written in such a way so that the name of God is not written out.

Here is one example to illustrate this reader’s opinion of this book. The text for the prayer said upon taking challah when baking bread is written large at the beginning of the illumination. It is then followed by a traditional meditation that the baker says following the prayer. All this is in the illuminated text itself. On the facing page, is a detailed but not overly lengthy description of the symbolism of the illumination which consists of a ketubah-like frame around the text in colors and designs that include wheat and flowers along with a central design at the bottom of a stylized loaf of braided challah. The reader will want to linger over each prayer to fully absorb it.

I can see this book being given to all b’not mitzvah as well as finding a happy place in all Judaica collections. This book is a winner.

Marion M. Stein, Founding Librarian of The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School, retired, New York


With this title, Kushner has added yet another book to his already prolific body of work, a collection of sermons, articles, and anecdotes. His breezy style and humor make this exceedingly readable, even though his humor is at times brash and inappropriate in the context in which it is used, as for example in the introduction, “What shall we call it? God? Schmod?” In his wide-ranging pieces he discusses the role of the rabbi, Judaism, family, mysticism, Israel and more. The book is instructive as well as entertaining and contains many quotable pearls of wisdom. He is skilled at simplifying and explaining Jewish concepts and topics. Readers will forgive him for his misuse of “lay” and “lie.” I recommend this book for synagogue and academic libraries.

Susanne M. Batzdorff, Librarian, Retired, Celia Gurevitch Library of Sonoma County, Congregation Beth Ami, Santa Rosa, CA


The title of Langton’s fascinating, multi-disciplinary book is chosen well. The topic is not the first century Apostle Paul himself, but rather, his portrayal in Jewish writings and art throughout history. It is an important contribution both to the study of Jewish-Christian relations and the study of Jewish identity in the modern age.
Langton notes the surprising paucity of Jewish mentions of Paul, pro or con, before the modern era. Using references to the Jewish apostle to the gentiles in The Jewish Chronicle as a case study, he outlines the modern myth of Paul as an apostate, self-hating Jew who, by distorting the Jewish teachings of Jesus, was personally responsible for aspects of Christian thought that are most hostile to Judaism.

Langton argues that the real roots of modern popular Jewish antipathy to Paul “lie in the apostle’s association with much more recent sociological developments.” He surveys thirty-nine 19th and 20th century Jewish thinkers who focused on Paul in some way. These include religious leaders, biblical scholars, theologians, philosophers, psychologists, Zionists, feminists, an artist, a musician, a playwright, and two novelists. As Langton puts each work into its sociological context we learn much about the shifting nature of Jewish identity in the modern world, especially as related to Christianity.

This is an essential volume for academic Jewish studies collections, an important contribution by a respected scholar. With a writing style that is easily accessible to non-specialists, it should also be considered for adult collections in synagogue libraries.

Paul A. Miller, Director of Library Services, Ostrow Library, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA


As the title so aptly states, this is a guide book for visiting Jerusalem, more specifically, it is an extremely useful book for observant Jews to visit the holiest city in Judaism while still observing mitzvot.

The first section of the book gives the traveler useful resources. Along with the standard list of emergency contacts, you’ll find information on special access for disabled visitors and how to arrange for meals on Shabbat. The author also advises travelers when a tour comes too close to a cemetery to allow for a Cohen to visit. The next section of the book delves into the history of Jerusalem both from a geopolitical and biblical standpoint. Even people well versed in Israeli history will come away with new information.

At this point the book follows the standard format for guidebooks. Tours are presented in a logical pattern according to geographic layout. Usually each site has an introduction with specific historical background. Contact information for each site is provided, along with an estimate as to how much time to set aside for each venue. Mr. Levinson gives his opinion as to how difficult the walking portion of the visit of each site is, which would be appreciated by the elderly and the disabled. I would have preferred that Mr. Levinson not share his personal evaluation of the films or media presentations, a simple correction of inaccuracies would have sufficed.

First, I skimmed through the paperback version, then I downloaded the book onto my Kindle for iPhone. Neither edition had a map, to my dismay. I preferred the iPhone version because although it was smaller, you could touch an item in the table of contents and it would jump to that page. It was useful to have a guidebook with me in Jerusalem because I did not know at what moment I might have free time to explore. I would recommend this book for both synagogue and academic libraries for patrons that might decide to visit Israel.

Jackie Ben-Efraim, Special Collections Librarian, Ostrow Library, American Jewish University, Los Angeles, CA


The subject of child sexual abuse in the Jewish Community is an issue that it is not publicly acknowledged, but as victims can testify, it does occur. There are very few books written on this subject. These include: Shine the Light: Sexual Abuse and Healing in the Jewish Community by Rachel Lev, and Tempest in the Temple: Jewish Communities and Child Sex Scandals, edited by Ami Neustein. In Breaking the Silence, the editors focus specifically on the abuses that happen in the Orthodox Community and the special challenges that it represents. Some of these challenges stem from the discomfort of reporting a fellow Jew to secular authorities, the lack of sex education in Orthodox Jewish Schools and homes, the under-reporting of sexual abuse and the plain denial that it exists. This book is aimed at health professionals, educators, parents and community leaders with the goal to inform and educate on ways to prevent, assess and inform on sexual abuse issues. The first part comprises testimonies of abused victims and how this abuse has affected their lives. The second section is intended for parents and schools to help them identify changes of behavior that could signal that abuse is taking place. It also provides advice on how to act in such circumstances such as contacting the police and filing abuse reports. The third part deals with Jewish legal issues and misconceptions about reporting an abuser. The last section is intended for health professionals and deals with the psychological analysis and treatment of victims and offenders. This book is recommended for all libraries.

Sonia Smith, Jewish Studies Liaison Librarian, McGill University, Montreal, Canada


The subject of this book is the development of a national style of fine art with all the attendant birth pangs. Needless to say, since we are talking about “Jewish art” there is no agreement as to what that means or how one arrives at forming such a style. Key figures in the process dating from the turn of the 20th century until the establishment of the state are Boris Schatz, founder of the Bezalel School and Reuven Rubin (née Riven Zelicovic in Romania). Ms. Manor writes about the connection between the development of
the style, its connections to the nascent Zionist movement and its strong connections to the land of Israel itself. The connections between the art and the ideology of Zionism did not happen in a vacuum. In fact, other national movements in Europe were important points of reference along the way. This book is highly recommended for its thorough treatment of the subject in many historical and geographic contexts. It contains relevant illustrations both in color and black and white which greatly enrich the text.

The only complaint is that there are numerous typographical errors and some of the black and white illustrations could be clearer. A revised digital printing with these minor corrections is in order. This book is suitable for all serious art collections and Zionist history collections. Ms. Manor has written a scholarly monograph on the subject replete with endnotes, bibliography and an index.

Marion M. Stein, Founding Librarian of The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School, retired, New York


Rabbi Meszler simultaneously attempts to provide assistance to three groups of people regarding illness in this 180 page paperback. While you may read the book sequentially, each of the four sections are independent and can be read separately as the author addresses a difference audience in each. The first section focuses on the person facing body or spirit failure; the second section addresses the caregiver. Family and illness is the subject of the third section; universal questions of God are covered in the fourth section. The author includes appendices on the laws of visiting the sick and practical suggestions for the actual visit. The book is easy to read, with large print, cutout boxes, some notes at the end, and is structured around Rabbi Nachman of Breslov’s saying regarding the three dimensions that people reach – inward to the self, outward to others, and upwards to God.

The book is useful to people who want to understand and better address the issues of illness. By debunking many of the commonly held myths regarding illness, the author helps us deal with the difficulties of sickness and caring for people who are sick. This book is recommended for people searching for answers regarding how to handle illness and who have already read the many other more comprehensive books addressing this topic.

