
This volume, the latest in Cambridge’s History of Christianity series, contains forty-three essays that deal with various aspects of Christian life and thought from the Great War to the turn of the millennium. The essays are divided into three sections: “Institutions and Movements,” “Narratives of Change,” and “Social and Cultural Impact.” In a sense, all the essays deal with questions of the social and cultural impact of a particular issue, whether concerning the papacy, the religious ferment of the 60s, postcolonial Christianity in Africa, or relations between Christians and Muslims. Many of the essays cover similar themes, but this allows the reader to examine a topic such as the papacy within different contexts. In fact, the essays ought to be read as one would read articles in an encyclopedia: they offer a broad overview and encourage further reading. Scholars of history will find the essays in this volume to be helpful overviews of broad topics that are examined in a century’s perspective. Scholars of theology, however, will find that the volume lacks essays on such a momentous event as the Second Vatican Council, on individual Christian theologians, or on theological analyses of Christian encounters with other religions. The book’s high cost makes it unlikely that individual scholars will purchase it, but one hopes that libraries add it to their collections, along with the other volumes in the series. Besides the overviews found in the essays, the volume contains a helpful bibliography and is well indexed.

Scott D. Moringiello
University of Notre Dame

Judaism: Hellenistic thru Late Antiquity


The vast majority of approaches to the composition of the Mishnah, the first document of Rabbinic Judaism, posit the existence of an original fixed text (whether oral or written), edited sometime in the early third century CE, and then subsequently transmitted through rote memorization, and amplified and expanded by successive generations of rabbinic tradents. In this work, Alexander argues that the results of Orality Studies can be successfully applied to yield a dramatically different portrait of the Mishnah’s composition. Drawing primarily from the conceptual models developed by A. Lord and M. Parry, Alexander seeks to examine the role of the oral transmission of the Mishnah in the shaping of its own textuality and how this process was in fact fundamental to the construction of the Mishnaic text and the establishment of its authority. This work explores the “oral conceptual lens” of the Mishnah through a series of close analyses of selected Mishnah passages from the tractate Shevu’ot (Oaths), often in dialogue with cognate rabbinic literature (i.e., Tosefta, Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds). Alexander’s careful attention to detail and lucid style mark this book as a significant contribution to the study of the Mishnah, and an example of the successful integration of the disciplinary model of Orality Studies to Rabbinic literature.

Alex P. Jassen
University of Minnesota


Modern research has demonstrated that the book of Judges is a combination of an older collection of stories of individuals who delivered Israel (often very violently) from harm in the premonarchic period (Retterbuch) with an editorial layer crafted by the Deuteronomistic historian, in order to present the monarchy as the anecdote for the violent and lawless character of the initial period of settlement. In this very readable and highly engaging work, Mobley peels away the later literary layers, in order to reconstruct the history and literary representation of what he identifies as the “heroic age” of Israel. This period is marked by larger-than-life characters and their violent interaction with Israel’s enemies. Moreover, these stories are recounted in carefully crafted language and imagery that is intended to highlight the heroic features. After delineating the formal characteristics of the literary presentation of the heroic age, Mobley then focuses on close readings of the Ehud, Gideon, and Samson narratives, as well as the location of these narratives in the larger context of the heroic age. Mobley’s greatest contribution in these chapters is his careful analysis of the literary sophistication of the Hebrew text (in transliteration). This work successfully integrates source criticism, literary analysis, and classical philology to make the book of Judges and its characters come to life.

Alex P. Jassen
University of Minnesota

Judaism: Modern


Litvak has written an imaginative, path-breaking study that contributes immeasurably to the study of modern Jewish history and culture, Imperial Russian history, and theoretical discussions regarding the intersection between literature, history, and memory. Litvak focuses on how suc-
cessive generations of Jewish intellectuals interpreted and represented the loaded encounter between Jews, Jewish communal leaders and Russian authorities between 1827 and 1917. Starting with the infamous conscription act implemented by Tsar Nicholas I, Litvak demonstrates how Jewish intellectuals repeatedly turned to the story of Jewish recruits to justify and legitimize their own worldviews and, in many cases, political agendas. Beginning with a discussion of early praise for the Jewish recruit and his acceptance of the emancipation contract with the state by adherents of the Jewish enlightenment, the author continues by looking at the image of the Jewish recruit in later enlightenment literature in the works of such central figures as Yehuda Leib Gordon, moves on to an analysis of the Hebrew writings of cultural nationalists like J. Brenner (Yosef Hayim Brenner), and concludes with an examination of how the experience of conscription was woven into early incarnations of the Jewish historical canon in the works of S. Dubnow. By looking at the legacy of Jewish soldiers through the lens of Jewish literature written in Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish, Litvak’s study of history, culture, and memory has injected important theoretical approaches and considerations into the field of Jewish studies. Litvak adroitly demonstrates how so much of what has been written and what is then subsequently remembered about “the Jewish experience” in Tsarist Russia was not recorded, but, in fact, constructed.

