Seven Questions with Blima Marcus

This issue’s Seven Questions with … features Blima Marcus, oncology nurse practitioner and Assistant Adjunct Professor at Hunter College. Marcus has garnered national attention for her efforts as a vaccine educator in ultra-Orthodox communities. Her scholarly publications include, most recently, A Nursing Approach to the Largest Measles Outbreak in Recent U.S. History: Lessons Learned Battling Homegrown Vaccine Hesitancy (Online Journal of Issues in Nursing, 2020). Marcus also serves on the editorial review board at Online Journal of Issues in Nursing and is a reviewer at Bellevue Literary Review: A Journal of Humanity and Human Experience.

1. Thank you for taking the time to speak with AJL News and Reviews! Can you tell us about your work as a vaccine educator?

I am an oncology nurse first and foremost. I rarely encounter children, and my work never crosses with primary care, which is where vaccines are discussed and administered. However, in my work in oncology I constantly care for an immunocompromised population. And this became important for me in 2018 when New York became the epicenter of a measles outbreak.

I began receiving questions from friends and acquaintances who had questions on vaccine safety and didn’t have anyone else to turn to with the time and ability to delve into the science and address their concerns. Many nurses and several physicians joined me in this, and we formed a non-profit health outreach and education organization, called the E.M.E.S. Initiative, where EMES stands for Engaging in Medical Education with Sensitivity, and in Hebrew, emes means truth and honesty.

At our core we use both empathy and science when we speak to anxious parents. We meet parents where they are at, literally and figuratively. Before COVID-19 happened, we met with parents in homes, in school classrooms, and by phone, email, and text. We created content tailored to their concerns. Most importantly, we taught them how to critically evaluate information they come upon — how do you know if information is accurate? In an era of so much misinformation, who do you trust? We give parents these tools so they can feel empowered and learn to discern science vs false information.

2. As you may know, libraries and librarians play an important role in educating the public about reliable resources for information, including health information. We call this part of librarianship “information literacy.” What role, if any, can public librarians and school librarians play in helping Orthodox communities learn about information literacy?

A significant part of our work with the E.M.E.S. Initiative is empowering parents to learn how to learn, and that’s where information literacy is so important.

Libraries can host “information seminars” to help community members learn how to become fluent in critiquing sources of information. Learning how to look up information,
how to discern accurate from inaccurate information — these are skills!

I also think it would be great to host learning events with healthcare experts on topics relevant to the community the library serves. One of the biggest issues I’ve noted in ultra-Orthodox communities is a lack of focus on preventative health measures. There are hundreds of organizations dedicated to helping the ill, either with medical referrals, health insurance payments, car rides to hospitals, meals, help with childcare, travel, etc. But there is very little attention paid to health promotion.

We need better access to information on mammography, genetic screening, cancer screenings, vaccinations, mental health screenings and more. This community rises to the occasion very well when someone faces a medical crisis, but I would love to see us prevent these crises more.

3. Do you ever use books, such as children’s books, for example, either to communicate with children about vaccines, or to give to parents to facilitate a conversation with their children? If not, would you want to encourage writers to explore this topic in Jewish children’s literature?

Ann Kofsky, author of a children’s book on vaccination, sent me a copy of her book, *Judah Maccabee Goes to the Doctor* [Apple & Honey Press, 2017], and I was pleasantly surprised by how perfectly it addressed the topic of childhood vaccination. I had initially expected a simplistic, “Berenstain Bear” kind of storybook.

It was nothing I had anticipated. It was wise, creative, empathic. Instead of simply focusing on the importance of vaccines in preventing illness, it points to the important but often-forgotten point in protecting OTHERS who cannot get their immunizations. Judah is afraid of a shot but when his dad points out that his baby sister Hannah is too young for her vaccines and needs Judah to be immunized to prevent passing on diseases to her, Judah agrees. And he cries, but briefly. Tying in this sweet children’s story to the Chanukah story where Judah is proud to learn that his namesake, Judah Maccabee, was also a brave and strong warrior on behalf of his family and other Jews, is just another layer to this fabulous children’s book.

My children love how the sibling relationship is depicted. They love the honesty where Judah is scared of the doctor, and how he does cry briefly after his shot. I love the sibling portrayal as well, and I love the emphasis on vaccination to protect those vulnerable around us. The easy explanation goes a long way in explaining immunology.

I think there is a need for public health books for children AND for adults! COVID-19 showed us how fragile we are and how our behaviors affect others. Many people confuse medicine and public health — and there are very few similarities. Medicine and medical decisions are personal, but public health is... public. I’ve heard people say they’ll think about whether the COVID vaccine is right for them. But it is not about them, actually — it’s necessary for the public. And this concept seems new to many people. I think it would be great if this concept could be addressed in a children’s book, which will likely also be educational for the parents.

4. You have studied at length in higher education. Can you tell us about your experiences doing research in libraries for your nursing studies? Were librarians available to support you?

I’ve only had excellent experiences with librarians. My longest stretch in one college was at the Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing where I received my doctorate. I developed relationships with the librarians there because I spent 5 years in that institution and completed my doctorate capstone. I remember one librarian being unable to help me, but he referred me to a colleague at a completely different institution and medical center. I emailed her and about a week later I received a response. She profusely apologized for the “delay” in her response, explained that she was caring for a very ill person and couldn’t email me back immediately — and then she sent me a dozen articles on the topic I needed. Librarians are so devoted.

The first semester of my DNP program at Hunter was in September of 2012, and I spent that entire semester having classes in the actual Hunter College library on 68th street and Lexington Avenue! Hurricane Sandy ruined portions of the Health Sciences Campus near the FDR Parkway on the East River, and we had to be relocated — and somehow the only space for our classes was in a section of the library on their main campus on the Upper East Side. We sat amidst aisles of books in chairs, and it was amazing. Libraries and hospitals are the two places in which I feel most comfortable.

5. As an oncology nurse, do you have access to hospital libraries and librarians? Medical librarians are specially trained to support medical professionals in their research, teaching, and clinical practice, and perhaps they have been able to support your work.

When I worked in academic institutions, I did have hospital libraries available to me and I often used them! Using the electronic databases have been the best method for me to access relevant clinical information, but I loved that there was a physical space with access to physical and electronic literature on any topic — with librarians to help. Between my university and my medical institution, I was flush with resources. This proved very helpful as my E.M.E.S. team and I created content on vaccine information, because we sourced nearly every single sentence with references.

6. What do you want secular librarians to know about the Orthodox community as library patrons? How can we be most welcoming in all library spaces?

It depends on the Orthodox community, because they are not monolithic. In the ultra-Orthodox spaces, what would make participants feel comfortable would likely be gender-segregated forums or events. Having sections with culturally appropriate books would also be welcoming to Haredi families. Kosher

(Continued on page 3)
cookbooks, Jewish children’s books, books in Yiddish or Hebrew would be ideal. Ultra-Orthodox men often do not participate in sports or other “extracurricular” activities, and they often turn to politics for stimulating reads, so political biographies or autobiographies may be popular.

7. We always ask, because we love books, what do you like to read for fun? Any favorite authors?

I don’t stop reading. I live with my husband and two children in a 2-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn without a lot of space, but I do have a narrow closet with shelves where I store both books and shoes (I also love shoes). As I buy more of one, I need to get rid of the other, and the books always win, so my shoe collection has dwindled.

Before I went to nursing school one of my undergrad degrees was in history, and I focused on Civil War America. That led me to spend the next decade reading up on the American slave experience and how we haven’t really reconciled our past, which has led to an incomplete Civil Rights era. We have so much left to do in the fight for racial justice. Some of the books which really left me affected include *Negroland* by Margo Jefferson, *Go Set a Watchman* by Harper Lee, *Black Like Me* by Howard Griffin, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Ann Jacobs.

Another favorite category over the last decade for me have been books set during the World War II and Holocaust era. As a child and teen I read many, many Holocaust memoirs and that left me never wanting to read about those experiences again.

But then I dived into the other experiences of the war — the heroes who rescued and hid Jews, the Nazis who did not follow orders, the experiences of Germans who were uncomfortable with the regime. Some great options include *Ordinary Men* by Christopher R. Browning, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, *The Search for Major Plagger* by Michael Goode, and *The Zookeeper’s Wife* by Diane Ackerman.

For fiction, I absolutely love Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie, and I own both collections. I’ve never fallen for modern mystery. My other love is for Herman Wouk, and I’ve enjoyed many of Ken Follett’s books as well for good historical fiction.


As an oncology nurse practitioner who does a lot of palliative end of life care, the books that have helped me most are *The End of Your Life Book Club* by Will Schwalbe, *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, *Gift From the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh (which should be mandatory reading for every woman), *This is My God by Herman Wouk*, and *The Most Good You Can Do* by Peter Singer.

**Digital Exhibition: Romaniote Memories, a Jewish Journey from Ioannina, Greece to Manhattan**

Vincent Giordano was a photographer and filmmaker dedicated to finding and recording the unique, collective memories of families and communities. From 1999 until his untimely death in 2010, he documented the places, people and events of New York’s Romaniote Jewish Community, centered at Kehila Kedosha Janina on Broome Street in Manhattan, and their city of origin, Ioannina, Greece. Giordano intended to make a full length documentary on the subject titled *Before the Flame Goes Out*; sadly, he passed away before his project was complete.

In 2019 Hilda Giordano donated the archive of Vincent’s work to Queens College, where it is a major part of the Hellenic American Project and is preserved as part of the Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library’s Special Collections and Archives. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the physical collection has not yet been processed. Fortunately, we were able to use a selection of scans of Giordano’s prints and negatives to create a new online exhibition Romaniote Memories, a Jewish Journey from Ioannina, Greece to Manhattan: Photographs by Vincent Giordano. Many of these images have never been presented in public before.

The Hellenic American Project seeks to expand Greek American Studies, which has traditionally focused on the immigration of Greek Orthodox peoples to the U.S., to include communities such as the Romaniote Jews, whose history and culture are not widely known or understood. As exhibition curator Dr. Samuel Gruber says, “The largely unknown Romaniote Jews are a living link with ancient Judaism of the Hellenistic period, which formed the matrix out of which Christianity was born and developed and from which came great rabbis and scholars who influenced Jewish life, including R. Tobias ben Eliezer, R. Moses Kapsali and Shemarya Ikriti.” Romaniotes have their own language - a dialect of Greek that combines words and phrases from Hebrew and Turkish - which is only spoken by the older generation. Tragically, in Ioannina, of the 1,960 Jews deported to Auschwitz by the Germans during World War II, only 110 survived.
The exhibition, powered by the open source software Scalar, features over 100 photographs presented in thematic sections, or digital paths. Each path begins with a scholarly introduction, followed by galleries of images which are titled, captioned, and tagged with metadata. The initial paths focus on the Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York City, while the latter focus on the Kahal Kadosh Yashan Synagogue in the city of Ioannina, in Northern Greece. The images beautifully showcase the art, architecture, religious rites, and still vibrant culture of these congregations. In addition to the buildings and sacred objects housed within, Giordano captured the joyous Bar Mitzvah of Seth Kofinas in June 2007 in New York City, and the observance of the High Holidays in Ioannina, Greece, in 2006. Glossary and resource pages help facilitate use of the exhibition for pedagogical purposes. The content was curated by Dr. Samuel Gruber, President of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments, and the site was designed by Annie Tummino, Head of Queens College Special Collections and Archives.

The items featured in the exhibition represent only a small fraction of the total Giordano collection. This coming year, the Center for Jewish Studies will fund opportunities for graduate students to fully process and catalog the materials, which will be made available online through the Benjamin Rosenthal Library’s partnership with JSTOR Open Community Collections. Additionally, the Hellenic American Project provides research data and oral histories which further contextualize the experience of Romaniote Jews living in New York and the United States, and their ethnic and religious identities.

Annie Tummino is Head of Special Collections and Archives at Queens College’s Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library. Dr. Nicholas Alexiou is Professor of Sociology and Founder and Director of the Hellenic American Project at Queens College.

Educating the Jewish, Legal and General Communities about Jewish Lawyers in Nazi Germany

By Gail Wechsler, Library Director, Law Library Association of St. Louis

In a recent report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), it was noted that Jews and Jewish institutions were the overwhelming targets of hate crimes in 2018, the most recent year the statistics had been compiled. “It is unacceptable that Jews and Jewish institutions continue to be at the center of religion-based hate crime attacks,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

With that in mind, the Law Library Association of St. Louis, a public and membership law library located in the Civil Courts Building in downtown St. Louis, sought out a travelling exhibit sponsored by the American Bar Association (ABA) and the German Federal Bar. The exhibit, called “Lawyers Without Rights: Jewish Lawyers in Germany under the Third Reich,” details what happened to those practicing law in the Weimar Republic who were Jewish. The exhibit, which consists of panels that tell the stories of dozens of attorneys and judges of Jewish descent who had their law licenses stripped from them due to their religion, is still relevant today. It shows in stark detail what happens when the rule of law breaks down in a democracy. It also highlights the tragedies that strike when people are “othered” based on religion, race or on similar bases typically protected by anti-discrimination law today.

The exhibit, which had never been seen before in St. Louis, started its run March 8, 2020, just a few weeks before general lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local sponsors in addition to the Law Library Association of St. Louis are ADL Heartland and the Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum in St. Louis. With its run extended due to COVID, the exhibit now is expected to stay in St. Louis until September 1, 2021. (The original run was supposed to end in June 2020.) The exhibit reopened for visitors individually and in small groups on July 13, 2021.

In addition to the exhibit, the Law Library Association and local co-sponsors have presented several lectures connected to its themes. The opening program, live on March 8, 2020, featured William Meinecke of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and was titled “Law, Justice and the Holocaust.” It focused on the contribution of the judiciary to the stabilization of the Nazi German state and the implementation of the Nazis’ racial agenda. Another virtual event took place on August 18, 2020, when Washington University School of Law Professor Laila Sadat presented on “Lessons of the Holocaust and the Creation of the International Criminal Court.”

Most recently, we welcomed Professor Warren Rosenblum of Webster University for a virtual lecture on March 3, 2021.
called "Jewish Lawyers and the Fight Against Fascism: 1926 to 1933." Professor Rosenblum, Chair of the History, Politics and International Relations Department at Webster, spoke about several Jewish attorneys during the Weimar Republic and their efforts to fight anti-Semitism and Fascism through the German courts. They included Bruno Weil, who is featured in the exhibit. One famous lawsuit was triggered by Weil and several other Jewish attorneys, who published a satirical cartoon about Pastor Muenchmeyer, a German Christian who led efforts to promote anti-Semitism at the Borkum Resort in Germany. When Muenchmeyer filed an insult suit over the cartoon, the lawyers raised the defense that the real threat to Germany was not their cartoon, but Fascism. The judge hearing the case gave just a token penalty to the defendants and berated Pastor Muenchmeyer for his activities. However, ultimately the Nazis came to power and the Jewish attorneys were sent to concentration camps or forced to flee the country, if they could do so in time.

In addition to the exhibit, there is a related book, Lawyers Without Rights: The Fate of Jewish Lawyers in Berlin after 1933, written by Simone Ladwig-Winters. Those who want to dig deeper into this issue will find the book comprehensive and eye-opening.

The reception to the exhibit and the lectures has been overwhelmingly effusive. Lawyers who have seen the exhibit or attended the programs thanked the library for making this material available to the general legal community. At the same time, the exhibit has brought more members of the Jewish community and the general public to the library (both in person and virtually). We are grateful to the ABA and the German Federal Bar for allowing us to host the exhibit and supporting our related programming.

To find out more about the St. Louis run of the exhibit, go to https://llastl.org/events-exhibits.

For more information about the exhibit and the book generally, go to https://lawyerswithoutrights.com

Congregation Rodef Sholom: A History and Lesson in Collaboration and the Creation of an Archive

By Sarah B. Wilschek and Kayla Metzger

Congregation Rodef Sholom’s History and Role in the Community

Congregation Rodef Sholom is a Reform Jewish synagogue in Youngstown, Ohio, devoted to meeting the spiritual, educational, and social needs of its members and to fulfilling the Jewish obligation of social action to help those in need. Founded on May 12, 1867, Rodef Sholom (“Pursuers of Peace”) is the oldest Jewish congregation in Youngstown, originally occupying a building on Federal Street downtown before breaking ground for the current synagogue on Elm Street in 1914. Congregation Rodef Sholom remains the largest congregation in the Youngstown area and the only one with a Brotherhood and Sisterhood, serving the greater Mahoning Valley including Trumbull, Columbiana, Stark, and Mahoning counties, as well as communities in the Shenango Valley (Sharons, New Castle, and Sharpsville, PA) following a merger with Temple Beth Israel in 2015. Rodef Sholom is committed to working with the local neighborhood and nonprofits to promote a strong sense of support and community. The Board of Trustees established an inter-congregational collaboration committee with regional neighbors, El Emeth and Ohev Tzedek, to implement a consolidation plan for the three entities.

Discovering Rodef Sholom’s History: Down the Rabbit Hole

In 2019, shortly after starting her position as Executive Director, Sarah Wilschek discovered boxes and shelves full of documents, objects, ledgers, and more tucked away in a utility closet on the lower level of the synagogue. She investigated other areas of the synagogue, locating many more records that tell a more detailed story of the creation, growth, and contributions of the congregation for over a century and a half of their operation, that now enable Rodef Sholom to better understand their history as an organization.

Congregation Rodef Sholom’s archival collections date back to its foundation in 1867, encompassing material from both Rodef Sholom and Temple Beth Israel. The materials include, but are not limited to: framed/mounted art and photographs; membership ledgers, financial ledgers, deeds, documents, and maps for Congregation Rodef Sholom’s cemeteries (Briar Hill and Tom Homestead, 1967 - present); Sisterhood records from 1867 and Brotherhood records since 1924, including programs, (Continued on page 6)
projects. Metzger developed a collections management policy and industry standards for historic preservation and public history effective and sustainable in their operations and to strive to meet archive. Metzger’s primary role as an OHSC member is to provide assistance to community heritage organizations in becoming more effective and sustainable in their operations and to strive to meet industry standards for historic preservation and public history projects. Metzger developed a collections management policy and other documentation for Rodef Sholom to follow through the various stages of the Archive Project. Following numerous meetings and discussions, Wilschek and Metzger formalized a partnership with YSU’s Applied History Program, under the direction of Dr. Thomas Leary, to have his Applied History Practicum course assist in the first stages of the project. They also partnered with other entities for their support and guidance, including the YSU Center for Judaic and Holocaust Studies, the Archives/Library of the Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor (managed by the YSU Applied History Program), the American Jewish Archives, and Mahoning Valley Historical Society. The Applied History Practicum students, Jacob Harver and Hannah Klacik, are working towards their M.A. degrees in History at YSU. The practicum course is designed to allow them to apply the knowledge learned in class to community initiatives related to historic preservation or public history.

**Archive Partnerships**

In February 2020, prior to the pandemic, Wilschek conceptualized the creation of an archive for the synagogue. Recognizing the valuable assets in the greater Youngstown area, Wilschek contacted history faculty at Youngstown State University (YSU) to begin a conversation regarding the development of a partnership and how to proceed with the collections. Wilschek was also in contact with the American Jewish Archives regarding best practices and to understand the expectations of Jewish archives held at synagogues. When asked about the impact of creating the collection, she shared, "the creation of a formal Congregation Rodef Sholom archive is not only an invaluable resource to our congregation, congregants, and their distant families. It is also a resource documenting the impact our congregants and congregation have had on the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys over the past 154 years. We also have collections from synagogues that have merged with us over the years - allowing for multiple entities to formalize their archives. Furthermore, partnering with Youngstown State University, Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor, the American Jewish Archives, and the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, has enabled us to have a large reach and add a breadth of knowledge and experience to ensure our archival resource is a success. One of the largest successes of this project is the recognition that we are an innovative collaboration and resource to advise in duplicating our process.”

YSU faculty connected Wilschek with Kayla Metzger, an AmeriCorps Ohio History Service Corps (OHSC) member hosted by the History Program, to begin the conceptualization of a partnership between multiple entities in the creation of an formal archive. Metzger’s primary role as an OHSC member is to provide assistance to community heritage organizations in becoming more effective and sustainable in their operations and to strive to meet industry standards for historic preservation and public history projects. Metzger developed a collections management policy and other documentation for Rodef Sholom to follow through the

**Congregation Rodef Shalom Archives**

**The Goal and Ongoing Management of the Archival Project**

Congregation Rodef Sholom's collections serve as a connection to the past and enable individuals to reconstruct the history of the organization, its congregants, and the contributions they made to the practice of Judaism in the region, state, and international movement. The long-term goal of this initiative is to develop an archival center at Congregation Rodef Sholom for visiting scholars and students to conduct research and learn about the contributions and impacts local congregations have had in the region and greater Judaic community. Moreover, the archives will offer programs for local school districts to learn about local Jewish history. Through this project, Congregation Rodef Sholom will be able to act as a model institution for other area synagogues to gain control over their records and contribute to the greater understanding of local Jewish history.

As the project continues forward, Rodef Sholom congregants will have the opportunity to become more engaged in the process and with their historical collections. They will assist in identifying individuals in photographs, sorting materials, managing the collection, assisting in locating documents, and updating all finding aids as new additions are made to the collection. The volunteers will be organized through the office and our auxiliary groups, such as the Sisterhood.

The archive will be unveiled with the creation of the “Congregation Rodef Sholom: Now and Then” exhibition, which will focus on how the spaces in the 107 year-old building have adapted over the years.
In advance of the 2021 Virtual Conference, the Association of Jewish Libraries is pleased to announce that longtime member Rachel Kamin has been named the 2021 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award Winner. “On behalf of the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award committee, we are proud to have been given the opportunity to honor Rachel Kamin as this year’s recipient of the Award. Over the years, Rachel has contributed so much to the Association of Jewish Libraries, to the field of Judaica librarianship, and to librarianship as a profession overall. On very short notice and under challenging circumstances, she played a pivotal role in transforming AJL’s 2020 conference from an in-person to a highly successful virtual event. Rachel’s passionate devotion to public service is a model for us all, and she truly personifies the values and legacy of the Award’s namesake, Fanny Goldstein,” said committee chair Zachary Baker. Rachel Kamin has been a synagogue librarian for over 20 years and is currently the Director of the Joseph and Mae Gray Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, Illinois. She serves on the Association of Jewish Libraries New Jewish Fiction Award Committee and contributes articles and book reviews to BookLinks, School Library Journal, Jewish Book World, Judaica Librarianship, Library Journal, and AJL Reviews. She contributed a chapter on recommended children’s books to The Tot Shabbat Handbook: A Practical Guide for Engaging Young Families in Congregational Life edited by Paula Feldstein (URJ Press, 2010) and co-authored a chapter about Jewish children’s literature for Reading and Teaching with Diverse Nonfiction Children’s Books: Representations and Possibilities, to be published in the summer of 2021 by the National Council for Teachers of English. Rachel facilitates book discussions for five Chicago area synagogues as well as for other organizations and private groups. She holds a BA in history from Grinnell College and a master’s degree in library and information science from the University of Michigan.

In addition, Rachel has been a member of AJL for at least 20 years and has attended the AJL Conference regularly. After the decision was made to not hold the conference live in Chicago in 2020 as planned, Rachel restructured the face-to-face conference that she had planned, into AJL’s first Virtual Conference. This year, Rachel is coordinating all the programming for the 2021 Virtual Conference and working with the planning committee to ensure that the divisions get the program they desire. This year she has also been moderating AJL’s “Serving Students” Virtual Roundtable and facilitated the Purim book discussion.

Since the spring of 2020, Rachel has delivered over twenty Zoom presentations on Jewish fiction for Hadassah, the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, American Jewish University, and the Judaica Network of Metropolitan Chicago, as well as for synagogues and Jewish groups across the country. She also facilitates book discussions for five Chicago area synagogues as well as for other organizations and private groups.

In addition to all of the above, Rachel has been the chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, continues to provide Bibliography for the AJL Bibliography files, and recently accepted the position as AJL’s representative on ALA’s Sophie Brody Award Committee. Overall, Rachel lends her hand and expertise whenever a volunteer is needed. She is an outstanding representative for AJL.

Rachel will receive her award during the Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, to be held virtually from June 27 to July 1, 2021.

The Fanny Goldstein Merit Award, named for the librarian, social activist and founder of National Jewish Book Month, is bestowed in recognition of loyal and ongoing contributions to the Association of Jewish Libraries and to the profession of Judaica librarianship.

Born on May 15, 1895 [some sources say 1888], Fanny Goldstein devoted her life to books and community. She was the first female Judaica librarian and the first woman to direct a branch library in Massachusetts, where she was head of Boston’s West End Branch for many years. A prominent figure in the Boston Jewish community, she is best known as the founder of Jewish Book Week, which began when Goldstein organized a display of Jewish books at the Boston Public Library in 1925.

Members of the 2021 Fanny Goldstein Merit Award committee are Chair Zachary Baker, Aileen Grossberg, and Yossi Galron.

The Association of Jewish Libraries, the leading authority on Judaic librarianship, promotes Jewish literacy through enhancement of libraries and library resources and through leadership for the profession and practitioners of Judaica librarianship. The Association fosters access to information, learning, teaching and research relating to Jews, Judaism, the Jewish experience, and Israel.
Max Gross is the winner of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) Jewish Fiction Award for his novel *The Lost Shtetl*, published by HarperVia, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. The award includes a $1,000 cash prize and support to attend the 57th Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, June 27—July 1, 2021. Two honor books were also recognized: *To Be a Man: Stories* by Nicole Krauss, published by Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, and *Apeirogon: A Novel* by Colum McCann, published by Penguin Random House. The Committee reviewed over 70 works of fiction originally written in English with significant Jewish thematic content published in the United States in 2020. Thanks to all those who submitted entries for consideration. The wide array of books published in 2020 is a testament to the vibrant state of contemporary Jewish fiction.

In many ways Kreskol, the nominal *Lost Shtetl*, is a typical 19th century Polish village. It has the expected mix of competing synagogues and schools; happy and miserable families; and comfortable and poor inhabitants. What is surprising about Kreskol is that in Brigadoon style, it survived deep in the forests with no connection to the outside world. Set during the end of the 20th century, *Lost Shtetl* tells the story of a town neglected by time, unaware of the Holocaust or the creation of the state of Israel. When the Polish government “finds” Kreskol, there is massive culture shock on both sides. The Jewish villagers must decide how much to embrace the modern world and the Polish government has to decide how much they want to invest in this small contentious village. “An impressive debut novel, *The Lost Shtetl* is a thoroughly enjoyable story, with lots of humor, but also incredibly sophisticated, clever, poignant and thought provoking,” noted Laura Schutzman, Chair of the Award Committee.

The ten stories in *To Be a Man* by Nicole Krauss deal with the struggle to understand what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, and all of the tensions in the relationships between parents and children, lovers and friends, husbands and wives. All contemporary, they span the globe from Switzerland, Japan, and New York City to Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, and South America. “Each is impactful and memorable with fully developed characters, often wrestling with their Jewish identity, who stay with you long after the reading experience is over,” commented Rachel Kamin, member of the Award Committee.

*Apeirogon*, in telling the story of two fathers, an Israeli and a Palestinian united in grief after losing their daughters to the conflict, weaves together fiction and nonfiction, crossing centuries and continents, to create a multifaceted and multilayered exploration of history, art, politics, love, loss, hope, and the power of storytelling. An apeirogon is a shape with an infinitely countable number of sides; *Apeirogon*, the novel, “evokes a mosaic with an infinitely countable number of pieces that have been assembled into a beautifully written, emotionally charged, and exceedingly relevant work of fiction,” remarked Paula Breger, member of the Award Committee. The intricacies and conflicting themes of *Apeirogon* are sure to elicit much debate and discussion.

View the complete announcement here: https://jewishlibraries.org/announcements.php?id=93

The AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee members are Paula Breger, Beth Dwoskin, Rachel Kamin, Laura Schutzman, and Sheryl Stahl.

The Association of Jewish Libraries gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Dan Wyman Books for underwriting the Award. Submissions for the 2022 AJL Fiction Award (titles published in 2021) are now being accepted. For more information, please visit www.jewishlibraries.org.

The Association of Jewish Libraries is an all-volunteer professional organization that promotes Jewish literacy through enhancement of libraries and library resources and through leadership for the profession and practitioners of Judaica librarianship. The Association fosters access to information, learning, teaching and research relating to Jews, Judaism, the Jewish experience and Israel.
Dear Friends,

I hope you had a wonderful — albeit small or Zoomed — Passover and are looking forward to celebrating Shavuot. While we are not out of the Pandemic woods yet, we are tantalizingly close. I have received my two-shot vaccine (Moderna) and am very eager to get out of my house to see my kids, one in Texas and one in Massachusetts. My goal is to visit them during the summer months and celebrate Thanksgiving together as a family!

Have you had the opportunity to attend one of AJL’s Member Round Tables or an AJL Presents event over this past year? If not, I encourage you to find time to do so. Since beginning to gather on a regular basis via Zoom, we have had informational round tables on a wide range of topics like weeding, managing collections, serving patrons during COVID, Digital Humanities, eBooks, book discussions and more. Beyond being edifying, however, these sessions have been opportunities for staying connected to and networking with one another. We have some remarkable programs coming your way in the next few months, including:

Members Only
“Sekhel Circle” for Retirees/Library Students
Digitization Basics for Small Synagogue Archives
Central European Libraries
Wikidata: Beginner’s workshop

AJL Presents (open to the Public)
Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI)

Watch your inbox for information about registering for these upcoming members-only Round Tables. We welcome you and your friends to our AJL Presents showcase.

There is lots of information about our virtual 2021 Conference: Moving Forward from Sunday, June 27 — July 1, 2021 elsewhere in this Newsletter. Registration is now online at our NEW WEBSITE! The Conference Planning Committee has put together an exceptional digital conference for all of us. I look forward to seeing you there very soon. Again, please note that arrangements are continuing for us to have an in-person conference in Philadelphia, PA in June 2022.

We are always looking for volunteers to serve on our many committees, and with the innumerable tasks that are ongoing. If you are interested, please contact Heidi Rabinowitz, our Member Relations Chair at BookofLifePodcast@gmail.com.

There are so many exciting things happening at AJL! You will learn about many of them in this Newsletter, so ...

... keep reading and stay well!
Kathy B.

Join the Association of Jewish Libraries Sunday, June 27 - Thursday, July 1, 2021 for the AJL 2021 Digital Conference: Moving Forward. Most sessions will take place between 11:00am-4:00pm EDT. All sessions will take place on Zoom and will provide participants with the opportunity to hear from outstanding scholars, knowledgeable and experienced librarians, archivists, and educators, and award-winning authors as well as receive updates from our divisions and committees. All presentations will be recorded and will be made available, along with digital handouts, to all registrants for up to a year following the conference.

Multiple sessions will be offered throughout all five days of the conference covering topics ranging from advocacy, digitization, and library management to documenting the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching remotely, and digital archives, as well as updates from the Library of Congress and the National Library of Israel. Vendor Roundtables are scheduled to give attendees the opportunity to meet with booksellers, publishers and database providers. Pop into the Virtual Hospitality Suite to chat with past AJL Presidents and connect with other conference attendees in a casual, informal environment.

The AJL 2021 Digital Conference will kick-off with the annual Feinstein Lecture on Sunday, June 27. Dr. Shalom Sabar, Professor Emeritus of Jewish Art and Folklore at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, will speak on “The Hidden Treasures of Jewish Ephemera.” Programming on Monday, June 28 will begin with the International Librarians’ Roundtable and conclude with an Author Showcase. Tuesday, June 29 will highlight the winners of the 2021 Sydney Taylor Book Awards and the Judaica Reference and Bibliography Awards. Israeli politician, human rights activist, author and Soviet refusenik, Natan Sharansky, will be our distinguished guest on Wednesday, June 30 as part of a panel presentation about the Russian Library in Jerusalem. The 2021 AJL Fiction Award Winners will also present and special evening programming will include a Storytime Showcase and a panel discussion of the new documentary The Last Cyclist. Richard Ovenden, Bodley’s Librarian at the University of Oxford, will deliver the Keynote Address on Thursday, July 1: “The Keepers: Librarians and Archivists as Preservers of the Truth.”

The preliminary program and registration information are available on the AJL website. Full abstracts and presenter bios will be available to conference registrants through the Socio app. The registration fee is $65 for AJL members and $35 for students. We welcome non-members to register for $150 but we encourage you to join AJL to benefit from the member rate.

For more information, go to www.jewishlibraries.org, or e-mail conference@jewishlibraries.org. Contact ajladmanager@gmail.com to place an ad in the conference program book or to become a sponsor, exhibitor, or vendor. Visit the AJL Zazzle Store to purchase t-shirts, pens, notebooks and more!
Chapter Chatter and Member News

‘Parsha Posters’: An AJL/CAC Program
Presented by Hillel Smith

by Yermiyahu Ahron Taub, President, AJL/Capital Area Chapter

On Sunday, February 7, 2021, artist and designer Hillel Smith presented a program entitled “‘Parsha Posters’: Towards a Contemporary Judaica.” The program was held on Zoom and sponsored by the Association of Jewish Libraries/Capital Area Chapter (AJL/CAC) with the support of AJL National. Approximately seventy people—from the Capital Area and beyond—attended the event.

Mr. Smith provided a broad survey of the connections between general illumination and design with Jewish visual practices over the centuries, and in more recent times, with poster art. He carefully demonstrated how prominent artists and general contemporaneous art trends influenced Jewish poster artists. For example, he highlighted the work of Hungarian Jewish artist, Slomo Jedidja-Seelenfreund (1875-1961), whose flowery flourishes and rounded line movements clearly reflected the art of Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939) and the Art Nouveau movement.

As he notes in his biographical/artist’s statement, Mr. Smith’s work “revitalizes ancient rituals ... encouraging creative reconsideration of religious practice.” He sees “Hebrew as the visual glue that binds Jews together across time and space.” These principles were on vivid display during the heart of his talk, when he presented images of posters from the weekly Torah portion as they appeared in his Parsha Posters book (Hashmark Press, 2017). From each Torah portion, he created a single, and indeed singular, image, one that would incorporate the key dramatic moments in the biblical narrative. For each poster image, he offered an in-depth exegesis of the text and a rationale for his artistic decisions—a kind of “Midrash According to Hillel,” if you will. For example, for the parsha of Be-shalah, there is a foregrounded image of the split sea. Just “barely” visible on the bottom of the poster, one can see hands, flailing, desperately trying not to drown. It was important for the artist to present a complex reckoning with these foundational texts, one that grappled with their sometimes unsettling contents and resisted any kind of easy triumphalism. As he explained in the Q and A session, Mr. Smith specifically chose not to include his analysis of the posters in the published book. He wanted readers/viewers to experience the visuals on their own terms, without his guidance. And indeed what visuals they are! The poster images are distinguished by vibrant colors, an urban hip-hop sensibility, and a kineticism that literally pops off the screen.

Viewers of the Zoom event, therefore, felt particularly fortunate to hear such an insightful “behind-the-scenes” discussion of an artist’s decision making process. The question-and-answer period was highly rewarding as attendees engaged in great depth with Mr. Smith’s work. A recording of the program will be made available to AJL members on the AJL website.

To learn more about Hillel Smith’s art, please visit: https://hillelsmith.info/parshaposters.

Special thanks to our guest speaker, Hillel Smith; AJL/CAC members, Nahid Gerstein, Rebecca Levitan, and Gail Shirazi; and AJL national members, Jackie Ben-Efraim, who ensured the smooth technical functioning of the program, and Michelle Chesner.

Congratulations to Uri Kolodney who received the 2020 President’s Outstanding Staff Award from University of Texas at Austin for his work as the Hebrew, Jewish and Israel Studies Librarian and the Film and Video Liaison.

David Levy, Chief Librarian, Lander College for Women, Touro College, has recently published more YouTube videos which are available at Touro Scholar.

Editor’s Note

Dear Safranim,

I hope you all had a joyous and meaningful Pesach. This is the second year that many of us have had “zoom seders,” an experience that is both an opportunity to be with distant family and a poor substitute for actually being with our families. As this past year has unfolded, we have all faced significant challenges in our workplaces and in professional organizations such as AJL. As such, I want to give a yasher koach to our team of editors, reviewers, and contributors who have kept News and Reviews rolling along.

In our May/June issue, in addition to our excellent reviews, I am excited to include a “Seven Questions with...” interview with Blima Marcus, a dedicated educator on vaccine safety in the Jewish community. What could be more timely? We are also pleased to feature articles about Jewish libraries, archives, and exhibits from across the continent, with contributions from Missouri, Ohio, Queens, New York, and Montreal, Canada.

As always, I invite you to touch base with me with your thoughts on this issue and any suggestions for upcoming issues. You are welcome to join our team of contributors — just email me at generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org to pitch an article related to Jewish librarianship!

Warmly,
Sally
ALA Publishes Resources on Combating Antisemitism and Islamophobia with Multicultural Children’s Literature

By Heidi Rabinowitz, Member Relations Chair

In our last issue of AJL News & Reviews, you read about an ALA presentation called “Combating Antisemitism and Islamophobia with Multicultural Children’s Literature” presented by Heidi Rabinowitz and Sadaf Siddique for the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Roundtable (EMIERT) of the American Library Association (recording here: http://www.ala.org/rt/emiert/webinars). We are pleased to report that Programming Librarian, a website of the ALA’s Public Programs Office, has published a Resource Round-Up based on that presentation.

At this link, you will find more links to resources on positive representation, global perspectives, celebrating diversity year-round, teaching resources, podcasts, and more. The introduction to this list says “Having multicultural children’s literature in your library — and programming around it — can provide much-needed positive representation for a child. These books can also help to normalize the acceptance of others and influence the actions children make as they mature.” We couldn’t agree more, and are thrilled to have Jewish and Muslim literature and resources shared with this wide audience.

Summer of NewCAJE 2021

By Kathleen Bloomfield, President, AJL

I encourage AJL members to apply to present at NewCAJE in July. It would be wonderful to have librarian representation at NewCAJE this summer.

Information about applying to participate is available at this link.

“Writing with Many Pens”: Incunabula and Post-incunabula from the National Library of Israel and the Jewish Public Library (Montreal)

by Eddie Paul, Senior Director/Directeur, Library & Learning Services/Services de bibliothèque et d’apprentissage, Jewish Public Library, Montreal

The Dr. Michael D. Paul Rare Books Initiative

Collection: approx. 1800 volumes
Spans 1481 (The Antiquitates Judaice, Josephus) - 1899
Languages: Hebrew, old Yiddish, Latin, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Italian, German, Ge’ez
Notable texts: The Liturgy of the Seventh Sabbath (date unknown — in manuscript) — a Coptic prayer book from Ethiopia, The Mirkevet Mishneh (1551) by Isaac Abravanel (censored), Brant shpigl (1676) by Moses Altsuler, Bello Judaico (1536), Josephus.

The rare book collection, operating always as a separate special collection distinct from the lending collection, dates to the earliest days of the library. In 1914, the collection was comprised of the amalgamation of smaller collections from reading rooms developed by nascent Jewish groups throughout the city, all in Yiddish and Hebrew. The two co-founders of the library, Yehuda Kaufmann and Reuben Brainin, both came from strong intellectual traditions but Brainin, who was decidedly a Hebraist was much more focused on community-building whereas Kaufmann, a polyglot whose education derived from both religious and secular training, was more eclectic and scholarly in his pursuits. Though the library had little funding to expand on its original collection, Kaufman is known to have traveled to the United States, primarily to New York City and Philadelphia, in order to purchase antiquarian Hebrew books. Unfortunately, the titles of these books are lost, having disappeared amongst the larger collection. Individual donations of single titles over the years bolstered the burgeoning collection, including a larger donation of roughly thirty titles made in 1955 by the widow of Hyman Ressler, who was a button manufacturer, amateur musician, and avid antiquarian book collector. Some of the books from this donation include treasures such as Omnia opera Ysaac printed in 1515 in Lyons. The Ressler donation is one of the few in which an intact list of titles given to the library has been kept.

It was not until 1951, however, that the bulk of the collection was acquired by the library. In 1947, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc., in partnership with the United States Military, began the laborious task of collecting the manuscripts and books looted by the Nazis at the Offenbach Archival Depot, where they were catalogued. Efforts were then made to return them to their original

(Continued on page 12)
owners or repositories, but few original owners or repositories remained. European Jewry had been decimated, and so alternatives were sought. The decision was made to distribute the thousands of remaining books amongst institutions serving Jewish communities in North America and Israel, such as Hebrew University and YIVO, but also smaller institutions, such as Montreal’s Jewish Public Library (JPL), already serving a large diasporic Jewish community.

The JPL’s rare book collection was not supplemented so much as transformed by the 1,500 books entrusted to them in 1951 due to the intervention of Canadian Jewish Congress, who coordinated the distribution of a selection of books and objects to Canadian institutions. Unfortunately, though the intention was to ensure that each book repatriated via the Offenbach Archival Depot was stamped, this doesn’t appear to be the case. Between the lack of stamps, an absence of a list detailing which books were sent where within Canada, and an ad hoc donation system for the early rare books, the origins of the vast majority of the collection are lost.

The collection’s visibility had been limited to sporadic and minor displays around Jewish holidays. Though the JPL’s catalogue was automated in 1994, it remained one of the only collections to enter in the database. In 2012, a former Montrealer and friend of the library saw an ad hoc website the archivist had put together with images from the rare books collection, and as an ardent antiquarian collector himself, decided to fund the cataloguing of the collection. Over the next two years, several exhibits were curated, one of which was a joint collaboration between the JPL and the Jacob Lowy Collection of Library & Archives Canada.

This kind of exhibit however, suspends the perception of these books: behind a glass case, they’re perceived as artefacts. Digitization, an inevitable project that most libraries pursue still imposes a veil between the book and us. The idea we conceived was to create workshops that would bring these books into direct contact with people for whom we could reconstitute the narratives behind the works, their authors, their printing and by extension, a palpable interaction with Jewish history.

The first iteration of these workshops was a series of class visits from local Jewish elementary and secondary schools. We coordinated with school librarians who in turn needed to coordinate with teachers, principals, and other administrators to free the student from their classes within their existing schedules, and while the workshops were successful, they were logistically challenging to organize.

Much of our approach in the beginning was improvisational; there was no model to base this on and it became obvious that we had to create one. We conceived and developed a simple idea: 60-120 minute sessions in which 7-8 books are presented according to the compelling narratives behind the authors, the works, and most notably, the printers and printing houses that shed light on some of the broader socio-political events of the day.

In an attempt to circumvent the administrative barriers, in 2018, we ignored the risk and anxiety that accompanied the removal of these books outside our building and brought them into the schools. The initiative extended into synagogues, churches, university and CEGEP (junior colleges in Quebec), secondary schools, other libraries, and seniors residences.

The sense of intimacy between the audience and the texts is paramount; cultural backgrounds and educational levels differ between groups of participants and our approaches in each session are scaled accordingly. Since these books were meant to be used — not observed under a glass case — our workshops attempt to resurrect that sense of intimacy. We encourage our participants to handle the books (albeit carefully) which in turn, emphasizes the material resilience behind book culture. Since the workshops are primarily storytelling events, the sessions become an expression of augmented literacy: understanding the life and genealogy of the Jewish book becomes a collective experience of knowledge exchange.

In 2020, the workshops have been offered on Zoom, (we hope temporarily). While this has compromised the original idea behind the workshops somewhat, it has allowed us to offer them to audiences around the world. If you have a group of people whom you think would be interested in participating, the workshops are free. Please contact Eddie Paul at rarebooks@jplmontreal.org

Yehuda Kaufman, 1886-1976
Co-founder, Jewish Public Library

Reuben Brainin, 1862-1939
Co-founder, Jewish Public Library
FROM THE MULTIPLE AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF MY MOTHER’S SON

“A sweeping examination of the unique buckle in time that was the ‘Sixties,’ told from the perspective of the ultimate outsider. Hirshberg’s insights and observations about society, his peers, bigotry and anti-Semitism are both trenchant and currently relevant. A deeply moving, sensitive, and profound novel—a definitive must read.

—Marcia Clark,
author of Blood Defense and Final Judgment

LEARN MORE & ORDER
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

In the Spotlight
EDITED BY LISA SILVERMAN and ELLEN DRUCKER-ALBERT


Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition come to Trujillo, Spain in 1481 searching for judaizers, New Christians who were forced to convert to Catholicism but still practice Jewish traditions in secret. Determined to root them out for the purpose of “reconciling them to the Church” or consigning them to the literal flames of Hell, the Inquisition will stop at nothing to find “the Truth.”

With this as a background, Isabel Perez, the 16-year-old eldest daughter of a converso family, finds herself betrothed to the alguacil (sheriff), a much older, ill-mannered man who Isabel finds repulsive. As a member of a New Christian family, and therefore low on the social hierarchy, this betrothal can mean protection for everyone she knows and loves, so she accepts it. Until, while returning home from a poetry reading, she sees Diego Altamirano, a handsome young man who sweeps her off her feet. Unfortunately, Diego is the son of a duke, part of an Old Christian family whose Christian bloodlines go back centuries. There is no chance that they can ever be together, yet they meet in secret and declare their love for each other, risking their lives should they be caught.

The story follows Isabel as she searches for a way to escape her betrothal, stay with Diego, and protect her family, all while writing poetry, learning Hebrew (a crime!), and studying Talmud (another crime!). There are many twists and turns, including the spectacle of an auto-de-fé (burning of heretics), and time spent in the dungeons of the Inquisition before Isabel and her family find a resolution to their dilemma.

The back matter of the book explains the connection between the author and Spain, includes pictures of Trujillo’s Jewish past, provides Research Notes, and lists suggestions for further reading. This is a professionally written, well-researched story based in an important era of Jewish History. The graphic torture scenes make this a read for an older teen audience, but this should easily find a place on the Jewish history bookshelf.


A bicyclist uses his fame as a national sports hero to camouflage his daring work to save 800 Jews. Everyone knows the rider who twice won the Tour de France for Italy. No one knows his Holocaust heroism; he keeps it a secret until he dies. This action-packed, moving biography places wartime deeds in an unusual setting: Gino Bartali’s homeland is an ally of Germany and explains Hitler in an interesting way: Italians know his claim that Jews are bad is a big lie; they decry Hitler as a liar; they determine to undermine his murderous plans. When Bartali wins the famous bike race in France, he becomes a recognizable celebrity and national idol at home. Approached by the Archbishop of Florence he becomes a righteous gentile, agreeing to deliver forged documents to help Jews escape Italy. He places the papers in the hollow bars of his bike. He rides up to 250 miles every day. Nazi guards pass him through towns and border checks thinking he is practicing for the next race. Once he crashes; the papers peep through the bars; he must carry his bike, not ride it. Bartali escalates to hiding Jews in his own home, to distracting station guards allowing Jews to board trains, to rescuing forty-nine imprisoned English soldiers. After the war, he wins the Tour de France a second time. Still Bartali does not talk about his heroism because he said, “Some medals are pinned to your soul, not your jacket.”

The illustrations are outstanding with a gold/green color scheme. Pictures appear from creative angles. Expressive faces dominate, starting with the gripping cover. This striking picture book ends with a chronology that mentions a fact not in the story itself: his arrest by the local SS. Amalia Hoffman’s 2019 picture book, The Brave Cyclist: the True Story of a Holocaust Hero includes this and his weakling youth he overcomes by training. This national legend betrays his nation for the greater good.

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

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President, Seal Beach, CA

Continued on page 15
The theater in Princeton, New Jersey. Though her performance met well-known is the story of Anderson’s 1937 concert at McCarter. These two communities worked together towards common goals. Consciousness, Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Without self-consciousness, he observed in America. It was this memory that sensitized the great scientist to the racial discrimination he saw in America. He described how the Nazis had burned Jewish properties (dramatically evoked in illustrations of books engulfed in flames). It illustrated vividly show, even the concert-goers averted their gazes from Marian Anderson. All but one — Albert Einstein. The sparse narrative and boldly-colored digital art mesh perfectly to convey the subtle ways in which Jim Crow was manifest even in America’s north at that time.

The concert itself was a triumph, but while Anderson “wanted only to take her shoes off and rest,” the theater owner refused to book her a room at the whites-only Nassau Inn. As the book’s illustrations vividly show, even the concert-goers averted their gazes from Marian Anderson. All but one — Albert Einstein, who approached her, lavishly praised her singing, and invited her to spend the night at his home.

Over coffee and cake, they spoke of their shared love of classical music. Then Einstein shared his experiences in Nazi Germany. He described how the Nazis had burned Jewish properties (dramatically evoked in illustrations of books engulfed in flames). It was this memory that sensitized the great scientist to the racial discrimination he observed in America.

Many young people have grown up unaware of the intense cooperation between Jews and African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Without self-consciousness, The Singer and the Scientist recreates a time when these two communities worked together towards common goals. A helpful Author’s Note gives further background on Einstein’s and Anderson’s involvement in human rights.
Vera’s respective pictorial images start to mix within each other’s personal tableaus. This is an inspiring and beautifully illustrated story that reminds us that even during very dark times, quiet, humble heroes can have a momentous effect on the lives of many. An author’s note has additional background information about Sis’s inspiration for this story, and “Nicky” and “Vera,” as well other related resources.

Ellen Drucker-Albert, Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews, Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY

Bible Stories and Midrash


Using the midrashic story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza as a jumping off point, Lenny and Benny is the story of two rabbits living in the forest. Lenny is the resident leaping champion, but when Benny seemingly beats him, Lenny is hurt and angry. Benny tries to make amends, but Lenny turns a deaf (floppy) ear to Benny’s pleas. Still at odds, Benny hosts a birthday party, unintentionally inviting Lenny. When Lenny arrives under the impression that they will rekindle their friendship, Benny screams him out of his house continuing the schism in their friendship. Eventually Lenny leaves an apology gift for Benny and their friendship is given new life.

The illustrations, strictly done in red and blue pencil, bring the two rabbits and their forest home to life and creatively express all of their big feelings. Young readers will easily identify with Lenny’s outrage when Benny out jumps him, and the hurt that both rabbits are feeling. Fundamentally a tale of forgiveness, the story is enhanced by the author’s note at the end. In it, Benziman quickly retells the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza and then explains how in that story, anger and meanness can spread quickly and how the story of Lenny and Benny is an alternative when we spread kindness and forgiveness instead.

Though the timeline is a bit choppy, this is ultimately a sweet story of friendship and forgiveness with which many readers can identify.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

Biography


ounded in 1960, the Paralympic Games provide a worldwide stage for elite athletes with disabilities. The background of this event is a fascinating one, described here in succinct and engaging text (fourteen brief chapters, which fly by), with frequent cartoon illustrations, archival photographs, and useful sidebars. Following health- and sports-related epigraphs from Hippocrates, Maimonides, and the book’s subject, the story begins in June of 1944, with a British soldier’s dramatic paralysis. At that time—and as far back as 2700 BCE when an ancient Egyptian scroll indicated the condition as “an ailment not to be treated”—paraplegia was deemed “incurable.”

The text next introduces Ludwig Guttmann, born in a German mining town in 1899. At the University of Breslau, where he studied medicine, he helped found a Jewish fencing club, and “when he learned that young Jewish children were no longer allowed to join German scouting groups,” he and a friend started one. A respected clinician, he protected Jews as possible, until escaping Nazi Germany for England. There he was considered an outsider, and without a hospital job, conducted laboratory research.

His theoretical work on the human nervous system and spinal injuries eventually led to a post at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, where he revolutionized care of patients with paraplegia. No longer considered “incurables,” they were instead treated through new procedures, fewer surgeries, and rigorous therapies—including sports. “Wake, dress, eat, walk, work…play sports!” became Guttmann’s treatment plan, after witnessing an impromptu (and rowdy) game of “wheelchair polo.” Additional activities followed—wheelchair netball, archery, and more, leading, in 1948, to the first Stoke Mandeville Games, precursor to the Paralympics. Guttmann’s tenacity (“Few people won an argument with Ludwig...While his direct manner didn’t always win friends, it got results”) comes through in the engaging text. “If I ever did one good thing in my medical career, it was to introduce sport into the rehabilitation of disabled people,” he said, and Alexander and Drummond excellently convey this legacy. Photographs, illustrations, and sidebars help enliven the presentation, with thorough back matter including a timeline, bibliography, source notes, and an index.

Elissa Gershowitz, The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA

Continued on page 17
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


This picture book biography is one of a trio of books that tells the story of Lisa Jura, a talented musician who dreams of becoming a concert pianist. She lives in Vienna, Austria with her parents and two sisters, but after Kristallnacht on November 9—10, 1938, her parents make the heartrending decision to send Lisa on the Kindertransport to Britain for safety.

In clear, expressive prose, Golabek, who is Lisa’s daughter, tells about Lisa’s journey and how she at last finds haven in a hostel on Willesden Lane in London. Luckily and happily for Lisa, she is able to play her beloved piano at the hostel. The music brings comfort to her and the other refugee children. The story continues during the war years and tells how Lisa is eventually accepted at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music and how she plays her triumphant debut recital. This inspiring book for younger children emphasizes hope and courage, and ends with the words, “I kept my promise, Mama. I held on to my music and never let go.” At the end of the book, an author’s letter to the reader and a page of historical background tell what happened in Austria after the “Anschluss” and Kristallnacht.

The design of this book is stunning. The inside front cover is medium brown with musical notes dancing throughout; the back inside cover contains framed photos and documents illustrating Lisa’s life and accomplishments. The masterly illustrations (watercolors and colored pencils) by Italian artist Sonia Possentini are mostly muted browns, blues, and greens but Lisa’s dress or coat is sometimes painted a deep shade of red. One interesting aspect about the illustration that depicts VE-Day is that the faces of people seem to be taken from photos, adding a touch of authenticity. For a more detailed telling of Lisa Jura’s story, see Mona Golabek’s two other books: *Lisa of Willesden Lane* (2021) and *The Children of Willesden Lane* (2017).

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple; author of *Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure* (Second Story Press), Toronto


In this second of a trio of biographies about Lisa Jura written by her daughter, Mona Golabek, we find out about Lisa’s early life in Vienna where she lives with her parents and two sisters, and how, after Kristallnacht, fourteen-year-old Lisa is sent to England on the Kindertransport. Along with other refugee children, Lisa finds a haven in a hostel on Willesden Lane in London. While she lives there throughout the war, the kindly woman who cares for her sees her potential to become a classical pianist. We follow Lisa’s path as she is accepted at the Royal Academy of Music until her triumphant debut recital at the end of the book. We learn more about the fate of her sisters (who survived the Holocaust) and her parents (who did not). With imaginative use of dialogue and letters, as well as sidebars explaining various aspects about World War II and the Holocaust, this biography is a captivating and heartfelt story about one girl who held on to her music while giving comfort and hope to the people around her.

The font is large and easy to read; the leading, generous. The expressive, detailed black and white illustrations add interest and emotion to the telling. The back matter is generous: photographs, discussion questions and activities, historical timeline of the Holocaust, resources. Unfortunately, the map at the front of the book is difficult to read, and the quality of the paper is rather flimsy. This biography would be a welcome addition to a classroom study of World War II, the Holocaust, or refugees and immigration. For another point of view about Jewish children living through the London “Blitz,” see Kitty Wintrob’s memoir *I’m Not Going Back: True-Life Story of the London Evacuation and Blitz: Illustrated Edition* (Toronto: Now and Then Books, 2016). For a review of *The Children of Willesden Lane* for older readers, see Rebecca Levitan’s review in the May/June 2018 issue of *AJL Reviews.*

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple; author of *Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure* (Second Story Press), Toronto

Continued on page 18
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS


This lovely and vibrant book is subtitled, “The True Story of the World’s First Female Rabbi” and the story will surely be a surprise to almost everyone who picks it up. The life of a Kurdish Jewish woman named Osnat Barzani, who was born in Mosul in 1590, is relatively unknown to modern readers. This imagined biography informs us that she was a great yeshiva scholar and teacher. The Author Notes at the end relate some of the various legends that surrounded her, and tell of discovered amulets that recounted her supernatural abilities. Author Sigal Samuel has incorporated these legends, along with historical research, into a 500-year-old tale of woman power that will appeal to all families, particularly those with young girls. Osnat Barzani was taught to read by her scholarly father who ran a yeshiva. When he died, she took over as leader and became an inspiration to women everywhere.

The book is particularly enhanced by the beautiful illustrations, which are a mix of gouache and pen and ink, with added block print techniques used for the flowing robes worn by the Middle Eastern characters. One two-page spread wonderfully depicts various Hebrew letters surrounding young Osnat, with the words, “Osnat loves the shapes of the Hebrew letters. One looked like a mysterious animal, and another a creeping vine”. The black line drawings (that are overlaid on the Hebrew letters imagining all the various animals) are extremely clever, and will be enjoyable to point out to children.

Lisa Silverman, 
retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles, CA; Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews

Fiction - Middle Grade


This guide for aspiring young artists and storytellers of all varieties aims to be “a Jewish creativity mentor in a book.” In each of the seven chapters — Filmmaking, Cartooning & Graphic Novels, Cooking, Songwriting, Painting & Art, Making Midrash, and Creating Judaica — two different contemporary artists or writers describe in interviews how they got started on their individual creative projects, oftentimes as children or young adults. Sections such as “Doing It Jewish,” “Keeping It Going,” “Making It As Good As It Can Be,” and “Taking It Further” are meant to provide ideas and inspiration to the young readers as well as some practical advice in getting started in their respective media. Experts from different cultures are included. For example, filmmaker Rachel Harrison Gordon is biracial, food entrepreneur Jeffrey Yoskowitz comes from a mixed Ashkenazi and Moroccan background, songwriter Sarah Aroeste hails from a Ladino family, and artist Siona Benjamin grew up in Bombay’s Bene Israel community. The author’s hope is that the testimonials of these accomplished creators, sometimes including their failures, and the suggestions for ways of combining one’s artistic and Jewish interests, will encourage budding artists to create their own unique work.

Marcie Eskin, 
Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL


The author appropriately dedicates this story to “To every kid who’s ever been told, ‘you’d be so pretty or handsome if...’” In gentle, but powerful free verse, Fipps tells the story of twelve-year-old Eliana, called Ellie but cruelly nicknamed Splash, who at her fifth birthday party jumped into the pool causing a mighty plume of water to erupt over the pool's side. The reactions of those around her opened Ellie’s eyes to the fact that she is overweight and that this is cause for teasing, shaming, and relentless ridicule. These feelings, once accessed, are not easy to move beyond, especially when some of the worst shaming is coming from Ellie’s own immediate

Continued on page 19
family. Her sister is unsympathetic, her brother is outright cruel, and her mother is the worst culprit of all, rarely letting a conversation go by without referring to Ellie’s weight and suggesting both out loud, and by plastering magazine articles around the house, that diets, exercise programs, and even bariatric surgery would solve all of Ellie’s problems. The latter terrifies Ellie who knows that her aunt had complications from this procedure, nearly died from them, and is still overweight. Ellie’s father tries to be supportive but, although he is a psychiatrist, he doesn’t have the strength to stand firmly enough up to her mother to cause the abuse to stop. School, of course, is no haven; it is a primarily a place of cruel taunts and pranks.

Ellie lives by a series of what she calls “Fat Girl Rules” which she thinks will shield her from negative attention but the strategies are ineffective and also cause her to shy away from many relationships and limit what might have been good experiences. With the help of a new friend, a wise therapist, and her father, who begins to see his role in her life as essential, Ellie gradually learns to “starfish,” to accept herself by spreading out into her own space in life, much like a starfish with arms extended out toward the world.

Although religion is not an integral part of the story, Ellie has a Jewish father and a Christian mother. Her sister and brother choose Judaism but Ellie tries to identify equally with both religions, feeling that her choice might provide a bridge between her parents, reducing tension and improving their relationship. The whole family celebrates Shabbat together on Friday evenings and celebrates Hanukkah.

Readers who feel different from those around them may see themselves in Ellie and feel less alone. Others will be sensitized to the plight of girls like Ellie who only want to be understood and accepted.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian; current library volunteer in Efrat, Israel; editor of children’s and young adult book reviews for the Jewish Book Council

Grannick, Carol Coven. Reeni’s Turn. Raleigh, NC: Fitzroy Books, 2020. 204 pp. $15.95 (9781646030125) PBK. Gr. 4-7.

Many books describe the complicated lives of sixth-grade girls. Carol Grannick has put a realistic twist on the genre.

When 11-year old Reeni’s ballet teacher asks her to perform the solo for the spring ballet recital, Reeni is thrilled and terrified. Not only does she suffer from stage-fright, the evening will also mark Mrs. Allie’s retirement. Meanwhile, Reeni’s older sister (a high school senior) is too preoccupied with college to care. Meanwhile, Reeni enters the roller-coaster of puberty. While her parents try to coax her into acceptance of the inevitable physical and emotional changes, Reeni experiences all the angst she can handle. Her self-image isn’t helped when her mother takes her to see the Nutcracker. Her schoolwork suffers; she and her best friend argue. She tries dieting and late-night binge-eating, and lies to her family about her trauma. Meanwhile, her body continues to change, and her performance fears rise. Finally, she rediscovers the “still, small voice” inside herself, and her passion for dancing. The book ends as she steps on stage for her performance.

Rather than use a traditional narrative, Carol Grannick tells Reeni’s story in short, one-page free-verse segments. Their pithiness (some are Tweet-length) increases their effectiveness. Reeni’s
pain and confusion elicit our sympathy; her situation should resonate with young readers and their families. Despite its limited Jewish content — Shabbat and the Seder are mentioned — it should be considered for synagogue and middle-school libraries.

Fred Isaac,
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Assigned to write a letter in social skills class, eleven-year-old Vivy Cohen decides to contact VJ Capello, the baseball player who first taught her to throw a knuckleball. As a girl with autism, her opportunities to join a real baseball team are limited, but when she’s spotted by a coach and invited to play for real, Vivy finally gets her chance. Her first letter to her hero becomes a real back-and-forth exchange where they discuss baseball, overcoming challenges, and more. When she is injured during a game her concerned parents crack down on her involvement and Vivy has to learn to find her voice and advocate for herself in real life as well as in writing.

This is a sweet and poignant “own voices” story; the author is Jewish and has autism. VJ is Black, and he and Vivy find common ground through their experiences with discrimination and prejudice. Vivy’s Jewishness is seamlessly portrayed if not central to the plot (she dresses up as famous knuckleballer Phil Niekro for Purim!). The idea of an adult communicating so candidly with a child is a bit far-fetched but is made to work; both of their voices are insightful and compelling. Because it touches on so many topics — sports, disability, friendship, family — this 2021 Schneider Family Book Award honoree will be interesting to a wide audience.

Aviva Rosenberg,
Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ


Although Leah means well when she successfully creates a golem to take care of her Zaide, who is suffering the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease, her situation quickly becomes out-of-control as the golem inserts, and asserts itself in Leah’s life.

The Nevins family has recently moved to be closer to Leah’s great-grandfather, Zaide, a holocaust survivor, to provide increased care in light of his failing health. Leah leaves her Conservative Jewish day school (Solomon Schechter), her friends, and experiences a difficult transition experience to public school. She is obsessively self-conscious about her large nose, and feels that it will be a major obstacle in her attempts to fit in socially. In addition to her personal challenges at her new school, based on overheard conversations, she fears for her Zaide as her parents prepare to move him to an assisted living facility, or worse, nursing home. Not only does she not want her Zaide to leave his home, but this will also mean the end of treasured visits with him, and Saturday visits with her cousins at his house.

Leah recalls one of Zaide’s stories, about the legendary golem of Prague that protected Eastern European Jews from danger, and how he had created his own golem from clay to protect his family from the Nazis (a decision which also went terribly wrong). Originally skeptical of this tale, she soon finds a mysterious envelope in Zaide’s house filled with dirt and decides to take matters into her own hands creating a creature in her own image, only with a “button” nose. This golem, at first looks to be just what Leah envisioned, quickly turns on her with regard to both her family and friends and she must find her inner strength and the confidence to save her family and herself.

This fast-paced, sometimes dark, modern day telling of the golem legend will especially resonate with those middle schoolers who may be faced with social pressures of fitting in to a secular public school setting after transitioning from a Jewish Day School. Leah is not only faced with anti-Semitic micro-aggressions but blatant anti-Semitism. Leah also learns important lessons about friendship, family relationships, and learning to be comfortable in your own skin, to which all middle schoolers can relate.

Ellen Drucker-Albert,
Co-editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews; Manager, Adult & Information Services, Cold Spring Harbor Library & Environmental Center, Cold Spring Harbor, NY


The characters from Anya and the Dragon (a 2019 Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Middle Grade) — Anya (the girl), Ivan (the fool), and Håkon (the dragon) — return in this 2020 Sydney Taylor Honor Book for Middle Grade. In this story, they are on a quest to find Anya’s Papa and return him home from a faraway war. While it is not essential to read the first book, it may be helpful in order to know the characters and their backgrounds.

Continued on page 21
He panicked during a class presentation and now, although he had an embarrassing experience when he was in third grade.

Three year-old Jacob, known to family and friends as Cobber, had an embarrassing experience when he was in third grade. He panicked during a class presentation and now, although an accomplished amateur magician, suffers from stage fright whenever he thinks about performing in public.

Anya and the Nightingale

Called Anya and the Nightingale, a forest elf who is causing a great deal of damage to the road leading to the kingdom. Upon further research, they discover that the Nightingale, whose name is Alfrecht, is a deaf tree-elf who is using sound magic to try to free his brother, Wielaf, from the Kiev castle dungeon. The trio, accompanied by Alfrecht, find their way into the dungeons, locate Wielaf, and are met with an angry, evil monster they must defeat before they can leave. The battle is vicious, frightening, magical, and ultimately successful.

There are several loose ends left hanging at the end of this second book: Papa is still not home; Anya has met a Jewish family in Kiev and is attracted to their son, Misha; the identity of the evil monster in the dungeon is not revealed; and Ivan is in love with Alfrecht; to name a few. It will be no surprise to read something with a title like, "Anya and the Evil Monster," sometime soon.

Just like the first book, Anya and the Nightingale has an abundance of Jewish content, and fills an important niche of Jewish Fantasy, with time travel, spirits, elves, Jewish legends and more. References to Jewish rites and rituals are spread throughout the book, starting - and ending - with

Anya building a Sukkah in her family's field. In addition, Anya, whose family are the only Jews she knows, finds Kiev to be a multicultural city with a large and learned Jewish population where she experiences a level of Judaism she has never encountered before. The details are well-researched and interesting. Overall, this is a fun read - especially when viewed as a trilogy in the making.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL President,
Seal Beach, CA

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anya building a Sukkah in her family's field. In addition, Anya, whose family are the only Jews she knows, finds Kiev to be a multicultural city with a large and learned Jewish population where she experiences a level of Judaism she has never encountered before. The details are well-researched and interesting. Overall, this is a fun read - especially when viewed as a trilogy in the making.


When the football program at Ironville Middle School is cancelled due to lack of funding, over-achiever Caleb successfully writes a grant for new top-of-the-line gaming computers and convinces his teacher Mrs. B to let him start an after school eSports Club. The "gamers" also persuade Mrs. B to make the popular (fictional) World War II simulator video game “The Good War” the focus of the club despite its mature rating.
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Fiction - Teen Readers


Two rising high-school seniors canvass for a Georgia Democrat up for special election to the state senate, and learn about each other and the insidiousness of prejudice in the process. Jamie Goldberg’s mom works for a state senator, his cousin runs the campaign for a Democratic underdog, and the two rope Jamie into canvassing as a way to overcome his shyness and prepare to give a speech at his sister’s Bat Mitzvah. Maya Rehman is Muslim, misses her best friend who is about to start college, and struggles with disappointment over a cancelled family vacation and, far worse, the possible cancellation of her parents’ marriage. When the two former childhood friends meet, Maya’s parents promise to consider giving her a car if she canvasses with Jamie. Although neither teen is eager to canvass at first, a friendship and then a romance develops, as does an understanding of what’s really at stake in the election—including a proposed bill to limit the wearing of head coverings, like the one Maya’s mother wears. What starts as a chore, quickly becomes the most important thing they’ve ever done.

Inspired by an actual Congressional special election, authors Albertalli and Saeed offer a nuanced, albeit definitively left-leaning, #OwnVoices response to the Trump era. Jamie and Maya come to recognize how widespread hatred has become—“Bowser became president in 2016. But I guess I didn’t really think about how it’s not just about him—there’s hundreds of Koopa Troopas everywhere to watch out for too.” As Jamie’s car gets “Fifi-ed” (stickered with an antisemitic icon along the lines of Pepe the Frog) and as doors close in Maya’s face simply because she is visibly Muslim, Jamie considers the ways in which his Judaism makes him a target and recognizes that he can “pass” in ways that Maya (stickered with an antisemitic icon along the lines of Pepe the Frog) and as doors close in Maya’s face simply because she is visibly Muslim. Jamie considers the ways in which his Judaism makes him a target and recognizes that he can “pass” in ways that Maya and her family cannot. Still, there is plenty of teen social drama, familial warmth, and comic relief in the form of a “social media queen” Grandma to make this a fun, as well as meaningful, read. The book ends on a hopeful yet satisfyingly complex note.

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


These first-person narratives in graphic-novel form are based on interviews with six children who survived the Holocaust. The children came from various parts of Europe—Poland, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Czechoslovakia—and from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds. They were all Jews. They all lost their homes, their possessions, most of their families, ended up in concentration camps and/or labor camps and barely survived. The thread that connects each story is the fact that, at the end of World War

After a Molotov cocktail is thrown into her synagogue Amina is very upset and worried. Her parents send her away, against her will, to Gardner Academy, a high-end boarding school in the hopes that the school environment will help her work out her anxiety. She joins a school club of teens from diverse backgrounds. One of the members is a Black teen who has spent his childhood in a commune. Another is an attractive student who pays her tuition by promoting clothes on a fashion website. One of the club’s designs.

The artwork is stunning and heartrending. The artists portray the “before” and “after” life in vivid reds, oranges, and greens, but the ghettos and camps are filled with foreboding greys and blacks. As the Nazis continue on their path of genocide, the victims become thinner, skeleton-like, almost “dehumanized.” The artists don’t flinch from showing the horrors of the camps, including starvation, beatings, and disease. The depiction of Mengele is horrifying—the stuff of nightmares. The panels on the page are varied; the text is clear and readable, with a good balance between text and illustrations. End matter includes a timeline (with a strange emphasis on Romania), a glossary, and a colorful (somewhat inaccurate) map. *We’ll Soon Be Home Again* would be a useful addition to a graphic novel collection about the Holocaust, along with Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Anne Sax’s *The War Within These Walls*. In her forward, the author states, “You and me and our friends, we are all responsible for our world, and how we want it to be.” Let it be so.

Anne Dublin, retired teacher-librarian, Holy Blossom Temple; author of *Jacob and the Mandolin Adventure* (Second Story Press), Toronto


Set during the five years preceding the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Lori Banov Kaufman’s *Rebel Daughter* tells the story of fourteen-year-old Esther bat Hanan as she steps from childhood into womanhood. Through her eyes, we track the downward spiral of her city. The fault lines in Esther’s realistically drawn family mirror those that Jewish tradition blames for the loss of Zion — baseless hatred among Jewish factions. Esther’s father, a senior Temple priest, opposes the young hotheads, while his fanatical son Yehuda joins them. Feisty Esther protects her little brother Matti with a fierce loyalty that steels her during siege, exile, and enslavement in Rome.

Kaufman paints a vivid tableau of the material and social life of first-century Judea: In the market, “The Egyptians wore white linen garments with wide sashes and more jewelry than anyone else.” Marriage is about protection, not romance: When Esther dodges an encounter with her repulsive prospective husband, her mother comments dryly, “I wasn’t happy about your father either when I married him.”

To avoid the arranged marriage, Esther sets her sights on the cosmopolitan Joseph, the Jewish turncoat we know as the historian Flavius Josephus, who cannot be trusted. Meanwhile Tiberius, a Roman freedman and honest trading partner of her father, has his eyes on her. This Darcy-esque figure appears at critical moments to rescue Esther and Matti — from a street massacre in Jerusalem, and later, in Rome, from castration for Matti’s pedophilic master’s designs.

Though Tiberius’s love for Esther is sometimes expressed in potboiler prose, Kaufman’s gritty history is solid. At times the short chapters lend the narrative a choppy feel, but the fall of the city strikes a poignant chord: “[T]hey merged with a throng of people rushing toward the Huldah Gates. Some carried cooking pots and blankets; others, fine clothes. Apparently no one knew what they’d need when the Messiah came.” Unlike Jewish tradition, which shapes the loss of Jerusalem theologically, *Rebel Daughter* presents Esther’s story as a triumph of character over fate. She loses city and family, but not memory. In that way, she is like her people.

Continued on page 24
The author’s Foreword orients the reader in time and place, and the closing Historical Note by Jonathan J. Price, professor of ancient history at Tel Aviv University and historical consultant to Kaufman, offers further background for the curious reader.

**Majorie Gann,**
*retired teacher; co-author (with Janet Willen) of Five Thousand Years of Slavery and Speak a Word for Freedom: Women Against Slavery, (Tundra), Toronto, Canada*


Many books discuss the Nazi regime. This one examines it through the lens of basketball and the 1936 Berlin Olympics for a wide audience.

Andrew Mariniss begins by telling the history of basketball. He then reviews the state of the game in the 1930s, when several groups — colleges, the American Athletic Union (AAU), and local and business-sponsored leagues spread the game’s popularity around the world. Mariniss examines American society in the Depression, and the widespread prejudice against Jews, Asians, and Blacks. He then discusses the creation of the U.S. Olympic team — including the role of Avery Brundage (a Nazi sympathizer) — and the controversy around a potential boycott of the Games. He tells about the tournament that led to the selection of the dozen members of the Olympic basketball team. The book notes the absence of African American players, and the inclusion of only one Jewish player, Sam Balter. He follows the team to Germany and portrays Jewish life under Hitler, and American athletes’ experiences with the Nazis. The book includes a dramatic account of the Olympics, including Jesse Owens’ victories and the basketball games (the final game was played outside, on a dirt court, in a driving rainstorm). The conclusion tells what happened to many of the players.

Though the author talks about many aspects of the game, he overlooks the famous Jewish players and leagues that drew thousands of spectators in the 1930s. Despite this, *Games of Deception* is a well-written book covering America’s relationship with Germany, the Nazi era, and the 1936 Olympics. It is an important story with significant (though not primary) Jewish content for sports fans and historians. The many photographs and use of quotations vividly tell the story alongside the text. It should be considered for all libraries from junior high school and above.

Fred Isaac,
*Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA*


Told in the voices of five teenagers involved in World War II, each for their own reasons, this is a story of dark fantasy and the levels to which people might go to gain power and exact revenge. Liam, an 18-year-old from New York, has discovered the portal to enter the shadow world of monsters and is searching for a book that will provide him the key to entry. Unfortunately, it is in German hands.

David, a Jewish teen from Lodz, has witnessed the death of his family and wants nothing more than revenge. His sister, Rebeka, also wants to see the Nazis disappear, but more than that wants her brother to stay alive. Simone, a French-Algerian, is part of the Resistance and is shepherding Phillip, a brilliant Black American electrical engineer from Tulsa, Oklahoma to various locations to beef-up communications between resistance groups.

How they wind up together, fighting against the Nazis, and supporting one another, is the basis for this complex and multi-layered story. With flashbacks and story sharing, the lives of each of these young people is revealed. The end struggle is a thrilling, imaginative and dark battle between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness, fear and hope, that keeps the reader glued to the pages. There are numerous accounts that the Nazi regime was heavily into the occult. This story is a fantastically engaging journey based on those accounts.

In the end, of course, the heroes win and find their dream relationships with one another: Simone reunites with her girlfriend in Paris, Liam and Daniel fall in love and save each other from the monsters, and Rebekah and Phillip find their shared experiences of bigotry makes a perfect connection.

With graphic language, explicit sexuality, and detailed descriptions of blood and gore throughout the book, this is definitely a YA novel and one not for the weak of heart. Nevertheless, the story comes to a fitting conclusion. This novel will be appreciated by teens who enjoy a mix of historical fiction and science fiction, or as the publisher puts it “Inglourious Basterds meets Stranger Things.” An interesting addition to the WWII and Sci-fi/Fantasy bookshelves.

Kathy Bloomfield,
*AJL President, Seal Beach, CA*
Holocaust and World War II


Hopkinson has written extensively about World War II for young people (*D-Day: The World War II Invasion That Changed History; Duet!: World War II Stories of Sailors & Submarines in the Pacific; Courage & Defiance: Stories of Spies, Saboteurs, and Survivors in World War II Denmark*), with her 2020 title, *We Had to Be Brave: Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport*—and this new volume—centering Jews and the Holocaust. *We Must Not Forget* is divided into three main sections, with Part One (“Fleeing from Evil, Hiding from Horror”) focused on “True Stories from Germans”, Part Two (“Families Torn Apart”), France; and Part Three (“Desperation and Defiance”), Poland. Sections begin with an “About the People” introduction, along with “Key Dates” timelines, providing useful snapshots about setting and experience.

Individual chapters spotlight specific people’s stories, with greater context provided through the accessibly detailed narrative. Many quotes appear throughout, along with well-placed and well-reproduced black-and-white photos, maps, archival materials, and other visuals. Chapter-ending “Look, Listen, Remember” boxes provide URLs to connect readers with first-person accounts, with many more useful links and copious information included in the well-documented back matter. An epilogue (“Liberation and Sorrow”), glossary, timeline, bibliography, source notes, photo permissions, and index complete the volume.

Elissa Gershowitz,
The Horn Book, Inc., Boston, MA

Israel


Sharon Rechter wrote *The Girl From Over There* in Hebrew, in 1987 when she was eleven years old, so it is not surprising that she skillfully describes the inner thoughts of eleven year old Michal. The book has been recently translated into English. The story takes place on a kibbutz immediately after World War II. Miriam, the “girl from over there,” is an orphan who arrives at the kibbutz in tattered clothes clutching her only possession, a teddy bear. Michal hates Miriam because she is different and Michal is jealous of the attention Miriam receives from the adults on the kibbutz and especially from her boyfriend, Dan. Michal begins to understand the horrible trauma Miriam has suffered when Miriam tells Michal how she watched her foster mother die and how she dug her grave with her bare hands. Several other adults who have just arrived from Europe tell their horrific stories of unbearable loss.

The book is beautifully illustrated with colorful primitive-looking drawings. Red roses, a sign of hope and beauty, adorn the tops and corners of many pages. Unfamiliar terms and concepts such as kibbutz, communal bedroom, children’s caretaker, and lost relatives are described in footnotes at the bottom of the page. The book is well written and describes life in the early kibbutzim. Each parent, librarian or teacher must decide which children are mature enough to read *The Girl From Over There*, because of its disturbing detail about personal suffering and loss during the Holocaust. When reading this book the reader is advised to have a box of tissues within easy reach.

Ilka Gordon,
Beachwood, OH

Picture Books


When her cousin Lizzy’s wedding falls on the day of the ballet performance she’s practiced for months to perfect, Sarah worries that she will never have the chance to perform her big solo. On the day of the wedding, to her parents’ dismay, Sarah throws on her recital dress, fidgets through the ceremony, and does her best to resist her parents’ invitation to join in the hora dance. However, Sarah can’t help but notice that the cantor’s song during the ceremony is “soft and sweet, like the lullabies her mother used to sing to her,” and when Lizzy circles her groom the traditional seven times, it looks just “like a dance!” Lizzy eventually draws Sarah into the hora circle—the very center of the circle, no less!—and Sarah gets to do a solo more meaningful than the one she missed.

The overall message appears to be that Jewish traditions, like the hora and Jewish wedding ceremonies, have a beauty all their own, and that partaking in such traditions with family and community members has great value. While Sarah certainly learns these lessons, readers may wonder at the ease with which her parents

Continued on page 26
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

expect her to give up the performance she’s worked so hard to perfect, and the implications of Sarah’s absence on her dance troupe. Likewise, Sarah’s ultimately getting a solo at the wedding may seem inconsistent with the community- and family-spirited-ness of the Jewish wedding celebration. Nevertheless, the visual details in this book will capture young dance enthusiasts’ hearts. Illustrations filled with elegantly swirling lines and soft blue, green, and orange tones capture the satisfying otherworldliness that Sarah feels when she dances. Sarah’s emotions are echoed in her stuffed animals’ faces, and at times in her cat’s, making the illustrations a delight to explore. Budding dancers will appreciate diagrams that demonstrate relevant dance steps, including those for the hora, and those new to Jewish wedding traditions will get a taste for their dance-infused beauty as well. Backmatter explaining Jewish wedding traditions offers a starting point for further exploration.

Rebecca Fox,  
Children’s Librarian, New Canaan Library, New Canaan, CT


The very successful “Little Golden Book” series (that still features Pokey Little Puppy, Saggy Baggy Elephant, and all the rest) has entered into the world of children’s biographies with a new series about four important people: Jackie Robinson, Frieda Kahlo, Martin Luther King, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The book on the late Supreme Court Justice is well-done and uses the child-centered language necessary to reach the young readers of its target audience. Not a lot is conveyed about Ginsburg’s childhood, as in other biographies for children, but the concepts of fairness and overcoming inequality that she experienced in her lifetime are appropriately presented. The illustrations are charming and bright and sure to appeal to youngsters. In the domestic scenes there is no direct depiction of a Jewish home, but periodic mentions of Ginsburg’s Jewish heritage, especially in a dramatic double page spread showing the words “NO WOMEN” and “NO JEWS” in large font. The text states, “Some law firms didn’t want to hire Jewish people. Others didn’t want to hire women. Ruth never forgot this. She spent her career fighting to make discrimination of all kinds illegal.”

There is also an excellent two-paragraph explanation of the role of the Supreme Court and particularly the historical importance of when a justice writes a “dissent,” which Ginsburg often did. One strangeness in the text is the use of a weird font for quotes. It doesn’t appear often, but it consists of all letters capitalized with the exception of vowels, which are in lowercase for some unknown reason. This seems to be a poor choice for a book for children just learning to read. Other than this flaw, it is really quite a bargain at $4.99. These biographies present an entire new realm of well-written, collectible books for young children.

Lisa Silverman,  
retired Library Director, Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles, CA; Co-Editor, Children’s and Teen Literature, AJL News and Reviews


Kate and her younger brother Nate spend every Shabbat with their grandmother doing fun activities, so when Bubbie shows up in a motorized scooter, Kate worries that things will not be the same. She begins to miss the grandmother who loved to dance and take them to climate marches. “Maybe different is good,” Bubbie tells her. “Long ago people who had trouble walking were stuck indoors.” As their grandmother leads the children through a day of taking the bus to buy apples for Rosh Hashanah, flying a kite from her scooter at a park, and picking flowers, painting, and reading books in her garden, Kate comes to accept and even embrace the scooter, realizing that it is enabling Bubbie to continue to do all the adventurous things she enjoys.

The ink and watercolor illustrations are bright and include diverse groups of people in the bus, market, and park crowds. The author’s biography notes that she co-founded KickstART Society for Disability Arts and Culture and uses a motorized scooter herself. Although the Jewish content is minimal (the story takes place on Shabbat, they shop for Rosh Hashanah, the grandmother is Bubbie), and many of the day’s activities do not align with traditional Shabbat observance, the author and illustrator have provided a positive example of differently-abled people.

Marcie Eskin,  
Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL

Continued on page 27

Even the hardships and poverty of shtetl life do not lessen the will of Nathan’s parents when it comes to paving the way for their son’s future. It is evident that their child has a unique gift—a voice that can lift people’s hearts. When a famous singer gives a concert in a nearby village, the family is convinced that Nathan too is destined for a musical career, a goal that can be achieved only with operatic training in the best place in the world—Italy! Much scrimping and saving precede Nathan’s tearful departure, but the story takes a dramatic turn at this point, when language difficulties and confusion cause Nathan to board the wrong ship and finds himself bound for America. With his talent undiminished he is able to sing his way into a variety of opportunities that turn his mistake into good fortune, his marriage, and even a reunion with loved ones.

Playful illustrations mostly in concentrated shades of blue, green, yellow and orange help to convey joy in this sweet immigration tale. Images of New York streets, the Statue of Liberty, and Ellis Island are scenes that bring to life the immigrant experience of so many Jewish families in the early 1900s. The author has included a note to explain that this work of historical fiction was inspired by her own grandfather’s journey.

Gloria Koster, retired school librarian from New Canaan, CT Public Schools; Children’s Author; Member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education


Jella Lepman was a woman who had the ambitious conviction that sharing international children’s books could “create bridges of understanding” between people, could heal and unite nations, and could even prevent war. Living in Germany during the rise of the Nazis, the Jewish Lepman emigrated to England during the war and, upon return, was appointed the job of “helping German children whose lives had been disrupted.” She chose to do that through books.

In this imagined portrayal of Lepman’s impact on children, a young sister and brother walk the streets of 1946 Munich, poor, hungry, and despondent with their war-torn city. The elder Anneliese, who selflessly cares for her brother, Peter, sees no point in the neighbor women’s efforts to clean up the town, thinking, “Couldn’t they see the street would never be what it had been before the war?” The two happen upon a line of people waiting outside a building and Anneliese hopes food is being distributed, but the building is Munich’s art museum, Haus der Kunst, where Lepman’s exhibition of 4,000 international children’s books is underway.

Upon entering, the siblings are awe-struck by the dazzling amount of books and Anneliese is reminded of her father taking her to the library and reading to her at bedtime. But the library is now gone, as is her father. Just as Anneliese notices a lady “pulling books from a shelf and talking excitedly to a group of adults” and saying “the word hope,” Peter asks her to read him a book, presumably *The Story of Babar*. The two become so engrossed, they don’t realize they are the last in the museum. The “lady with the books” invites them to return the next day and when they do, they find the lady enchanting a group of children with *The Story of Ferdinand* about the flower-loving bull who would not fight. The lady also tells Anneliese about the book *Pippi Longstocking*, prompting Anneliese to consider how Pippi “had lost both her parents and yet did just fine for herself.” That night, Anneliese awakes seeing Pippi Longstocking, prompting Anneliese to consider how Pippi “had lost both her parents and yet did just fine for herself.” That night, Anneliese awakes seeing the world in a different light and decides that, “Tomorrow...she would join the women with their brooms. She would help clear the street around the damaged library. And maybe someday, the building would again be filled with books.”

*The Lady with the Books* is gorgeously illustrated in muted tones with realistic, yet dreamy renderings with a hint of whimsy that perfectly match the essence of the story. End pages include information on Lepman’s life and her creation of the international book exhibit, International Youth Library in Munich, and International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). In today’s global political climate, the spirit of Jella Lepman seems a supremely important one to foster and this beautifully told story is a wonderful way to start.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

**Lifecycle and Jewish Values**


*Wise Friends* takes Jewish teachings and incorporates them into a poetic love letter to trees. A loose storyline introduces us to an unseen narrator named Raviv (“a little droplet of water, a perfect round gift”) who brings us messages...
of wisdom from his tree friends. For instance, the date palm urges “Stand up! Straight as can be! Always do the right thing and you will reach as high as the top of my fronds.” Hebrew appears on the page, quoting Psalms 92:13 and the translation appears at the back of the book: “the righteous bloom like a date palm.”

The illustrations, in various hues of green, reproduce works of art from as early as 1479 BCE to as recent as 2019. All the featured trees grow in Israel. Perspectives shift from super closeups to wide shots, giving a surprising sense of movement to a book about stationary beings. The entire package is an invitation to contemplation, both visual and philosophical, that will resonate with children and adults alike, at Tu B’Shvat or year-round.

This unusual book of tree-appreciation fulfills the mission of Hiddur Mitzvah, the creators’ company, whose charge is to create meaningful modern objects of Judaica. While a hardcover binding might have enhanced the beauty and gravitas of the book (as well as its durability), the lush art design and thought-provoking text make the paperback a worthwhile purchase.

**Heidi Rabinowitz,**
*Feldman Children’s Library, Congregation B’nai Israel,*
*Boca Raton, FL*

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**Shabbat and Holidays**


Every autumn, as Rosh Hashanah approaches, Max and Emily’s Savta (grandmother, in Hebrew) visits from Israel. Max is eager to help Savta prepare caramel apples, but Savta tells him, “Not so fast.” First, they must pick the apples. Emily and Savta savor each moment, picking extra apples to dip in honey on Rosh Hashanah, finding a tree branch that looks like a shofar, and watching leaves twirl, “Around and around … Just like the end of one year leads into the beginning of the next one.” At first, Max struggles with their ponderous approach—can’t they just gather their apples and start cooking already? But Max soon gets wrapped up in the spirit of the outing and discovers that there is plenty of time to learn about Savta’s childhood traditions and to make some new traditions with his family.

Crisp, autumnal illustrations perfectly set the scene for a Rosh Hashanah apple-picking expedition, and wiry-haired Savta with her hiking boots and Star of David necklace is a natural guide for Max’s—and the reader’s—spiritual journey through the great outdoors. Important Rosh Hashanah symbols, like the shofar and the round challah, are playfully introduced, with supplemental explanations at the book’s end. The real takeaway is that the days leading up to Rosh Hashanah are a time to slow down and reflect, and this imaginative outing offers a wonderful opportunity for readers to do just that. Recipes for Savta’s Apple Cake and Max’s Caramel Apples are appended, and many families will surely make these recipes part of their own traditions for the New Year.

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

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**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

*Continued on page 28*
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

Non-Fiction


With the emergence of Nazism in Germany in the West and the geopolitical opposition in Communist Soviet Union to the East, Polish Jews were caught in a vicious vise that came with the German invasion. While the belief that the Russians would serve as a block to Nazi persecution and an ideological linkage to Jewish liberalism, the newly found patron only succeeded in bringing Polish Catholic anti-communism and latent antisemitism ever more sharply to the fore.

This book tells the relatively little-known story of how 200,000 refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland withstood unbearably harsh conditions while living hidden for six years in the Soviet interior. When they returned to Poland after the war, they learnt about the Holocaust and discovered the terrible fate of their coreligionists. As a result, many of them chose to stay silent about their own ordeals.

Adler, an Associate Professor of History and Jewish Studies at Pennsylvania State University, has amassed a treasure trove of archival material augmented by an impressive collection of immigrant memoirs to tell this compelling social history.


Ballen has been drawing plants and gardens from a young age, and through her experience and studies has learned much about those mentioned in the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible). Several textual chapters are provided at the beginning of the book. After the introduction, Ballen discusses Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden) and Paradise through references to gardens and orchards that are also metaphors for delving into Torah study, as well as fragrances and fruit trees. She then expounds on “The Five Most Mentioned Fruits in the Hebrew Bible:” figs, grapes, olives, dates, and pomegranates. These chapters are followed by a presentation of many of the plants in alphabetical order. Each of these pages includes a beautiful illustration, the English and Hebrew names, the Latin scientific name, and a verse from the Tanach that mentions the plant. Trees like the almond, citron (etrog), and laurel, fragrant bushes like myrrh and myrtle, and anemone, thistle and lily flowers are included.

Ballen’s art has been exhibited internationally, and she is also the author of award-winning book, *The Power of the Hebrew Alphabet*. The detailed color illustrations and sparse text make

This riveting book confronts the social, political, and cultural upheavals of the late nineteenth-century that fostered a virulent anti-Semitism in Europe and ultimately led to the Holocaust. Heavily researched, with contemporary diaries, documents, and statistics, the author presents a grim chronology of legislation, complaints (“too many Jews!”), expulsions, pogroms, and civil wars affecting the Jews of chiefly central, eastern, and southern Europe. The fin-de-siècle was rife with contradictions: the rise of democracy broke down barriers for “ambitious” Jews yet created envy among “sluggish” traditional Europeans of the aristocracy or peasantry, i.e. those unable to compete in a changing world. Nationalism fueled ethnic pride yet left Jewish citizens further marginalized and often caught between feuding minorities. The Industrial Revolution created wealth and built up the middle class yet exacerbated hostility toward Jews also in search of opportunities. Little wonder the Nazis found plenty of outside helpers. The author describes sickening accounts of local populace rounding up or denouncing neighbors, usurping Jewish property, and cheering the massacres. The hatred was a culmination of sixty years, of which the author considers capitalism the largest factor because of economic inequality. However, might this contradict the popularity of Communism and other left-wing politics that attracted so many—probably too many—Jews (who were also blamed)? Also, is the author aware that this hatred existed long before the secularized age of the Enlightenment? Some might view this tragic epoch instead as an updated version of “Esau vs. Jacob.” Nevertheless, this book is recommended for academic libraries with Jewish or European History collections.

Hallie Cantor, Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY


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the book accessible to all ages. While the verses are not comprehensive—only one or two are included with the pictures, and some species will be more readily identified with more modern names (“plane” is the translation for the modern Hebrew word for “chestnut; “quince” in modern Hebrew is “khibush;” while “apple” is “tapuach” — it is a good resource for learning about plants and trees that still grow in Israel, and about biblical verses.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


We already have numerous books on European resistance to the Nazis. In this book, Tim Brady tells the Dutch story, focusing on three young women, Truus (b. 1923) and Freddie (b. 1925) Oversteegen and Johanna (Hannie) Schaft (b. 1920). All three came from Haarlem in the northwest Netherlands, but their backgrounds were very different. The two sisters (Truus and Freddie) were raised by their working mother as Leftists; their opposition to Germany was a lifelong political stance. Hannie Schaft was middle-class, a law student who became a fighter by choice. The protagonists are not Jewish, but Brady provides several references to the Frank family and other Jews.

The first half of the book takes readers chronologically through the War, describing the Dutch experience from 1939 to 1943; along the way, it recounts the lives of these young women as they became dedicated fighters. After meeting one another in late 1943, the focus turns entirely to their exploits. Many of their actions are told in graphic detail, including assassinations, rescues, and other acts of sabotage. The main text ends with Hannie’s capture, interrogation and execution in 1945. The Epilogue describes the sisters’ lives after the War, and the honors bestowed on all three of them.

It is always good to read about how resistance to the Nazis in various European countries operated, and thus Tim Brady’s book is a useful, usable introduction to the topic. Regrettably, the style is over simplistic, and the text presumes little or no background on the Shoah. The book would have benefitted from the addition of photographs, a bibliography and index; while there are footnotes throughout, many of the quotations are derived from Truus’s autobiography and a biography of Hannie. *Three Ordinary Girls* is most appropriate for high school students and synagogue libraries, but it is not adequate for research institutions.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


In this book Dina Danon, an Assistant Professor in Judaic Studies and History at Binghamton University, examines how the Jewish community of the Turkish port city of Izmir on the western coast of Anatolia responded to the socioeconomic and cultural
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

challenges it faced during the late 19th to early 20th centuries. She analyzes these developments against the background of events and ideologies in the Ottoman Empire, viewed through theories on modernization, poverty, and minorities, comparing developments in Izmir with those in the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and the Jewish World. The study is based on Ladino primary sources of the communal council—many of them in the soletreo, a hard-to-read cursive script, seldom consulted by historians—as well as local periodicals, Ottoman archival sources and numerous published sources and studies.

By the late nineteenth-century, the Jews of Izmir numbered circa 25,000 out of a population of some 200,000, most of whom were Hellenic and Ottoman Greeks as well as Muslims and Armenians. Most of the Jews were poor petty tradesmen, unskilled laborers, craftsmen and unemployed, many of whom sought alms on a daily basis and during special events. Danon examines the self-awareness of community members and leaders to the condition of the poor and various attempts to alleviate it through special organizations and events as well as vocational training. Danon also evaluates the impact of the Alliance Israélite Universelle education system on economic developments in the community and internal struggles.

While the impact of the gabela tax on the community and its implementation method could be further explained, this work provides a major contribution to the study of a Jewish community in general, and an Ottoman one in particular. It will also be useful to those interested in the broader social and economic history of the Mediterranean and the Ottoman Empire.

Rachel Simon, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ


IrResilience is a collection of biographical profiles of Israelis from many communities—Jewish and non-Jewish, religiously observant and non-observant—who have overcome significant personal events or trauma and have succeeded. Even one of the authors, Naomi Baum, overcame the trauma of September 9, 2000 (9/11) and a 2010 fight against breast cancer. The concept of the book is that despite trying times, insecurities, or personal setbacks, Israelis have demonstrated national and personal resilience. Israelis, it turns out, are collectively among the happiest people in the world.

These are stories of empathy, flexibility, and finding meaning in life. Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, for example, survived the Holocaust to become chief rabbi. His mission was to carry on the family tradition of rabbinic leadership. Another example is Gadeer Kamal-Mrech, who became the first female Druze member of the Knesset. As a non-Jewish, native Arabic-speaking Israeli government official, she actively works to build bridges among people.

This is an inspirational and feel-good book that can be easily read in a few hours. It is highly recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman, Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL


In this treatise by Dionysius bar Salibi, the reader gains some rare insights into the dynamics of the competing cultures in the Levant during the 12th century C.E. The original title of this treatise, “Against the Jews,” is a format commonly employed by early apologists (i.e., Josephus’ Against Apion). In this instance, this treatise is sandwiched between two similar treatises, “Against the Moslems,” which preceded it and “Against the Armenians,” which followed it. According to the editors, the Syriac text in this edition was derived from all available manuscripts and a critical apparatus is included. As a Hierarch in the Syrian Orthodox Church of the 12th century, Bar Salibi bore witness to a tremendously turbulent period in history when Christians and Moslems battled for control of the Holy Land. Interestingly, Bar Salibi demonstrates little awareness of changes that might have occurred among the Jews since the time of the New Testament. He writes as though, even in the 12th century C.E., Pharisees and Sadducees are still battling it out for leadership of the Jewish people. The editors point out that Bar Salibi writes with some contempt but nothing like the animosity voiced by later actors (i.e., John Chrysosthum).

There is little indication that Jews represented a threat to him, and as the editors explain, “...there is no criticism of Jewish manners or morals: of ‘legalism’ or ‘hypocrisy,’” as is found in the works of later authors. In truth, the work tells the reader little about the contemporary condition of the Jews, speaking only to what Bar Salibi regarded as their ancient and obsolete beliefs.

Bar Salibi little expected to count Jews among his readers, but...
instead, his writings were intended for the eyes of the Christian leadership, striving to strengthen their convictions and beliefs. Written in the Levant in the wake of the 2nd Crusade, the treatise reveals the views, including the prejudices of a diligent, and for the time, scholarly Bishop of the Syrian Orthodox church. The text and commentary are accompanied by notes, a bibliography, an index to biblical references, and facsimiles of some of the manuscript pages. Although perhaps not appealing to a wide Jewish readership, this edition of Bar Salībī’s “Treatise against the Jews” provides an interesting example of medieval Christian polemics.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


In 1932, the young Nachum Gidalewitsch traveled from his hometown in Munich to visit relatives in Poland, and as a keen and budding photographer he documented what he saw there. These photographs, taken by someone who would later achieve fame as one of the pioneers of modern photojournalism, capture scenes of a vibrant Jewish community life in Poland just seven years before it would all be torn apart. In 1936, Gidalewitsch emigrated to Palestine, eventually becoming the prize-winning Israeli photographer, Tim Gidal.

Depicted here, in this early photo essay, are Polish Jewish men and women, children and elders, people across all walks of life, captured in a multitude of scenes ranging from conditions of “material well-being” to conditions of “abject poverty.” As Wosk writes in the Preface, “Perhaps none of the people... portrayed in these photographs of 1932 survived the war... When you look upon them, you are looking at ghosts... Each photograph is a monument, a letter in light.”

For a grandson of a family of Polish origin who lost 72 members in the Shoah with only a very few members surviving, it is a very painful and emotional experience to go through all the photos of pre-war Poland in this book and reflect on them. Notwithstanding, this book underpins the truism that “a picture is worth more than a thousand words.” One simply cannot just go through the photos without being moved: the images are engaging, captivating, painful and thought-provoking. Kudos to the late Tim Gidal, and to all the people involved in putting together this beautiful memorial book based on his work.

Moshe Weisblum, PhD.


The relationship between Jews and Arabs is most often contextualized in relation to the history of the establishment of Israel and its conflict with the surrounding Arab world presenting what appears to be a static situation. Hart now expands this time-bound perception by providing a cultural exploration of the relationships between Jews and Arabs from a pre-Islamic setting in Arabia evolving over multiple historical periods. The author is a cultural anthropologist with an impressive background in the Spanish and Latin American connection to Jewish history resulting in an appreciation of the Sephardic tradition.

Hart divides his book into three parts. The initial section deals with the existence of Jewish tribes in Arabia in the pre-Islamic period through to the establishment of Islam as a religious belief system and its expansion into what is today referred to as the Middle East and across the northern African continent. The second part relays the glorious history of Jewish genius in Muslim-dominated Andalusian Spain from the early 8th century up to the antisemitic policies of the Catholic Spanish monarchy in 1492 and the expulsion of its Jewish population. From there we learn about the presence of Jews in the greater Arab world with an emphasis on Jews found in North Africa. The third part covers the undulating history of cooperation and conflict with the introduction of European colonialism and the emergence of Jewish nationalism. Here the author turns his attention to the perceptions that Arabs and Jews have toward each other and the roots of intolerance and social hatred.

This is an excellent source for extended education beyond the contemporary journalistic approach to contemporary Middle Eastern affairs.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Ph.D, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


A n impressive array of Jewish scholarship on the Decalogue, the Ten Words, more commonly phrased as the Ten Commandments. Each of the Tanach’s ten commandments is subject to commentary by a combination of 24 rabbis or Judaic studies scholars with incredible erudition, often with high levels of abstraction. There is a heavy reliance on the past
works of Hebrew Sages and Rabbinic midrashim, all of which have provided guidance on acceptable behavior for Jews passing through life searching for assistance in their decision-making. While this brief tome might be best read by either other rabbis and Judaic studies students, it would also be of interest to any member of the Jewish community seeking reflection on proper behavior. It is, furthermore, an ideal educational tool at many levels of use.

Sanford R. Silverbugh, Ph.D, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

This book brings to the fore a topic that has often been on the sidelines: Jewish life in Shanghai in the early 20th century. The real action had been in the centers of Jewish life, whether in Europe, the Land of Israel, or the larger Muslim world. Shanghai’s Jewish life was a periphery, encompassing the periphery of the mainstream of Baghdad Jewry, a small group of Russian Jews who emigrated under Soviet rule, or refugees who fled from the Nazis. By shining a light on this seemingly obscure location, this collection of essays emphasizes both the normal lives of Jews in Shanghai and the emergency situations during the intersecting conflicts that affected Shanghai between the rise of Nazism and the aftermath of World War II.

The city was in some ways unique—a Chinese city with a large international presence, and during much of World War II under Japanese occupation. In the early 20th century, Shanghai already housed a small but influential community of wealthy Baghdadi Jewish traders as well as a small group of Russian Jews who wanted to leave the Pale of Settlement. After the rise of the Soviet government, another group of Russian Jews desired to leave the centers of Soviet rule. Finally, for a short period after Kristallnacht, Shanghai even allowed travelers to disembark without visas, making it a perfect place for refugees to flee. Tens of thousands of Jews lived in Shanghai: religious and secular, Sefardic and Ashkenazic, wealthy and poor, refugees and residents. They created synagogues, newspapers, mutual aid-societies, and businesses, which can help us understand the reality of daily life under challenging circumstances.

The essays collected in this readable book find a balance between the personal and the academic. Most articles are written by those who personally lived in Shanghai or who are descended from those who did. For readers used to the academic distance of typical historical writing, the mixture of personal recollection and historical context seems a bit surprising. But it is also refreshing, reminding readers that Jewish Shanghai might be far away and a bit exotic, but it was populated by real people, with struggles, desires, loves, wants, successes and failures.

Yoel Finkelman, National Library of Israel


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One tradition we have in our home at our Shabbat table is to say a few words on the weekly Torah portion. We do this by reading a commentary and other times we orally highlight a part of the portion. Sometimes we would read selections from a parashah book. Thus, we did with Ideas: Bereshit by Sina Kahen, which we test-drove at our Shabbat table.

Ideas: Bereshit is divided in two parts: a two-part Introduction and Torah portions. In the Introduction, Kahen defines “ideas” as “a structure formed by different elements arranged in a pattern, [that] go on to represent that arrangement with a symbol, and then use that symbol as a component in even more elaborate structure.” These patterns are ideas. This scaffolding allows for the building of linked ideas, which would be referred to as knowledge. The section on the Torah portions are the ideas, thus the title. What Kahen does is introduce an idea, which he slowly develops by bringing in other scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish, Ashkenazic rabbis and Sephardic rabbis, and across all disciplines. It is this last point that is most appreciated about this book. Bringing in thoughts from across the disciplines and from different individuals, regardless of background, not only shows the openness to other ideas, but also, as Kahen writes that “all areas of worldly knowledge are simply the effects and God is the Cause.”

The contributions from all the scholars are presented in the form of quotations throughout each Torah portion in the book. At the end of the Torah portion is a full list of citations for all the quotations cited. Recommended for day school libraries, synagogue libraries, and home personal libraries.

Haim A. Gottschalk, Olney, MD

Continued on page 35

In *Brothers from Afar*, Kanarfogel argues against the long-held view that those who apostatized from Judaism and returned were enthusiastically welcomed by the majority of the rabbis of the Middle Ages. The medieval period in Europe was a tumultuous time for Jews. Brutal anti-Semitism and Jewish adherence to their faith often resulted in a clash among Jews between apostasy and reversion to Judaism. According to Kanarfogel, the great 11th century Rabbi Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi, 1040-1105) stands out as having been relatively receptive to penitent apostates. However, as bitterness and anger escalated among Christians in the period of the first two Crusades, the animosity toward Jews increased exponentially, just as it did against the Moslems in the East who were the original targets of those Crusades. It manifested itself in numerous massacres and pogroms. Sometimes Jews were permitted to convert or leave. In other instances, they were simply massacred. Apostates came to be viewed as threats to the Jews, since they often had insight into the workings of the Jewish community and could be driven to testify against their former brethren.

Kanarfogel argues that in the face of this increased tension, many rabbis came to reject Rashi’s relatively gentle approach to apostates and in welcoming returnees. Some argued that the halakhic status of apostates was significantly reduced. More importantly, the rabbis demanded that some sort of penance be imposed in order to absolve the apostate of their crime of apostasy and to confirm their contrition. Some argued that lashes were needed to atone for their sins, while others asserted that ritual immersion was needed to cleanse the returnees and to act as a form of reverse-baptism. Kanarfogel notes that one of the leading advocates for such impositions, Rabbi Israel b. Petahyah Isserlein of Austria (1390-1460), went so far as to assert that some of the traditional customs and rules that applied to the average Jew could be abrogated if they ensured the conviction of returnees. For example, a returnee could be required to shave before ritual immersion, even if it were in a period when shaving was otherwise prohibited (i.e., during *hol ha-Moed*, the weekday or secular part of a festival). Kanarfogel argues that Isserlein’s responsa and dicta were groundbreaking and set future standards for apostates returning to the fold.

The notes and indexing in this volume attest to the author’s meticulous reading of the rabbinic manuscript sources. There is even a helpful list of European rabbinic scholars from the period. An excellent assessment of the changing views of the medieval rabbis, this book would be a valuable addition to academic Judaic libraries.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


Professor Scult, who in 1993 published a biography of Mordecai Kaplan, continues to show that he is a leading authority on the life and writings of Kaplan. This volume covers part of World War II and the beginnings of the State of Israel. Kaplan grapples with a philosophy of Judaism that strives to bring Jews closer to participating in Jewish life while his ideas of “reconstructionism” are at odds with his fellow faculty at Jewish Theological Seminary and traditional Jews. Kaplan is bothered that few members of his own congregation, Society for the Advancement of Judaism, are not believers in his version of Judaism. Many of the entries concern his relationships with these people, events in his personal life, and his thoughts on Jewish life. Since this is a personal journal, perhaps not meant for publication, we only get Kaplan’s side of the story. A search was unable to find any statements from the people Kaplan talks about to learn the other side of the story.

The editor, Mel Scult, has done an excellent job of transcribing Kaplan’s text, giving headings to each entry, and adding context through footnotes to the text. Scult includes a glossary that has mini biographies of the people mentioned. Since the journal is meant to be the private thoughts of the writer, it does not flow like a well edited book. Kaplan did not make entries every day and Scult did not include every entry.

This book is highly recommended for personal, synagogue, and academic libraries.

Daniel D. Stuhlman
Temple Sholom Library, Chicago, IL


With deep ties to both the Jewish community in Squirrel Hill and Pittsburgh, as well as to the greater Pittsburgh community, this reviewer feels honored to be able to read and comment on this book on behalf of the Association of Jewish Libraries. Assembled here are essays from people in Squirrel Hill and the greater Pittsburgh community, including contributors who are members of each of the congregations in Tree of Life, reporters, spiritual leaders, and others. Each of the essays chronicles the
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS


Klawans, a specialist in the religious literature of ancient Judaism at Boston University, and Wills, a visiting professor of Religious Studies and Judaic Studies at Brown, have joined forces to edit the third book in a trilogy of books published by Oxford University Press that incorporates Jewish traditions and interpretations into editions of major biblical works. The first part of the *Jewish Annotated Apocrypha* contains the English translation of apocryphal texts organized in a fixed manner: description of the contents, authorship and historical context, followed by the text itself in its entirety. The sixteen texts are arranged according to type of literature: law, history, prophecy, and wisdom.

The second part of the book consists of a series of essays on the history of Israel, various other texts and historical perspectives on the apocryphal writings by a range of scholars in the field. The volume concludes with a timeline of the history of Israel that corresponds to the writing of the texts presented, bibliography, glossary and index.

This is a well-organized and well researched reference work. It would be an appropriate addition to any collection that includes Jewish history and Bible study.

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


The papers in this volume stem from a conference at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of Southern California in 2016. The conference addressed the question, “What does an understanding of Jewish history contribute to the study of the Mediterranean, and what can Mediterranean studies contribute to our knowledge of Jewish history?” The nine papers range in time from ancient to modern, with the bulk dealing with Sephardic or former Converso merchant communities in the early modern to modern period. The papers include historiographical essays, micro-histories, and cultural studies.

The papers take aim in part at a trope in Mediterranean studies that plays up the integration of minorities across communities, with character types of cosmopolitanism, fluidity, and diversity. The papers examine what made Jews and Jewish communities distinctive, even as they interacted with their Muslim and Christian neighbors and business partners.

Topics include Jewish patronage, gift giving, and exchange in Roman Palestine; the trade and religious ties of Sephardic merchant communities; interreligious boundaries in Livorno; differences in religious rulings on whether hemp thread counts as *shatnetz* in northern and southern communities; Jewish intermediaries in the early-modern slave trade; how merchants families keep ties and controls over their adolescent children sent to other port communities; changing trade patterns in the nineteenth century; Sephardic self-images and promotion in advertising; and literary memories of the Mediterranean and exile.

Missing though overall is the Mizrahi and North African Mediterranean experience. This book is recommended for academic libraries.

Harvey Sukenic, 
Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Continued on page 37
Dr. Lerner is a gynecologist and obstetrician. His well-researched book discusses what parents need to know to make a bris (rite of circumcision) for their newborn son. The information presented is from a non-Orthodox point of view. Dr. Lerner begins by citing the Biblical passages that command Abraham to circumcise his sons. In an interesting chapter, Dr. Lerner describes the history of the ceremony in the Greek and Roman world, the Christian period, and today. The healthful medical reasons for circumcision are also discussed. Dr. Lerner expresses his opinion on special circumstances such as a mixed marriage where the mother is not Jewish, or if the child has a medical problem. Social aspects of a bris ceremony such as what should the baby wear, what guests should wear, what food should be served, and whether it is appropriate to bring small children to the bris, are all clearly and concisely explained. Anatomical drawings of the procedure illustrate exactly what happens to the baby during a bris. Photographs of cute babies and happy families compliment the text.

A separate section on Biblical origins of the ceremony, a glossary of terms, and an index are included at the end. So You Want to Make a Bris is geared toward the non-Orthodox layperson who has little knowledge of the purpose or religious significance of a bris. It is well written and answers many important questions today’s parents might have when they are deciding whether to have a Jewish ceremony or not. Parents who have decided to make a bris, but who are not familiar with all the details involved, can also gain much insight and practical information from reading this book.

Ilka Gordon,
Beachwood, OH


This study adds to the steadily growing literature on the fate of the Sephardim during World War II. Most of the scholarly and literary work on the Jewish experience during World War II focuses on the Ashkenazim in Europe. Much less dealt with are the repercussions of the War on the Sephardim in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. The unique contribution of this work is the use of over 170 interviews which the late Professor Isaac Jack Lévy conducted with Sephardi Holocaust survivors, mostly during the 1980s to the 2010s, most of them from Salonika. A list of the interviews is included, detailing where and when they were held and where the interviewee originated from.

The book is divided into an introduction and eight chapters including selected parts of the interviews. Thus, we get memoirs regarding the journeys to the death camps, life in the camps, medical experiments, and the death march at the end of the war. Memoirs are also provided on the revolt of October 7, 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, events in Albania, Croatia, and North Africa, and the role of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husayni during World War II. The book concludes with reactions of survivors to the place of God in the Holocaust.

The book reflects the deep concern to the suffering of the Sephardim during World War II by Levy, who left Rhodes in 1939 as a young boy with his mother and grandmother and reached the USA via Morocco. The main contributions of this book are the excerpts of numerous testimonies which are cited in great detail, often in the original language (mainly Ladino) translated into English.

The focus is primarily on the experiences of the interviewees in the various camps to which they were deported rather than a broader history of the Sephardim during World War II. Moreover, much of the material was collected some forty years or more after the events took place and some interviews were even held with persons whose testimonies cannot be first-hand (e.g., someone who had been born in a camp or another who had left the region for Palestine and did not experience the horrors described).

All in all, the book provides much unique information, utilizing testimonies of Sephardim reflecting their memoirs regarding life and suffering in their places of origin and in the camps to which they were deported, as well as during their transportation and lengthy marches.

Rachel Simon,
Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ


Reference resources for Jewish history abound; many are published in multi-volume sets and many are available online. With Essentials of Jewish History: Jewish Leadership Across 4,000 Years by Brandon Marlon, you have a reference resource in “a single convenient volume.” Even though the emphasis here is on Jewish leadership roles throughout history, by reading the entries on the individual leaders one learns about key events. The
book begins with a timeline of Jewish history and ends with a selected bibliography and an index; the main body of the work is divided into 15 chapters, with two of the chapters being further subdivided. Each chapter focuses on a type of leader, such as the biblical prophets, Talmudic sages, or Zionists. Each chapter provides an introduction to the topic; within each chapter are the entries, which are organized in chronological order and presented in a concise and comprehensive manner.

Marlon states that his work is “intended as a useful resource regardless of one’s education background.” One observation is that although both women and men are represented, the book does have more entries for men than for women. Nevertheless, this book makes for a handy reference resource in Jewish history and can serve as a useful starting point for research. Recommended for day school libraries and synagogue libraries.

Haim A. Gottschalk, Olney, MD


This book presents an autobiographical collection of materials by a specialist on genocide and Holocaust studies and Jewish sociology who is perhaps best appreciated as an observer of Left-oriented Jewish political activism. There is no objective analysis, allowing the reader to completely appreciate the ideology presented and understand the Jewish relationship to the Leftist approach to politics. This book is an essential guide as to how Jews have been so involved in Left-leaning politics and activism. Advocacy for labor-socialism during the early part of the 20th century found newly arrived Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe pouring into urban centers bringing with them their revolutionary ideas. Support for the Soviet Union, at least prior to the infamous agreement with Nazi Germany, was a popular theme amongst many in the Jewish community. The Vietnam era saw open hostility toward American involvement, particularly among students, with the Jewish component therein at the forefront of the organizational effort. Perhaps most divisive among American Jewry is the issue of Zionism and Israel and its domestic policies toward the Palestinian population which has brought about intense opposition. Marxism and related testimonies are fully examined and serve as a backdrop to the various contributions of the author. While controversial to some, this is a valuable contribution to a social phenomenon.


Viktor Frankl is one of the best-known psychotherapists due primarily to his 1946 book, Man’s Search for Meaning. History professor Pytell, in this intellectual history of Frankl, shows that the central ideas in that book were not inspired by his immediate Holocaust experiences—he was held in three camps—but were the result of a long fermentation process. He was a disciple first of Freud and later of Adler but broke with both over what he considered their reductionist views of human nature and their nihilism. Frankl was much influenced by existentialist philosophy which sees human beings as capable of freely choosing how to live. Frankl believed in God (though he came from an assimilated Jewish family), and a spiritual realm where objective truth can be found. His method of logotherapy could help patients see the possibility of discovering a meaning to their lives and then realizing it. Pytell suggests that Frankl did not successfully reconcile his existentialism, which stressed the importance of individual authenticity, with his belief in an objective meaning to life.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University


This book offers an in-depth study of the social-economic stratification of Roman Palestine in the tannaitic period of the Mishnah. It analyzes the various economic strata from extremely poor to very wealthy, and it examines the various positions and roles occupied by the Jewish population, from laborers to craftsmen, artisans, and independent farmers, to politicians and royalty. The work draws on rabbinic sources, such as the Mishnah, Tosefta, and halakhic exegetical texts; the material culture of archeology (e.g., the excavations of triclinium: Roman private dining halls), along with the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, the New Testament, and classic literature. The language and terms

Sanford R. Silverburg, Ph.D. Catawba College, Salisbury, NC

Continued on page 39
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

used in the sources are closely considered. The book attempts to sketch definitions of levels of poverty and wealth and demarcate the gradations of charity structures, including the discrete fund (lisbat hashain) for sons of the good families (ben tovim) made poor by Roman conquest; the serving dish (tamhui) used to feed the poor in soup kitchens; the clothing funds (gemakh), and the charity fund (kupa).

Recommended, although the cost of the book may incentivize libraries to buy the eBook version.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, NYC


This is a very interesting edition of a 20th century memoir, written in Yiddish, of a grandfather who was deemed an enemy of Russia and sent to the far reaches of Siberia for forced labor, as punishment. It is interwoven with the contemporary life of his grandson, an award-winning media, advertising, and political campaign strategist living in the United States. It is difficult to imagine two more different lives. The memoir documents in detail the terrible experiences of a young man punished by the dictatorial regime of the time. In stark contrast, the life of his grandson and his family in America is privileged, comfortable and demonstrates the many ways he is able to contribute to the modern democracy in which he lives.

Reading this book, which includes generations of family photographs, is fascinating, but it will probably only appeal to a limited number of readers, perhaps those whose family members may have been victims of the cruel Russian system. It is therefore recommended only for libraries with extensive collections on Jewish history in Russia.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Librarian/Archivist retired


In this ambitious, ground-breaking anthology, fourteen scholars tackle the difficult subject of humor and the Holocaust. The editors, three highly respected scholars of the Holocaust, approached the challenging task of examining how humor is used in this regard and with the goal to explore “the significance and value of Holocaust-themed humor.” Each chapter is very informative, fascinating, and well-written, whether it is about Holocaust related Yiddish humor, Holocaust cartoons in Latin America, the place of Holocaust comedy in Israel and America, Holocaust comedy in American sitcoms, and much more. The writers and editors are to be commended for this unique work about a subject rarely associated with any type of humor.

It is recommended that any library that has even a small collection of Holocaust related books, include this anthology. It is very readable and brings forth a subject not written about before.

Michlean Lowy Amir, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Librarian/Archivist retired


What light do Cairo Geniza medieval manuscripts shed on the legal, linguistic, historical, and literary roles of Jewish women in Islamic society? Do texts authored by women speak in a socio-linguistically different voice, and are there measurably ways of documenting different changes in linguistic style and content by and about women? What does the correspondence of women amongst medieval Islamic families reveal about gender roles and family life? What challenges does the scholar face when deciphering, excavating, and sleuthing between the lines of texts by and about medieval women in Islamic culture? Is it possible to map a taxonomy of gender biases women faced in medieval Islam from documents? When compared to other Genizah letters from the same period what do the high incidences of Middle and Mixed Arabic forms, linguistic deviances, spontaneous expression, unpretentiousness, tendency to vernacular forms and natural speech, more colloquial elements in orthography, morphology, in women’s letters suggest? How does the economic-social status of a women writer influence the way they write and ability to navigate legal-political systems?

The chapters in this volume are written by six different scholars who each examine elements of these questions in great depth. In addition to subjecting these written texts to rigorous linguistic analysis, they consider the tone, unstated silences, and between-the-lines the political-cultural-economic-social registers of the
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

women and try to uncover the female voice. Collectively, their work sheds new light on the role of women as reflected in letters from medieval Egypt, and the volume presents a significant advance on the state of knowledge of gender relations in the genizah period. Recommended.

David B Levy,
Landers College for Women, New York, NY


Deborah Starr, a professor of Near Eastern Studies and Jewish Studies at Cornell University, examines in this book the role of Togo Mizrahi, a pioneer Egyptian Jewish movie producer and director in the first half of the 20th century. The book covers the development of the Egyptian movie industry as well as Mizrahi’s impact on Egyptian civilization and nationalism. It includes detailed notes and a bibliography, as well as Togo Mizrahi filmography and screenshots from his various movies.

Togo Mizrahi (1901-1986) grew up in Alexandria to a veteran Jewish family holding a foreign citizenship (Italian) as many Jews had at the time. Originally named Joseph Elia, he became known by the nickname Togo after the Japanese admiral Togo Heihachiro, the hero of the Japanese victory over the Russians at the battle of Tsushima (1905). Mizrahi studied commercial studies in France and Italy, but chose to enter the emerging Egyptian movie industry instead of his family’s trading business. Working as producer and director he nonetheless used his business knowledge to his advantage. He founded the Egyptian Films Company through which he directed and produced movies in Alexandria during 1930-1935 and then in Cairo until 1946. Following the 1952 Free Officers Revolution he settled in Rome, where he stayed for the rest of his life.

Starr examines several of Mizrahi’s movies in depth and considers how topics such as farce, mistaken identity, queerness, assumed identity, anxieties, and women as courtesans and concubines, are expressed in his work. Also discussed are the involvement in Mizrahi’s films of two of the most famous female singers at the time: Layla Murad (who was Jewish) and Umm Kulthum. The study concludes with the impact of Mizrahi’s films on the Egyptian film industry during his time as well as on the Middle Eastern film industry later on.

In her detailed examination of Mizrahi’s oeuvre and the specific topics mentioned above Starr contributes to our understanding of the Egyptian movie industry and the role of Jews in its development. Of special emphasis is the treatment of indigenous people holding foreign citizenship in this process. The study is also of importance to women and gender studies, examining queerness and the role of both Jewish and Muslim women in the entertainment industry.

Rachel Simon,
Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ


The book, *A Passion for Israel*, is drawn from the journals kept by successful corporate lawyer, Mark Werner, during the years he spent as a volunteer on Israeli military bases from 2006 to 2019. Werner’s journals detailed his experiences dealing with tedious manual labor, dangerous situations, unappetizing food, disorganized staffing, and stifling heat. Nevertheless, his passion for Israel and the Israeli people, and his admiration for the only democracy in the Middle East shine through. While many of the jobs were repetitive, such as sorting items in warehouses and packing backpacks for soldiers, Werner saw his contributions as vital, and he described the camaraderie that developed among the volunteers and the Israeli soldiers. He also recorded many scary moments, including hearing the Red Alert, which signaled that he had to run and hide in a bomb shelter at night; the sound of Hamas rockets exploding in a nearby Israeli town, and the popping sound of a Dome missile destroying a Hamas missile. Throughout, Werner shows admiration for the bravery and intelligence of the Israeli soldiers, and for the IDF in utilizing everyone’s talents, including providing roles for people with disabilities. A little better editing of the journals could have avoided some of the repetition that now occurs in this book. Nevertheless, it’s an inspiring read for anyone who loves Israel and for anyone who wants to take Werner’s lead and volunteer there.

Ellen Share,
Potomac, Maryland.

Continued on page 41
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS**

**Fiction**


("The Faberge Secret") is a work of historical fiction written by the New York Times bestselling author of *The Paris Architect*, Charles Belfoure. The story takes place in Russia in 1903. Dimitri Markhov is a prince in the imperial court of Russia and is a close friend and confidant of Czar Nicholas II and his family. Belfoure describes the decadent and magnificent life of the Russian aristocracy whose main interest is gossip, luxury, and wealth. The reader is immersed in the details of Dimitri’s extravagant lifestyle. Yet, Dimitri is different from the other princes. He has a profession. He is an architect and has been commissioned by the Czar to build a memorial to Tchaikovsky. Dimitri’s life is upended when he passes a wagon carrying a young child who has been killed in a pogrom. The image of the dead child haunts him. Later, he meets Katya, a Christian doctor who has just found out that her great-grandmother was Jewish. Katya takes Dimitri to meet her friends who are planning to overthrow the Czar. Dimitri and Katya soon fall in love, but if Dimitri wants to continue his relationship with Katya, he will have to abandon his life of luxury and betray his closest friend, the Czar.

**Ilka Gordon,**
*Beachwood, OH*

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This novel is the story of an English teacher at a high school in Tel Aviv, told by one of her students. It begins with her suicide, and traces her life back through childhood and adolescence, describing how she and her family were caught up in the Holocaust. The impact of what happened to her, how she survived, is the central focus of the book. It details her struggles with survivor guilt, how this affects her everyday life, as well as her teaching.

Ben-Naftali, the author, was born in Tel Aviv in 1963, and she is a published writer, translator, and editor. The novel won the Sapir Prize for Literature in 2016. Its translation was made possible with the support of the Israel National Library. It is not easy reading, but it provides a fascinating glimpse into the psychological impact of the Holocaust. An appropriate addition to Holocaust and modern Israeli literature collections in Temple, synagogue and academic libraries.

**Susan Freiband,**
*Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Alexandria, VA*

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In Joel Burcat’s second novel, *Amid Rage*, Mike Jacobs, an environmental lawyer takes on the mining industry. While using a colorful array of characters, Burcat shows us the seedy side of this industry, especially in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. This complicated tale about permits and corruption shows the length that some people will go to mine every last drop of coal. Mike’s job is not to defend or prosecute the case, rather to moderate between the two parties, the mining company Rhino Mining and the complainants, the people of the town under attack. Through a series of misadventures, and seedy mine operators’ hijinks, Mike manages to prove who is the wronged party. While this is not a Jewish story per se, the main character is Jewish and there are hidden references to his Judaism throughout the book. Recommended for public libraries and school libraries.

**Laura Schutzman,**
*AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee Chair; AJL Publications Chair; Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY.*

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Jonathan Dunsky has written six detective novels featuring Adam Lapid. The first five take place in the period of early Israeli statehood; this latest one occurs in Auschwitz in 1944. Two interwoven narratives are presented here. One is an intense, graphic description of life in the camps. The reader sees Lapid’s (and every prisoner’s) harrowing, monotonous everyday existence. The book includes images of arriving trains loaded with victims, and of the warehouses filled with their belongings. The mystery plot revolves around the death of Franz, a teenage “servant” of the “Lageralteste” (the section leader). The Lager orders

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Continued on page 42
Adam to find the boy’s killer; if he is unsuccessful, Adam and his best friend will be executed. Over four days, Adam questions both prisoners and guards, discovering information about both the system and its overseers. In the end, he uncovers the answers he seeks, as well as an array of tragedies affecting everyone involved.

Dunsky’s novel is part of a small (and growing) sub-genre of crime fiction set in Nazi Germany. Over the past twenty years, Philip Kerr, Volker Kutscher, and David Downing have placed their heroes in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany before the war. Others, including Alan Furst, J. Robert Janes, and Jacqueline Winspear, have described Wartime Europe in detail. Only J. Madison Davis’s The Murder of Frau Schutz (1985) is known to have taken place entirely in a camp, but it deals with the death of the Commandant’s wife, not a prisoner. In the Afterword to The Auschwitz Detective, Dunsky asserts that he wanted it to be an unsparing account of life in Auschwitz, combined with a curious, powerful crime story. It is definitely not for the faint of heart (or stomach). Recommended for purchase—with great caution—by synagogues and academic libraries with large Holocaust collections and knowledgeable readers.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Other Media


This wonderful film offers several aspects of modern Israeli life in one sitting. A section of the beach in Tel Aviv is set aside—separate, in the Hebrew title—for religious Jews from B’nai Brak, three days a week for each gender. The movie depicts what happens on the days when women show up, with bags of food and crowds of teenage girls. The film shows the women during their hours of peace, freedom, and joy on the beach, as they enter the water fully clothed and sing and dance in circles while immersed. Meanwhile, the secular male lifeguards and security officials in charge of beach safety watch with amused tolerance, interacting easily with the women who approach their open-sided headquarters.

The film wisely avoids interviewing the beachgoers with set questions. Instead, they speak freely about how much the beach means to them on personal and communal levels. There’s a specific focus on one troubled American-born woman whose teenage daughters are rebelling against Orthodox Jewish restrictions.

Tension arises from the objections of the hoary communal rabbinical authority to the proximity of the gay beach that the women can see if they peer between the slats of the wooden separation walls. The rabbis hold a meeting to explain their concerns while the women listen in silent, cynical protest. Abundant humor abounds throughout the film, including on days when Orthodox men show up for their turn at the beach. But the mood turns sober when the siren sounds, warning everyone to take shelter from a Hamas rocket attack. Herded into a safe space by the lifeguards, the beachgoers pray, but remain confident in divine protection.

This film has beautiful production values and is short and sweet. It’s a must for any program trying to portray modern Israeli reality.

Beth Dwoskin, Cataloger, Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI


Dvora Omer (1932-2013) was a teacher and prolific author of over one hundred children’s books. She was awarded the 2006 Israel Prize for “lifetime achievement and special contribution to society and the State.” She had also been awarded the Lamdan Prize for children’s literature (1968) and the Prime Minister’s Prize for Hebrew Literary Works (1979) and many other honors.

In this documentary made by her son, Ron, her story develops slowly. Dvora’s parents separated when she was about a year old. While she seldom saw her father, she had a very close bond with her mother. When she was eleven, her mother died. She was shot during Hagana training, although there were rumors that she shot herself because of a broken heart. It is also revealed later that because Israel was under British rule at the time, it was reported as a suicide so the British would not know about training exercises.

Dvora grew up on Kibbutz Ma’oz Haim, in the Beit She’an valley, often escaping to the hills and writing. Ron talks to his father, Shmulik about meeting his mother, and his father told him she described herself as “a girl with rain in her eyes” because she cried often. Shmulik knew she had a lot of pain inside, but she channeled it into her writing, often working eighteen hours a day.

Omer interviews his father, his siblings, Dvora’s friends and students, and other writers to give a full picture of who she was and what her writing meant to many, many people. She was admired for her honesty and her willingness to deal with subjects like loneliness and suicide. Like many creative people, she is remembered as a sensitive and delicate soul. The film includes archival photographs and films and Dvora’s original diaries and writing, often read out loud. The subtitles are excellent, and most of the footage is clear. A fascinating film for those interested in Dvora Omer, the history of Israel, and/or Israeli literature.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel
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