

One cannot expect in a volume such as this that all the contributions will be at the same level of scholarship, even when dealing with 'popular-level' scholarship. Anyone seeking information on ancient Persian Jewry, be it the Achaemenid period, the Sasanian Empire or the Babylonian Talmud, for instance, would do well to look elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The same is true for the Middle Ages, since just one article, dealing only with Jewish–Muslim interaction, has been included and much here will be known from general surveys.<sup>2</sup>

The axis upon which the history of the Jews in Iran turns, particularly as it moves from medieval to modern times, is that of their status as 'outcasts' (pp. 95–102). This might result in the establishment of the *mahalleh*, the Jewish quarter or neighbourhood, technically a 'voluntary' decision on the part of the Jews, or even in forced conversion to Islam, such as in the case of the 'Anusim of Mashad' in 1839 (pp. 115–36). Even as the Jews began to be transformed from 'outcasts' to 'citizens', their questionable standing never really dissipated, as they learned in 1979.

The major contribution of this work revolves around the articles on the twentieth century, and particularly the depictions of social history. There are contributions on clothing and makeup (pp. 175–95), languages and dialects (pp. 283–93), Jewish Persian carpets (pp. 295–309), life events such as births, bar-mitzvahs and weddings (pp. 311–35), mothers, daughters and family life (pp. 403–14) and even sports (pp. 373–78). Numerous pictures have been included in these and most other articles. There are also studies on education (pp. 197–212), Zionism (pp. 237–58) and political history during the last century (pp. 259–72).

As mentioned above, the articles in this volume may not technically qualify as scholarship. Unfortunately, however, the individual tales that they tell combine to form a eulogy for a community that has all but disappeared. Whether read as 'semi-scholarship' or as a eulogy, this volume serves as a fitting memorial and deserves a reading.

JOSHUA SCHWARTZ

MEIRA WEISS, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences)*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2002. ix, 176 pp. £34.95. ISBN 0804732728.

Meira Weiss worries that, after this book is read in Israel, 'they will not allow me to come back' (i.e. from sabbatical at Berkeley where the book was written) (p. 136). She fears that she might even be considered a traitor: 'As I watch Israel, I see myself being seen by my country. How will it see me? As a traitor?' (p. 137). By now Weiss, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, knows that her fears were unfounded. She has returned safely to country and university and 'traitor' is rarely wasted on professors of sociology writing academic tomes in English. Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> A number of articles dealing with the early periods are reprinted, such as that of Amnon Netzer and Parviz Varjav on the Prophet Daniel which originally appeared in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* VI (1993), pp. 657–61, and that of Geo Widengren on the Sasanian Empire, 'The Status of Jews in the Sasanian Empire', pp. 33–40, which is a condensed version of his article of the same name which originally appeared in *Iranica Antiqua* I (1961), pp. 134–54. While the original article became a 'classic' in its field, there should have been some effort made at updating. The article on the Babylonian Talmud by Rabbi Ozer Glickman, pp. 43–48, could have been left out altogether.

<sup>2</sup> Negin Yavari, 'Toward a History of Jewish–Muslim Interaction in Medieval Iran', pp. 51–59. This reviewer, however, found that this was not the case regarding the contributions of Vera B. Moreen, 'The Safavid Era', pp. 61–74, and David Yeroushalmi, 'Judeo-Persian Literature', pp. 75–93.

when the scheduled Hebrew version appears it will arouse more of a commotion,<sup>1</sup> but since the avowed purpose of the book is to show 'how the Israeli politics of the body has influenced me and my family' (p. 8), and since the author 'was a child from an upper-middle-class, white background, who became an officer in the Israeli military, and later a professor at the Hebrew University' (p. 8), it is likely that she reflects less of modern-day Israel than she might imagine. Her problem, and that of the book, is that she is not aware of this or does not care.

Since Weiss has chosen to add 'glimpses of personal reflection' to her academic text and she feels that 'my biography is important in the context of my research' (p. 8), the reviewer will allow himself to join the bandwagon of 'biographical positioning' and to add personal comments. After reading Weiss's book, I somehow had the feeling that I had misread all of my time in Israel, having moved there from the USA some thirty years ago to begin graduate studies. While the presence of the military in many aspects of Israeli life cannot be missed, and while many, including this reviewer, believe that less of such presence would be better for all, I had not noticed that I was actually living in 'Sparta'. Was I, however, a fully fledged Israeli 'Spartan'? Did I fit into the author's world of the 'chosen body' (p. 4)? While I hope to be considered 'masculine', and am certainly 'Jewish', my Ashkenazi ethnicity plays second-fiddle in Israel to my 'Anglo-Saxon heritage',<sup>2</sup> and I am far from and was never really that close to fitting into anyone's conception of body-perfect or the 'chosen body' that Weiss seeks to describe and study and that was and is, according to Weiss, a major force in forging Israeli society in the past and present (p. 4). Indeed, as a former *oleh*, having missed all the bodily 'screening and molding' of formative years, a religious Zionist and resident of Efrat, a bedroom community fifteen minutes south of Jerusalem but over the Green Line, am I even part of that collective identity described by Weiss, being constructed through the moulding and regulating of the body? Probably not; and I am not alone and not just for the personal reasons just mentioned. While Weiss correctly points out that Arabs and non-Jews would be excluded from that collective identity, she pays scant attention to those Jews outside of her biographic parameters.

All of the above, however, does not mean that Weiss is not correct in much of what she presents, especially regarding both the pre-State and early years of the State of Israel. Zionism was indeed also a 'bodily revolution' (p. 1) and there was much to revolt against in terms of internal Jewish perceptions of the body as well as of external views. In the Diaspora the Jewish male was often considered weak and even womanish.<sup>3</sup> Zionism, the 'pioneer' (*halutz*), the *sabra* and the IDF were all moulded within the framework of an ideal type, the 'chosen body' to form a new Jewish collectivity. There is no doubt that the drive towards collectivity has influenced most aspects of Israeli life and society, including reproduction and child-care, attitudes towards disease and disability, bereavement and the media. The 'chosen body' has certainly been the ideal of the IDF in the past and the influence of the IDF has permeated many aspects of Israeli society and at many levels. However, this is a far cry from seeing obstetricians and gynecologists as 'commando fighters' undertaking abortions for the greater glory of God, country and (future) regiment (p. 32).

Moreover, one gets the impression that Weiss has been in some sort of timewarp.

<sup>1</sup> For the moment see the review of Arthur W. Frank, *Canadian Journal of Sociology Online*, November 2002, at [www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/chosen/html](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/chosen/html).

<sup>2</sup> While this might seem strange to real Anglo-Saxons, in Israeli society, the phrase is used to denote Jewish immigrants to Israel from English-speaking countries, many of whom stubbornly retain characteristics and cling to traits of their native lands considered 'quaint' (but also foolish) by many native Israelis.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Irven M. Resnick, 'On Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses in Jacques de Vitry's *History of Jerusalem*', International Rennert Guest Lecture Series 3 (1998).

Much of what disturbs her has been changed or is being changed, perhaps even because of a reaction against the reality of the past which she so aptly describes. Thus, for example, since the 'chosen body' and collectivity are so intertwined, she must find some way of explaining the burgeoning trend toward individualism in Israeli society. While she may see this as simply 'collective patterns of consumption' and while she may be correct that some in Israeli society still see 'individualism' in a negative light (p. 19), globalisation has introduced the Israeli public to many different types of individualism and many are becoming widespread and accepted, even in the traditionally collective-oriented Israeli school system. Individualism is also beginning to change the attitude toward the supreme symbol of the chosen body, the IDF. While she is correct that at one time 'people unfit for national service are bound to be deemed marginal' (p. 88), today success in business, academia and the media etc. can often displace this marginality, and while the IDF used to be a springboard for careers in many fields (p. 44), this phenomenon has been limited by increasing demands for specialisation and specialised career knowledge. The very possibility of even being able to succeed, while being unfit for national service, represents a tremendous change in Israeli society.<sup>4</sup>

Weiss's views on the IDF should have been tempered by more comparative study of other armies. While training in the IDF may be elitist and at times even brutal, it is after all the army and not summer camp. While on sabbatical in the US she should have visited the 'boot camps' of the US Marine Corps or US Army Rangers. Military basic training is probably one of the least pleasant experiences one can have in any country and at any time, but the fact is that the IDF has in recent years forbidden many of the humiliating initiation ceremonies that were popular in past years. Had she spoken with Russian *olim*, many having served in the army of the former Soviet Union or in armies of the countries that comprise this area now, she might have altered somewhat her view on the chosen body and IDF.