Scott Ury

Tel Aviv University


In this indispensable guide, Sheppard guides his reader from Strauss’s early Jewish and Zionist writings, his critique of C. Schmitt (according to Strauss, Schmitt was still too liberal), books on Spinoza and Hobbes, Philosophy and Law, and Persecution and the Art of Writing, an early work written in exile from New York. Sheppard highlights the figure of “exile” as the key term with which to understand Strauss’s early works. For Sheppard, exile stands in for the intractability of political and philosophical problems, the imperfection and even inherent evil of human beings, the inability to create a just society, and the precarious position of the philosopher. Call it pessimism or realism, it was this that compelled Strauss to reject modern liberalism. Unlike many Jewish readers of Strauss, Sheppard does not shy away from Strauss’ early flirtation with ultraconservative politics, including an infamous letter to K. Löwith, in which Strauss openly espoused fascism. But why, Sheppard asks without ever providing a satisfactory answer, did Strauss import a sensibility conditioned by totalitarian rule into a liberal, democratic regime like the United States? And why should it be Strauss, and not Buber or Scholm (or Arendt or I. Berlin), who epitomizes the modern Jewish condition?

Zachary Braiterman

Syracuse University


A first-rate collection of essays by Jewish and Christian philosophers (Rashkover, Ward, Ochs, Bader-Saye, Kepnes, Gibbs, Quash, Wells, Magid, Davies, and Pecknold). Most of the authors uphold traditional liturgy as an alternative to modern (Western and secular) models of human subjectivity, temporality, and action in the world. Much attention goes to the aesthetics of liturgy, its basis in perception, participation, and theatrical performance. We learn that God acts in time and will redeem this broken world through liturgical practice. The Christian contributors seem more persuaded that the Kingdom is very near, whereas the Jewish contributors are more likely to note the inverse relation between the world as imagined in liturgy and the world as we live it. Unruffled by doubt or irony, the tone overall is both confident and urgent. Does liturgy have the world-redemptive significance ascribed to it? Liturgical expressions of praise and trust in God (especially vis-à-vis the redemption of suffering) are by and large taken at face value. Most of the contributions will strike critical readers as pop-eyed and militant, as failing to see the violence in their own language of redemption and participation, especially when it is posed as a one-sided critique of modernity.

Zachary Braiterman

Syracuse University


This original and thought-provoking study, originally published in German in 1999 and superbly translated into English, describes the world of rural women in a small village near Metz in the eighteenth century. It is based mainly on court records, official documents as well as additional sources; consequently, it deals not only with elites but with a cross section of the community. The mixed nature of the population (Catholic, Jewish and some Protestant) makes a comparative approach possible. Of the seven chapters, two deal specifically with Jews (the history of the Jewish community and the lives of Jewish women) and one on Christian–Jewish relations. The rich documentation covers many aspects of women’s lives; the wide-ranging references to secondary and theoretical literature, especially in German, can be quite useful. The author gives careful attention to
popular religion in particular. The result is an exceptional contribution to our knowledge of gender issues in the modern period, and particularly among Jews. It belongs in any serious collection that deals with gender and religion as well as with rural Catholicism in Lorraine and certainly with the history of Jews in France and central Europe.

Shaul Stamfer
Hebrew University


This volume is a singular and delightful introduction to the world of rural Hungarian women in the nineteenth century. While much of the book is devoted to recipes based on the recipe book of the great grandmother of the author, they are used as a means to a “comprehensive description of her household and way of living” and much of the book is indeed devoted to the religious cycle of the year through the foods typical of each holiday. The result is a fascinating picture of the culture and outlook of a rural Jewish woman in the nineteenth century that is totally different from the very ideological picture of Jewish life often presented in standard histories of Hungarian Jews. The author’s charming drawings and readable style make absorbing the rich information in this book very pleasant. The detailed indices and essential glossary make it very usable. It would be a valuable addition to any collection dealing with European (especially Hungarian) Jewry, religious modernization, gender studies, as well as with Jewish food.

Shaul Stamfer
Hebrew University


This is a valuable collection of studies on S. Ansky—a Russian Jewish intellectual whose life personified many of the transformations Russian Jewry underwent in the modern period. He was born in the Pale of Settlement, became attracted to general culture, joined the Russian revolutionary movement and later in life returned to the Jewish community to be active in Jewish culture and life. Ultimately he achieved his greatest fame as the author of the play The Dybbuk. The studies in the volume, written by a who’s who of Russian Jewish studies, clarify many aspects of his life and literary appendage. Appended to the book is an early draft of The Dybbuk as well as a CD that includes recordings made by Ansky before World War I as well as newly recorded versions. Much of the volume is devoted to Ansky’s literary and ethnographic work. He was one of the pioneers of self-study by Russian Jews and felt acutely the difficulties of reconciling modernity with Jewish identification. Many of the positions and attitudes expressed implicitly in his work went on to become characteristic of broad elements of Jewish communities in later years. The sophisticated studies in this volume should clarify to contemporary readers the depth of thought current in a hundred years in Russian Jewry. This volume would be very important for any collection dealing with Russian Jewish history, folklore, and tradition, or related topics.

