

van Tonder, Gerry. *Irgun: Revisionist Zionism, 1931-1948*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2019. 128 pp. \$22.95. (9781526728692). Also available as an eBook.

This is a concise history of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, one of the underground groups that fought the British to establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. The work mainly deals with the actions of the Irgun while the ideological and psychological aspects, though not totally ignored, receive much less attention. For example, van Tonder deals with the incidents involving the Irgun ship *Altalena* that almost led to civil war, but he does not explore its ramifications or try to discern blame. Similarly, he does not discuss at any length the context and ramifications of the Irgun's attack on the King David Hotel. In other words, the book is much stronger in description than analysis. The details are clear and, for the most part, accurate. One faulty detail, however, is the discrepancy between the timeline at the beginning of the book which states that Labor Zionist politician Chaim Arlosoroff was assassinated by Revisionist Zionists while in the text of the book the culprits remain disputed. Thus, while van Tonder's book serves as a useful overview, the one essential English-language book on the Irgun is still *Terror Out of Zion* by J. Bowyer Bell. Bell provides a full account of the Irgun and its breakaway group, Lehi, and he also offers sophisticated analysis of them.

Shmuel Ben-Gad. Gelman Library, George Washington University

Weiss, Tzahi. *Sefer Yesirah and its Contexts: Other Jewish Voices*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 196 pp. \$59.95. (9780812249903).

The *Sefer Yesirah* is generally thought to be one of the earliest texts of Kabbalistic literature, but as Tzahi Weiss demonstrates, we may be reading it anachronistically through the lens of later mystical texts. As Dr. Weiss jokes in the introduction, "We know almost everything about this book except four minor issues. Who wrote it? Where and when was it written? What does it mean? And what was the original version?" This book makes the case that the *Sefer Yesirah* is not a product of the rabbinic world but was written by 7th century Jews influenced by Syriac Christianity. Aside from its narrow focus on this important text, this work broadens our ideas of how we define Jewish mysticism and Judaism as a whole outside of the accepted canon. Recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Wobick-Segev, Sarah. *Homes Away from Home: Jewish Belonging in Twentieth-Century Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018. 295 pp. \$65.00. (9781503605145).

This intriguing book contrasts the assimilated Jewish communities in three major European capitals during the 19th and 20th centuries. As secularization led to erosion of physical boundaries, the Jews, no longer confined to the shtetl or ghetto, found the freedom of wide-open spaces that allowed for alternate religious expressions. Examined are the dynamics and experiences among each city – largely acculturated Parisian Jewry; the Jews of pre-Hitler Berlin, where tensions arose with the influx of their more provincial East European brethren, the *Ostjuden*; and the Russian Jews in St. Petersburg (Leningrad), where they straddled two worlds being considered an ethnic rather than religious group (those allowed to live there were already assimilated, yet tried to retain some of their heritage, at least until Stalin). The dichotomy – being a citizen on the street but a Jew at home – reflected waning Torah observance, and a crisis of authority, while individualism bred alienation and decline of marriage and traditional structures. New buildings – some magnificent, like the Choral Synagogue in St. Petersburg – offered, instead of prayer and ritual, spaces for lavish weddings, bar mitzvahs, or fundraisers, glamorous but devoid of Jewish meaning. Cafés and theaters became far more popular meeting places for the young and restless. The book ends somewhat tragically with the aftermath of the Holocaust and Communism, and the cultural ambiguity, and possibly failure, of new or recreated spaces. One bright note: the author