

*W*ESTMINSTER QUARTERLY

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Henry Layard's image of Nineveh

Nineveh - That Great City
Inside Rwanda
The Khazars
Israel Zangwill

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Westminster Welcomes its New Members

- Bryan & Lorraine Lewis
 Nicola Cohen
 Sarah-Lou Morris
 Olivia Leland & Van Chappell
 Ronda Fogel
 Esther Leon
 Sam Feller & Andrea Carta
 Samuel & Nina Wisnia
 Robert Emdin
 Charles & Maria Samek
 Denisa & Michael Sofaer
 Daniel & Manizeh Rimer
 Avital Mashian
 Danny Strauss & Sunny Iyer
 Dalya Rothschild



Births

Raphael - a son for Michele & Roberta Raba on 1st November

Infant Blessings

Sasha, Jake & Emilia Hammerson on 15th September
 Theo Lawrence on 8th December

B'nei Mitzvah

Max Peel on 29th September
 Daniel Orton on 6th October
 Alex de Kare-Silver on 13th October
 Sofia Stalbow on 17th November

Marriage Blessing

David Barnet & Safa Choudhury on 19th August (in Italy)

Death

Justine (Joy) Bryer on 11th November

Condolences

We offer sincere condolences to

Alan & Daniel Weiner on the death of their mother
 Nora Ohrenstein on the death of her aunt

Lesley King-Lewis and Lisa Villiers and their families on the death of their mother and grandmother



A man walks by a dark alleyway in Belfast. As he is approaching, a voice says sharply from the alleyway: 'Are you Protestant or Catholic?' 'Have mercy on a poor Jew', the man tremulously responds. 'Hmm, Jewish! - but are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?!'

In the Jewish world too, there is sometimes a tribal and divisive obsession with denominational labels. 'Yes, but what sort of a community are you really? Are you Reform independent or are you Orthodox independent?'

We sometimes put others or ourselves in a denominational box, explaining that we do not do or believe something because we are a particular sort of Jew. I believe our conversations, and indeed our Judaism, will be more interesting if we openly explore substantive commitments and values, rather than using vague general identities as an assumed shorthand for unclear, frozen points of view.

The foundations of our evolving independent identity are our diversity and our welcoming, non-judgmental approach. Our founding principles, laid down in 1961, strikingly begin with 'Our aim is to create a Synagogue which will be an instrument for the pursuit of religious truth'. Our independent identity has given us an exciting ability to focus on the pursuit of truth, rather than on its presumption. We are explorers, willing to change and try out new things.

At our last *Yom Kippur* Service, we tried out the *Ashamnu* confession, a short alphabetic expression of attitudinal and behavioural errors. It is not yet in our prayer book, so we used an insert card, and after an overwhelmingly positive feedback, it will now be included in our final version of the book. The process of

exploring *Ashamnu* was interesting in several ways. Rich, sensitive research into its meanings and context was shared. Views changed. We decided that the experiencing of an act is part of the process, and so we all did the *Ashamnu* together in our Services, and then we gathered feedback.

The community has also explored changes through more streamlined processes. Last year we initiated pre-Service gatherings on a Saturday morning to get to know the Service - and each other - better, and to consider ways in which our services could be ever more participatory and meaningful. In one of the first gatherings, somebody asked, 'Well if the *Amidah* is a standing prayer why do we not stand for it?'. Finding no compelling answer, the group in the room decided to try standing for all of it (or at least almost all of it) and we have done so since. A community wanting to make changes, based on informed conversation, experience and experimentation, is a proud model of progressive Judaism.

We have discovered that Reform and Liberal Judaism have developed. In exploring the *Ashamnu*, we found that almost every prayer book in the world, from Liberal to Orthodox, now includes it. For those who identify as progressive Jews, being progressive entails being able to change, and that sometimes means returning to elements that were once discarded. Reform Judaism is not Reformed Judaism: it is an ongoing verb, an exploration, rather than a complacent, complete assertion. Indeed, Liberal and Reform Judaism, both in the UK and in America, have returned to some important traditional elements over the last decade: there is more Hebrew - and there is a more open exploration of ritual and *mitzvot*.

Our Community, as an independent synagogue engaged in the ongoing pursuit of truth, could stand out as a great example of a certain form of open Judaism. There are two contradictory versions of progressive Judaism that are competing right now in the world. One states that 'As a Liberal/Reform Jew we do *x* and we most certainly do not do *y*' - which could be seen as just the reverse of

a prescriptive and dismissive assertion that 'this is not the true Orthodox way'. Essentially being a progressive Jew is taken to be a fixed identity which necessarily entails ruling certain things out (many portions of Torah, our sacred canon and many rituals, both personal and collective, become anathema).

On the other hand, the one that I unashamedly care about, is a Judaism that embraces certain values which bring with them red lines; those values which are gender egalitarianism (equal religious rights for men and women), education and participation (we regularly invite people to own their own Judaism rather than surrendering authority to a Rabbinic or priestly caste) and we now recognise that part of the pursuit of meaning, of education and participation, is the experience and not just the discussion of aspects of Judaism. This form of progressive Judaism embraces a plurality of practice and opinions, of occasional cultural Jews and committed daily religious Jews - providing that the values of egalitarianism, education and participation are not being attacked.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was born into a learned, elite *Chasidic* family. He experienced a range of settings in which he did not fit into the box - a traditional *yeshiva* education, the University of Berlin, and the *Wissenschaft*, the faculty of the Reform Rabbinical School, HUC, for five years, and then JTS, the Conservative Seminary. The question of *Torah min Hashamayim*, *Torah* from heaven, had long been used as a divisive issue, to ask people if they believed unequivocally in the divine giving of *Torah* or not, to put them in a box. Rabbi Heschel taught us that before we argue and exclude people over whether *Torah* comes from heaven or not (whatever that means) we need to first experience *Shamayim min ha'Torah*, heaven from the Torah.

Rabbi Benji Stanley

Nineveh - That Great City



*Sennacherib
King of Assyria
705-681 BCE*

Reading the Book of Jonah on *Yom Kippur*, we are reminded of a great and wonderful city, the capital of the kingdom of Assyria, Nineveh. The city's size, and by implication its splendour, is mentioned three times in the story, and indeed it was a wonder of the Middle East, featuring in many accounts of the kingdom, and in many illustrations, both contemporary and of a later time.

Nineveh was situated on the Tigris, in present day Iraq, not far from the modern city of Mosul, where the ruins of the mighty palace can still be seen. This was an excellent position, at the important junction of commercial routes between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, where the West met the East, and where the city could benefit from the wealth of most of the known world. It was indeed 'that great city', one of the oldest and richest known to ancient man.

In the time of the old Assyrian Empire, Nineveh was an important centre of worship of the goddess Ishtar, attracting pilgrims from near and far, and in the fourteenth century BCE the King sent a statue of the goddess to the Pharaoh Amenhotep III. Gradually each Assyrian monarch built extensively in the city turning it from a provincial township into a vast sprawling metropolis, the wonder of the Middle Eastern world.

It was however Sennacherib, son of Sargon II, who in about 700 BCE made Nineveh his capital, building a new palace, extending and beautifying the city, and erecting inner and outer city walls that still stand. Sennacherib figures prominently in the Old Testament, when

'in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, did Sennacherib, King of Assyria, come up against the fenced cities of Judah and took them.' The Assyrian king's greatest achievement in his capital was the magnificent palace he built within the walls of the city. Its plans have been recovered in the course of the archaeological excavations that have taken place over many years on the site. It was of a vast size, built on a foundation of limestone, with eighty rooms. The enclosed area had more than 100,000 inhabitants (maybe closer to 150,000), about twice as many as Babylon at the time, placing it among the largest settlements worldwide. The documentation includes many pictorial records, accounting for every step in the construction, including the carving of statues - one huge statue needed forty-four men to tow it into place. On the walls of the palace were depictions of battle scenes, and the spoils of war, retribution against prisoners, of which Sennacherib wrote concerning his conquest of Babylon, 'Its inhabitants, young and old, I did not spare and with their corpses I filled the streets of the city'.



*One of the ancient gates of
Nineveh*

He describes his confrontation with Hezekiah at Lachish, 'And Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke ... him I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city, like a caged bird. Earthworks I threw up against him, and anyone coming out of his city gate I made pay for his crime'. Sennacherib is believed to have been murdered by his two sons in his great capital city. Many of the discoveries found on the site are now in the British Museum.

With fifteen great gates set into the walls, Nineveh covered an area of nearly three square miles; it had an elaborate system

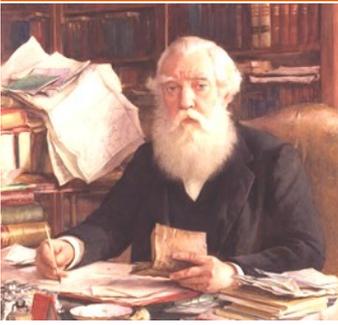
of canals bringing water down from the hills (it was from one of these that Jonah took up his vantage point) and an aqueduct took the water around the city to wherever it was needed. More than a hundred thousand people lived within the walls (the Book of Jonah mentions 120,000), and some scholars believe that the so-called Hanging Gardens of Babylon were actually part of Sennacherib's Nineveh - no evidence shows exactly where they were.

a vast sprawling metropolis, the wonder of the Middle Eastern world

When Ashurbanipal inherited the Assyrian throne, the Empire began to decline, though he was in fact a great but cruel fighter. In 616 BCE Nineveh was attacked by an alliance of Assyria's vassal states including those of Babylon, Chaldea, Persia and Media. After bitter fighting the city was sacked and most of it destroyed; its people were either killed or escaped from the area into the surrounding countryside. The ruins of Nineveh were left to disintegrate, to become centuries later a fruitful source of archaeological discoveries.

According to Genesis (10:11) Nineveh was founded by a man named Ashur, Noah's grandson, after the Great Flood, who then went on to found other important cities in the region. The name Assyria may derive from Ashur, or perhaps from the ancient deity of that name. Certain of the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to confirm Nineveh's original foundation.

The Book of the prophet Nahum is largely devoted to an account of the destruction of Nineveh. He denounces the evil doing of its inhabitants, and recounts God's revenge on Assyria's pride. His language is colourful and uninhibited, 'Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery ... the noise of the rattling of the wheels and of the prancing horses and of the jumping chariots. There is a multitude of slain and a great number of carcasses; and there is no end of their corpses, they stumble upon their corpses'. The Book of Tobit is also set in Nineveh



*Sir Austen Henry Layard
(1817-1894)*

where Tobias lives, the young man who is helped by an angel to drive away the devil.

It was in 1847 that the distinguished archaeologist Henry Layard, then a young man, began to excavate the area where the great city had once stood. He soon found the first traces of Sennacherib's vast palace with its colossal bas-reliefs. He discovered the fabulous library of Ashurbanipal with its 22,000 cuneiform clay tablets, which when deciphered laid open much of the way of life and religion of the ancient Assyrians.

Following the defeat in 612 BCE, the site was largely unoccupied for centuries and the ruins remained almost intact during Achaemenid rule, though the library of Ashurbanipal may still have been in use until around the time of Alexander the Great. The city is mentioned again in the Battle of Nineveh in 627 CE, which was fought between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Sassanian Empire of Persia near the ancient city. From the Arab Islamic Conquest in 637 CE until the modern period, the city of Mosul on the opposite bank of the Tigris became the successor of ancient Nineveh.

Further archaeological investigations took place in subsequent years, with the remarkable finds taken back to



Carved stone panel from the Palace of Sennacherib

European and American museums, to the wonder of those who came to see them. The British Museum – the Assyrian Room – shows some of the finds from the rooms and courtyards of the Neo-Assyrian Southwest Palace of King Sennacherib decorated with a series of detailed carved stone panels. The panels depict a variety of scenes, including the transport of huge sculptures of human-headed winged bulls (*lamassu*) that weigh up to thirty tons and were intended for the main entrances to the palace. These illustrations provide an insight into ancient quarrying and transport techniques, as well as Sennacherib's keen interest in his building projects. Other panels on display depict the King's military campaigns.

Near the North -western corner of the great walls were found 300 prism fragments which turned out to be the royal records of Sennacherib, his sons Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The work is continuing today. The University of California, Berkeley, is engaged in excavations in the area - though the war in Iraq, around Mosul, is hampering the dig.

The Mosul dam, too, is in disrepair and could endanger the whole operation around the ruins of the ancient city. But it is the ISIS forces in the area which are perhaps Nineveh's greatest danger. They have threatened to destroy whatever remains of the old city, including some artefacts in the Mosul museum, and have menaced the archaeologists working at the site. At least two of the ancient gates of the city which were still standing have now been destroyed.

Christian religious groups in Iraq – Copts, Eastern Catholics, Syriacs and Assyrians – still mourn the loss of Nineveh, rather as the Jews do their lost Temple, and fast for three days in early spring; this fast is known as *Nineveh's Prayer*. Many of the present day inhabitants of Mosul consider themselves descendants of the people of ancient Nineveh.

Philippa Bernard



Sayings of the Rabbis

If a word spoken in its time is worth one piece of money, silence in *its* time is worth two.



Teach thy tongue to say, 'I do not know'.



Thy friend has a friend, and thy friend's friend has a friend; be discreet.



The place honours not the man, 'tis the man who gives honour to the place.



Few are they who see their own faults.



Two pieces of coin in one bag make more noise than a hundred.

Inside Rwanda



Louisa and Marius

I recently took part in *Inside Rwanda* - a ten-day trip for twelve young professionals from the USA, Canada, UK and Germany. It provided an immersive experience into the culture, history, food and community of the landlocked Central African country.

During the 100-day genocide in 1994, nearly one million people were killed and even more displaced. Today, Rwanda is slowly rebuilding but is still feeling the impact of the genocide; it has the world's highest *per capita* orphan population.

The trip was organised by The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, (the JDC - a Jewish relief organisation based in New York City) and the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (the ASYV) which is a non-profit outfit for healing and educating vulnerable and orphaned youth in Rwanda. I didn't expect that my first experience with JDC would be in such a place. Often known as the 'best kept secret' within the Jewish community, this work has provided

support and hope to millions of Jews across the world. JDC Entwine is the young professional branch of the organisation; which coordinates a variety of trips throughout the year introducing the Jewish world to young Jewish professionals.

Our base was Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV), an amazing residential community in rural Rwanda outside Kigali. The 144-acre site is home to over 500 children who were orphaned during the 1994 genocide. Modelled after *Yemen Orde* and the Israeli youth villages that served children who had lost their parents during the Holocaust, ASYV was founded as a special project of JDC, built in partnership with the village founder, Anne Heyman. Today, JDC continues to offer logistical support, and places year-long Jewish Service Corps and multiple-year fellows in the village.

It is incredibly hard to explain the village to someone who has never visited. As soon as you arrive you feel a wealth of love, hope and peace (*Shalom*); a true sanctuary. The village is designed to care for, protect and nurture the most deprived young people across all regions of Rwanda. ASYV not only offers the young people a fantastic education in English but a community built on Jewish core values and, most importantly, *Tikun Olam* (Hebrew for Repairing the World). These values provide comfort to the children, none of whom are Jewish. Within Agahozo-Shalom's supportive and structured community, the rhythm of life is restored, with the ultimate goal of equipping young people who have

lived through great trauma to become healthy, self-sufficient and engaged in the rebuilding of their nation.

Every year, four of the most deprived children from each region in Rwanda are chosen to join the village. They are placed in a family of around twenty students, led by a Mama who has often lost her own children and family during the genocide - a perfect pairing between children who lack parents/family and Mamas who are looking to love and care for a child again.

Students take part in English-speaking school, sport, community service and enrichment programmes throughout the school year. For many this is the first time they have had three nutritious meals a day and a support system. Given the opportunity to flourish, by the time the young students leave the village they have great expectations, are able to articulate their thoughts and have dreams of changing both Rwanda and the rest of the world.

I was so impressed by the students; they were incredibly hardworking, resilient and had this insatiable passion to make the most of the opportunity of being part of ASYV. On this trip I met Marius Bischoff - also a member of Westminster Synagogue - who works in the Board of Deputies International Division. He and I found the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village to be an extremely positive and uplifting experience. Like the Jews, the Rwandans have also had to overcome a genocide in the twentieth century. ASYV is a place where love could start to repair a troubled history and demonstrates how our Jewish upbringing, experiences and resources can be used to help a non-Jewish community. It is important to continue the impressive work of ASYV. Marius and I are hoping that others will be inspired by our experience and help us to raise £1,500 to support the village. Donations can be made via the following link: <https://fundraise.asyv.org/fundraiser/1661002> For more information about ASYV please refer to their website - www.asyv.org/

Louisa Golden

Louisa is Westminster Synagogue's under 35s observer on the Board of Deputies.



Young Jewish professionals with the Youth Village community



Consultant Diagnostic Radiologist



I have been a Consultant Diagnostic Radiologist at the Royal Marsden Hospital for the past twenty-four years. I specialise in the diagnosis of breast cancer, cross-sectional imaging, general and interventional ultrasound, gynaecological cancer and soft-tissue sarcoma. I joined The Royal Marsden as a junior in 1989 before becoming a consultant in 1994. I spend my days reporting CT scans, MRI and undertaking ultrasound and guided biopsies.

When I qualified as a doctor in 1981, imaging was in its infancy. There were just seven CT scanners in the whole of the UK and MRI had not been invented! Ultrasound was incredibly primitive and cumbersome. Over the past decades diagnostic technology has changed beyond all belief. Where we used to report in dark rooms with X-ray film, we now sit in front of high-resolution workstations, with digital archiving and use rapid voice recognition software for dictation. The quality of the imaging is astounding, and the variety of techniques and machinery changes all the time.

RMH is Britain's premier NHS cancer institution and we are lucky to use state-of-the-art equipment and to have a beautiful modern X-ray department.

Although the volume of work is enormous and increasing all the time, I feel privileged to be part of this amazing facility. Our patients are grateful to be in a specialised environment and my colleagues are all of a high calibre, due to the reputation of the hospital.

I grew up in Wembley, North London and was encouraged to pursue medicine by my mother Dr Eve Hammer Moskovic who was an anaesthetist. She qualified in 1948 and had a successful career but always felt held back by being female and she struggled to cope with raising a family plus working. In those early days, women doctors were paid fifty per cent of that of male salaries and in response to this, she helped to found the Medical Women's Federation. Eve always pushed me to achieve the best for myself and I really owe all my success to her. She was thrilled when I passed my postgraduate exams and of course so proud when I got my position at the Marsden.

After qualifying at the Royal Free Hospital, I worked in general medicine in various London hospitals but soon came to realise that most decision-making regarding patient care was made in the X-ray department. I felt stimulated by the new technology that was rapidly coming through. The advent of routine cross-sectional (multiplanar) imaging was very exciting as we could now see 'inside' the body in wonderful detail. The specialty of Radiology used to be limited to plain films (X-rays of chest, bones and joints) and barium studies for the bowel, but was rapidly replaced by CT scanning, ultrasound and MRI.

the complexity of human anatomy and our ability to diagnose tiny abnormalities with modern equipment.

I am still fascinated by the complexity of human anatomy and our ability to diagnose tiny abnormalities with modern equipment. We can take samples from lesions deep inside the body without

requiring surgery and we can monitor abnormalities with sequential scans, for example in patients on chemotherapy for cancer.

I have never regretted a minute of the hard work I have put into my career over the past thirty-seven years, and despite still working full time and being on call, I love it all. The work is challenging, sometimes sad, but also uplifting, and always worthwhile. It makes you reassess your own life daily and be grateful for your health and happiness. We tend to forget how lucky we are in all the frantic chaos of modern life.

I am particularly blessed in having a really supportive husband, Meirion Thomas, who has encouraged me every step of the way. I like to think I am a positive role model not only for our daughter Dorabella but also for other young women thinking of taking on challenging careers.

For anyone prepared to work hard, I thoroughly recommend hospital medicine and particularly radiology as a career, which has kept my interest after all these years.

Eleanor Moskovic
MBBS FRCP FRCR

The Khazars



Stone found in Sarkel

In 1976 Arthur Koestler published his book on the history of the Khazars called *The Thirteenth Tribe*. It caused both a sensation and considerable consternation. His book claimed that the Jews of Eastern Europe were the descendants of the Khazars; the theory has also extended to the idea that the Khazars have merged with the Magyars to form modern Hungary. Thus the belief that the origins of the Jewish people lay in the Middle East was in ruins and those who were anti-Semitic from the start thought this theory was a fabrication out to upset them and claim that for example the Hungarians were of Jewish descent in view of their Khazar origin.

Koestler's theory has been blown apart by many, as sadly he did not provide much evidence. For example, the former Head of the Rabbinic College in Budapest, the late Rabbi Professor Alexander Scheiber, dismissed the thought that Magyar and Kabor migration blazed the trail of the growing settlement of Jews in Poland. Whilst no one can argue that the Khazar tribes accompanied the Magyars on their expeditions of conquest, Scheiber, a specialist in Hungarian Jewish history, has pointed out that the Kabors were a rebel Khazar tribe, and that it is unlikely that the leaders of this group of Khazars, rebelling against the king, actually professed Judaism and would thus themselves be Jews. There were however also positive reviews of Koestler's book and theory, such as that of Grace Halsell reviewing the book in June 1991 in the *Washington Report*.

Jews migrated to Poland and there the Polish Kings protected them, having invited them, from around the eleventh century, to develop trade. They came in great numbers both from Germany and Hungary. Their protection was assured by the Polish Kings but this ended with the death of King Wladyslaw IV in 1648 and tragically gave licence to the cruelty of the Chmielnicky Cossacks attacking and killing some 100,000 Jews.

The Khazars were a civilized, semi-nomadic Turkish-speaking people who founded an independent kingdom in about the year 652 in southern Russia near the Caspian Sea. Their territory spread out to both the Black and the Caspian Seas. Their wealth was said to have been derived from collecting payments from traders who were keen to do business between East and West and they lay in the middle of the Christian and Muslim lands. They were instrumental in stopping the Muslim onslaught against Byzantium, the Eastern jaw of the gigantic pincer movement that in the West swept across northern Africa and into Spain. Thereafter the Khazars found themselves in a precarious position between the two major world powers: the Eastern Roman Empire in Byzantium and the triumphant followers of Mohammed. As Koestler points out, the Khazars were the Third World of their day. They chose a surprising method of resisting both the Western pressure to become Christian and the Eastern to adopt Islam. Rejecting both, they converted to Judaism.

I accept Koestler's theory as to why the Khazars chose to convert to Judaism; this was that, as the Jews had no land or king they were not beholden to anyone - truly an independent people - an idea which must have been appealing to the Khazar King and his people. However his claim that the Khazars could not have just disappeared but that they were absorbed in what is now the Soviet Union, with others in Hungary and Poland, was an unrealistic assumption. For example Jews had lived in Eastern Europe since Roman times and indeed in Hungary where several Jewish graves were found supporting this view.

Certainly there was a Jewish community in Hungary in the tenth century because Hasdai ibn Shaprut thought of using them as a conduit for the delivery of his letter to the Khazar King. Khazars were an important and significant feature in the development of Judaism, showing the welcoming spirit of Judaism and accepting many as equals.

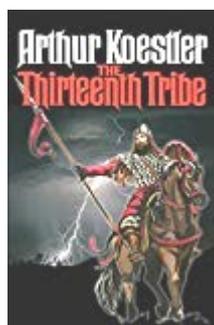
There has been a great deal written about the Khazars and their conversion to Judaism and indeed there is an extensive website devoted to the history of the Khazars, developed by Kevin Alan Brook. There is also an idea that the Khazars may have belonged to the empire of the Huns (fifth century CE). In the time of Procopius (sixth century) the region immediately north of the Caucasus was held by the Sabirs, who may have been the Khazars as in Turkish they are called Sabirs. Whilst there is historic data about this nation its precise racial origin is unknown.

Norman Golb ascribes much greater weight to the correspondence between Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a well-known figure in Muslim Spain in the tenth century, and Joseph, King of the Khazars.

The practice of Judaism in Khazaria is demonstrated by the document in the Cairo Genizah collection of an autograph letter (T-S 12.122) of the Khazarian Jewish Community of Kiev, the town which is in the Westernmost part of the Khazar State. This letter was probably written around 930 CE and it refers to a captive who was redeemed by the Jewish community of Kiev.

According to Joseph's letter, a descendant of Bulan named Obadiah, later 'renewed the kingship and strengthened the religion as was fit and proper'. He built synagogues and schools, brought together Israelite scholars, and gave them silver and gold. Apart from a Longer and Shorter version of the letter, there is further evidence from the work *Kol Mevasser* of Isaac Akrish in or after 1577, and moreover there are two letters published by the younger Buxtorf in his edition of the book *Cosri (Kuzari)* of Judah Halevi in 1660. Although it is not known what manuscript sources were used by Isaac

Akrish, Buxtorf depended on *Kol Mevasser*. The only known manuscript of the correspondence as a whole, containing the Letter of Hasdai and the Reply of Joseph was in the library of Christ Church, Oxford but is now part of the Cambridge Geniza collection, which was made possible by the generosity of the Littman Foundation and the support of the Littman family. This manuscript is very similar to the printed text, which, it has been suggested, is a transcript. There appear to be no special grounds for this opinion, though the manuscript, which is undated, has no claims to great antiquity. Nothing is sure about its provenance, but it is thought to have belonged originally to the celebrated Dr. Fell (1625-1686)



The Thirteenth Tribe
by
Arthur Koestler
1976

Hutchinson

The conversion of the Khazars was known to the monk Druthmar of Aquitaine, writing in Westphalia in 864: 'At the present time we know of no nation under the heavens where Christians do not live. For Christians are even found in the lands of Gog and Magog -- who are a Hunnic race and are called Gazari (Khazars)... circumcised and observing all the laws of Judaism. The Bulgars, however, who are of the same seven tribes as the Khazars, are now becoming baptised into Christianity'. It is important to note that the monk was a historical figure. His name was Christian of Stavelot. He is sometimes (possibly incorrectly) referred to as Christian Druthmar or Druthmar of Aquitaine. Christian was a noted grammarian, a biblical commentator, and eschatologist. He was born in Aquitaine in the early ninth century CE, and became a monk at the Benedictine monastery. At some point he was sent to the Abbey of Stavelot-Malmedy in Liège to teach Bible to the monks there. It is unknown whether he died at Stavelot, or returned to Corbie or was ultimately sent elsewhere. Christian was called the

'Philologist' because of his extensive knowledge of Greek grammar and his ability to comment upon the Gospels in their original Greek. He probably also had some understanding of Hebrew. The traditional date given for the composition of this work is 864.

In addition there were many others who wrote about the Khazars, for example Ahmad ibn Fadlan in his travelogue (c. 922): 'The Khazars and their King are all Jews'. Ibn al-Faqih (c. 930): 'All of the Khazars are Jews. But they have been Judaized recently'. Abd al-Jabbar ibn Muhammad al-Hamdani, in *The Establishment of Proofs for the Prophethood of Our Master Muhammad* (c. 1009-1010) writes: 'One of the Jews undertook the conversion of the Khazars, who are composed of many peoples, and they were converted by him and joined his religion. This happened recently in the days of the Abbasids... For this was a man who came single-handedly to a King of great rank and to a very spirited people, and they were converted by him without any recourse to violence and the sword. And they took upon themselves the difficult obligations enjoined by the law of the *Torah*, such as circumcision, the ritual ablutions, washing after a discharge of the semen, the prohibition of work on the Sabbath and during the feasts, the prohibition of eating the flesh of forbidden animals according to this religion, and so on'. A note by Abraham ibn Daud of Toledo, Spain, in *The Book of Tradition* (1161) reads: 'You will find the communities of Israel spread abroad... as far as Dailam and the river Itil where Khazars live, peoples who became proselytes'. Ibn al Athir tells how in the days of Harun, the Emperor of Byzantium forced the Jews to emigrate. They came to the Khazar country, where they found an intelligent but untutored race and offered them their religion. The inhabitants found it better than their own and accepted it.

There is an extensive body of literature written about the Khazars but unfortunately we still do not know exactly who they were and why they converted, but of their existence there is no doubt whatsoever.

Thomas Salamon

The stork, *chasida* in Hebrew, is mentioned in the Bible six times. Here are two examples: in the book of Zecharia the prophet says: 'I lifted up my eyes and saw two women going out and wind in their wings which resemble the wings of a *chasida*.' Jeremiah complains that the *chasida* in the sky knows the fixed times of year when she has to leave her country - the stork's dwelling is in the northern countries - and comes back for her survival. But his own people do not observe God's laws to help them survive.

In the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, the bird appears three times but is given names of other birds. The debate over the identity of the biblical *chasida* was studied in Rabbinical literature. In the Talmud Rabbi Yehuda asks, 'why was she called *chasida*?' His explanation is that the bird was charitable. Rashi linked the biblical bird with the identity of the stork and the word *chasida* was adopted. Today the stork has a good reputation, not only in our culture but in others too.

However, in the book of Deuteronomy the *chasida* is mentioned among ten other birds which we are forbidden to eat. Is the *chasida* that is mentioned in the Bible the same one known to us today?

