

Book Reviews

works by, among others, Shaul Ginsburg, Mikhail Agursky, Eugene Avrutin, and Judith Kornblatt. This book will be essential reading for students of Jewish social history and especially for scholars of Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Brian Horowitz
Tulane University



Lewis Glinert. *The Story of Hebrew*. Library of Jewish Ideas. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. xii + 281 pp.
doi:10.1017/S0364009418000326

To write the three-thousand-year history of anything in 250 pages is no easy task. The challenge is even greater when the subject matter is a language. Yet Lewis Glinert achieves a readable and engaging history—or rather story—of the Hebrew language. That story, however, is much better told as the book progresses through the three-thousand-year history of the Hebrew language and, alongside it, the three-thousand-year history of the Jewish people. Which is to say, the narrative is much stronger and livelier when it treats the medieval and modern periods, no surprise given Glinert’s own interests and specialization.

Throughout the book, Glinert weaves into the narrative a host of important information in a compact manner, with ample illustrations (both of texts, often in Glinert’s own translations, and of manuscripts and documents) serving to illuminate his points. Well-known figures such as Sa’adiah Gaon, Jonah ibn Janah, and Maimonides appear alongside more obscure figures such as Sa’id ibn Babshad, Joseph ibn Zabara, and Shabbatai Donnolo. In like fashion, most readers will learn here for the first time of the existence of *Melekh Artus*, a Hebrew Arthurian romance from 1279, “with the Holy Grail judiciously changed to a *tamhuy*” (98).

Glinert’s fluid prose and his ability to capture the essence of the Hebrew style of a particular writer create a very readable book. Authors ranging from Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Judah al-Ḥarizi to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Ḥayim Nahman Bialik, and Saul Tchernichovksy come alive in Glinert’s apt characterizations: for example, al-Ḥarizi’s “playful allusions to biblical imagery” (93), Bialik’s “poems of wrath” (192), Tchernichovksy’s “poems of Hellenic and Canaanite beauty” (192).

Two fine chapters are devoted to Christian Hebraists, from Jerome through the Reformation, and indeed through the American colonial period. Among the gems to be mined in this book is Glinert’s treatment of the thirteenth-century Ramsey Dictionary (England), whose “verb section lists 1,392 Hebrew verbs, many with several subentries, and all listed (for the most part correctly) in the imperative form—a feat of organization and grammatical analysis by itself since in the Bible only one in ten of these verbs occurs in the imperative” (135). To allow the reader a glimpse of the Ramsey Dictionary, one folio of the manuscript is reproduced on the facing page (134).

Book Reviews

For the modern period, Glinert covers an array of topics in fine fashion, ranging from the revival of Hebrew to the Canaanite movement to the work of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. Another gem is the reproduction of an Israeli Ministry of Education poster from the 1950s, which was displayed in medical clinics (221). Body parts and medical equipment are labeled in Hebrew, thereby providing both patient and practitioner the ability both to learn and to converse. Best of all is the heading on the poster: *בְּמַרְפָּאָה דְּבַר עִבְרִית* “At the clinic speak Hebrew and be healed”!

As intimated above, the early portions of this book are weaker, often representing older scholarship. It is not clear that “the rabbinic sages” are responsible for the biblical canon (17). I do not know on what grounds Glinert claims that “more recent evidence” would group Hebrew more closely with Aramaic rather than with Canaanite dialects (Phoenician, Moabite, etc.) (19). The reason for the use of Aramaic in “Ezra’s historical records” is not “obscure” (25), but rather reflects the use of the language in imperial Persian documents. The sects would not perish after the Great Revolt, leaving only rabbinic Judaism and the new religion of Christianity to continue (39), for there is a considerable evidence that speaks to the persistence of a nonrabbinic stream of Judaism (Ein Gedi synagogue inscription, Damascus Document, etc.). Antioch is in modern-day Turkey, not modern-day Syria (126).

