

Ira Robinson, Naftali S. Cohn, and Lorenzo Ditommaso, eds., *History, Memory, and Jewish Identity* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 378 pp., ISBN: 9781618114747.

Scholars have long looked to narrative and memory as avenues for studying how the past is actualized in the present. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor* (1982) brought these issues to the fore of Jewish studies, and Amos Funkenstein's critique in *History and Memory* (1989) opened a rich and continuing debate over historical consciousness in Jewish life. In 2011, a conference at Concordia University considered these questions, the results of which are the volume *History, Memory, and Jewish Identity*. In fourteen essays, the editors hoped to bring a "fresh, panoramic view" (viii) of ways that representations of the Jewish past have been building-blocks for Jewish identities. Generally, the contributors fall into Funkenstein's camp of historical consciousness: In opposition to Yerushalmi's argument that Jews traditionally eschewed historical writing, the contributors here identify and articulate ways Jews have looked to the past to shape their present, even if they did not write 'history.' The editors collected case studies from across Jewish history, but the collection is focused on modern times: Only six of the fourteen essays are dedicated to the pre-modern era. Regardless, the editors sought to – and succeeded in – bringing together important studies demonstrating how the past has been a source of memory and a means to shape identity in various contexts.

The first section looks at memories of violence and strife in antiquity. Lionel Sanders' "The Causes of the Alexandrian Pogroms and the Visit of Agrippa I to Alexandria in 38 CE" argues that Agrippa's visit directly caused the anti-Jewish riots that occurred there that year. Naftali S. Cohn ("Sectarianism in the Mishnah: Memory, Modeling Society, and Rabbinic Identity") brings to bear Barry Schwartz's notion of the past as "a memory and a lamp" to articulate how the Mishnaic depiction of pre-70 CE Judea expresses the early rabbis' historical consciousness. He argues that rabbinic conceptions of the unitary Temple ritual, on one hand, and sectarian conflict on the other hand, were ways for them to imagine an idealized future. Jack N. Lightstone ("Power and the (Re)Creation of Collective-Cultural Memory in Early Judaism: The Case of the Mishnah"), however, takes a different approach, detailing how the Mishnah ahistorically constructed an image of an archetypical rabbi, codified ways of remembering the Bible, and created an "authoritative professional identity" for rabbis (87).

The second section focuses on the medieval and early modern periods. James A. Diamond's "Maimonides vs. Nachmanides on Historical Consciousness and the Shaping of Jewish Identity" frames these two scholars' debates between rationalism and mysticism with their historical perspectives, explicating how Nachmanides imbued the Bible and Jewish ritual with historical and memorial properties whereas Maimonides viewed them as primarily functional. David Phillip Bell's "Community and Sacrality:

Jewish Customs and Identity in Early Modern Worms” looks to customs books and rabbinic responsa for a glimpse of Jews’ historical consciousness in this most ancient city. Howard Tzvi Adelan (“Criticism and Tradition: Leon Modena, Azariah de’ Rossi, and Elijah Levita Bahur on Kabbalah and the Hebrew Vowels”) examines debates in sixteenth-century Jewish historical writing about the nature of medieval texts based on these scholars’ search for anachronisms.

The third section turns to the modern era. Beth Wenger’s “American Jewish Immigrants and the Invention of Europe” argues that Jews’ experiences in America helped them to imagine a European past. She suggests that representing Europe as a place of persecution was a way to ‘invent’ Europe as a singular entity. Steven Lapidus also looks at memories of Europe in “North American Hasidim: Between Modernity and the Old World,” examining ultra-orthodox and Haredi townships in upstate New York and their idealized visions of the shtetl. Lapidus calls out contrasts between romanticized memory and reality, like the distinction between the isolation of Haredi towns in America and the history of cultural interchange in Eastern Europe. Pierre Anctil’s “The Challenge of Memory for Yiddish Language Activists in Montreal” considers the transformation of Montreal’s Jewish population in the early twentieth century and ways in which migrants looked to preserve Jewish history and identity, particularly through publishing memoirs and chronicles.

Richard Menkis’ important essay, “Identities, Communities, and the Infrastructure of History: Creating Canadian Jewish Archives in the 1930s and 1970s,” examines efforts to create archives for Canadian Jewry. He argues that archive-making was a means to project a Canadian Jewish identity by bringing together the histories of Jews in varied locales. Menkis considers two moments that demonstrate two rationales for archiving: In the 1930s, Jews created an archive in response to their communal and cultural needs without any expectation of state support, but by the 1970s the government looked to recognize and incorporate minority groups in a vision of Canada as a multiethnic society. Menkis suggests that this aided Jews’ archive efforts, but also posed vexing questions about Jews’ relationship to this new multicultural vision. Benjamin M. Baader’s “The Shoah, the Sacred, and Jewish Victim Identity in Postwar Germany and North America” considers ways the Holocaust has been remembered on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly the Holocaust’s sacralization in North America. Calvin Goldscheider’s synthetic essay, “Macro and Micro Insights into Contemporary Jewish Identities: Europe, Israel, and the United States,” overviews the diverse nature of Jewish experience, suggesting a new focus on networks and institutions as well as globalization and transnational approaches.

The volume concludes with essays that consider how modern Jews have used the past for political and ideological purposes. Rachel Havrelock’s “Rallying All of Israel: David Ben-Gurion and the Book of Joshua” explicates Joshua as a backdrop for projects like the National Water Carrier and Ben-Gurion’s vision for the state of Israel

in general. Havrelock argues that Joshua is crucial for understanding the modern conquering of the land of Israel in linguistic and cultural terms, pointing out that terms like *kibbush* (conquest) and *nahalah* (settlement) retain Biblical baggage. Ira Robinson presents an excellent overview of Marrano memory (“Who is a Marrano? Reflections on Modern Jewish Identity”). Robinson traces the image of crypto-Jews from the fifteenth century to the present, considering how opinions and representations of them reflected presentist exigencies. He argues this group provides a useful paradigm for postmodernity. The fact that there have been so many terms for them – Marranos, New Christians, crypto-Jews, and so on – represents diverse ways in which the forced conversion of Iberian Jews has been brought forward to support distinctive historical narratives and memories, like Cecil Roth’s consideration of Marranos as a counterpart to Nazi oppression or Yerushalmi’s notion of the relation between assimilation and crypto-Judaism.

The editors succeeded in presenting a ‘panoramic’ perspective. Some contributors look to theoretical bases for their work, like Maurice Halbwachs’ ideas of collective memory or Barry Schwartz’s notion of memory as a ‘mirror and lamp.’ However, the lack of an extensive introduction means there is no attempt to synthesize such themes. Additionally, the editors and authors avoid grappling with the challenge of defining the meaning of or ‘Jewishness,’ or of “identity” – a concept which has met with critique for some time. Goldscheider briefly considers the ‘Jewish’ content of communal and individual memory, but otherwise this issue mostly lays fallow. Ultimately, this volume presents a welcome contribution to an ongoing debate about the relationship between history and memory and the ways the past shapes present mentalities and future prospects.

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