Nathan Aaron Rosen, New York, NY


In eight chapters, Miller covers the political, religious, and social events affecting Moravian Jewry in the mid-decades of the nineteenth century. First, Miller describes the social and political limitations imposed on Moravian Jews, especially the Familiants Laws, the legislation regulating the number of Jews in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia entitled to found families, in effect since 1726. He focuses on the district rabbis for Moravian Jewry, first on Mordechai Benet ( or Banet, 1789-1829), then on Nehemias Trebitsch (1832-1842), and on the interim period when two rabbis contended for the position, Hirsch Fassel and Samson Raphael Hirsch. The later was elected in 1847 and served during the 1848 Revolution before resigning in 1849 to lead a much smaller Orthodox community in Frankfurt on the Main. The 1848 Revolution generated violence against Jews in Bohemia but was delayed in Moravia, the violence there occurring in May 1850. The following decades saw the development of new Jewish communities and the decline of older ones, especially the smaller and more rural ones. Rabbis and Revolution is not a full-fledged history of Moravian Jewry in the middle of the nineteenth century, but it provides a detailed analysis of the processes of civil emancipation and religious modernization in Moravia, a district in the Habsburg empire which was not administered (or its Jews) very differently than Bohemia or Silesia.

Recommended for all academic libraries with a Jewish studies program.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


Survivors is a serious volume on the subject of who contributed to the rescue of Jewish survivors in Nazi-occupied France, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The book is a response to the questions that were raised after the publication of Moore’s previous book Victims and Survivors: the Nazi persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940-1945 (1997). In addition to emphasizing active Jewish self-help, private humanitarian initiatives, the role of Christian churches and the Quakers, Survivors also discusses several cases of Jewish traitors, Nazi- collaborators and even rare occurrences involving Nazi rescuers.

The documentation (including notes, photos, and maps) and information is vast. Bob Moore concludes that the Jewish communities of Western Europe were as active as they could be in warning and helping Jews flee from the major centers. The role of rescue networks, combined with many individual rescue efforts, differed from country to country. The scope of their activities depended on the local cultures and on the direct control of the Germans.

The book concludes with extensive notes for each chapter, glossary, list of works cited, and an index. It is a good reference material for all Holocaust collections and academic libraries.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


*Silver from the Land Of Israel* is a companion volume to the author’s *Gold from the Land Of Israel.* In *Gold from the Land of Israel,* Morrison, an Orthodox Israeli rabbi and former student at the yeshiva founded by Rav Kook, offered his readers essays on the weekly parashah based on Rav Kook’s writings. In *Silver from the Land Of Israel* Rabbi Morrison offers us the same format, but focusing on the holidays. Rabbi Morrison has produced a volume that presents a picture of Rav Kook in depth, one that should be welcomed by all lovers of Jewish tradition.

Rav Kook was the first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel. He spoke from a background that was both Orthodox and kabbalistic/Hasidic. As I read Rabbi Morrison’s work I was especially impressed with the nuances of Rav Kook’s thought. Breadth not only describes Rav Kook’s knowledge, but also his openness and love for all Jews. I was for example especially impressed by Rabbi Morrison’s discussion of Rav Kook’s views on Orthodox and non-Orthodox. In the essay on “Unity and Repentance” he brings out Rav Kook’s love for all Jews and his emphasis on the idea that rather than point the finger at others we should all follow the classic definition of the righteous person as someone who judges himself strictly while judging others leniently.

I wish to commend Urim for having produced not only a quality text but a quality book as well. The page layout is well done and the book itself lies flat when open, facilitating easy reading. I highly recommend this book for inclusion in all Jewish libraries and all libraries with general collections in Jewish studies and comparative religious studies.

Daniel J. Retthberg, Librarian, Klaui Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH


This well written volume of five essays is based on lectures from a symposium “Jewish Life in Nazi Germany,” hosted at the University of Vermont. Each essay furnishes very useful, unique information about everyday Jewish life in Nazi Germany and the way in which such activities changed as conditions worsened. This approach is not often found in Holocaust scholarship and provides the reader with an understanding of how Jews in Germany coped with their plight, up until the beginning of the implementation of the death and labor camps. One essay focuses on the changes in the dynamics of the Jewish family so that the mother usually became the sole means of financial support, often as a domestic. Another chapter describes the methods Jews tried to remedy their lives through legal means, based on their prior service in the German Army, their possible _mischling_ (gentile) lineage or high ranking in society. Another interesting essay describes how the Jewish community tried to provide for the less fortunate. There is also an examination of Jewish life in ghettos, not always walled off areas, but more often segregated from the rest of the German population. The cultural activities of the Jewish community and the way artists, actors, and musicians participated in a means of spiritual resistance is described in another essay. There is also a very useful appendix of primary source documents. This book is highly recommended for Holocaust collections.

Martin Goldberg, Head Librarian, Penn State University, Monaca, PA

Niekerk, Carl. *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna.* Rochester, NY: Camden House (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture), 2010. 312 pp. $75.00 (9781571134677).

Carl Niekerk presents the Jewish elements in Gustav Mahler’s (1860-1911) life and music. It is surprising that Mahler’s Jewishness evolved to become a fascinating topic in the early 21st century. Mahler summarized his status as a person that considered himself “thrice homeless -- as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world.” He was a genius that felt his status was “Always an intruder, never welcomed.”

While presenting and interpreting Mahler’s major musical works, Niekerk is looking at the literature, philosophy, and images that Mahler was interested in, and that were the roots of his musical inspiration and expression. Niekerk’s approach is an intellectual-cultural one in contrast to a musicologist’s interpretation.

The author clarifies three main aspects of Mahler’s works: (1) The ambiguity of Mahler’s music for legitimizing an authoritarian regime against his critical and personal intentions to resist this form of governing. (2) Mahler was aware of the German political anti-Semitism of his times. In spite of his admiration of Wagner’s music, he challenged Wagner’s anti-Semitic and racist constraints on Jewish creativeness. Mahler developed his own modern musical voice to contradict in words and music Wagner’s explicit positions. (3) Mahler’s music emphasizes and promotes difference and diversity.

This is a thought provoking book that serves well as a literary companion to those that want to listen and better understand Mahler’s music. Extensive notes, works consulted, and an index, conclude this scholarly volume. Reading Mahler should be a part of all serious academic and public classical music collections.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL


This is quite a useful resource, aimed specifically for _olim hadashim_ (new immigrants), but useful for any student of Modern Hebrew. The book is a listing of useful words and phrases arranged by subject. The vocabulary is practical
for day-to-day personal and professional life in Israel. Each term is given in both British and American English along with its Hebrew translation. This resource is also useful for Hebrew speakers learning English. The accompanying mp3 cd is an audio version of the work read rather quickly, but clearly, and is over 12 hours long. There are Hebrew and English indexes as well as a track listing for the cd. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


It was an enormous challenge that Philipponnat and Lienhardt undertook when they set out to write a biography of the very intelligent, complex human being and the excellent writer, Irene Nemirovsky. They did a great service to those who admired her Suite Francaise, the book that brought her to the attention of readers around the world in the last decade. The manuscript, found and brought to publication by one of Nemirovsky’s daughters, became an immediate best seller in France and was translated into many languages. As a result of the book’s success, new editions of Nemirovsky’s early works (she was well known before World War II) were reissued in French and translated for the first time into English and many other languages.

This book is not just a biography which includes much about the life and works of the author, but it is also a well-written and well-documented history of wealthy Russian Jews who escaped the Soviet Revolution and ended up in France. Many, like Nemirovsky, were assimilated and considered themselves very much a part of French society. Some did not bother to become citizens for they thought they did not need that ‘official’ paper. Though she had converted to Christianity, Nemirovsky was deported to Auschwitz and died there in the summer of 1942 while her two daughters survived in hiding.

In many ways this work attempts to explain the gradual distancing of Russian Jews from their roots and thus the supposed lack of Jewish themes in Nemirovsky’s writing. When one looks closer, it becomes clear that her books are, in fact, filled with her knowledge of and feelings toward Judaism. Some of her feelings are negative, as evidenced in her first novel, David Golder. In Suite Francaise there are no references to Jewish issues.

This very thoroughly researched and well-written book is recommended for all libraries with collections of Jewish literature, including synagogue libraries that include some of Nemirovsky’s writings.

Michlean Amir, Reference Coordinator, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC


As someone with lifelong interests in the Renaissance and Reformation periods, I was delighted to learn a few years ago that David Price, Professor of Religious Studies, History, and Jewish Studies at the University of Illinois, was writing a book on the famous German humanist and Christian Hebraist, Johannes Reuchlin. Basing himself squarely on primary sources, he outlines the story of Reuchlin’s life and his developing interest in Hebrew language and Jewish, particularly kabbalistic, sources. Perhaps more importantly, he discusses Reuchlin’s Jewish teachers and their increasing influence on him. Unlike other Christian scholars of the time, his belief in the importance of the Hebrew language led not just to the furthering of his study of Christian sources, but to an appreciation of Jewish texts in their own right and to an increasing respect for the Jewish people.

Reuchlin was the pioneering Christian Hebraist as well as perhaps the most gifted secular jurist of his period (1455-1522). He shocked his colleagues and most Christian leaders of his time when the German emperor asked him to give a formal opinion on whether it was legal by secular and church law to seize and destroy Jewish books. He gave an extensive response completely destroying the idea. His opponents spent the next decade fighting his opinions in print and in court. Conservative by today’s standards, he was still someone ahead of his time.

Price is an excellent writer and the book is well organized. He writes clearly, avoiding academic jargon and limits himself to chapters of some twenty five pages each. Unfortunately Oxford bound it against the grain, making it necessary to consciously hold the book open when reading it. In Oxford’s defense they kept the price reasonable and printed the book on acid neutral paper. Highly recommended for all libraries with an interest in the history of Jewish-Christian relations.

Daniel J. Rettberg, Librarian, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH


As an Israeli who lives in the United States, I enjoyed reading this book. The authors use their expertise in Social Science to do an in-depth study of the phenomenon of Israelis who emigrated to America. They estimate the American Israeli population at 175,000. The authors collected and discussed numerous data in the book (including 49 very attractive tables and figures) that trace the social and economic mobility of American Israelis. They looked at motives for emigration and analyzed the characteristics of the population, such as age and gender, geographic distribution, economic acculturation, employment and income.

I found the fourth chapter, “Jewish Identification and Attachment to Homeland,” very interesting. The
authors investigated the affiliation and integration of the Israelis into local Jewish institutions such as Jewish Community Centers and Orthodox, Conservative and Reform synagogues and the effect on Jewish identity. The authors found that over time, the American Israelis distance themselves from Israel, regardless of their community and synagogue involvement. In the fifth chapter, “Discussion: the Multifaceted Israeli Diaspora,” the authors discuss the challenge of maintaining Israeli identity, especially among second generation American Israelis. This book is central to Israeli Studies as it has comprehensive and current data on Israelis in America.

Yoram Bitton, Hebrew Manuscript Cataloger, Columbia University, New York


Bill Rebiger, a fellow of the Institute for Jewish Studies at the Free University of Berlin, provides us with a reworked and updated version of his doctoral dissertation of 2004 in this volume. It is a thorough study of the text of the Shimmush Tehillim, a classical Jewish liturgical magical handbook. In his prefatory chapters Rebiger outlines the development of the text which he reconstructs based on a wide variety of manuscripts and printed versions. The central portion of his work is a translation into German of the first printed edition (Sabbellion, 1551), representing the Ashkenazi tradition. Alongside this translation he presents a translation of the Sephardic recension, based on a 15th-16th century manuscript in the Wellcome Institute in London. He also offers critical editions of the respective Hebrew texts, together with critical texts of a 14th century Provencal manuscript, and a 14th century Ashkenazi manuscript. He includes a full panoply of tools, among them his own numeration of all his sources, and a full listing and description of each known manuscript together with a listing of all printings according to the Jerusalem National Library. To this he adds his own commentary on the text and a full bibliography and index.

I use the term “magical” advisedly. The more one progresses through this book, the more one is forced to ask oneself again and again, “What is liturgy?” and “What is magic.” Rebiger addresses this problem himself in his preface. In tandem with this question I find this manual of great help in finding my way into the daily life of pre-modern Jewry. The Jews of the Shimmush Tehillim live in a very deterministic and sometimes harsh world.

I heartily recommend this work to every academic library with collections devoted to Jewish history, religious literature, and magic, as well as to all individuals with an interest in medieval Jewry able to read German.

Daniel J. Rettberg, Librarian, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH


Jewish integration into the larger society is often couched in terms of modern history, the 20th century, etc. However, Gideon Reuveni and Nils Roemer have pointed out that the Jewish people have always “consumed” the greater culture, whether that culture be Hellenistic, Roman, Medieval, or modern. Reuveni, Lecturer in modern European and Jewish History at the University of Melbourne, and Roemer, Full Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas, have collected writings not only from Jewish Studies scholars, but from art historians, and independent scholars as well to bring evidence of our long standing consumer culture to light. Through these insightful essays, readers see how Jewish people through history consumed, marketed, patronized, and enjoyed leisure time in the midst of a larger community.

Although the entire book is quite interesting, readers casually picking this book up would do better to pick and choose chapters that interest them the most. The book is simply too expensive for most synagogue libraries to afford and as it is academic in nature, many synagogue libraries wouldn’t have a patron base for it. However, for academic libraries collecting in Jewish studies or in Economics, this would make an interesting addition.

Rachel Minkin, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Lansing Community College; Congregation Kehillat Israel, Lansing, MI

Roemer, Nils. German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2010. 316 pp. $85.00 hc (9781584659211); $35.00 pbk. (9781584659228).

The Jewish presence in Germany today is, to a large degree, one of memory. Few Jews actually live there, but many Jews remember it as the home of their parents or more distant ancestors. Jewish memory of Germany carries a very negative set of connotations as well. It is almost as if they are two different places – Germany of the Nazis, and Ashkenaz of the Jews. But, of course, these memories are attached to one and the same place. In German City, Jewish Memory, Nils Roemer traces the different ways in which Jews have remembered the city of Worms for over one thousand years. Much of the book is a history of the Jews in Worms – creating a memory for the contemporary reader of the Jews who lived in the city. But his focus is on how those Jews remembered themselves, or their ancestors, in that same place. Sometimes, it focused on unique Jewish identity, and sometimes the goal was to portray Jews as authentic Germans.

Like any historical study, German City uses textual sources to reconstruct the past. But Roemer uses some kinds of text that historians do not usually take seriously. He consistently draws our attention to the Jewish cemetery of Worms, the tombstones that are found in it today and that were present there in the past. Roemer makes innovative
use of travelogues and travel guides, showing how the way the city was described and the type of landmarks that were emphasized at different times indicate different values at play in society. The book contains many images from 19th and 20th century postcards, from Roemer’s personal collection, which make the remembered city of Worms a little more tangible.