Within the context of tannaitic literature, Glinert refers to the ten words of the *ham-moši* blessing as “symbolically [paralleling] the ten ordinances governing production of bread (such as tithes and gleaning)” (52). The ten ordinances are mentioned in Y. *Hallah* 1:9, but the connection to the *ham-moši* blessing is not made until Eleazar of Worms (thirteenth century).¹ This may be a beautiful teaching, but clearly the correspondence between the ten words and the ten ordinances is merely a coincidence. After all, the formulation in M. *Berakhot* 6:1 is simply the usual six-word benedictional introduction followed by the four-word phrase adapted from Psalms 104:14.

When Glinert writes that “the Talmud promises the afterlife to all who recite Psalm 145 ... three times a day” (53), he refers to later printed editions (and, admittedly, the Munich and Florence manuscripts). Note that the Paris and Oxford manuscripts, which clearly reflect the original wording, state once per day (see Rendsburg, *Oqimta* 2 [5774]: esp. 41–42).

One final observation: for the early modern and modern periods Glinert focuses much more on the Ashkenazic world, to the expense of the Sephardic/Mizrahi orbit. Clearly this is where his interests lie—witness his book *Hebrew in Ashkenaz* (Oxford University Press, 1993)—but one would have hoped for more even coverage in the book under review here. As one indication thereof, note that Yemen appears only three times in the book, and in all three instances as one of several countries mentioned as participating in the same process (for example, the widespread adoption of the Spanish style of Hebrew verse). Surely

1. My thanks to Ari Lobel (University of Sydney) and to my colleague Azzan Yadin-Israel (Rutgers University) for their assistance on these rabbinic texts.

the remarkable Hebrew traditions of the Jews of this distant land—with deep knowledge of both the Tiberian and Babylonian Masoretic systems—merit specific attention. Note too that Glinert’s transliteration of Hebrew reflects Ashkenazic pronunciation, even when rendering ancient texts, for example, *kidshanu* (36), as opposed to *kiddeshanu* (beyond the matter of *k* instead of *q*).

These criticisms aside, to repeat, Glinert has produced a very engaging and readable survey of the three-thousand-year history of the Hebrew language. Specialists and nonspecialists alike will enjoy the narrative, will learn tidbits in every chapter, and will absorb the author’s palpable enthusiasm for his subject.

Gary A. Rendsburg
Rutgers University



Gur Alroey. *Zionism without Zion: The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2016. viii + 359 pp.
doi:10.1017/S0364009418000338

Gur Alroey’s *Zionism without Zion* offers readers a triumphant study of spectacular failure. The subject of Alroey’s book, the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO), barely gets a mention in most Zionist historiographies. Yet the ITO once presented a powerful ideological challenge to Zionism and competed for popular and intellectual support. Alroey reveals how the ITO emerged as the most notable nationalist ideological rival to Zionism in the early twentieth century and was later reborn in the years leading up to the Holocaust.

Readers unfamiliar with ITO ideology, its history of humanitarian efforts, and its rivalry with Zionism will feel as though they have stumbled upon a bizarre world in which Zionist values and aims have been inverted. Instead of the biblical land of Israel as the focus of nation building, the Territorialists—as ITO adherents were typically known—sought another parcel of land large enough to sustain a Jewish demographic majority. Instead of devotion to Zion, Territorialists worked to rescue Jews and resettle them elsewhere in the Diaspora. And though they venerated Theodor Herzl, the Territorialists favored another author, playwright, and activist, Israel Zangwill.

Alroey thus calls the ITO the “alter ego” of the Zionist movement (12). Though he does not state as much, Alroey’s intimation seems unmistakable: that one cannot adequately understand modern European Jewish history—and especially the trajectory of Zionism—without delving into the sad history of Territorialism. The looking-glass world that Territorialism holds up to the Jewish past reveals what might have been and, hence, urges us to consider our commitments in the present era. Unfortunately, few scholars have demonstrated much interest in the ITO or its interwar reincarnation, the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonization.