
Jews: The Making of a Diaspora People

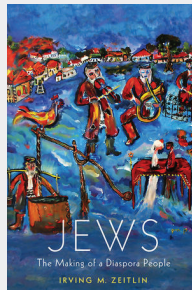
By Irving M. Zeitlin

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 298 pages, ISBN 9780745660172.

Reviewed by Harvey E. Goldberg

THE SUBTITLE of this one-volume overview of Jewish history presents its main focus as the notion of diaspora, but its twenty-eight chapters are more accurately grasped by dividing them into sub-themes. Chapters 1-9 discuss the development of “diaspora” as a social-historical concept in recent scholarship, and sketch the emergence of the Jewish diaspora from Biblical times (when Israelites and Judeans were exiled by the Assyrian and Babylonian empires), through the diaspora under Roman rule whose benchmark was the destruction of the (second) Jerusalem Temple in 70 of the Common Era. The next section (chapters 10-15) portrays medieval Jewish life, mainly within the context of Christian Europe. Chapters 16-18 are a history of ideas, touching upon major Enlightenment luminaries and some of the reactions of Romantic thinkers. It underlines the (often multivalent) ways that Jews appeared within these intellectual schemes. The emergence of racial ideas, feeding into Nazi ideology and policies, and a condensed history of the Holocaust are presented in chapters 19-27. A final chapter discusses “Zionism, Israel, and the Palestinians,” tailing off in the 1970s.

Zeitlin, a sociologist who has written on major political theorists and social thinkers, successfully sums up extensive and detailed historical data while keeping them within a framework of the ideas he seeks to get across. As an example of his orientation, Max Weber is important to him both in terms of “ideal types” that



enable building a model of diaspora that is both analytic and responsive to the data of the case at hand, and with regard to features of modern bureaucracy that are indispensable for comprehending the efficient implementation of the Nazi goal of destroying the Jews. His first section deftly takes us through highlights of

contemporary theorists who have contributed to the study of diaspora, sorting out valuable ideas from misleading ones.

This skill is evident in the second section too, which nevertheless is disappointing because the authorities he selects are dated. His method is to take a few major works and rely upon them for both data and some perspectives in forging his socio-analytic approach to each topic. Salient are the work of Simon Dubnow (1860-1941) whose *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* was translated into English from Russian in 1916-20, and of Leon Poliakov (1910-1997) whose *History of Anti-Semitism* was first published in Paris between 1955-77. The studies are still important, but research has moved past them on a number of issues, as now illustrated.

Two chapters (11-12) discuss the seventeenth-century messianic movement that developed around Sabbetai Zvi, and its continuing influence even after Zvi converted to Islam in 1666 under pressure from the Ottoman authorities. Various scholars, including Dubnow, saw the background to this messianic enthusi-

asm in the catastrophic pogroms suffered by Jews in the Ukraine and Poland beginning in 1648. The major researcher of Sabbetianism, Gershom Scholem, downplayed the social background of the messianic movement and stressed its inner dynamic from within mystical traditions—*Kabbala*. Zeitlin musters data challenging Scholem’s over-emphasis on religious factors, and while these make sense he overlooks a range of younger historians who have challenged Scholem’s views on the Sabbetian movement. There are also sociological perspectives that take Scholem to task along these lines, pointing out that Sabbetianism can be linked to general economic decline and the “crisis of the [late] seventeenth century.”¹

Another example concerns the eighteenth-century Hasidic movement. This crystallized in Ukraine-Poland, centering on the mystical figure of Israel Ba’al Shemtov (“the Besht”). It attracted poor Jews in rural communities with little exposure to Talmudic learning (the normative ideal of communities further north in Lithuania), and potentially signaled a challenge to the rabbinic regime of religious authority. This class-based understanding of a new religious movement that stressed simple piety was one factor in its spread, but recent research has moved past simple dichotomies. Murray Rosman (who Zeitlin cites in a different context), recently demonstrated that the established Jewish community where the Besht resided was supportive of him rather than seeing him as an oppositional figure.² Room for updating also appears in other realms.