The book is organized in chronological order, tracing Jewish memory in Worms from the Middle Ages up to the present day. The early chapters are useful for the deep research that Roemer has invested, but the narrative is disjointed, often yielding its place suddenly and temporarily to extended discussions of memory, local stories and descriptions of the cemetery. Many stories or details are referred to repeatedly without ever being laid out explicitly. As the chapters move through time, the focus becomes sharper and the descriptions fuller. The last chapters, describing Jewish attitudes towards the city of Worms in the post-Holocaust period, are particularly moving and fascinating. Besides academic collections that focus on Jewish history (medieval and modern), synagogues with interest in books on the Holocaust and about Jewish life in post-War Germany will be enriched by this book.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem.


In the last forty years Jews and Christians have organized dialogues in an effort to improve relations. James Rudin, former Interreligious Affairs Director for the American Jewish Committee, has written a source book citing issues of concern to Jews during their tragic 2000-year encounter with Christianity. Topics include the life and teachings of Jesus, the early Church, anti-Semitism, missionaries, the Holocaust, Israel, etc. The book has brief background information about why these topics are controversial.

Conversely, Rudin discusses recent actions taken by the Catholic Church and some Protestants to make amends. Most notable was Nostra Aetate, the declaration by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 repudiating the deicide charge against Jews. Other advancements were the proclamations of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI stating that God’s covenant with the Jews is irrevocable and that anti-Semitism is a sin. Catholics were urged to improve relations with Jews, our “elder brothers.” Nevertheless, Jewish suffering over the centuries clearly outweighs Christian reconciliation.

The last chapter offers suggestions for organizing interfaith programs and joint educational and social action projects. Most importantly, dialogues should lead to mutual respect and not have hidden agendas (such as conversion).

The book is well organized, easy to read, and has an extensive bibliography. Surprisingly, there is no introduction. Rudin never explains why he wrote the book and what he hopes the book will accomplish. I hope this omission is remedied in later editions of the book. Recommended for center and synagogue libraries.

Lee Haas, Librarian, Temple Emanu El, Cleveland, OH


The 150th anniversary of the Civil War is a fine time to remind ourselves of the many ways Jews participated in the conflict. In this volume Professor Jonathan Sarna and his associate Adam Mendelsohn have collected nineteen essays published over the past 65 years that provide an overview of the roles Jews played.

The book opens with an introduction by Adam Mendelsohn reminding readers about Jewish writing before Bertram W. Korn’s involvement, and an overview by Eli Evans. Two introductory essays on “Jews and Slavery” follow. Part Two discusses abolitionism, providing both the Jewish perspective and the abolitionists’ view of Jews. Part Three examines rabbis’ attitudes and actions in the pre-war period: Sefton Temkin reviews Isaac Mayer Wise’s ambiguous role in the conflict, and Isaac M. Fein writes about Baltimore rabbis, including David Einhorn and Benjamin Szold. Part Four contains articles on Jews as soldiers and biographies of Alfred Mordecai and Louis Gratz. The two essays in Part Five explore women’s roles from two very different perspectives. Part Six, “Jews as a Class,” includes Rabbi Bertram Korn’s seminal essay (from 1948) on Jewish chaplains, and two articles on Grant’s nefarious General Order #11, which removed Jewish residents from several small towns. Finally, Part Seven discusses Jews in Post-war America.

Jews and the Civil War will open the Civil War to many American Jews who are unaware that their ancestors played a role in the great struggle. The articles are taken from the past half-century of American Jewish History, the American Jewish Archives, and other journals. The volume’s price may put it beyond the reach of smaller libraries. It should be in academic institutions, however, and can be considered by larger synagogues. Includes index and bibliography.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


The following discourse, given by the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shmuel Schneersohn, on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5640 (1879), focuses on the worship of the Golden Calf in the wilderness and the question as to why only the men, and not the women, strayed. Integrating Chabad Chassidus with Talmudic and Midrashic sources, the Rebbe explains how the sin resulted not from desire for idolatry but rather the men’s intellectual assumption, after awaiting Moses’ return from Mount Sinai, that the monotheistic God was far too lofty from involvement in earthly affairs, while the women, whose soul derived from Malchut (the sphere bordering the material world), felt a natural aversion to idolatry and
refused to participate.

Articulate, extensively annotated with footnotes and bibliography, and presented in both English and the original Hebrew, this booklet would nicely grace a Shabbat table during the weekly Torah portion Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35) or on Rosh Chodesh (which, thanks to their actions, has been traditionally given over to women as a “day off” from housework). Feminine Faith makes Chabad mysticism accessible both to the practicing Chassid who is looking for further stimulation and to the seeker who might desire an introduction to Chassidic thought. Feminist readers would appreciate the Rebbe’s praise of the Jewish woman and acknowledgement of her spiritual superiority. For all adult Jewish libraries.


Rabbinic literature – the Talmud, the Midrashim and other related works – were clearly written with pedagogic and moralistic intentions in mind. They are texts that aim to change their readers, and generations of traditional readers approached these texts with the expectation of being changed. The critical study of this literature, as part of the emergence of academic Jewish studies, consciously distanced itself from these intentions. This distance was partly strategic – to preserve academic “objectivity” – and partly emotional, as the pursuit of academic Jewish studies played a part in the construction of a non-traditional Jewish identity. Several generations of scholarship have considered philological, cultural, historical and literary dimensions of rabbinic literature, but only rarely have they taken it at face value.

Jonathan Schofer’s book tries to do just that, but in a sophisticated way. Schofer’s concern is with the ethical messages that rabbinic texts are trying to give. Specifically, he looks at texts that aim to shock people into self-awareness by reminding them graphically of their own humanity. Schofer discusses texts about old age and death, about bodily functions like defecation, and about natural disasters like drought that still confound the efforts of humans. He aims to open these texts up in a language that can be accessible to contemporary ethicists of all kinds. At the same time, however, he endeavors to subject these texts to textual analysis according to the norms of contemporary Talmudic philology. He mentions textual variants in manuscripts, discusses how a single story or series of stories can be framed differently in parallel rabbinic texts, and provides references to discussions of his sources in academic scholarship of the past generation. This aspect of the book toes the line of Jewish studies discourse, but it is not careful or consistent enough to be a real contribution to that field. It also serves as a distraction from the main purpose of the book, which is to consider the ethical value of these stories. Schofer’s discussion of ethics, however, is sensitive and moving, and his book is full of thought-provoking insights. It is a worthwhile addition to any collection on Jewish ethics, or Jewish thought about life and mortality.

Pinchas Roth, graduate student in the Talmud Department at Hebrew University, Jerusalem


The emphasis in Schreier’s study is how the Jews of Algeria, or more specifically, the Jews of the Algerian western coastal city of Oran, responded to the “civilizing mission” of French authorities, which was supported by the French Jewish leadership. Based on extensive use of French military and administrative archival sources as well as those of the central consistory of the Jews of France, Schreier shows what French policies towards Algerian Jews were, how these were influenced by local developments and supported and shaped by French Jewish leaders. Similarly, the study examines in detail how Oran’s Jews responded to French efforts to “civilize” them, especially when it came to imposing on them non-indigenous leaders and religious practices in ritual and personal law. Thus, while Algerian Jews adopted French as their language of civilization, they used their linguistic and administrative knowledge in order to keep their local religious and educational practices and leadership. The book includes an index and detailed endnotes, but would have benefited from a bibliography. This is an important study showing how the Jews of Oran managed to shape their communal and personal lives within the framework of French colonial and civilizing policies towards them and French Jewish leadership attempts to incorporate them into their own milieu.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ


Rabbi Rami Shapiro is a gifted translator and teacher and provides a text that is clear and easy to understand. In his extensive preface he clearly outlines his own presuppositions and his approach to the text of Ecclesiastes. Heavily influenced by Buddhism, he understands the references to “God” in the text as referring to nature or the way things are “under the sun.” He tempers his views by noting his understanding that the author is writing for people of all faiths and backgrounds. The book also includes a foreword by Rev. Barbara Cawthorne Craifton.

Shapiro’s notes compare the text of Ecclesiastes with Pirke Avot, as well as with the classic wisdom literature of other
religions, and of classical philosophy. According to Rabbi Shapiro, Ecclesiastes is the one book of the Hebrew Bible that speaks to those who may be alienated from traditional religion. The text never uses the Tetragrammaton, and does not discuss devotional practices or life after death. It hews to a simple but thought provoking message that says that the key to a happy and well lived life is to eat and drink simply and moderately, to find good and satisfying work and to cultivate a few close relationships. Rabbi Shapiro emphasizes this point over and over again in his comments.

Not all will agree with all of his interpretations and conclusions. Nonetheless Rabbi Shapiro’s book is a serious, well thought out, and well written contribution to a perplexing part of the Hebrew Bible. His work deserves to be included in all collections devoted to Biblical Studies and Jewish thought, and is appropriate for all adult students of the Bible whether in academia or in the general community.

Daniel J. Rettberg, Librarian, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH


In recent years, there has been a renaissance in the study of Tanakh in the Modern Orthodox world, at first in Israel then spreading to the United States. This approach combines a Nechama Leibowitz-style close reading with insights from the world of academia, encompassing archeology and lower biblical criticism. If you are a fan of this approach, this is the Haggadah for you. If you are a newcomer, this Haggadah will make you a fan. Rabbi David Silber is the founder and dean of the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. His student and collaborator, Rachel Furst, is pursuing a doctorate in medieval Jewish history at Hebrew University.

While this Haggadah does contain a line by line commentary, the real meat of the book is the collection of essays that examine the biblical context of Maggid at length. (That is to say, it’s not the best Haggadah for bite-sized nuggets of information to impress your seder guests. Study it closely beforehand.) Full of fresh insights, this Haggadah is appropriate for all Jewish collections. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


Matthew Silver’s detailed and engaging book follows the process by which Leon Uris’ fictional narrative

Jews Without Power

Written by Dr. Ariel Hurwitz, JEWS WITHOUT POWER, provides a fresh and different perspective on the role of American Jewry during the Holocaust. The ill-organized, fearful Jewish community of the late 1930s and 1940s, in no way resembles the wealthy and confident American Jewish community of today. To understand why the American Jewish community’s actions were ineffective, you must read JEWS WITHOUT POWER.

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Forbidden Strawberries

Written by Cipora Hurwitz (Fela Rozensztajn), who was less than six years old when WWII erupted. All at once the life of her tranquil family became a hell. Cipora, as yet a young child and an orphan, was miraculously saved after surviving the Budzyn camps and the Majdanek extermination camp. The author relates the story of her life during the Holocaust to a delegation of Hashomer Hatzair youth and Israeli High School students on a mission to the death camps in Poland. Hurwitz pays tribute to the memory of her family and friends who were exterminated during the Holocaust by bearing witness to what transpired before and during the camps. This is a powerful memoir as seen through the eyes of a mature-beyond-her-years 10-year-old.

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of a real story, and Otto Preminger’s film of the same, have elevated *Exodus* to the level of a cultural and national emblem for American and Israeli Jews during the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

Silver sets out to analyze how Israel’s meaning and identity in world culture was framed by the Uris’ novel and the subsequent movie: “this comparison of the film, the novel, and the real *Exodus* ship story provides insight about how popular culture struggled to come to terms with the complexity of dilemmas faced by Hitler’s victims… behavior undertaken by Jews in the name of survival…” Silver is very much aware of stereotyping and simplification of complex issues regarding the birth of Israel and discusses the importance of context in understanding the political stance taken by Uris in his narrative. While recognizing the poetic and emotional licenses taken by the author and the director, he cautions against debating fiction as if it were an indisputable document written by historians. Recommended for academic as well as school and synagogue libraries, and collections specializing in cultural identity and the history of film in the US.

Dr. Yaffa Weisman, The Frances-Henry Library, The Jack Skirball Campus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles


The dialogue as a literary form has been reborn. Mordecai Drache refers to Plato’s Symposium as a forerunner, but Professor Stavans modestly mentions titles from the medieval era and the current popularity of interviews in today’s media.

This short book originated with a series of lectures at the National Yiddish Book Center. Professor Stavans is a knowledgeable scholar and prolific author who has discussed translation, the resurrection of Hebrew and rabbinical responsa in his publications. As an academic he moves against the flow of increasing specialization and “enjoy(s) thinking deeply and broadly about a wide array of topics.” He considers himself a public intellectual (http://seek.forward.com/articles/117118/) and discusses these topics as “a layman making connections.”

The book’s introduction focuses on the Shema prayer and lays out the premises and limitations of the book. The author then proceeds to shape chapters focused on Adam, on Abraham’s mission, and on Jacob and his children. Further chapters are devoted to “The National Self,” discussing wars, ancient and modern, the Song of Songs and the story of Job. Professor Stavans focuses on storytelling, language, and especially the relationship between the people and God and the role of real estate. Multiple references, citations, and even works of art are integrated into the discussion but there are no notes or bibliography. There are some careless errors in the copy-editing. Some of the transliterations and spellings (seudo-epygrapha) are strange. Potiphar (spelled Potifar on one page) is referred to as a eunuch, which is one reading of the Hebrew word (*saris*) in the text. It could also just indicate that he was a court official.

Once the reader becomes accustomed to the dialogue format, which professor Stavans has used in several other books, the author’s felicitous use of language, personal comments and deep interest and knowledge of the stories draw the reader into the book. Recommended for Torah discussion groups and students.

**Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)**

**Steinberg, Emily.** *Graphic Therapy: Notes from the Gap Years.* Philadelphia, PA: Emily Steinberg, 2010. 246 pp. $25. (5800039842818).

As the title suggests, *Graphic Therapy* is an illustrated biography in the vein of *Maus, Two Cents Plain,* and *Girl Stories.* Unlike those books, this one combines four genres in one, seamlessly moving back and forth between a narrative about the difficulty of making and selling art in Philadelphia, a travelogue, horror stories of dating men (including the fiancé she broke off an engagement with) and descriptions of her therapy sessions with different therapists (and in different types of therapy: individual, group, and couple). Combining her ear for dialogue with her artist’s eye for visual detail (realistic or symbolic, depending on the context) and sardonic wit, Steinberg conveys to the reader the absurdities of her personal experiences and her struggle to cope with the banalities of life in our modern dysfunctional society.

Although Steinberg is not an observant Jew, her Jewish background becomes relevant in various places throughout the book, e.g. being sent to Camp Ramah, discomfort when dating a gentile, reading the diaries of children who lived during the Holocaust, and dealing with the “December dilemma.” I would recommend this book for the adult biography section of academic, public, and synagogue libraries.

**Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)**


Russian born David Tarras (Tarasyuk) was a third generation *klezmer* player. As a boy he was an active member of his family’s band which traveled all around the Ternovka region playing at both Jewish and non-Jewish events. He and his wife moved to the United States in 1921. After his arrival, he started playing part time at weddings. This quickly parlayed into positions in movie theater orchestras, Jewish Jazz groups, and recording contracts. Unlike many other *klezmer* players of his time, Tarras was remarkable for his skills at reading and transcribing music.
His transcriptions preserved many songs from 19th century Eastern Europe

The book has a bit of a home-made genealogy look and feel with lots of quotations from Tarass’s family and friends as well as many family pictures. But don’t let the look fool you. While this volume is clearly a labor of love by the author, it is full of scholarly historical and cultural information about the lives of klezmorim and their music both in the “old country” and in the United States. Approximately one half of this book is made up of scores. 28 melodies encompassing several styles of music are printed twice; first for C instruments and then for B-flat instruments. Recommended for music collections.

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


The adage says not to judge a book by its cover, but what about the by the title? One would expect from the subtitle that each story in this collection would incorporate a Jewish theme or character as well as an element of science fiction or fantasy. Sadly, this is not the case.

One story which features a strong Jewish presence but no fantasy or sci-fi element is “Fidelity: A Primer” by Michael Blumlein in which a middle-age man struggles with the idea of circumcision and contemplates having an affair. Other stories have a clear science fiction setting but no Jewish content. Matthew Kressel tells the story of Betsy, the lone human on a space ship of aliens at the end of the world but, unless this “alienation” is seen as the Jewish theme, there is no Judaic content. Similarly, “The Problem of Susan” by Neil Gaiman is an intriguing story with a nod to Narnia, but with no Jewish content.

Other stories retread well-known themes (Holocaust, anti-Semitism) and settings but add a magical element. In “Geddarian” by Sonay Taaffe, a young violinist must bring building to life in the ghetto to help him escape the Nazis. Matthew Sullivan’s “Niels Bohr and the Sleeping Dane” it is the statue of a Danish king in the role of a golem who helps a group of Jews flee the Holocaust. A Jewish inventor in the American South tries to build a plane that will fly him away from the anti-Semitic mob to a mythical floating refuge in “The Wings of Meister Wilhelm” by Theora Goss.

There are a few gems in the collection. Peter Beagle offers a story of an elderly, successful Jewish painter who is visited in his studio by an angel who identifies herself as his muse. The feisty artist has no need of a muse and as it turns out, the angel isn’t quite what she appears to be. A thought-provoking alternative reality is proposed in Ben Burgis’ “Dark Coffee, Bright Light and the Paradoxes of Omnipotence.”

While many of the stories in the collection are engaging tales written by well-known writers, as a collection of Jewish science fiction and fantasy, it is disappointing and an optional purchase.

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


Twelve-step programs originated with Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1930s. Between the influence of a Christian fellowship (the Oxford Group) and the resistance of many Jewish communities to address addictive behavior, these programs have been written off as “goyish.” Rabbi Taub uses his knowledge of both Judaism and the twelve-step process to describe how the steps, particularly developing a personal relationship with God and making amends, are distinctly Jewish. The focus is not on addiction, but using a spiritual approach to improve one’s life. Rabbi Taub draws heavily on Chabad (Lubavitch) Chassidus to make his points, but one of his strongest analogies of how the program works (sponsorship, fellowship, tolerance) is drawn from the Mishnah. Through chapters about power and will, he describes how the addict realizes his own powerlessness and eventually sees that God is the Ultimate Power. A chapter about codependency contains insight into dysfunctional relationships. The appendices include a list of twelve-step groups and a glossary of rabbinic sources.

The combination of Jewish sources and the language of the twelve-step program evidence Rabbi Taub’s expertise. While the topic is serious and there are some deep concepts, the tone is positive and sometimes humorous. Because these programs are anonymous, and because most will benefit from “these principles,” Rabbi Taub’s description is the recommendation for this essential book: Is it a book about addiction for Jews or a book about Judaism for addicts? “What this book is really about is the essence of our humanity, the frailty and nobility of the embodied soul and how we imperfect beings can learn to live better by letting ourselves love and be loved by a Perfect God.”

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ; Secretary, School Synagogue and Centers Division. AJL; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, AJL


Ms. Tomaszewski along with Tecia Werbowski began the project of writing this book after meeting one another in connection with 50th anniversary commemorations in Canada, where they both live. They are from Poland and are both academics and writers. Their goal was to bring to the public’s attention the war’s impact on the civilian populations in Poland, which they claim suffered the most,
being in “the eye of the storm.” Not only did the Poles suffer during the German occupation but subsequently under the Soviets as well.

This book deals with the situation of the Jews in particular and their relations with many sectors of the Polish population during the war years. The reader learns about the complexities of relations among the diverse Jewish groups and their Polish neighbors. The main focus of this text is the Zegota organization which was made up of non-Jews and Jews working together in the Underground. The stories the authors tell are very compelling and, according to them, this is the first presentation of many of them. The stories build in tension as the book progresses and as the situation becomes more and more desperate. The authors end with a set of brief biographies of a number of the ‘rescued and rescuers’ which is a fitting way to end.

Even though the book is documented with footnotes, a bibliography and an index, this is the weakest part of the book. It is possible that further research needs to be done to fill in some of these gaps. Some of the materials used only came to light in the last 10 years.

This reviewer recommends the book for all academic and high school collections as well as synagogue libraries with extensive Holocaust collections.

Marion M. Stein, Founding Librarian of The Abraham Joshua Heschel High School, retired, New York


Martin Van Crevald (http://www.martinvancrevald.com/biography/), Israeli military historian and author of numerous publications in the discipline, sets out to outline the course of events – from the beginning of modern Zionism at the end of the 19th century to the most recent negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that have shaped modern Israel and his own views on the future of the region.

In the prologue to his book he states his goals and position about Israel: “I want to explain its military, political, economic, social and cultural development…I want to show it for what it really is:…a country that, while coping with every imaginable obstacle, in many ways is perhaps the greatest success story in the entire twentieth century.”

Five detailed and informative chapters, followed by extensive notes pointing to well documented sources, a helpful and clear historical outline covering 1897-2009, and a glossary of Hebrew terms, make the book easy to read and the events easy to follow and understand in their context. The Epilogue offers a sober look at the options that the modern State of Israel is facing in light of global changes.

Recommended for readers interested in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the history of Israel, and for readers who would like some respite from the New Historians and their judgments.

Dr. Yaffa Weisman, The Frances-Henry Library, The Jack Skirball Campus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles


Already well known for a variety of engaging works, (most famously, Yiddish with Dick and Jane), Ellis Weiner and Barbara Davilman have created yet another fabulously funny text…and this one serves a purpose! However Jewish you, the reader, might be, you’re not Jewish enough. You can be, in the authors’ words, “…all the Jew you can be.”

Now, the authors are NOT suggesting you, the reader, move from your cozy Reconstructionist synagogue to a Lubavitcha shul. No, they are suggesting you get mezuzot upon your doorposts (giving directions on how to do so, naturally) and get rid of the Hanukkah bush you’ve put up every year. Saying “thank you” when complimented? Not anymore. Accepting the first table you’re shown to at the restaurant? Not even close. And while they’re at it, Weiner and Davilman will educate you on Jewish holidays, learning Yiddish, and Jewish calendars.

Educational (really!), fun, and a quick read, The Big Jewish Book for Jews is more at home on a personal book shelf than a synagogue book shelf. However, for a more fun loving sort of congregation, this book might fit right in. As always, librarians should take into account their patrons before buying.

Rachel Minkin, Reference and Instruction Librarian, Lansing Community College; Congregation Kehillat Israel, Lansing, MI


While converts are welcome in Judaism, and the halakhic (Jewish Law) process of conversion is defined, in contemporary times there are several ways to convert. The Choice presents the personal experiences of forty-five converts to Judaism (among them the author Carol Weiss Rubel). The life stories are as diverse as the people who share them. This book exposes the reader to the different existing paths to accomplish conversion including those that are new and unique to our times.

The authors divide the converts into three groups: those who made their choice in early adulthood, those who made it in adulthood through midlife, and those who not only converted but went on to work as spiritual leaders of Judaism. Rabbis Harold M. Schulweis and Lawrence Sebert, both ordained Conservative rabbis, wrote forewords. Rabbi Schulweis is a leading theologian of the Reconstructionist movement and was an innovator for introducing women in the minyan as well as other life style and gender perspectives. Rabbi Robert Layman and Rabbi Joseph F. Mendelsohn, also ordained rabbis affiliated with the Conservative movement, conclude the volume with their practical comments as Witness-Guides to the converts.
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

The authors add a helpful glossary but no index or bibliographic references. *The Choice* is a valuable book for those who are seeking spiritual support and answers in Judaism from a liberal perspective. The book will add content to the adult sections of theological collections, synagogue and public libraries. The book however fails to alert the reader that it is written primarily from the perspective of liberal and not halakhic based Judaism. The book would have benefited from including the experience of a convert that first underwent Reform or Conservative conversion, and then felt compelled to convert according to halakhah. For this reason the book with all of its excellent content should have been titled “The Choice - Converts to Judaism (according to the Reform and Conservative Traditions) Share Their Stories”.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL


In 2003, Rabbi Mordechai Weiss left his job as Rabbi of the Teaneck (New Jersey) Chabad House and made aliyah. He, with his wife and ten children, chose Mitzpe Yericho for the warmth and diversity of the community, as well as the panoramic views of the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea. He kept in touch with friends and family by sending frequent emails, which chronicled the family’s growth and challenges. Through the emails, readers learned about community events, daily life in Israel, and the boys’ baseball leagues. Rabbi Weiss is now a certified tour guide. Black and white photographs and a glossary of terms are included after the text.

Each chapter begins with a brief musing on the topic (“Baseball,” “Red Tape”) and then some of the emails that pertain to the topic. The main detractor of the book is that the entries, from June 2003 to July 2008, are not in chronological order, so keeping track of a family of thirteen can get confusing. Things that were dramatic, like the disengagement from Gaza, are no longer so. It can also be repetitive as something explained earlier is then described. For this reason the book with all of its excellent content should have been titled “The Choice - Converts to Judaism (according to the Reform and Conservative Traditions) Share Their Stories”.

Kathe Pinchuck, Clifton, NJ; Secretary, School Synagogue and Centers Division. AJL; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, AJL


Ora Wiskind-Elper’s book, *Wisdom of the Heart*, is not a self-help book, as the title might suggest. Wiskind-Elper guides the reader through selected passages she has translated from Rabbi Yaakov’s derashot (teachings on the weekly Torah portion and on the festivals) and related texts from the Izbica-Radzyn tradition. Using a teacherly tone, she explains the multiple layers of Jewish texts contained in these teachings. Wiskind-Elper is interested in Rabbi Yaakov’s views of the self, the body, and of the feminine as they relate to spiritual life. Her analysis is literary and philosophical, and while not opaque, it is demanding. The chapter on the feminine, describing the stages of a spiritual life in gendered terms, will be of particular interest to readers of Jewish feminist theology.

Izbica-Radzyn is a lesser-known Hasidic dynasty, and the works of Rabbi Ya’akov (Jacob Leiner, 1818-1878) have not been translated or written about in English, as his father’s (Rabbi Mordecai Joseph) and son’s (Rabbi Gershon Hanokh) works have been. (For a scholarly, historical analysis of their works, see Shaul Magid’s *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in Izbica/Radzin Hasidism.*) Wiskind-Elper, then, is making Rabbi Ya’akov’s thought accessible in English for the first time.

Recommended for academic libraries with collections in Hasidism and/or Gender Studies, and for synagogue libraries with patrons who are willing to engage in textual analysis on specific topics in Jewish spirituality.

Deborah J. Margolis, Reference/Instruction Librarian and Liaison for Jewish Studies, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI


This memoir portrays the mesiras nefesh (devotion to the point of risking one’s life), of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilber, son of the Rabbi of Kazan who, with devotion to God, practiced Judaism clandestinely after the Russian Revolution, keeping mitzvos in secret. Jewish properties were confiscated, and yeshivot and chedorim shut down. Some of the observant were falsely accused of wrongdoing and were deported to Siberia. There were bans on: kashrut, keeping shabbos, being a mohel to perform brit milah, printing religious texts, baking matzah, praying, wearing such Jewish dress as a talis koton, or shechita. This is a unique spellbinding story, filled with remarkable personalities, self-sacrifice, courage and heroism against a vicious totalitarianism. The reader may be transformed to (1) feel gratitude to God, (2) never give up on a task that seems too hard, (3)be inspired by Tzadikim who refused to let the spark of Yiddishkeit go out. Highly recommended. *Kol dichfin yeisei v’yechal* -- let all who hunger [for truth] come and read this story of liberation from bureaucratic enslavement.

Dr. David B Levy, Touro College, New York

Dr. David B Levy, Touro College, New York
**FICTION & POETRY**


This amazing book is emphatically not for the patron seeking light, escapist fare. It’s a shocking, violent, bitter vision of Israel as dystopia, with its inhabitants driven to various forms of madness by the pervasive terror, paranoia, claustrophobia, and nationalist myths they live with. The surrealistic format gives the author freedom to play out all these traumas through the main character, Dolly, who lives in a nightmare version of Tel Aviv called Dolly City. Dolly is a quack doctor, consumed by anger, obsessed with visions of disease, and fixated on protecting her son from harm even if she kills him in the process. Dolly is surrounded by characters playing symbolic roles in her dadaist universe. Hovering over everything is the national airline, Pan-T, a force that controls Dolly’s life at every turn, and that seems to control the country as well.

This book was first published in Israel in 1992. The English translation by Dalya Bilu (first published in 1997 in London) does a good job of capturing the characteristic spare quality of Hebrew and its effectiveness as a medium of sharp and painful satire. Though the writing style is lean, the symbolism is rich and layered, almost overwhelming at times. This very dark conception of Israel, along with the casual violence on almost every page, will probably offend many readers. It can be unbearable to see mythology and national identity shredded brutally, even if the intent is to try and normalize Israeli existence through savage humor and fresh metaphor. Recommended for academic collections, and for libraries attempting to build comprehensive collections of Hebrew literature in translation. The current American edition includes afterword by Karen Grumberg, Hebrew Literature Prof. at the University of Texas at Austin.

Beth Dwoskin, Catalog Librarian, Proquest; Chair, Library Committee, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI


Iraq is in the news and the American consciousness. At the same time American Jews have become more interested in the stories and history of Jews from Arab countries and the Middle East, not just from their own preponderantly European origins. Both these trends have encouraged authors whose families came from Egypt (Andre Aciman, Lucette Lagnado, ), Iran (Gina Nahai, Marjane Satrapi) and Iraq (Marina Benjamin, Mona Yahia,) to tell their stories in memoir and fiction.

Now Jessica Jiji captures the excitement, intrigues and dangers for Jews in 1940s Iraq in her second novel, *Sweet Dates in Basra*. Omar and Shafiq are twelve-year-old buddies, neighbors and “brothers” in Basra. Shafiq’s family is Jewish and Omar’s is Muslim but, even as the story opens, Omar’s mother has already saved Omar’s life. The two families are more than friendly, they depend on each other and Iraq, in 1941, is peaceful and tolerant of minorities. The developing teenagers are confused by the conflicting ideologies of Nationalism, Zionism and Communism, World War II, and, despite arranged marriages that never cross religious boundaries, forbidden love. The growing friendship between middle-class Shafiq and a poor maid from the southern marshes becomes the center of the story but there are lots of other characters and plenty of action to keep the reader interested as s/he also learns about life in Iraq, attitudes toward the British and the Germans, and the effect of the birth of the state of Israel on Jewish life. This is an easy-to-read light romance, with some substance, which will be enjoyed by book groups.

Merrily Hart, Ann Arbor MI; Librarian, Siegal College, Cleveland, OH (retired)


This wonderful book is a compilation of selected columns written in The Forward by the authors over the course of 38 years. It grew out the organic confusion among lovers of folk music about the attribution of a song text, especially in the pre-copyright days of Yiddish poetry at its height—is it truly a folk song, and if not, who wrote it? In the process of answering queries about various texts, the authors wrote richly detailed biographies of the various poets, filled with old-world images and intimate, first-person knowledge. The poems are printed in Yiddish, with English translations by Barnett Zumoff on facing pages. Zumoff wisely chose to keep his translations close to the original, rather than crafting them to his own poetic purpose. This collection is a window on the world of the generation of secular Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe and America. No academic account of this seminal period in Jewish history can compare with the immediacy and familiarity of these poetic interpretations of this lost world. Virtually all the major poets are represented here though sadly, only three of the 38 are women. Subjects run the gamut from Jewish suffering redeemed by socialism or Zionism, to poverty, to religion, to love, to the violinist Paganini, to the Yiddish language itself. Several of the poems will be familiar to lovers of Yiddish song. For collections that are specializing in Yiddish culture, this book is a must. An ideal companion is the songbook, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, published by the Workmen’s Circle in 1988, which has musical settings for some of this material, as well as the CD by the same title.

Beth Dwoskin, Catalog Librarian, Proquest; Chair, Beth Israel Congregation Library Committee, Ann Arbor, MI

Set in southern California, these two novellas, written by sisters, deal with the world of the elderly. *Feeding Mrs. Moskowitz* is an engaging story of what happens to Golde Moskowitz, an elderly Russian Jewish widow living alone, lost in memories of the past, after she is involved in an accident while crossing the street. Natalie Holtzman, a young graphic artist who runs into her, becomes involved with helping out, and as a result both their lives change dramatically. The story, with a fairy tale ending, is easy to read and funny.

*The Caregiver* tells the story of a young Hispanic woman who takes care of an elderly resident at the Sunset Hills Retirement Community, a fancy assisted living facility in Hollywood. Each chapter tells the story of one of the residents of the facility. The stories are interrelated, absorbing and powerful. They describe the feelings of men and women in a situation that they are not happy with; how they confront the changes and challenges in the final stage of their lives. The book is highly recommended for fiction collections in Jewish community center and public libraries.

Susan Freiband, Library Educator (retired), Arlington, VA


Prize winning mystery author Kenneth Wishnia sets his latest novel, *The Fifth Servant*, in 16th century Prague. On Passover eve a young Christian girl’s corpse is found in Jacob Federn’s store. Immediately Federn, the Jewish shopkeeper, his daughter and wife are arrested and the community in the ghetto is accused of using the Christian girl’s blood to bake matzohs for Passover. Benyamin Ben-Akiva, the newly arrived shammes for the famous mystic and philosopher, Rabbi Judah Loew, (The Maharal of Prague) is given three days to find the real killer. Benyamin’s search takes him through the back streets of the ghetto, Emperor Rudolf’s luxurious palace and Prague’s cemetery. Wishnia paints a realistic and dark picture of what it was like to live in the Prague ghetto and suffer tortures and persecution by ordinary Christians and the infamous Inquisition. The varied characters, both historical and imaginary, are well developed and interesting. Benyamin Ben-Akiva is a clever and pious protagonist. He is inspired by and liberally quotes from Jewish prayers, the Talmud, the Torah and other Jewish holy books. *The Fifth Servant* is highly recommended for the historical fiction collection of all libraries.

Ilka Gordon, Librarian, Siegal college of Judaic Studies, Cleveland, OH

**BOOKS RECEIVED**


**AUDIO RECEIVED**


Musiques Judeo-Francaises des XVIIIe et Xixe siecles. Paris : Buda Musique, [2003?]

**Reviews of Multimedia**

**SOUND RECORDINGS**


The 15 vocal numbers on this CD demonstrate “the Black investment in Jewish music.” They span a 30-year period, and are as much a portrait of popular American music in general as of the African-American approach to what was perceived as Jewish music. Two standards are included—Cab Calloway’s “Utt da zay” and Slim Gaillard’s “Dunkin’ bagel”—but the other 13 are unknown or forgotten curiosities, examples of a rather strange phenomenon of the American recording industry—the attempt to sell “Jewish” music as a crossover. Performances are uniformly excellent, by the singers as well as their accompanists. Sadly, three of the best cuts—Alberta Hunter singing “Ich hob dich tzufil lieba,” Nina Simone singing “Eretz zavoat chalao,” and Johnny Mathis singing “Kol Nidre”—are marred by the slurring and mispronunciations that plague singers dealing with an unfamiliar language. The brilliant Lena Horne sings a passionate civil rights message to the tune of “Hava nagila.” Johnny Hartman throws in a few garbled lines of “Di grene kuzine” at the end of “That old black magic.” There’s a scratchy but beautiful recording of a torch singer named Libby Holman singing a blues song, accompanied by master guitarist Josh White. Holman was Jewish, and sounds like a black woman on this recording, but the cut doesn’t really fit into the criteria for this CD. Probably the most successful cut is the *Fiddler on the Roof* medley performed by the Temptations. Amazingly, their distinctive style works perfectly. The booklet that accompanies this CD contains outstanding, in-depth explorations of the recordings, as well as laying out the rationale for the Idelsohn Society for Musical Preservation: “Jewish history is best told by the music we have loved and lost.” This CD is recommended for academic and popular music collections.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


*The Gathering* is the fourth release by the New York power-trio Rashanim, a staple of the Tzadik label’s Radical Jewish Culture series. While this album is all acoustic, the intensity of this group is not toned-down in the least. A wide variety of instruments and musical styles are employed and the result is a more diverse and eclectic mix than their previous releases. Each tune on this album is named for a biblical figure. While they are firmly based in a jazz-rock aesthetic, there are hints of klezmer, classical, country and Cuban music. A highlight is the atmospheric tune “Jeremiah” in which fragments of “Ha-nerot halalu” and “Al ha-nisim” are chanted in a manner that would not be out of place in an Italian horror movie soundtrack (this is a good thing). It hints to a possible new direction for an incredible group of musicians. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Librarian, Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL; RAS Vice President, AJL; Chair, Bibliography and Reference Book Award, AJL


It is striking that in John Zorn’s long and varied career as a musician, he has never set text to music. While he has worked with many singers, they have sung vocalise (without words) and when he does work with text, it is spoken. Bearing this in mind, it is a rare treat to hear his tunes, all from his second Masada book of tunes, adapted to texts. Mycale, a vocal quartet made up of four of the most highly individualistic and creative singers working today, more than does justice to the material. Basya Schechter has been making waves in the Jewish music world with her group Pharoh’s Daughter. Ayelet Rose Gottlieb is an accomplished jazz singer and composer (her recording *Magim Rabim* has been previously reviewed). Sofia Rei is one of the new leading voices in South American jazz. Malika Zarra’s work combines North and Central African musics with jazz and European popular music. The combination of their diverse voices and stylistic inflections is constantly captivating; it is also striking to hear the counterpoint of Hebrew being sung in different lines with such different accents. The texts are from a variety of languages and sources, with the Hebrew Bible being the focus and fit perfectly, as if the melodies were written for them. My only complaint is that this disc is full price for barely over a half hour of music. Nonetheless, a must have.

Beth Dwoskin, Catalog Librarian, Proquest; Chair, Library Committee, Beth Israel Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI