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Table of Contents

Introduction
VICKY SCHINKEL

From an Israeli Moshav to Archives and Manuscripts:
Moving Backward and Forward in Jewish Studies
HARVEY E. GOLDBERG

Contesting God’s Compassion and Choosing Humanism over Divine Mercy – Yahuda Amichai’s God Has Pity on Kindergarten Children
DVIR ABRAMOVICH

Hiking as an Educational Tool of Zionist Youth Movements in Mandate Palestine
YAEAL KESLER and YOSSI GOLSTEIN

Relations Between Jews and Dönmes in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic
C. M. KOSEMEN

New Observations on the Story of Moses’s Expeditionary Force to Medina
HAGGAI MAZUZ

Military Service in Israel – Should I Join or Not? Cognitive and Motivational Aspects: The Case Study of Haredi Enlistment in Israel
DAN SOEN and NITZA DIVDOVITCH

Sounds and Silence: The Post-Shoah Poetry of Israel’s German-speaking ol’tm
MONICA TEMPIAN

Book Reviews
See overleaf for details

Contributors

5
8
34
43
75
99
112
136
158
220
Books Reviewed

George B. Foster
Jewish Medical Resistance in the Holocaust
By Michael A Grodin (Ed.)
158

Jeremy Benstein
Kabbalah and Ecology: God’s Image in the
More-than-Human World
By David Movarach Seidenberg
148

Michael Sasson
Changing the Immutable: How Judaism Rewrites Its History
By Marc B. Shapiro
175

Shimon Cowan
The Codification of Jewish Law and an Introduction
to the Jurisprudence of the Mishna Berura
By Michael J. Brody and Ira Bedzow
184

Myer Samra
Jews, Judizing Movements and Traditions of Israelite
Descent in South Asia
By Navras Jaat Aafredi
187

Marianne Dacy
Bibliography of Australian Judaica 1788-2008
By Serge Libermann
193

Daniel Moalem
Shanghai’s Baghdadi Jews: A Collection of Biographical Reflections
By Masie Meyer
198

Philip Mendes
Let My People Go: The Untold Story of Australia and
the Soviet Jews 1959-89
By Sam Lipski and Suzanne D. Rutland
203

Harvey E. Goldberg
Studies in the Culture of North African Jewry: Collection of the
Lectures Presented in the Workshop at Yale University
October 15-24, 2012
By Moshe Bar-Asher and Steven D. Fraade
207

Rachael Kohn
JESUS RECLAIMED: Jewish Perspectives on the Nazarene
By Walter Homolka
203

Myer Samra
Pepper, Silk and Ivory: Amazing Stories about Jews and the far East
By Marvin Tokayer and Ellen Rodman
203

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Welcome to the 2015 – 2
Jewish Studies. Our best wis
tanks for his work on the Jr
to the editor are
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In this year’s volume a di
papers are featured. Since
Australian Association of
conferences, featuring an in
contributors from around th
conference was, “Neighbour:
throughout History,” while T
of the Australian Association
in Brisbane in February
Environment from Biblical Ti

This edition of the Jou
fascinating keynote address
an Israeli MosheVito Archive:
Forward in Jewish Studies.
describes the “... anthropologists “do history b
of moving back and forth b
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describes three phases of:
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Australian Journal of Jewish S
Honking, Sir Elly later expanded into rubber, gas and electricity companies, hotels and real estate. His many ventures made him extremely wealthy. Sir Elly was generous to the Shanghai Sephardi community. He helped establish schools, hospitals and a number of function centres fostering charitable and social activities. He and his family also sponsored schools, hospitals, relief organisations to a number of Chinese, Indian, Israeli and Iraqi cities. Sir Elly built a magnificent home called Marble Hall and he used it for functions to enhance his charitable work. He was interned by the Japanese during the war but survived to resume his work when war was over. The takeover by the communist regime forced him to leave Shanghai.

Although these three gentlemen were the outstanding members of the community, there were numerous others who generated substantial wealth and lived luxurious lifestyles. Many of these took leading roles in the religious, social and cultural life of the Sephardics. At the other extreme, a small number of families struggled to make ends meet and at times had to rely on charity. B’nai B’rith and a committee of Sephardi leaders did much to alleviate their plight.

With the takeover of the country by the communist regime, the Russian Jewish population were terrified that some of them would be sent back to Russia, perhaps to the gulags, and made hasty arrangements to leave China. Fortunately, the State of Israel was formed and many embarked for Israel. The Sephardi community soon followed as business and job opportunities faded.

This book makes interesting reading, and is thorough in its retelling of the histories of the various families. It also gives an insight into life and aspects of the history of China at that time. I can highly recommend the book, which covers a small part of the colourful history of the Jews of China.

Daniel Moalem


There are many areas of Australian Jewish history that have been relatively untouched by historians. One is the growing engagement of Jews with Indigenous issues and concerns. Another is the complex nature of the relationships between Jewish leadership and advocacy
groups, and Australian political parties and governments. A third gap until now has been the campaign for Soviet Jewry.

In *Let My People Go*, the well-known journalist and communal activist Sam Lipsky and prominent historian Suzanne Rutland combine to present an ambitious historical overview of the Australian Soviet Jewry movement from 1959–89. This is very much an insider’s story. Lipsky personally participated in some of the key events described in the book, and much of the archival content is sourced from the private Jerusalem-based collection of Izi Leibler who was a key leader of the movement.

The book commences with the dramatic visit of the leading former refuseniks to Melbourne in May 1988. These heroes of the “Let my people go” campaign were greeted by a large and enthusiastic crowd at the Arts Centre Concert Hall, and formally welcomed by Prime Minister Bob Hawke who was long regarded as a close friend of the Jewish community and Israel. The authors comment that Hawke “punctured the air of celebration” by drawing an analogy between the Soviet Jewry campaign and the struggles of the Palestinians and Black South Africans for freedom. They argue that his remarks offended many of the audience, and fractured his long-term friendship with Izi Leibler. But they don’t fully explain why this was so. I remember thinking at the time that Hawke may have chosen the wrong occasion to make these remarks, and they could have been worded slightly more sensitively. But nevertheless, the Australian Jewish community prior to the signing of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord had a serious blind spot on Palestinian human and national rights. And Hawke rightly felt that they needed to be told this by friends, even if they preferred not to hear the message.

The text then returns chronologically to the beginning of the story in 1959 when a young Izi Leibler is recruited by the Israeli spymaster Shaul Avigur (convenor of a clandestine agency called the Liaison Bureau or Lishkah), to assist in a campaign to promote Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel. Leibler, who was Chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies, became a key activist in this international political network, along with other leading figures such as the Anglo-Jewish writer Emanuel Litvinoff and the American Jewish journalist Moshe Decter.

Leibler quickly initiated a public campaign against Soviet anti-Semitism. The publicly stated objective of the campaign was to raise the question of Soviet antisemitism at the United Nations and elsewhere as a means of placing international pressure on the USSR to cease discrimination against its Jewish population, restore Jewish cultural and religious life, and/or allow those who wished to do so to emigrate. An associated objective was to conclusively marginalize those left-wing groups within the local Jewish community such as the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism (JCCFAS) who were unwilling to publicly break with the Soviet Union.

The campaign attracted strong support from key community figures such as Maurice Ashkanasy and Frank Knopfelmacher, but also provoked some opposition. The question of the relative efficacy of public versus private protest was a source of ongoing contention within the Jewish community. Those who favoured the mobilisation of public opinion argued that the Soviet authorities were sensitive to international criticism of antisemitism, and likely to respond with a softening of anti-Jewish measures. But other Jews preferred quieter behind the scenes lobbying on behalf of Soviet Jewry. This viewpoint appears to have been most prominently represented by Nahum Goldmann, the President of the World Jewish Congress.

The most vigorous local opposition came from the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), and left-wing Jewish groups such as the JCCFAS whose former head, Sam Cohen, had recently been elected to the Australian Parliament as a Labor Party Senator. The CPA and JCCFAS either denied that institutional antisemitism existed in the Soviet Union, or alternatively argued that the question of Soviet Jewry could not be separated from resolving broader Cold War tensions.

Leibler held a strong anti-communist reputation, and chose initially to place the question of Soviet Jewry onto the local anti-communist agenda. Support for the campaign was provided by a number of prominent anti-communist groups and publications such as *The Bulletin*. In November 1962, he successfully persuaded the Federal Coalition Government to raise the matter of Soviet antisemitism at the United Nations General Assembly, even though the US administration headed by John F Kennedy had chosen not to. The Australian delegate, Mr Douglas White, demanded that the Soviet Union permit any Jews wanting to leave the country to do so.

One of the ironies of this success was that two of the leading Coalition figures at this time – Treasurer Harold Holt and the Minister for External Affairs/Attorney-General Garfield Barwick – were hardly regarded as friends of the Jewish community. Holt in his earlier role as Immigration Minister had been an aggressive and arguably prejudiced critic of the Jewish community campaign against Nazi immigration in the early 1950s. Equally, Barwick upset many Jews by
his 1961 statement declaring a moratorium on any investigation or extradition of alleged Nazi war criminals living in Australia. One cannot help but wonder about their motivations in supporting Soviet Jewry – was it solely a combination of political pragmatism and anti-communism as suggested by the authors, or something else?

Having gained conservative support for this campaign, Leibler then turned his attention to the Communist Party in an attempt to break the official communist silence on voicing public criticism of antisemitism in the Soviet Union. Via a series of private meetings with CPA leaders Bernie Taft and Rex Mortimer, Leibler convinced the Party to voice general criticisms of Soviet policies towards its Jewish minority. These official CPA statements were cautious and ambivalent. They acknowledged that there were antisemitic feelings and tendencies in the Soviet Union, but denied that there was any evidence of systematic anti-Jewish persecution or discrimination. Nevertheless, the official public criticisms that CPA leaders made regarding Soviet antisemitism were unprecedented for a Communist Party, and had a significant impact in encouraging other Communist Parties to address the Soviet Jewry issue.

Leibler also published an influential 78 page booklet called Soviet Jewry and Human Rights in 1965 based primarily on Soviet and left-wing sources. Attention was drawn to the history and details of Soviet antisemitism, the response of Communists and other progressives since 1958, and the specific response of Australian Communists and progressives. Leibler was careful to avoid reference to any broader anti-Communist agenda, and the book convinced many left-wingers and Communists worldwide who had previously been sceptical about the prevalence of antisemitism in the Soviet Union. At the same time, Leibler effectively challenged Nahum Goldmann’s preference for quiet diplomacy rather than public pressure and protest in a number of international Jewish forums.

Following the 1967 Six Day War, the Soviet Jewry campaign gained strength. A large number of Soviet Jews were inspired by the Israeli victory to apply for permission to emigrate to Israel, and actively sought international recognition and support. The harsh sentences handed out to a group of Leningrad Zionists who had attempted to hijack a plane to highlight their demand for exit permits provoked major international concern. A national Australian body for Soviet Jewry headed by Marcus Einfeld held public protest rallies and meetings with leading politicians to protest the arrests. Leading left-wing groups and individuals including the Labor Party leader Gough Whitlam, the then

ACTU leader Bob Hawke, and the Communist Party supported the protests.

But Whitlam was generally unsympathetic to Soviet Jewry. He had suggested as opposition leader that the Liberal Party was disingenuously exploiting the issue for electoral purposes. As Prime Minister, he displayed an indifference to the question of Soviet Jewish emigration, which seemed to reflect in part his resentment towards robust advocacy by Australian Jewish leaders. He was particularly resentful when this advocacy focused on the State of Israel as reflected in his famous angry outburst during a breakfast meeting with Jewish leaders in May 1974. But other Labor Party figures such as Kim Beazley senior, John Wheeldon and Joan Child were strong supporters of the Soviet Jewry cause as was the leading Communist trade union leader John Halfpenny.

Other major events discussed in this book include the controversial role played by Isi Leibler’s company Jetset as the official Australian Olympic Federation travel agent for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, the courageous but unsuccessful attempt by Bob Hawke in 1979 to secure the release of the refuseniks, and the major diplomatic support provided by consecutive Prime Ministers Malcolm Fraser and Hawke to the campaign.

Overall, the authors present a compelling story of the disproportionate role played by Australian Jews led by Isi Leibler and aided by politicians from all sides of the spectrum in campaigning for the freedom of Soviet Jews.

Philip Mendes


This edited volume, the second of two based upon a workshop centred on North African manuscripts in Yale University Library’s Judaic Collection (for the first volume, see Bar-Asher and Fraade 2011), opens and enlarges windows on a range of topics concerning Jewish life in the Maghreb. There is no unifying focus, but all papers are based on research informed by extensive and detailed linguistic knowledge, entailing both Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic. While some papers utilise