In his first chapter on Spain, where Jews experienced both Muslim and Christian rule, Zeitlin characterizes the former period as “... the Jews had joined the Muslim *Ummah* as sustaining members” (p. 114). This formulation ignores S.D. Goitein’s monumental study (which he calls a “sociography”) of medieval

Mediterranean Jewry based on Judeo-Arabic documents that provide a contrasting perspective: “The Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities each formed a nation, *umma*, in itself, but in every country they shared a homeland, *watan*, in common. Both concepts were of highest practical and emotional significance...”³ Beyond that, most of Zeitlin’s discussion focuses on Christian Spain, relying heavily on Yitzhak Baer’s *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* that was first published in Berlin in 1929, appeared in Hebrew in 1945, and was translated into English in 1961. This is not only a matter of “age,” for it should be relevant that by now there exist critical evaluations of Baer’s—undoubtedly still very valuable—historiography.⁴

As a concluding thought, it is no less frustrating that the probing ideas on diaspora appearing at the outset of the volume drop from view in subsequent sections. One arena where they might be picked up is in the restructuring of the Jewish world after the 1492 expulsion from Spain with Jews reaching North Africa, Italy, and Ottoman lands. This extensive movement followed shortly after the invention of printing, and by the 1570s, we witness the publication (and then re-publication) of the compendium of Jewish law compiled by Sephardi (Spanish) sage Joseph Caro (who began the project in Edirne), to which are appended the glosses of Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Kraków with the hope that this text would reach the scattered communities of a demographically refigured Jewry. This is just one example of how the “making” of the Jewish diaspora is an ongoing story.

Zeitlin’s book is a stimulating effort, but gives only an initial glimpse of the dynamics of the Diaspora. It might be flagged with the aphorism of first-century Hillel (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Shabbat* 31a), who when asked

by a potential proselyte to teach him the Torah while standing on one foot, answered “what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; the rest is commentary—*go forth and study it*.”

Endnotes

1. Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1982), chap. 7.
2. Murray J. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
3. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 2, *The Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 274.
4. David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Habermas and European Integration: Social and Cultural Modernity Beyond the Nation-State

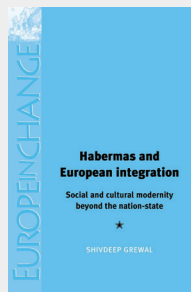
By Shivdeep Grewal

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012, 129 pages, ISBN 9780719078705.

Reviewed by Özgür Ünal Eriş

SHIVDEEP GREWAL has written this excellent research-turned-into-a book on Jurgen Habermas, one of the most important philosophers of our time. He makes a thorough analysis of Habermas' work and in the theoretical part of the book he discusses how modernity in both cultural and social terms has evolved in such a way that transcends the importance of nation state and finds a new meaning at the European Union level.

According to Grewal, social modernity is defined as the struggle of civil society to resist an ever increasing bureaucratisation and technocratisation. This definition can also be understood as juridification and legal consolidation of successive stages of social evolution. Cultural modernity is defined as progressive rationalisation, in the sense that increasing rationalisation gradually replaced mythical and religious belief as bases of social integration. As complementary to these two seg-



ments of modernity, Grewal looks in detail at the Habermas' conceptualisation of alternatives beyond the nation state, which would come to mean an opening and interpretation of national public spheres ultimately ending in the form of a European constitution. Normally, the European nation-state has been

defined by two factors, one negative and one positive. The welfare state is the positive factor; it provides the ordinary citizen with a set of social rights and, ensures that the capitalist economy operates in accordance with the public interest. Exclusionary nationalism, in contrast, is the negative factor. While a feeling of national solidarity has helped in securing identification with the democratic constitutional state, this feeling of national solidarity has often been bolstered by invidious conceptions of ethnic and cultural superiority. The negative consequences of nationality are apparent, so Habermas believes, both in the wars of the twentieth century and in the present