

popularity at the time—and therefore also for our own ability to study various aspects of Jewish demonology, spirit possession and exorcisms from a wide array of sources.

In judging this book's merits, three points are especially worthy of notice. First is the author's insistence on studying the Jewish sources not only from a narrow Jewish Studies perspective (including the 'thick' description which is so much in vogue nowadays—a technique which is perfectly legitimate in itself, but which often masks some very thin, parochial scholarship), but also within a broader Early Modern context. Having little direct access to sources in Latin and Arabic, Chajes read a great deal of secondary literature on Early Modern magic, demonology and exorcisms, and used this wide knowledge to ask the right questions of the Jewish sources themselves, and to look at the available textual evidence for similar Jewish phenomena in ways which have not been utilised before. Second is the author's healthy sense of humility, apparent not only in his reference to 'the great Chajes rabbis in our family's past' (p. 278), and his inclusion of Z. H. Chajes in the bibliography and some footnotes, but also from his recurrent preference for multifaceted explanations of historical developments. Readers used to the incisive 'Let me tell you how it was' style of some Kabbalah scholars (influenced by Gershom Scholem, but lacking his genius), will be relieved to find a fair number of ifs, perhapses and maybes interspersed throughout this book's historical reconstructions. Third is the author's lively style, and his ability to explain what exactly it is that he wishes to ask, and which answers the sources are willing to provide him with. Readers fearful of the confused and tedious style of some Kabbalah scholars, who often cannot tell the difference between the sources they adduce and the interpretations they attach to them, will find here a rare example of a book written in a clear and lively manner, by a scholar who knows how to enjoy reading Vital and Luria, but can learn something even from Eric Clapton. (The bulgy footnotes, on the other hand, would have benefited from a more economical system of references.)

Together with a recent collection of studies on the same theme (Matt Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2003, to which Chajes too contributed, but of which he had preprint access only to one more paper), this book is likely to become the basis for the study of demon possessions and exorcisms in Early Modern Jewish society for many years to come.

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TUDOR PARFITT, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2002. ix, 277 pp. £18.99. ISBN 0297819348.

When the Ten Tribes were exiled from Israel, apparently there was not a scribe among them to record for posterity at least some of the events that would befall them, and if such a scribe or scribes did exist, their writings, unfortunately, have not survived. This is not to say, however, that they got lost immediately. Jeremiah, 130–140 years after their dispersal, appears to have known where at least some of them were, and he hoped for the ultimate restoration of both Judah and Israel (Jeremiah 30–31). Talmudic tradition even cites a view that Jeremiah returned these tribes and they were ruled over by Josaiah (BT Arakhin 33a and BT Megillah 14b).¹

¹ While Parfitt is basically aware of the Jewish background and research material, this is clearly not one of his major concerns. Additional information can be found in the eclectic presentation of Ben-Zion Luria, 'The Fate of the Exiles from Samariah [*sic!*]', *Bet Mikra* 25 (69 [2]), (1977), pp. 159–76 (in Hebrew).

This, however, appears to have been wishful thinking, as is clear even from other Talmudic traditions, and 'lost' they became, although not forgotten, and consequently much effort has been expended on trying to re-discover them.² Over the centuries they have been sought 'beyond the Euphrates' as well as in Arabia, India, Burma, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, England, Ireland, Africa, the Americas and many more places, and, judging by the number of books and studies published on the 'Lost Tribes of Israel', apparently most of those who sought them, whether in the far corners of the earth or in the tomes of libraries world-wide, felt compelled to record their adventures and conclusions in great detail. And while in the modern-day State of Israel one can easily meet some of those who claim to have discovered remnants of the Lost Tribes and indeed even some of those remnants in the flesh, I tend to agree with the author, who states: 'the present writer does not believe that the Ten Tribes are still to be found and accepts their disappearance as a historical fact that requires no further proof' (p. 225, n. 1). Parfitt seeks, not to discover the Tribes themselves, but rather to trace the history of the quest for them as well as the myths that created (p. 1).

This is no small matter. At about the time that I began to read Parfitt's work, I chanced across the review of Hillel Halkin's *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel* (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2002), in the September/October 2003 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* (pp. 78–81).³ Halkin claims to have identified descendants of the lost tribe of Manasseh in north-eastern India near the Burmese border. I was not convinced and, as Rivka Gonen wrote in her review of that work (p. 80, see above): 'Halkin has failed to prove his case'. Parfitt does not have to prove one; rather he does an admirable job of tracing myths of Israelite identity from both inside and out, combining travelogue⁴ and solid research, to produce a 'history' of the Lost Tribes of Israel, of those who promulgated it and the reasons behind this 'history'.

There is a basic irony, however, in Parfitt's tale. While information about the Ten Tribes occasionally came from Jewish travellers such as Eldad ha-Dani (pp. 8–10), the Jews seemed to be far less obsessed with discovering their lost brethren than were Christians, and even today in the Jewish world, those who seek the Lost Ten Tribes tend to stand at the fringes of Jewish Society. The Christians sought these lost Jews or Israelites everywhere. They could have saved a good deal of time and effort if they had been willing to make do with actual Jews living nearby. These, however, were often despised and hated, while the imagined Jews provoked interest and even admiration. The denizens of the unknown were often imagined as Israelites, and their languages, strange and exotic to the European ear, were considered Hebrew or offshoots of this language. The new and exotic could often be frightening; relating to non-European 'others' was problematical. Just where, for instance, did all those peoples of the New World actually come from? Anchoring all this in Bible tradition, as tenuous as the connections may have been, and turning many of the Indians of the Americas into descendants of the Lost Tribes, resulted in the domestication of the exotic and seemingly provided some comfort in facing the unknown (pp. 6–24, 58–101, *passim*).

Sometimes the Lost Tribes could be discovered in one's very own backyard, as it were. Thus, the Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and did not return for almost

² The effort has hardly abated today. A random search in Google turned up over 230,000 relevant internet sites for 'Lost Tribes of Israel' or 'Ten Lost Tribes'.

³ One of the reviewers was Rivka Gonen who has also recently published a book on the Ten Lost Tribes. See Rivka Gonen, *To the Ends of the Earth: The Quest for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel* (Aronson, Northvale, N.J., 2002). The other reviewer was Ronald Hendel.

⁴ See, for instance, Parfitt's interview with David Espar of NOVA in which he recounts his odyssey on behalf of the Lemba, a South African tribe with claims to an ancient Jewish heritage, at www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel/parfitt.html.

400 years, barring the occasional exception. This did not stop the English from seeking their roots among the Israelites, and this trend continued for centuries after, sometimes including the Scots and Irish, both as perceived by the English and in their own Celtic perceptions. While the ancients often sought a pedigree related to world of the gods, the English sought the roots of their sacred history in that of the (invisible) 'Chosen People' (pp. 36–57).

For the most part, though, the Lost Ten Tribes apparently seemed to have gravitated to more exotic areas, and especially to the Far East. Missionaries were especially adept at discovering them such as in the case of the Chi'ang of western China. Their proofs, based often on points of faulty comparative philology and questionable understanding of comparative ritual, would seem to the modern reader to be totally outrageous. Some, however, were convinced. How ironic, once again, that Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, dedicating his life to discovering the Lost Tribes and bringing them to Israel, should often come to the same conclusions as these Christian missionaries. As to the Chi'ang, according to Avichail, they fled several hundred years ago, with their Jewish customs, to Burma, where their practices took root among the Karen and other Burmese ethnic entities (pp. 102–16).

In modern times, the India-Burma frontier has seen numerous and remarkable Judaizing movements among Chins, Lushais, Kukis and Mizos, collectively referred to, when moving towards Judaism, as Shinlung (pp. 132–44). The Shinlung turned into 'Benei Menashe' and received a good deal of attention, convincing many, from Rabbi Avichail to Hillel Halkin (see above), of their Jewish roots. Some converted and came or were brought to Israel. Others continued to practise their version of Judaism at home. According to Parfitt, these 'new-old' Jews were especially welcomed by Gush Emunim in settlements over the Green Line as 'front-line troops for Israel's demographic war with the Palestinians' (p. 142). While this idea might have fleetingly crossed the mind of the odd settlement leader, the relatively small numbers of Shinlung in Israel on either side of the Green Line would seem to belie Parfitt's theory.⁵

Parfitt goes wherever the myth has cropped up, be it in the Pacific (pp. 145–56), Japan (pp. 157–72), Africa (pp. 173–205) or to the Red Sea area (pp. 206–20). While he also devotes a chapter to the tribes of Afghanistan (pp. 117–31), once considered likely descendants of the Lost Tribes, Taliban rule and al-Qaeda terror have made this theory unpopular of late.

While the Jews of Europe and other lands often had to face hostility and hatred, their invisible cousins were much sought after, first, mostly by Christians seeking in some way to be reunited with their beginnings, and finally, by Jews seeking to make the Jewish nation whole again. Parfitt's remarkable book should be read by all who are interested, in theory or practice, in these Lost Ten Tribes, the myths surrounding them and implications of these myths for modern society.

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⁵ In a meeting of the Absorption Committee of the Knesset which took place on 24 June 2003 (Protocol 6649—this is a 'non-corrected unofficial' version of the protocol, but sufficient for our purposes), a representative of the Benei Menashe pointed out that Amishav, the group that dealt with the *aliyah* of this group, wanted to bring to Israel only 5000 Benei Menashe. The meeting also dealt with continued complaints of left-wing parties in Israel that those of the Benei Menashe who came to Israel were still being placed in settlements over the Green Line. The absolutely amazing thing is that the Chair of the Absorption Committee turned to a representative of the Chief Rabbinate present and enquired regarding the halachic-historic status of the Benei Menashe. The representative stated point-blank that they were descendants of the Ten Tribes. It apparently never dawned on the Chair of the Absorption Committee to question this. All the members of that committee, as well as the representatives of the Rabbinate, would have been greatly served by reading Parfitt's book before dealing with this issue.