Shaul Stamfer
Hebrew University


This book is largely a legal history. It deals with the institutionalization of the rabbinate, changes in attitudes regarding remuneration for scholarship, and developments in the legal claims and the means rabbis could employ to preserve and transmit their posts. There is very little in English on the history of the rabbinate, besides Schwarz-fuchs’s general study, and this is an important addition to the literature. Roth writes lucidly and the book should be quite understandable even to nonspecialists. He brings many sources that would not be available for most readers, and this book is very useful for anyone interested in the history of the rabbinate and in the development of Jewish law. It could also be useful for comparative purposes with other religious groups and for analysis in light of social science theories. However, this book has limitations. Unfortunately, the author did not take advantage of much of the very rich primary and secondary literature in Hebrew that is relevant to the topic. Hence, while useful for students, this study is far from the final word on the topic and should be used with care.

Shaul Stamfer
Hebrew University


Shternshis’ engaging study sheds much light on the underresearched lives of the approximately two and half million Jews who became part of Lenin’s Soviet Union in 1917. Shternshis’s book will be of great interest to those working on modern Jewish history and culture, Soviet history and society, and questions regarding the fate of ethnic and religious groups in totalitarian times. Based upon an impressive number of oral history interviews, a fascinating array of little-known published materials, and other eye-
opening sources, Shternshis takes the reader far beyond the cold war politicization and American Jewish and/or Israeli Jewish romanticization of “Soviet Jewry” as “the Jews of Silence,” and deep into the personal accommodations and transformations of those individuals who saw themselves as being both Soviet and kosher. Unlike many other studies of Soviet Jewry, Shternshis focuses on popular expressions of Jewish culture and society. Thematicall organized, the book examines the tension between the antireligious designs of the Soviet regime and the lingering presence of Jewish practices, the impact of state-sponsored educational projects on Yiddish readers and reading culture, the role of amateur Yiddish theaters in maintaining a separate sense of community, and other popular displays of Jewishness in Russian and Yiddish. Through these and other explorations, Shternshis argues that most Jews in the early Soviet era were neither opportunist lackeys who gleefully jumped aboard the bandwagon of Soviet redemption (and, in time, oppression), nor superhuman, Yiddish-speaking Marranos who miraculously maintained their “Jewishness” in the face of a modern Inquisition. Instead, Shternshis presents her academic objects as willing subjects. This sensitive rehumanization of hitherto dichotomized interpretations and constructions of “Soviet Jewry” stands as Shternshis’s most important contribution to the growing number of post-Soviet studies of the intersection of Communist and Jewish societies.

Scott Ury
Tel Aviv University


Socher’s first book offers an invaluable study of the Jewish philosopher Maimon (1754-1800), showing how much is to be learned from a figure often skipped over in the narrative of modern Jewish thought. Socher analyzes Maimon’s idiosyncratic but deeply instructive autobiography, his Hebrew and German philosophical writings, and his import for later Jewish writers and philosophers with equal and abundant skill. He argues that Maimon’s autobiography, the first in its genre in modern Judaism, simultaneously embraces and rejects contemporary perceptions of the Jew, and convincingly shows how these tensions correspond to the ambivalence and painful splitting of entering modernity. Socher analyzes the ten philosophical chapters within the autobiography, often omitted in later printings, in the context of Maimon’s philosophical, sociopolitical, and literary interests, and renders Maimon his due as an incisive interpreter of Kant and as a philosopher in his own right. Socher’s genuine facility with the rabbinic texts in which Maimon himself was educated allows him to analyze Maimon’s philosophical predilections in the context not only of German Idealism but also as a product of the tradition against which Maimon rebelled. The book demands both a new look at Maimon and the reincorporation of this liminal and deeply compelling figure into the canon of modern Jewish thinkers.

Mara Benjamin
Yale University


Nearly every essay in this useful volume thematizes, or at least addresses, the ambiguities of “Jewish philosophy.” (There is general agreement upon the significance and scope of the modifier “modern;” indeed, several essays are devoted, in part or in whole, to the legacy of Kant.) The contributors’ reflections upon the contradictory enterprise of Jewish philosophy tend to rehearse dilemmas with which other subfields made their peace some time ago, and recurrent references to “Athens” and “Jerusalem” will be quite familiar to scholars in the field. But that is to be expected: the task of the volume, as part of the Cambridge Companion series, is to mirror the current state of scholarship. Its content is thus of necessity conventional in other ways as well: the essays focus on Germany, on men, and on the figures one expects to find on the standard roster of luminaries (with the welcome addition of the long-marginalized S. Maimon and L. Strauss). Thematic essays on messianism, autonomy, ethics, language, and the problem of evil focus on major themes in the Jewish philosophical encounter with modernity. Precisely for these reasons, the volume provides a much-needed resource for undergraduate courses and for readers looking for erudite but manageable guides to critical issues for Jews, politics, and philosophy from Spinoza to Derrida.

Mara Benjamin
Yale University


In this thought-provoking take on the history of Jewish–Christian relations and Jewish identity, Seidman rereads key texts as “translation events” through postcolonial translation theory. The book ranges widely with chapters on the intertwined patristic views of Mary and of the Septuagint; Aquila’s Greek Jewish Bible as a acculturation project; connections between conversion and translation in the premodern Latin West; the translation projects of Buber and Rosenzweig in early twentieth-century Germany; Holocaust literature (with particular attention to the curious history of Wiesel’s Night); and the fortunes of I.B. Singer and Yiddish literature in the United States. Eschewing an essentialist reading that posits a single “Jewish” mode of translation, Seidman offers a series of case studies of particular “trans-
The Americas: Central and South America


A unique and valuable introduction to the contemporary religious landscape of Brazil, based on a 2004 seminar of the Instituto de Estudos da Religião (http://www.iser.org.br). Fifteen essays by an impressive set of senior and emerging scholars discuss specific religions (Catholicism, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Afro-Brazilian traditions, Kardecist Spiritualism, “neo-esoterism,” and “religious minorities”) as well as selected themes (religious pluralism, interpretations of the 2000 census, Charismatic Catholic use of the media, “religious transit,” the social sciences and religion, modernity/culture, and religion among Brazil’s youth). A fuller discussion of Judaism, Buddhism, New Japanese Religions, and other NRM’s is missed. As is typical in the Brazilian study of religion, indigenous traditions are not addressed. Key claims: Brazil continues 89.2 percent Christian, with increasing diversity among the 73.8 percent that is Catholic (down ten percent in less than a decade), with growing religious minorities, and with an increase of those with “no religion”; multiple adherence and syncretism are much more prevalent than quantitative data suggest; and the appeal of Brazil’s third-largest religion, Kardecism, is in part a function of its emphasis on texts, given the complex historical role of literacy in Brazil.

Steven Engler
Mount Royal College and Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo


Military historians have long been intrigued by the fact that H. Cortés, with fewer than a thousand Spanish troops, managed to conquer the Aztec Empire, whose armed forces numbered in the tens of thousands. Similarly, historians of religion have been fascinated by the fact that after the Aztec defeat, Mesoamericans apparently accepted Christianity in large measure and in large numbers. There are, of course, numerous accounts of both the Spanish invasion of Mexico and the Christianization of its inhabitants; less readily available, however, are succinct accounts that show how the political/military and the religious/liturgical dimensions were intertwined in the worldviews of both Aztecs and Spaniards. For example, the Spanish went into battle under the standards of Christ, Mary, and the saints; the Aztecs invoked the protection of their god, Huitzilopochtli. Military victory then was not only a matter of superior tactics and weaponry, but also the triumph of the Spanish God over the Aztec deities; accordingly, acceptance of Christianity was part of the price of military defeat. Although presumably intended for aficionados of military history, this coffee-table-style book—with glossy pages, abundant illustrations, useful maps, explanatory sidebars, a fairly detailed chronology (1469-1547) and a short but helpful glossary—provides well-written and well-balanced descriptions of both the Spanish and Aztec Empires at the time of the conquest. Also considering the fact that the hardback price is less than many paperbacks, this book seems serviceable—even enjoyable—as a text for college students in courses treating Hispanic/Latino theology and religious/cultural anthropology.

John T. Ford
The Catholic University of America


The struggle for human rights by indigenous people living in southern Mexico garnered international attention on January 1, 1994, when the “Zapatista Army of National Liberation” (EZLN) seized several towns in the state of Chiapas. Although the dozen days of armed conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican military were headline news, press interest quickly dwindled during the subsequent negotiations, while the root causes of the conflict remained largely unexplained and unexplored. This book provides considerable clarity and insightful investigation into the long-standing and widespread abuse of indigenous human rights in Mexico via a case study of a group of Tzotzil-speaking Mayan Catholics, who were illegally expelled from their home town of San Juan Chamula and subsequently established the colonia of Guadalupe in the environs of the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Utilizing a combination of conventional research and personal interviews in Spanish and Tzotzil, the author examines the history of the colonia of Guadalupe, the mission of the diocese of San Cristóbal during the controversial leadership (1960-2000) of Bishop S. R. García, and the