A society based on the chosen body will probably not be favourably disposed to the disabled and the handicapped. There is no doubt that Israel has long lagged behind many countries in the Western world regarding care for and support of the disabled as well in passing relevant legislation and establishing government bodies to deal with their needs (pp. 88 ff). While it is always possible to try and explain this away as a result of budgetary constraints and limitations due to defense and security,<sup>5</sup> the author is correct in seeing in both Israeli society and Jewish tradition a view that considers disability to be a stigma (p. 90).<sup>6</sup> In spite of this there have been recent strides, albeit

<sup>4</sup> Weiss sees her military service, as well as that of her daughter, both serving eventually as officers in the IDF, within this chosen body framework. My wife and I, *as parents*, encouraged our daughter to serve as an officer, in keeping with a quest to instil in her a sense of self-achievement and excellence. The army taught her responsibility, cultivated, albeit within necessary limits, individualism and fostered initiative. The 15 December 2003 issue of the *Jerusalem Report* (Matti Friedman, 'The Thirteenth Year', pp. 18–19) describes the growing phenomenon of Israeli teenagers putting off induction for a year to volunteer or study (or 'find themselves'). This too represents the growing trend toward individualism. Loosening the grip of the collective may in the end actually contribute to it.

<sup>5</sup> As I type these very words, Israel Radio announces a problem regarding parking spaces for the disabled on account of the bureaucratic infighting of two government offices!

<sup>6</sup> While Weiss understands that it is impossible to divorce Israeli society and culture from its Jewish roots, her use of Jewish tradition is highly selective and limited. There is a vast corpus of Jewish, halachic and religious material which would have been relevant to her comments on the IDF and it is a shame that none of this is included. However, Weiss rightly deals with the disabled in Jewish halachah and makes reference to an unpublished manuscript by Tzvi Marx, who has studied disabilities from a Jewish perspective, and could not have made reference to his recently published book *Disability in Jewish Law* (Routledge, London, 2002). However, she should have

sometime after difficult struggles, in ameliorating conditions for the disabled, making public buildings more accessible to the handicapped and generally changing common perceptions regarding them.<sup>7</sup> The chosen body is not immutable.

While Weiss makes reference to Jewish tradition regarding the disabled, her discussion of the 'National Cult of the Dead' (pp. 65–87) is unfortunately basically devoid of reference to this tradition. While public rituals of bereavement and commemoration may have been structured by manifestations of the chosen body, whether for political or social purposes, it is impossible to ignore religious elements at public ceremonies such as the recitation of the *Kaddish* and *El Maleh Rahamim*. She also makes no reference to 'alternative memorial commemorations', such as Camp Koby, a camp for children of terror victims or for child terror victims themselves, established by the parents of terror victim Yaakov (Koby) Mandel. This certainly provides not only a different perspective on the chosen body of the author, but an alternative (Israeli) chosen body.

The author sees most of the issues discussed above in terms of sexism, militarism and an exaggerated cult of the body. This paints Israeli society in a dark light indeed. We have tried to show that the author's chosen body, while perhaps historically accurate, does not necessarily reflect modern-day Israeli life. However, one aspect of her discussion remains frightening. Thus, while Judaism may ask women (and their husbands) to 'be fruitful and multiply', Israeli women also are committed to record amounts of prenatal screening, foetal diagnostics and a willingness to abort upon suspicion of a birth defect (pp. 27–32). The author sees this in terms of Zionist eugenics with obstetricians doing preliminary screening for the army.<sup>8</sup>

What is especially disturbing, however, is the tendency of Israeli parents to abandon children with visible but not often critical birth defects (pp. 32–41). While one may quibble over whether this is the result of a normative body image inculcated by Israeli national ideology to produce sound, healthy citizens and soldiers or a combination of militarism and chauvinism (pp. 40–41), or whether other factors are at play, there certainly exists a problem. Here too, though, there have been advances with programmes existing in which adults with impairments counsel parents of newborn children, serving as living proof that impairment, in certain cases at least, need not prevent one from leading a normal life.

In spite of the reservations expressed above, Weiss has written an important book providing fascinating insights into Israeli society. Unfortunately, her insights are based on one view of the chosen body. The very society to which she belongs and which provided her with her perspective on Israeli society is just one of many societies of modern-day Israel. We await her work on the chosen bodies of the Orthodox, of the

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made better use of the material by Marx. Halachic material on the disabled is often brought together with laws relating to minors, women and the mentally incompetent. Physical disability is often connected to age and gender. While all this may be connected to the body, there should have been a much more sophisticated approach regarding the Jewish material.

<sup>7</sup> See the comments of Arie Zudkevitch in Mike Ervin, 'Israeli Organization of Disabled Persons Holds 77 Day "Sit-In" about Benefits', *Disability World*, April–May 2002 ([www.disabilityworld.org/04-05\\_02/news/israel/shtml](http://www.disabilityworld.org/04-05_02/news/israel/shtml)): 'We didn't get all the things we wanted and we had to make compromises, because of the security situation that Israel has to deal with. But we got an improvement in the amount of money that the disabled people get . . . . The most important achievement we have now is the changes in Israeli society. People understand better the needs of the disabled people and the language of human rights.' On improvements regarding handicap accessibility in building see Abraham ben Ezra, 'Planning for the Handicapped', *Bne Beytcha*, at [www.bnebeytcha.co.il/maamar\\_main.asp?maamar\\_id=194](http://www.bnebeytcha.co.il/maamar_main.asp?maamar_id=194) (in Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> The author also discusses the pre-marital screening often used by the Orthodox to prevent marriages of couples who might produce a baby with a birth defect. Orthodox couples, however, revert to abortion only with clear rabbinic permission and thus abort less frequently than non-Orthodox. This might reflect the fact that their 'chosen body' is different than that of the author.

right, of settlers, of Arabs, of new *olim*, of the aged and of the disabled themselves, and their politics of the body vis-à-vis Israeli society.

JOSHUA SCHWARTZ

STEVEN T. ROSENTHAL, *Irreconcilable Differences: The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel*. Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, Hanover/London, 2001. 272 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 1584653280.

JEROLD S. AUERBACH, *Are We One? Jewish Identity in the United States and Israel*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J. / London, 2001. 224 pp. £18.50. ISBN 0813529174.

ELI LEDERHENDLER and JONATHAN D. SARNA (eds), *America and Zion: Essays and Papers in Memory of Moshe Davis*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2002. 232 pp. £21.50. ISBN 0814330347.

Steven T. Rosenthal has provided an excellent history, from an American Jewish organisational perspective, of the relationship between Israel and the US Diaspora. In the past, most mainstream American 'Zionist' Jewish organisations saw their public role as that of unflinching support for Israeli policy, and if there were matters of disagreement, these were not to be aired in public; their role was to provide financial and political support. This being the case, there was not always a good deal of understanding of the finer details of Israeli reality or policy. Mainstream organisational support for Israel was blind and this support was also to take priority to local community needs and issues. All this theoretically led to a feeling of 'we are one'.

Rosenthal shows how this relationship had a 'self-destruct' mechanism built into it, as it were: from the very beginning there were misunderstandings on both sides. Zionism, for the Israelis, both pre-State of Israel and afterwards essentially meant, *aliyah*, that is, living in Israel. Zionism was a different matter for the American 'Zionist'. Thus, American Zionism had to be compatible with American ideas and democracy (p. 13), it was not the result of anti-Semitism, and while it recognised the importance of living in Israel, it saw its role as offering support to those who wanted or needed to move or live there (p. 20), and this was not mainstream American Jewry. The American organisations, according to Rosenthal, did not start out in an equal relationship with Israel; the Diaspora deferred to Zion, and herein was the beginning of the eventual rupture. Of course, American 'Zionists' might have made more of an effort to be Zionist, but this is not an option discussed by Rosenthal.

A new twist in the relationship between Israel and the American Diaspora was created by the 'Exodus syndrome', the result of the 1958 novel by Leon Uris and the subsequent film. Hagana officer Ari ben Canaan, or rather Paul Newman (!), became the 'new Israeli'. While this might have brought numerous people to cinemas throughout the world and might have been a public relations coup for Israel, the Israelis never really managed to live up to Hollywood standards. Rosenthal claims that many of these perceptions had more to do with American Jewish identification issues than with concern for the survival of Israel (pp. 28 ff.); 'superman' made a better impression than 'concentration camp survivor'. How ironic that, decades later, the Holocaust would supersede the Zionist ideal in American Jewish perception, and to a great extent even in American Zionist circles.

Rosenthal shows how the American Jewish relationship with Israel was all too often based on a 'failure to communicate' with numerous misunderstandings. At first, the American Jewish groups were willing to 'turn the other cheek'. After a time there was