

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

to the middle of the second century BCE which suggests that the Judean masses knew of the *Torah* and were observing its laws in practice.”

The text discusses dietary laws, ritual purity, figural art, *tefillin* and *mezuzah*, circumcision, *Shabbat* prohibitions, Passover sacrifices and rituals, fasting on *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot* rituals and the lighting of the menorah in the Temple. In each of these examples, Adler provides evidence that the earliest time that these laws were unquestionably, and widely, observed was in the first century CE. Adler then goes back in time, seeking historical and archeological evidence determining when these practices could have possibly emerged. In each of these instances, the second century BCE is the time period with the earliest available evidence. This title also focuses on the Synagogue in the first century CE and how it was instrumental to the dissemination of *Torah* and its widespread adoption. The text concludes with an excellent summary of the book and after surveying the Persian and Hellenistic eras, explains why the second century BCE provides the most likely era for the emergence of what we would today recognize as traditional Jewish practice.

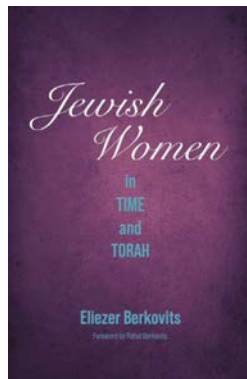
Although a scholarly work, Yonatan Adler writes extremely clearly and the book is well organized and summarized throughout. Therefore, this book is highly recommended for the beginner and the scholar alike.

David Tesler,
Efrat, Israel

Berkovits, Eliezer. Foreword by Rahel Berkovits. *Jewish Women in Time and Torah*. Jerusalem: Urim Publishers, 2022. 2nd ed. 144 pp. \$22.00 (9789655243659) HC.

This volume, by the now deceased European-born Eliezer Berkovits, ordained at the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and holder of a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin, brings together scholarship and extensive reading in both Jewish rabbinic sources and classical secular sources. Rabbi Dr. Berkovits, born in Transylvania (contemporary Romania) in 1908, lived in England, Australia, and the United States, as well as in Israel. His experiences in these varied settings influenced his approach to interpreting Biblical and Talmudic writings and commentaries across the centuries by Jewish rabbinical authorities.

Rabbi Berkovits views *Torah* teaching through a framework of *Torah*-tolerant as contrasted to *Torah*-taught teachings. *Torah*-tolerant directives responded to social, cultural, and economic conditions of the cultures surrounding Jewish people and framed social prescriptions according to prevailing norms. In contrast,



Torah-taught teachings, set forth directives with a much more profound regard for the personhood, personality and dignity of people, most particularly, women. Dr. Berkovits strongly promotes the view of the *Torah* as an evolving, and changing entity, *Torat Hayyim*, the Living *Torah*, to be interpreted and understood in the light of changing times.

Rabbi Berkovits applies his understanding to an ever-evolving *Torah* and its teaching to the status of women and considers *Torah* and rabbinic directives and prescriptions regarding the role of women in diverse contexts in this volume, the last of his nineteen books. He spends considerable time discussing issues related to marriage and divorce, encompassing the *Ketubah* or marriage contract, the *get*, or Jewish divorce, the status of the *agunah* (a woman unable to gain a divorce and hence unable to remarry).

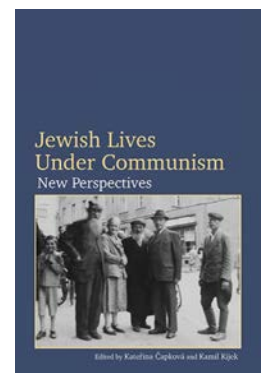
Dr. Berkovits reviews the conflicting approaches of the Talmudic authorities and later commentators on both the obligations and the desirability of women reading the *Torah*, holding women's prayer services, and saying *birchat hamazon* (grace after meals). His discussion of a number of these issues can be rather lengthy, and the level of detail he presents will not be of interest to all readers. On the other hand, the reader following the discussion along will gain an invaluable immersion in the nature of Talmudic and post-Talmudic interpretation and disputation; arguments set forth and countered, sources presented and dismissed.

Mindy C Reiser, Ph.D.,
Vice President, Jewish Study Center,
Washington, DC

Kateřina Āapková and Kamil Kijek, editors. *Jewish Lives Under Communism: New Perspectives*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2022. 280 pp. \$120.00 (9781978830806) HC; \$44.95 (9781978830790) PBK.

This compilation of essays by historians, anthropologists, and scholars examines the forty-year period of Jewish life behind the former Iron Curtain. Chapters are listed thematically, according to the ways in which Jews of postwar Eastern Europe dealt with transnational loyalties, marginalization, and dissidence, and show that not all the remnants — Holocaust survivors and their descendants — simply assimilated or emigrated to Israel or the West; rather, they creatively forged new identities.

The secular slant of these essays is apparent; there is no acknowledgment of the rabbis who worked underground to disseminate *Torah*, let alone the risks at promoting anything



Continued on page 36

REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

“counter-revolutionary.” While some religious practice was permitted in certain countries, and some charitable resources provided, such as prayer services, and kosher food, most communal life centered around Yiddish language, song, and theater, considered “progressive” enough not to oppose atheistic policies. Most of the local Jews had long harbored liberal leanings, even before the war. Nevertheless, while largely integrated into general society (as well as intermarried), they faced tensions: antisemitism and economic hardship in Poland; Nazi legacy in East Germany; and potential erasure of tradition.

The USSR, home to the largest Jewish population, was a sort of separate entity with unique challenges, including Stalin’s Doctors’ Plot of 1953, anti-Zionism, and a subculture of Moscow professionals. Birobidzhan is addressed, along with its futile attempts at autonomy. Also discussed are attempts at emigration by exploiting Jewish status. These essays point to many contradictions within that region and era.

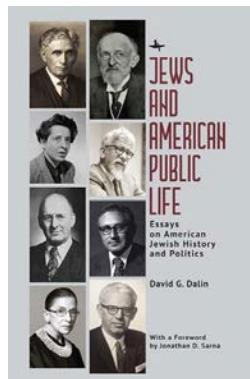
Heavily researched and footnoted, this book is chiefly for academic libraries.

Hallie Cantor,
Acquisitions Associate,
Yeshiva University, NY

Dalin, David G. Forward by Jonathan D. Sarna. *Jews and American Public Life: Essays on American Jewish History and Politics (North American Jewish Studies)*. Boston: Academic Studies, 2022. 320 pp. \$139.00 (9781644698815) HC.

For the past four decades, Rabbi Dalin has contributed to the genre of American Jewish history. This volume collects some of his wide-ranging scholarly articles and essays on participation in government and public discourse.

The book begins with the Founders’ relationship to the Jewish community (Washington, Hamilton, Adams, and Jefferson are analyzed), and Jews’ participation in the Executive Branch from the mid-19th century to 2020 (the original 2001 essay has been expanded to include the Trump and Biden years). Other essays discuss important individuals (Mayer Sulzberger, Cyrus Adler, Julius Rosenwald, and Louis Marshall), significant events (the appointment of Brandeis to the Supreme Court, the separation of Church and State, and the Nazi march in Skokie), and retrospective analyses of Will Herberg and Hannah Arendt. The collection concludes with short appreciations of Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax, both as players and as Jews who prized religious observance over the World Series. Dalin is especially insightful in his assessment of the roles of Mayer Sulzberger and Cyrus Adler, two giants of the period from 1890 to 1930. Their contributions



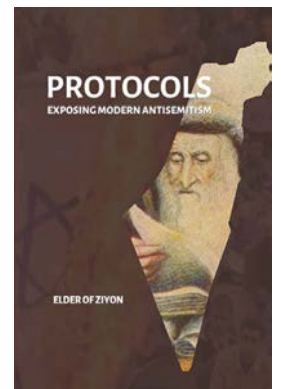
to American Jewish life, particularly the growth of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the interactions of Zionists with the non-Zionist faction, have been unfairly neglected.

This important book describes the significant role Jewish leaders have played in American government and civil discourse, both in public settings and behind the scenes, over the past century and a half. The writing is scholarly but not overly dense. There is no bibliography, but the footnotes are extensive. It could be used by college and graduate students, and should be considered by large academic libraries. Regrettably, the price puts it out of range for general readers and smaller institutions.

Fred Isaac,
Oakland, CA

Elder of Zion. *Protocols: Exposing Modern Antisemitism*. La Vergne: TN: EoZ Press, 2022. 365 pp. \$19.95 (9798985708431) PBK.

This is a selection of writings from the pro-Israel website “The Elder of Zion.” It is vigorous and straightforward in its defense of Zionism and Israel and not without humor. For example, after providing an extensive section of a paper by an anti-Israel academic, written in opaque postmodern prose, Elder of Zion writes, “Did you get that? Neither did anyone else.” He covers a wide range of subjects, including, in part, the legal status of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, the relationship of anti-Zionism to antisemitism, the intellectual shallowness and dishonesty of many academic anti-Zionists, and the hostility to Israel of certain NGOs. He does not hesitate to call hatred hatred, and thinks that the hatred of Israel, the notion that Israel is uniquely or supremely wicked country, and Jews do not deserve to be equal to other nations in having self-determination in their homeland, is irrational and causes anti-Zionists to see the world in a distorted way. This book is about a depressing subject but its strong, energetic defense of Israel is a tonic.



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

Einbinder, Susan L. *Writing Plague: Jewish Responses to the Great Italian Plague*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2023. Jewish Culture and Contexts. 272 pp. \$54.95 (9781512822878) HC.

The worst outbreak of plague since the Black Death struck Northern Italy in 1630-31, severely affecting Christian and Jewish communities, killing at least one-third of the

Continued on page 37