

Jewish Political Studies Review

It must be stressed that this book was published in 2010. Since then, South Sudan achieved its independence, which would certainly be considered a positive event by the author. At the same time, the popular explosion that brought down a number of dictatorships in the Arab world appears about to instate in their stead Islamic regimes that are unlikely to be more open to the needs of their ethnic and religious minorities.

Nonetheless, Ferhat Mehenni is doggedly keeping up the fight while his songs still bring hope to his people....

NOTES

1. P. 25.
2. P. 31.
3. P. 72.
4. P. 86.
5. P. 73.
6. P. 90.

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William D. Rubinstein, Michael A. Jolles, and Hilary L. Rubinstein, eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, 1061 pp.

Review by Leslie Wagner

From Arthur Louis Aaron to Szmul Mordekhai Zygielbojm this ambitious volume covers everyone (or almost everyone, more of that later) who was or is anyone in Anglo Jewry. The first and last entrants both died during the Second World War. Aaron, a young British airman from Leeds, was shot down over Turin and piloted his plane with one hand to enable it to land in Allied territory, before succumbing to his wounds. He was awarded the posthumous Victoria Cross. Zygielbojm was born in a Polish shtetl at the end of the Nineteenth Century, escaping in 1939. He became a member of the Polish Government in Exile in London, campaigning tirelessly to publicize the fate of Jews in his Nazi occupied homeland. In May

1943, having received the news that his wife and two children had been killed by the Nazis he gassed himself.

It is one of the volume's virtues that it records the lives of people, such as these, who deserve recognition beyond their own small circle of family and friends. The title is interesting. The book covers Anglo Jewish issues, institutions, events and communities as well as personalities, and therefore offers more than a biographical history. It would be a little grandiose, however, to call it an encyclopaedia, so the term, "dictionary" is about right.

As the editors anticipate, there will be inevitable disagreements about who is in and who is out. To forestall some of this, they explain their ground rules. Automatically included are Jewish members of parliament, peers, baronets and knights, together with all Jewish Fellows of the Royal Society. They regard as a Jew for this purpose "anyone who was or is regarded as Jewish, or regarded themselves as Jewish." They also include "notable figures with one Jewish parent," even if they practice a religion other than Judaism or no religion. This allows in Disraeli, Bishop Montefiore and Karl Marx. Prominent non Jewish philo-Semites such as the Rev James Parkes are also included. However the flexibility does not extend to embracing the Hitler or Israeli Law of Return criteria. Having one Jewish grandparent, does not get you in if you don't meet the other criteria. So, celebrities with a maternal Jewish grandmother but no connection to Jewish life are excluded, and we are therefore denied information on showbiz personalities Marianne Faithfull and Katie Price (Jordan).

The ground rules allow a great measure of discretion to the editors and inevitably there are sins of commission and omission. For example in terms of issues, the expected topics such as anti-Semitism, emancipation, and attitudes to Israel are included. However, "philo-Semitism," on which two of the editors have published authoritatively, does not have an entry.

In terms of communities there are some real delights, but also some serious oversights. As Anglo-Jewry shrinks to London and a few regional centers the spread of Jews across the United Kingdom since their re-entry in 1656 is often forgotten. So, in addition to Lincoln and York we have here Norwich, Exeter, and Plymouth. And places that long since gave up the idea of generating a *minyán*, such as Hartlepool, Barrow in Furness and Gt. Yarmouth are also remembered. Darlington, however, which is still functioning, is omitted. More seriously, those from Wales will feel aggrieved that Llanelli, offering refuge to the immigrants from Eastern Europe over 100 years ago and turning some of their children into well-known rabbis and senior UK politicians, has been overlooked.

Perhaps the most remarkable omission in terms of communities is in Scotland. Here, too, the smaller communities such as Dundee and Falkirk are mentioned, but astonishingly, the capital city is excluded. Indeed, this reviewer was so surprised at the omission, that he kept returning to the volume to make sure he was

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not mistaken, or that it had not been included elsewhere. A history of Anglo-Jewish communities that does not include Edinburgh, which traces its origins to the eighteenth century, and that is still functioning is seriously deficient.

The bulk of the near 3000 entries published in two columns per page cover the varied personalities who have travelled across the Anglo-Jewish stage. It is a very eclectic mix, from the peerage to show business, and from the famous to the infamous. This is exemplified in the age range from Sir Moses Montefiore at 101 to the singer Amy Winehouse at 27, although Winehouse's tragic death occurred after the volume went to press. The most distinguished or notorious are given around a column and a half (some 500 words) and most others considerably less. The content is sober, and as objective as can be expected, although those searching for it will no doubt be able to claim traces of "bias" in the treatment of their favourite person.

Caveats are inevitable however. There is a focus, if not an obsession, with the media, seemingly on the basis that if you work in or have appeared in the media you must be important. To give two examples, Vivien Creeger, a competent, but not major, television newsreader of the 1980s and 1990s and Carole Caplin, who for a brief period was a lifestyle consultant to Cherie Blair are, in the editors views, clearly part of Anglo-Jewish history. Frankie Vaughan, a leading singer of the 1950s and 1960s who regularly topped the charts, was closely identified with the Jewish community, and was a British heartthrob in the pre-Beatles era is not.

Moving up the intellectual scale, Isaac Deutscher, biographer of Stalin, and author of many other works, is not included, while far less worthy writers and intellectuals receive full entries. A history of Anglo-Jewry which includes Caplin and not Deutscher runs the risk of not being taken seriously. Community servants get due recognition with one significant omission. While the United Synagogue, the major religious organization in Anglo-Jewry is given due mention the two influential administrators during its heyday, Alfred Silverman and Nathan Rubin are omitted. It is difficult to understand how any comprehensive dictionary of Anglo Jewish history could ignore the contribution of these two great institution builders. This is particularly the case when the senior administrator of the Reform Movement, a much smaller organization, is (rightfully) included. This reviewer is also amused to note that his *mohel* is included, although his main claim to fame, apart from the aforementioned, seems to be that, 'he was often a thorn in the side of mainstream Anglo-Orthodox figures.'

The overall emotion after even a cursory read of the entries in this volume is in the words of the editors, one of "astonishment." As they write, "No one who even casually dips into this work can fail to be impressed by the extraordinary-indeed, singular and often unbelievable- range of achievement shown by those with entries here, in virtually every imaginable field. For a community that never at any time numbered more than (at most) 400,000, whose members often arrived penniless

and unable to speak a word of English, and who faced whatever anti-Semitism there was in British society, this is a truly remarkable record.”

Despite the inevitable flaws, the outstanding merits of the volume deserve recognition. Its comprehensive range and scope are testimony to both wide-ranging scholarship and great industry. To those who decry Anglo-Jewry it says in effect, “if it’s all so bad why does it seem so good.” The pessimists would respond that this is about the past and there is no denying that Anglo-Jewry has a past. But does it have a future? There may never be a second edition of this volume, if only for reasons of cost. But were one to be published, in say 50 years, it will be interesting to see if modern achievements match those of the past.

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