The word and its meaning have been adopted as Rashi predicted, although the stork did not have a good reputation in the Bible, and we are forbidden to eat it. From the root of the word - *chet*, *samech*, *dalet* - a Jewish sect called *Chasidim* was named. A *Chasid* performs *chesed*, a Jewish value that is one of the most important building blocks of our religion. In general, we never know if the biblical words that were adopted mean the same today. In Hebrew there is a strong link between the word and the meaning, aided by the root system. Although the *chasida* did not have a good reputation in the Bible she became a symbol of goodness as Rabbi Yehuda and Rashi had asserted. There is therefore a linguistic and a characteristic link between the bird *chasida*, the word *chesed* and the sect of the *Chasidim*.

Ilana Alexander

Muriel Byck (1918-1944)



Luba and Jacques Byck had come originally from Russia, but lived for many years in France and considered themselves French Jews. However, they moved to London where their daughter Muriel was born in Ealing in 1918. She went to the Lycée Français in Kensington, speaking of course perfect French, some Russian and a little English. She took the Baccalaureat and then went to the University of Lille.

Returning to London, Muriel took secretarial jobs until she became Assistant Stage Manager at The Gate Theatre in Notting Hill. When war broke out and her parents divorced, her mother remarried and went to live in Torquay with her daughter. Always anxious to 'do her bit', Muriel became an Air Raid Warden, joined the Red Cross and then enlisted in the Women's Royal Air Force. It wasn't long before the Special Forces Executive realised Muriel's potential as a fluent French speaker, and she was recruited into SOE in July 1943. She started her training in Cranleigh, Surrey moving to Scotland for paramilitary instruction and to Oxfordshire where she learnt to be a wireless operator. She was described in her file as 'a quiet attractive girl, keen, enthusiastic and intelligent', though it was noted that she was ignorant of exactly what her work would entail and generally guileless. The risks of the agents' work were clearly

explained in early selection interviews: they would have to work hard both by day and by night; life would be strenuous, lonely, and precarious, and they would always have to be alert to danger; if captured, they could face brutal interrogation, imprisonment, and probably death. Nevertheless, women like Muriel were willing to make this sacrifice and, secretly, few expected to return alive. She was chosen by Major Philippe de Vomécourt to be his assistant. Vomécourt led the Ventriloquist circuit in France, one of the small networks of resistance workers, and it was Muriel's job to train other operators, keep London informed and ensure that they were given codenames. Her own were first Violette and later Michèle.

Muriel's first drop into French territory was delayed for three days because of bad weather, but eventually she and three other male agents parachuted into France near Orléans. She had insisted on taking with her a powder compact given to her by her fiancé, an American agent she had met while in training, but when her leader, de Vomécourt, saw it he told her to leave it behind as no such article could be found in France. She insisted, so he rubbed it with ammonia to make it look old. She looked too young and pretty to be overlooked in personnel searches by the Germans, and she was given instructions on make-up and ageing.

She was terrified and wanted to leave at once, but her companions insisted that she should get used to the presence of the enemy

One of Muriel's tasks was to establish post boxes for transmissions to London and she was instructed in codes and passwords, for use if her base was compromised. Her inexperience was evident when her leader took her to

dinner at a restaurant much frequented by Germans. She was terrified and wanted to leave at once, but her companions insisted that she should get used to the presence of the enemy all around her. Her transmissions were kept as short as possible and her sending points changed frequently. She acted as courier between the different sabotage teams, keeping London informed at all times. On one occasion she was transmitting from a junk yard beside a garage used by the German military. Suddenly she noticed an eye looking in through a hole in the woodwork. It was a soldier examining the inside of the shack. Immediately she packed up her equipment, threw dust over the table where she had been sitting, and told her colleagues what was going on. The Germans arrived in force but could find no evidence of 'a pretty girl with a transmitter' and the poor soldier was duly punished.

Re-established in a safer spot where she could resume her work at night, she let it be known that she had come to the countryside from Paris to recuperate from an illness and needed to get up several times in the night to take her medication. This was not far from the truth as she had always been a little delicate. Knowledge of this prejudiced her chances of survival. It was decided that the British agents together with the local French *maquis* should bomb an ammunition dump at Michenon, and Muriel duly received a message from London that the raid was on. It was a success but the explosion affected her badly and she was taken in by a friend to recover. When de Vomécourt found out how ill she was he insisted on her boarding a plane shortly to leave for England. But she was by now too ill to travel and a doctor was called. He diagnosed another bout of meningitis - she had experienced one as a child - and he insisted that she be taken to hospital. This was a dangerous move as all hospital admissions were closely monitored by the Germans. De Vomécourt went with her, calling himself her uncle from Paris.

An operation to save her was unsuccessful and she died in his arms.

He took care of all the funeral arrangements, refusing to let her friends attend in case the Gestapo grew suspicious. He himself only just escaped. She was interred in a temporary grave in Romorantin, where she had died, but she was later reburied in a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Pornic, near St. Nazaire. The tombstone bears a *Magen David*. Muriel Byck never forgot her Jewish ancestry, though she wore a gold cross around her neck given to her by a Resistance colleague. The grave is often visited by those looking for Resistance memorials, and Muriel was mentioned in despatches.



Muriel's tombstone in the Pornic war cemetery

There are several memorials to Muriel Byck in France as well as in England. In St. Paul's Church Knightsbridge is one to members of SOE who lost their lives; in Valencay in France is another and in Torquay is a plaque in memory of the Byck family who lived there, as well as one on Torquay promenade. The Jewish Military Museum, now housed at the London Jewish Museum, remembers her too.

PB

The Jewish Genealogical Society



The Society was formed in 1992 to help its members, both beginners and more experienced researchers, to learn about genealogy with particular reference to their Jewish ancestry. It is a member society of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

For those wishing to trace their family background, or with a general interest in genealogy, it is an essential tool for the work, offering education and help in setting about the task, as well as promoting the indexing, collating and preservation of early documents. The Society offers a wide programme of workshops, training, discussion groups – both live and online – and the help of experienced researchers. There is an excellent library with more than a thousand books relating to family history, Jewish databases and other computer facilities. It has its own large collection of maps and leaflets, and the largest collection of *Yiskor* (memorial books) in the country.

Within the Society are smaller groups specialising in genealogical material from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and the Ukraine, as well as German, Dutch and Sephardi and Anglo-Jewish. There is also much information about sources, libraries, archives and other useful aids to genealogical research. For those outside London there are several regional groups, including the Chilterns and Home Counties Group, East of London, Leeds, Manchester, Midland Group, North Herts, South East Essex and South West London, all of whom hold their own meetings and specialise in research relating to their own areas.

Among the facilities offered by the Society are Federation Burial Records, Marriage Records, United Synagogue history and, in the Library, family trees already researched by other Jewish families. There is also a collection of genealogical

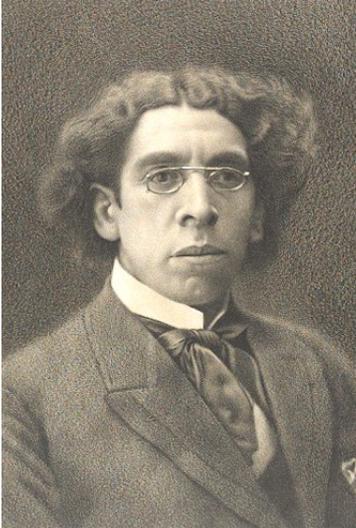
magazines from other societies across the world. The Society's own magazine – *Shemot* – is published quarterly, offering an interesting range of articles, book reviews, material and information of practical use from international sources.

Many Jews living in England are anxious to trace their families back to their roots; they may find that they are halted in their research when they need to access material from, say, Eastern Europe. This is where the Society can be of vital assistance. German records are relatively easy to find, as the Germans are known to keep immaculate papers on families who have lived in the country. As members of Westminster Synagogue will know, the scrolls that came to Kent House from the Czech Republic were accompanied by lists of the towns and cities they came from, enabling those concerned with the research into their origins to identify them from their original homes, and later to link them with the new recipients where they presently rest. But other nations – dealing of course with a minority race, usually poor and sometimes illiterate – paid little attention to records or papers, if indeed such records were preserved at all.

...the largest collection of *Yiskor* (memorial) books in the country

The Society however, has done much work in identifying sources of these records, and is often able to help with finding them, translating and dealing with the governments and owners involved. It can also often find a researcher familiar with these problems who for a fee can handle much of the groundwork involved. It can also provide a lecturer to visit Jewish groups to talk about the work of the Society, genealogy in general and Jewish genealogy in particular. The Society's website is informative and helpful as is its staff, and the annual subscription is very reasonable.

Israel Zangwill (1864-1926)



Two generations ago Israel Zangwill's vivid stories of immigrant Jews in the East End were out of favour with Jews who no longer considered themselves incomers, but home grown Englishmen and women. Perhaps they felt wary of their roots, even ashamed. But now those stories are welcomed and enjoyed as they reveal a wealth of colour and warmth, of families from Russia and Eastern Europe striving to better themselves in their new land and to hold on to their traditions inherited from the *shtetls* of Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine in the face of poverty and ignorance.

Israel Zangwill was born in London in 1864. His father, Moses, had come to England from Latvia at the age of twelve and earned a meagre living as an itinerant pedlar and glazier. He was a keen student of rabbinics and of Jewish learning, an observant and pious young man. He married Ellen Hannah Marks, a Polish woman, less religious than her husband, but very independent and the dominant force in the home.

The family - there were by now several more children - moved first to Plymouth then to Bristol, where at school Israel showed considerable promise. In 1873 the Zangwills moved back to London and Israel was enrolled in the Jews Free School. He did well, studying in the evenings at London University, receiving

an Honours Degree in French, English and Moral Sciences. He remained at the school as an articulated teacher.

Israel's relationship with the school deteriorated and he left to take up journalism, founding and editing *Ariel*, *the London Puck* and submitting articles to the national press. A novel, written in collaboration with a fellow teacher, Louis Cowen, was published as *The Premier and the Painter*, under the pseudonym J. Freeman Bell. He became known as 'the Dickens of the ghetto'. Several other novels followed, together with a volume of short stories, and the *London Star* published in 1891, in serial form, a thriller titled *The Big Bow Mystery*, believed to be the first 'locked room mystery' of detective stories.

At about this time Moses Zangwill, a Hebrew reader in the synagogue, left London to live in Jerusalem. Israel supported him financially. He himself rejected Orthodox Judaism, writing an article published in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 'English Judaism: a Criticism and Classification'. He was at the same time unwilling to adhere to Reform Judaism, referring to 'something touching and sublime in the common belief of a people in an apparent impossibility in the ultimate return of its national hero, in the recovery of its golden glories, something pathetic in its simple faith and credulous hope'. He was then commissioned by the new Jewish Publication Society of America to write a novel about Jews. This turned out to be *Children of the Ghetto*, one of the most graphic and moving depictions of the life of Jews in the East End of London in Victorian England.



In the novel, Zangwill describes the family of Esther, the bright and intelligent oldest child, charged with caring for her family from the age of twelve. All the traditions of impoverished Jewish life are there: the *shadchan* trying to arrange a marriage for Esther, the sweatshop of her father Moses, the shame of accepting charity even from her co-religionists, the Rothschilds. But Esther is not too proud to visit the soup kitchen. 'There was quite a crowd of applicants outside the stable-like doors of the kitchen when Esther arrived, a few with well-lined stomachs perhaps, but the majority famished and shivering. The feminine element swamped the rest, but there were about a dozen men and a few children among the group, most of the men scarce taller than the children, strange, stunted, swarthy, hairy creatures, with muddy complexions illumined by black twinkling eyes ... but for the most part it was a collection of crones, prematurely aged with weird, wan, old-world features, slipshod and draggled-tailed, their heads bare, or covered in dingy shawls in lieu of bonnets.' The author's gift for description runs through the book and the reader finds himself back in the ghetto of his ancestors, a part of the history of the Jewish people. The *Jewish Chronicle's* review when the book first appeared said, 'Mr. Zangwill has a mastery over Jewish life in all its crannies and ramifications. He has insight into the ideal, and an eye for the mean and the tawdry, a sigh for its pathos and a smile for its joy; he can sing its psalms in admirable verse; he can idealize its spirit, laugh at its humours with a richness of irony and wit worthy of Heine, and all this he does, not merely with observation but with real and deep knowledge.'

Several more novels about life in the ghetto followed, creating for Zangwill an unassailable position as the spokesman (in fictional form) of immigrant Jewish life in London.

In 1903 Israel Zangwill married Edith Ayrton. She was the daughter of the electrical engineer William Ayrton and his first wife Matilda Chaplin, a cousin.

She was one of the first women doctors in England but died when her daughter was only eight. Ayrton married again, this time to Hertha Marks (see *Westminster Quarterly*, July 2018), a Jewish scientist who brought Edith up as her own. Edith attended Bedford College and subsequently wrote several novels. She and Zangwill were married in a Register Office wedding and had three children.

Apart from being a feminist and a pacifist, Israel Zangwill became closely involved with Zionism, though he did not envisage Israel as the destination for a Jewish homeland. He became close friends with Theodor Herzl (he gave the eulogy at Herzl's funeral) but set his sights on the vision of the Jewish home in East Africa or Canada, or even the United States, the ideal of many American Jews. As a fervent Territorialist, he wanted only to provide safety for Jews fleeing persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe, and eventually broke away from the Zionist cause. He had originally believed that Palestine was a country peopled by a few Arabs of limited civilisation – 'an almost uninhabited forsaken and ruined Turkish territory'.

As a fervent Territorialist, he wanted only to provide safety for Jews fleeing persecution in Russia

He came to realise that a considerable population was firmly ensconced in the land, and at the time of the Balfour Declaration he felt that not enough consideration was paid to the native peoples. At the time of the meeting of the League of Nations he wrote to *The Times*, 'What is now being concocted is a scheme under which a free-born Jew returning to Palestine would find himself under British military rule, aggravated by an Arab majority in civic affairs.' Zangwill's new organisation was called the Jewish Territorialist Organisation, founded in 1905 to create a homeland for the Jews wherever it might be found, be it in



'A Child of the Ghetto' - Zangwill as caricatured by Walter Sickert in *Vanity Fair*, February 1897.

Australia, Mesopotamia, Uganda or Cyrenaica.

Zangwill continued writing, novels, articles, poems and plays. His most famous play was perhaps *The Melting Pot*, produced first in New York, where it was seen by Theodore Roosevelt who shouted down to the stage, 'That's a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that's a great play.' It tells the story of a Jew who emigrates from Russia to America after his family is killed. He composes a great symphony and on meeting and falling in love with a beautiful Russian girl finds that her father is the officer who killed the Jewish family. The father repents, the symphony is a great success and all ends well. But although the play was a hit, many critics deplored Zangwill's stance. He was called 'a Jew who no longer wanted to be a Jew. His real hope was for a world in which the entire lexicon of racial and religious difference is thrown away.'

Many of the plays had no Jewish connection at all, and some were turned into films, without a great deal of success. *The Melting Pot* is a lost 1915 silent film drama based on the play of the same name, and there were three commercial film versions of *The Big Bow Mystery*,

including in 1946 *The Verdict*, directed by Don Siegel.

Towards the end of his life Zangwill was virtually an invalid, cared for by his wife in their Sussex home. He had been a striking figure, tall and thin, with a mop of black hair and spectacles. He was a fine and witty public speaker. Although he was not a practising Jew he always recalled his Jewish roots and upbringing. He translated the Hebrew liturgy into English.

He died from pneumonia on 1st August 1926 and was cremated at Willesden; his ashes are held at the Willesden Liberal Cemetery. The funeral service was conducted by the Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and the eulogy was given by Rabbi Stephen Wise, the leading Progressive minister, visiting from America.

Philippa Bernard



Blue plaque on Zangwill's house at 28 Old Ford Road, Old Ford, London, E3



The Legacy of the Psalms



The Psalms which we read in the Bible, in the *siddur* on Shabbat, and on festivals, have had an enormous influence on western civilization. What is the secret of their success?

Rabbi Wittenberg had a conversation with a non-Jewish minister who mentioned the Psalms as 'My Psalms'. Rabbi Wittenberg said to him 'Don't take my silver away'. The Psalms have crossed traditions and cultures, inspiring ordinary people of all faiths including poets and composers - especially here in England. Our Bible was not always accepted by the Christian world as the true word of God, but the Psalms were - especially Psalm twenty-three.

Let us take Psalm twenty-three; *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*. This strikes a chord, not only amongst Jews but within the Christian faith too. This is not surprising. Even in translation the message is easily understood. The Psalm is about a serious subject which is *The valley of the shadow of death* but the reading of it is not threatening. On the contrary, it is comforting. The Psalm brings hope and respite at a time of adversity. *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me*. From the beginning, the Psalm is reassuring, and in a gentle manner, metaphorically holds the reader's hand before mentioning death. In this way, it helps one to bear death and bad events.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death is not the main subject. The Psalm starts with *The Lord is my shepherd ...He makes me lie down in green pastures*. The reader is led gently and with reassuring words to the central message so as to lighten the coming of the end of life. Psalm twenty-three achieves this by images taken from

nature to create an atmosphere of calm and serenity, for example using such words as 'flowing waters', 'green pastures', and 'shepherd'. Through nature, human beings are nearer to God because nature is His domain. Through these images, the Psalm creates a picture of rural perfection and an atmosphere of pleasantness rather than one of fear and horror.

Another Psalm in a similar vein is number one hundred and fifty, which is frequently used at a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. The subject matter also includes praise to God but does not have images from nature. Instead it has a special way of praising God. It is full of music. It brings with it the essence of a *Simcha* with the rhythm of its verses which are so adaptable to music and chanting. The verses glide from one to another with the repetition of the main words, *Praise the Lord*, which appear in various forms: *Hallelujah*, *Hallelu El*, *Hallelu*. All these words start with the letter *Hay* dominating the verses adding to their fluency, thereby evoking happiness and joy. This Psalm uses the word *Hallelujah* in an effective way. The word appears nine times and in other verses in other forms. It has a wonderful ringing sound like that of a trumpet. It is easily uttered and is universally used in speech and in song.



We also have six instruments with which to express praise for God. They are the harp, trumpet, lyre, cymbals, pipe and timbrel. Praise is the quintessential nature of these Psalms. The theme of this one - and indeed of all of them - is that the main religious function of human beings is to offer praise to God and to proclaim His greatness throughout the world.

I would also mention Psalm six which can be found in our *Yom Kippur* book and, of course, in the Bible. Man is miserable and frightened, asking God's forgiveness. The atmosphere is one of despair, fear, remorse and death. *My whole being is stricken with terror...For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all night make I my bed to swim. I drench my couch with my tears*. The Psalm commences, *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger*. The whole expresses in a beautiful way man's vulnerability and defencelessness and how his need for God is great and urgent.



The Psalms are loved in our tradition because they are attributed to the young David who used to play on his lyre to soothe King Saul who we now know suffered from depression. The Psalm as a medium of prayer is easy to read or sing and is attractive even to the non-believer. The Psalms can all be read as poems. Their success lies in their literary style. The verses in each Psalm are not repetitive even if the subject matter is the same - that of the relationship between God and humans. The metaphors, which are taken from nature and are familiar to all, are beautifully crafted. They express emotions which are everlasting - fear, worry, anxiety, joy - all feelings universally experienced. The effects of the Psalms are due to the power of their literary devices. Over the years, they have influenced composers from Palestrina, Monteverdi and Purcell to Stravinsky and Bernstein through their musical power.

Hallelujah!

Ilana Alexander

Israel's Rebirth

From Spanish auto-da-fé
From Auschwitz's sinister clouds
From Europe's ghettos
From North Africa's mellahs
From countries' blood-soaked earth
There rose the very image of Jewish martyrdom
As if that of a wound made of countless similar wounds
That of a scar across the Jewish soul
Motivating Jews to repossess their ancient land
To rebuild it, to redefine it
Their God-given stony country
To raise the blue and white flag proudly
The Star of David testifying to David's city
Reawakening a solidarity transcending time and space
Strengthening their will to fight yet again
Their readiness to die, yet not as victimised Jews
Their determination to win as Israel's justified fighters
To win as Israel's legendary heroes

Colette Littman



Visiting Sinai



St Catherine's monastery in Sinai has always welcomed visitors, throughout its long history as the oldest continually functioning monastery in Christendom. It is located amid the high hills at the southern end of the Sinai peninsula, at the foot of what is thought to be Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai or Jebel Mousa. As so often in Biblical history and archaeology, there is disagreement on whether Horeb and Sinai are the same mountain. One interpretation of the double identity links the name Horeb, 'glowing', to the sun and the name Sinai, from 'Sin' - a Sumerian moon deity - to the moon. They may be two faces of the mountain, or two peaks. In addition, the location of both is disputed.

In 330 CE the Empress Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, identified the site of the Burning Bush and raised a chapel there, somehow intertwining the stories of Moses at the bush and the Virgin Mary at the annunciation. Anchorite monks soon gathered round this holy place and the Emperor Justinian ordered the building of a fortified monastery during the troubled times of the mid-sixth century, and that building, with its later additions, remains as a stronghold in the Sinai desert. The best imperial architect was sent to oversee the building, which has certainly stood the test of time. But when the emperor heard about it, he ordered the architect's execution, for not putting the monastery on the top of the mountain, as he had ordered. This was a dire warning of the dangers of autocracy: the

architect had decided to locate the monastery not on an inaccessible peak but on top of a water source at the head of a valley. It is still a defensible position, as time has proved, but it also enjoys a natural spring that continues to provide enough for all the monks' and pilgrims' needs, as well as irrigating a productive garden for fruits, vegetables, olives and nut trees.

The association with Saint Catherine came when her relics were transported to the top of the neighbouring hill, Jebel Catarina, following her martyrdom towards the end of the third century. She was a remarkable lady, living in Alexandria and highly educated in philosophy, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Rejecting all offers of marriage, she was converted to Christianity by a desert hermit. Outspoken in her condemnation of idol worship, she came to the attention of the Emperor who sent fifty rhetoricians to argue with her, but they were persuaded by her instead, and Catherine was eventually put to death by means of that famous instrument of torture and execution, the breaking wheel, subsequently named after her and giving its name to the firework, the Catherine wheel. Moses and Elijah are also revered here and the place where Elijah encountered God is identified as one of the rocky promontories on the ascent of Moses' mountain.

The monastery is reached nowadays from the south in a few hours by jeep, or even

tourist bus, from Sharm el Sheikh, on good roads built during Israel's brief ownership of the land. At the moment, the flow of traffic from the north, from Eilat is greatly reduced because of security issues, but tourists from Israel have started to return, and there has been a steady flow of Orthodox Christian pilgrims and other visitors via Egypt, all made warmly welcome six mornings a week, apart from religious holidays. One can stay in St Catherine's village, at 'Fox Camp' or other places. Orthodox Christian visitors can stay within the monastery itself. But the best arrangement for Western Christians and Jews is to stay in the monastery's guest house, run by the Bedouin tribe responsible for looking after the monks, and they in turn receive the monks' protection.

The Bedouins are Moslem, and it was mainly out of respect for them that we wore 'modest attire', Moslem style. The monks were less concerned, provided basic respectability was maintained.



It is a small community of twenty or so monks, some very old, some living far away in receipt of medical care. But their numbers are easily made up by monks visiting from elsewhere, and the daily services are maintained with due ceremony, starting at 4am, with the nine offices arranged in three blocks through the day. We were welcome to join the monks any time after 5am, and again for evensong. The mid-day service, and the first hour of the morning, were reserved for their own prayers.

Their rituals are far more ancient than those in use by the Catholic Church, consisting of the chanting of psalms and long multiple repetitions of *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy on us) – but not *Christe eleison*, which made it easier for us to feel

part of the worship. The abundant use of incense was also reminiscent of (and of course modelled on) temple worship. As in the Temple of old, the celebrant was within the sanctuary, intoning prayers while clouds of incense would rise upwards. He then came out among the congregation (made up of a few monks and aspirants, a few pilgrims and our party), continuing to purify the atmosphere with incense – but of course no sacrifices.

a unique collection of over 3,000 ancient manuscripts

The power of devotion expressed in these rituals and the monks' respect for guests of other persuasions than their own made it very easy to share the contemplative atmosphere they have established, and that was in fact what our party had gone there for. We had the additional benefit on this, our second visit, of being able to access the extraordinary library, now reconstructed to the highest standards to house a unique collection of over 3,000 ancient manuscripts. These are mainly in Greek or Arabic and of a religious nature. Needless to say I spent many happy hours poring over a selection of these extraordinary tomes: early Bible texts, commentaries from the tenth century, theological works, and some exquisitely beautiful copies of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a masterpiece of advice for those who have chosen the monastic life, written by an abbot of the monastery in the sixth century, and valued ever since for its wisdom and insights. Particularly interesting to our party was a sixteenth century retelling of Bible stories with simple three-colour illustrations. Nothing was too much trouble for our host, the librarian, Father Justin, and for the other English speaking monk, Father Nilus.

I did not attempt to climb Mount Sinai this year. But Chris and most of the party did, experiencing at the summit the special qualities of the mountain. One feels very close to Moses and to those

early wanderings in the desert, even if the mountain cannot be identified for sure, and even if the 'burning bush' for which claims are made does not fit our idea of that bush.

There is certainly plenty of opportunity to sit quietly on one of the terraces and to contemplate what it means to be close to the divine, to be inspired, to renew one's commitment to an unseen, unknowable power, source of all the wisdom that guides us. It is also no wonder that the monks of St Catherine's regard their monastery as an 'ark', preserving for all peoples the heritage of the past. The new library has state-of-the-art storage for this priceless collection, fruits of collaboration for the great Byzantium exhibition held in New York and London in 2004 – the first occasion on which material had travelled from St Catherine's to the outside world, a loan rewarded with funding and expert advice.

A new museum has been built to house some of the icons and vessels, though many still remain in the church. Unique among these are some of the earliest paintings showing late Roman realism in portraiture – almost every other example was destroyed during the era of iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries. There is also a patent of protection signed in 623 CE by the prophet Mohammed himself, guaranteeing the safety of the monastery from religious persecution.



As for the library, it has yielded many treasures including the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus now in the British Museum, and it continues to yield more finds as old materials formerly tucked away in obscure places are being sorted.

The most valuable tomes are gradually being digitised and made available on the Web. Conservation work on the manuscripts will soon begin in a new wing presently under construction.

Our trips were organised as retreats by our friend, Elizabeth Edmunds, in collaboration with the World Community for Christian Meditation, and using the excellent professional services of Wind, Sand and Stars travel agency, who have nurtured a close connection with the South Sinai Bedouin whom they try to support.

I could write many more pages on the treasures of the library, but I shall end by trying to summarise the chief impressions that remain from our two visits – this year and last.

First and foremost what comes to mind is the human aspect, the kindness and generosity extended to us and the symbiosis that has grown up between Bedouins and Christians. Then there is the natural grandeur of the setting, tranquil for many hours of the day despite comings and goings of streams of visitors. The almond trees, pomegranates and roses that grow in the guest-house gardens, blossoming delightfully in the spring, the light that reflects off the faces of the rock, changing with the passing hours of the day. But above all the drama of engagement with the land trodden by our ancestors, where Moses encountered the divine not once, but twice – possibly even three times if Horeb and Meribah are to be equated – and shaped the destiny of our people.

Valery Rees

Moses: A Man for All Seasons

What do you know about Moses? Most people have an image of a man with a long beard, no not God, staff in hand, leading a vast multitude through a wilderness, bound for the Promised Land; and that is not to forget the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters of which were held back to allow the Israelites to cross dry-footed. This popular impression, bolstered by the creative imagination and wonder-works of Hollywood, is about what most lay-people can confidently describe.

In *Torah* we are given much detail of the man and his deeds, and the *Talmud* and *Midrashim* amplify the critical moments in the prophet's life. In *Parasha Shemot* we are given an account of the origins of Israel's greatest prophet, how a child born to Amram and Jochebed became the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, and how on witnessing the desperate state of the Hebrew slaves, became a fugitive after killing an Egyptian taskmaster. The life of Moses is fascinating because on the face of it he appears totally unsuited to the role of leader.

The Canadian economist, J. K. Galbraith, who incidentally was an adviser to President Kennedy, said of leadership: 'All great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was a willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership'. Perhaps, in our recent history, the man who epitomises this important quality was Winston Churchill. We know Churchill researched and rehearsed his war-time speeches to ensure they made the maximum impact on raising the spirits of the British people, and equally they were designed to show defiance in the face of Nazi aggression. Like Moses, Churchill suffered from a speech impediment, not unlike his father's, a major liability in an aspiring orator, and he worked tirelessly to overcome this, becoming in the judgement of many, an outstanding public speaker. In the case of Moses there is some doubt about how we should interpret the phrase in Exodus: *slow of*

speech, and of slow tongue. Maimonides states this is evidence of Moses' stammer. Other rabbinic commentators regarded the reference to Moses' speech as indicating verbal slowness and deliberateness. This interpretation suggests what he uttered was weighty, profound: not glib. It is also possible that Moses, if indeed he had a damaged tongue, lisped rather than stuttered.

There is a famous *midrash* that gives an explanation for Moses' alleged disability. Pharaoh took the baby Moses on his knee, and to the horror of the court astrologers the child grasped the king's crown and placed it on his own head. The advisers ordered two braziers to be brought, one filled with gold, the other with hot coals. If Moses took the gold, then his fate would be sealed. The Archangel Gabriel guided the baby's hand to the glowing coals, and Moses plucked out a burning coal and put it to his lips, and that is why he had a speech defect. The choice is yours as to which rabbinic exegesis you find most plausible. I am inclined to meld the two versions. A person who has difficulty articulating his thoughts may express views that are no less significant, and more often than not of greater import, than his more loquacious peers. This certainly seems to have been the case with Moses.

God tells Moses that Aaron will accompany him, stating: 'Is there not Aaron thy brother the Levite? I know he can speak well'. So Aaron is the mouthpiece, the man with the 'silvery tongue', but he is not the possessor of the encounter with the Burning Bush or the revelation at Sinai; it is Moses who experiences something so profound that words are woefully inadequate in communicating the ineffable. In Schoenberg's unfinished opera *Moses und Aron* the composer explores, both musically and dramatically, the theme of Moses, the man of vision. The brothers are contrasted; and Schoenberg sets up a dynamic between them by assigning a speaking role to Moses, representing God's absolutism, and Aaron, the rhetorician, who sings his role, a device that enables him to weave fantasies that form the medium for sensuality - enter the Golden Calf.

Whatever the truth of Moses'

communicative skills, he comes across as a reluctant hero, but a man who is passionate about the suffering of his people. He could not fail to recognise what Galbraith identifies as a defining characteristic of leadership, namely responding to the 'major anxiety' of the people.

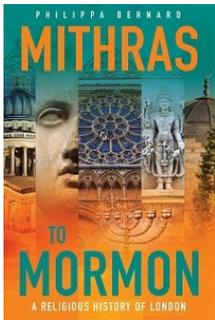
During his prophetic career Moses exhibited many attributes any successful leader requires. He acted decisively when confronted with rebellion; he faced down Korach, culminating in the destruction of the rebel Levites. He listened to the advice of his wise father-in-law, Jethro, and established minor judges to relieve him of the enormous responsibility of adjudicating at so many disputes. The many times the Hebrews were attacked in the desert saw Moses, as supreme commander, organise his forces to beat off the enemy. So what distinguishes a leader like Moses from the many heroes depicted in history books?

There is one essential that Galbraith does not mention, namely God. It was God's support throughout the prophet's ministry that brought the fledgling Hebrew nation to Canaan.

Judaism has its fair share of heroes, those we venerate either because they are champions of our cultural heritage, or they are sages who have given inspiration to the Jewish people; but these are mortals. They fulfil a destiny; they are instruments of the Divine Will; and although Moses has a very special place in the history of the Jewish people, he, too, was human. As a man he endured criticism from those he led; he expressed doubt; anger; impatience; and hubris. It was the latter offence that robbed Moses of entry to the Promised Land. He, in a moment of pique, became irritated with God's slowness to provide water at Meribah, and he was punished for that momentary loss of faith. So the man who was a reluctant hero, who rose to the challenge of leadership, and served both God and his people with devotion, fell victim - like commanders of all generations - to vanity and loss of self-control; and it is these qualities, both good and bad, that make Moses accessible to us ordinary folk.

Peter Beyfus

Book Review



Mithras to Mormon
A Religious History of London

by

Philippa Bernard

Shepherd-Walwyn
2018

Having been lucky enough to attend the book launch of Philippa Bernard's latest book, *Mithras to Mormon - A Religious History of London*, I knew it was going to be a good read. The launch took place at the Charterhouse and not only did Philippa speak about the writing of the book but we were all enthralled by an address, given by a resident, chronicling the life of the Charterhouse from 1371 to the present day. I am no historian and usually avoid reading history books but having known Philippa for some time and read three of her other published works, I realised that it was going to be well worth an investment of my time.

The author begins at the very beginning, (as Julie Andrews once sang) with reference to those most influential of invaders, the Romans, who brought with them their pagan culture which seemed to hardly notice the passive Druid-Celt influence of the years previous. When the Romans finally left, London entered its Anglo-Saxon phase that seemed to coincide with a mishmash of invasions from our European neighbours which may well have been the impetus for the Brexit movement we know today, and then in 597 St Augustine arrived and brought with him the earliest form of Christianity. The Viking invasions that followed brought a different flavour to this early Christianity, but this was the period when churches began to be built and those familiar names of St Clement Danes and St Bride's first became a feature of our great city.

Norman London followed, William having defeated us at Hastings and the little spats within the religious triarchy (yes, I did just make that word up) of

London, Canterbury and Winchester were resolved temporarily by William's recognition of the Christian significance of London. And then in 1095, the moment all Westminster Synagogue readers have been waiting for, Judaism poked its head above the parapet.

From the very first chapter, this book reflects Philippa's ability to convey complexity in straightforward English. London religion is chronicled in strict date order and each chapter is broken up into very readable bite size pieces, where every reader will have an 'I knew that' moment as well as a 'well I never' moment.

In charting the development of religion in our city, Philippa weaves in its impact on the social and economic history of London, relations with Christian European counterparts and the marginalisation and expulsion of the Jews. The middle section of the book will please anyone with an interest in the Kings and Queens of England and will be a godsend to any child sitting GCSE history covering the Tudors, the Reformation and the Stuarts. Although this book is written as a continuum, it is just as easy to pick up and read chapters and sections out of sequence without losing the rationale of the book.

Although it charts the life of a city, that of course is inextricably linked with religion, the influences have shaped secular life

One of Philippa's greatest writing skills is being able to bring historic characters to life by linking them to influences, geographical locations and events in a way that gives one's imagination a very clear picture of the people that they were. It is also possible to read this book as, simply, a history of London. Although it charts the life of a city, that of course is inextricably linked with religion, the influences have shaped secular life and this too is superbly chronicled.

As well as influencing, religion has been influenced by the dramatic events that occurred, particularly in the last two hundred and fifty years or so. Slavery, suffrage, revolution and riots are all seen through the perspective of religion and the impact of war is also briefly touched upon.

Another important aspect of the book is the categorisation of the different sects of Christianity. As a Jew, my knowledge of the State religion was extremely limited having always been excluded from religious education at school, for a reason that now, I cannot quite fathom. I had always assumed that there were Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists and Methodists, but now I have a deeper understanding of the various sects within Christianity. I should also add that reading the section on Muggletonians has given me a completely different perspective on Harry Potter.

It would be difficult to imagine that anyone who reads this book will not have a greater understanding of the development of London and the important part that religion has played in it. Religion has influenced, it still influences, and it will continue to influence in the future. There is something in this book for anyone who has lived in, visited or read about London. It is such a jolly good read, so now go out and buy it.

Janet Mernane

Obadiah the Proselyte

עבדיה הגר

Judaism is not a proselytising religion. In fact, many sections of the community make it as difficult as possible for non-Jews to convert. Why, therefore, did a Catholic priest in the eleventh century decide to become a Jew? This question has taxed many fine minds since the discovery of documents - fragments of a detailed biographical chronicle - in the Cairo *genizah*.

These fragments, now known as the 'Obadiah Scroll', are written in biblical Hebrew. The Obadiah Memoir describes in vivid detail the author's life and travels. He talks about his early times in the Catholic Church, his conversion to Judaism and his experience of the Crusades. One document contains the following: 'Obadiah the Norman Proselyte who entered the covenant of the God of Israel in the month of Elul, year 1413 of Documents which is 4862 of Creation' and continues 'he, Obadiah the Proselyte, has written (this prayer-book) with his own hand'.

Johannes Dreux was born in Oppido Lucan in Italy, the son of an aristocrat. Like many of his co-religionists, he studied the Bible and in so doing, he gradually became convinced that it was only the Jews who had faithfully followed the ways of the ancient Hebrews. His account of the Jews heroically facing the murderous attacks of the Crusaders has been deciphered amongst the tattered manuscripts.

The young man was also impressed by the story of the Italian archbishop Andreas of Bari who had converted to Judaism and had been forced to flee to Constantinople to escape the anger of his fellow Catholics. The anecdote inspired him to take on the Hebrew name of Obadiah and to go wandering among the Jewish communities of the Middle East. He recounts that his conversion was inspired by a dream which he had shortly after taking his Priestly vows. He too went to Constantinople to begin his Jewish studies and was attacked

by Crusaders. We also know that he moved to Baghdad and lived in a *hekdesch*, or alms-house, connected to the Synagogue. There he studied Hebrew, the Pentateuch and the Prophets. He also became aware of the desperate circumstances of the Baghdadi Jews.

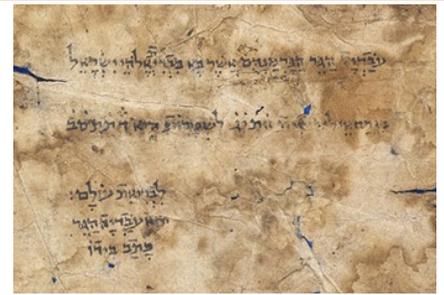
The translators of the manuscripts have established that in the early part of the twelfth century, Obadiah moved to Aleppo where he was given a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Baruch ben Isaac, head of the Yeshiva, confirming details of his conversion. He instructed Obadiah to carry this document with him at all times in order to show it to anyone who might question the validity of his conversion.



ברוך הגבר
Prayer set to Gregorian Chant by Obadiah

The scholars of the *genizah* collection have painstakingly translated his words which give details of the daily lives of the Jewish communities amongst which he lived. We are now able to learn that in those days, from Baghdad to Damascus, from Palestine to Egypt, the new convert was invariably welcomed by the local Jews who would give him food, shelter and religious education, despite their own difficult circumstances.

Amongst Obadiah's writings is a set of liturgical poems which he had heard in the synagogues and which he was able to inscribe in musical notation culled from



Opening of the Siddur text written by Obadiah

the Church. The musical compositions are exceptional. They are the only known examples in all of Jewish history of Hebrew prayers set to Gregorian chant! It is obvious therefore, that Obadiah was well acquainted with the musical traditions of the Church and saw no reason why Gregorian chant should not be used for Jewish liturgy.

The name 'Obadiah the Proselyte' first appeared in a 1901 collection of scientific and literary works compiled by Rabbi Solomon Aaron Wertheimer of Jerusalem. It has taken over half a century to build up a full picture of Obadiah's life and deeds. During this time, the scholars of the Cambridge University Genizah Collection, have been in collaboration with others - in the University of Chicago, the Bodleian Library and the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati.

In April 1970, a narrow street in the ancient town of Oppido Lucan was dedicated to *Giovanni-abdia il Normanno - Musicista Oppidano del Secolo Undicesimo*. (Johannes-Obadiah the Norman, Musician of Oppido of the Eleventh Century) in a special ceremony convened to honour this most unusual and gifted man.

Much more information is now available, thanks to the Cambridge University Genizah Research Unit and they have published a link to the website containing further details relevant to the life and writings of Obadiah the Proselyte.

<http://johannes-obadiah.org>

It is fascinating.

Claire Connick

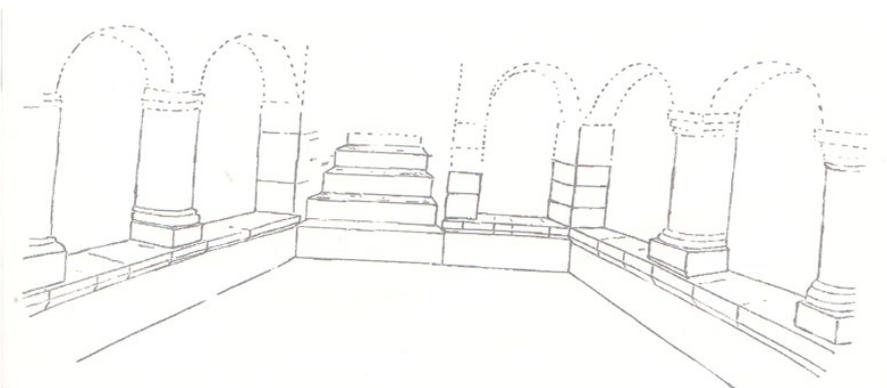
A Mediaeval Synagogue



Architect John Boas working in the discovered remains

Guildford in Surrey is a very ancient township. It was established as a small town by Saxon settlers shortly after Roman authority had been removed from Britain. It was referred to in the will of King Alfred, and the remains of William the Conqueror's castle still overlook the town.

In 1995 excavations on a site in the High Street uncovered a chamber with steps leading down from street level. It was ornately decorated with pattern designs. In the east of the room is an alcove and a pillar where scorch marks demonstrate that a light was often burning in this place. The assumption is that the steps might have led to a women's gallery, the alcove was the *Aron Kodesh* and the burn mark is left from a *Ner Tamid*. Evidence points to the likelihood that this room was an ancient synagogue. If so, then it is the



An artist's impression of the room

oldest synagogue site in Britain and one of the oldest in western Europe. These remnants of a synagogue date back to 1180.

The ancient Jewish house of prayer was probably part of a private house, which frequently contained a family synagogue (similar discoveries have been made in the City of London), and the names of several wealthy Jewish merchants are known, including that of Isaac of Southwark. The building was probably closed down in 1275 when the mother of King Edward I, Queen Eleanor of Provence, expelled the Jews from several English towns including Guildford. Her son finally drove out all the Jews of England in 1290.

It was first suggested that these remains might have been part of a Christian church, but they bear no resemblance to conventional church architecture, and such a church would have been at the front of the house, while a synagogue would be located at the back. There is a bench running round the room, with two entrances, and traces of four columns, often found in mediaeval synagogues. Within the site, coins and pottery shards have been found, indicating a possible Jewish presence.

The account of the discovery in the *Jewish Chronicle* of January 1995 indicates that it was hoped to lay a glass ceiling over the remains, but unfortunately that never happened. The site is now a shop, but one of the stones from the remains has been presented to the modern Guildford Synagogue, built in 1979 in York Road.



Amusement Arcade

*Some

HAIKUS

For Jews

After the youngest
recites the four questions, the
Fifth – when do we eat?

Our youngest daughter,
our most precious Jewel. Hence
the name, Tiffany

'Love the stranger, for
You were strangers in Egypt'
Can't we just be friends?

Middle East peace talks...
the parties reach agreement
Falafel for lunch

Too much Seder wine...
I dream of pyramids built
with cubes of sugar

Today I am a
man. Tomorrow I return
to my school classroom

*from a book by David M. Bader

Those of us whose membership of this community goes back to the early days will remember Debbie (Marta) Shelley who sang in our Services. They will also remember her daughter Carole who went on to become a talented actress of stage and screen.

We are sad to report that Carole died of cancer just after her 79th birthday in August last year. Glowing obituaries appeared in the international Press - including the *Jewish Chronicle*.

In her career, she earned four Tony nominations and won the Award in 1979 for her performance as Mrs Kendal in *The Elephant Man*. She made her last Broadway appearance in 2015 in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. She was still performing in readings and workshops until a short while before her death. She started her acting career in London appearing in many shows and then, in 1964, she was spotted by Neil Simon and went to America to play on Broadway in *The Odd Couple* as one of the Pigeon Sisters. She made her home there and was in constant work, appearing in everything from Shakespeare to *Showboat*. She starred in film, television and of course on the stage.

Carole remained close to Westminster Synagogue and regularly enjoyed reading the *Westminster Quarterly*. Rabbi Thomas and Renée Salamon visited her in New York, where she lived.

A very warm, witty and extremely kind and generous person, she will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

We were delighted to learn of the British Museum's new Judaica showcase. The Museum has always exhibited items of Jewish interest, particularly early texts and printed books (in the British Library), but now the Museum has devoted a special case to artefacts of Jewish historical value, such as a wedding ring (similar to the one at Westminster Synagogue) and a clover leaf-shaped *havdalah* spice-box. A case in its newly-reopened gallery 46, on post-mediaeval society, is now dedicated to artefacts that represent the Jewish presence in Britain.

The feature is indirectly the result of the Museum's new Islamic gallery, now open. That enabled Beverley Nenk, curator of medieval collections and Judaica, to bring together some of the Jewish exhibits which had previously been spread around the Museum.

By a strange coincidence – Rabbi Thomas says there is no such thing! – just after we finished the article on page 4 of this magazine, the British Museum announced a new exhibition, which runs until 24th February, on King Ashurbanipal of Nineveh. A further extraordinary coincidence: the excellent evening at Kent House in November, of Conversation between Prof. Michael Baum & Dr. Sean Kingsley explored much of the story we have told about Nineveh and particularly about Lachish; we would encourage all our readers to set out on the trail of the ancient Syrian Empire. They will not be disappointed.



Ralph Ehrmann writes:-

Having now had the pleasure of reading the Synagogue Quarterly for some years, I'd like to thank the writers and editors for producing a magazine which encompasses many of my interests and does so most elegantly. I have learnt much about Jewish History all of which is presented in a most readable style.

I am delighted to be able to write this letter of thanks and I hope it encourages your continued high standards.

Thank you Ralph. Ed.

Education Report



**Nick
Young**
*Head of
Education*

I was at a recent BBC Radio 6 event to celebrate the concept of *the album*. The singer Paloma Faith was in conversation and commented that- at least in terms of popular music - people don't listen to music the way that they used to. Instead of placing vinyl on a turntable and listening to side A before carefully turning over the record to hear the second side from start to finish, we now have the prevalence of what is known as 'shuffle culture'; in other words, any track is available at the touch of a button and people collect playlists of hit tracks, or personal favourites that are played in random order. As this is such an overwhelming trend, the art is suffering as musicians are thinking less in terms of crafting entire coherent albums - records (in the literal sense, as in documents relating to their thoughts, emotions and circumstances at the time), but are encouraged by record companies to provide one-off, stand-alone throw away hits that will become shuffle fodder for busy, impatient people.

An example of a great album that was released and became a monumental success, despite the instincts of the record company who feared that it would bomb, is Marvin Gaye's 1971 work, *What's Going On*. The story of the album is told from the point of view of a Vietnam veteran returning to the country he had been fighting for, and seeing only hatred, suffering, and injustice. Gaye's lyrics discuss themes of drug abuse, poverty, and the Vietnam War. He has also been credited with promoting awareness of global warming before the public outcry against it had become prominent - see the track 'Mercy mercy me (The Ecology)'. Now the story goes that when this album was first played to

the executives at Motown-Tamla records, they balked at releasing it, fearing commercial suicide. The artist was insistent, however, and as this was his seventh album he had sufficient clout to get his way. The result is that many of these tracks are instantly recognisable today marked by social commentary of as much relevance and pathos in 2019 as they were at the time. In fact, one can say that there is greater pathos today as we are facing many of the same issues as we were fifty years ago.

Our festivals, with *Tu B'Shvat*, *Pesach* and *Purim* coming in the next few months, represent a beautiful opportunity. They may be thought of as, if not a track from a classic, definitive album of music, then perhaps as a lovingly crafted hand-written note placed into our palms. Of course we may choose to read it, to put it to one side or to ignore it, but if we were to think of it in those terms, surely we would be more likely to unfold the paper, ponder the words and the message scripted over centuries which - like classic and familiar art that is

Each year, we hope to merit the chance to come back to the same season or moment

timeless - resonates in some of the same, but also in different ways today. The best opportunity however is always *Shabbat*, which fortunately rolls around fifty-two times per year at the end of each week. In the words of the great philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel, words that would no doubt have resonated with Marvin Gaye, 'It was on the seventh day that God gave the world a soul, and [the world's] survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day'.

When Heschel refers to the world's survival, he is incorporating our own survival - to maintain a state of well-being despite all the many commitments and distractions, and the tendency to 'shuffle' that we are faced with.

I hope that some of these thoughts may be helpful as 2018 turns into 2019 and our year 5779 continues to unfold. Information on how we are marking the upcoming festivals, including our *Purim Spiel* (20th March), *Pesach Seder* (19th April) and *Shavuot* study (8th June) will appear on our website and in our printed publications in weeks to come. Please save those dates, but also bear in mind the wonderful opportunities presented each week on *Shabbat*. Friday night Services at 6.30 pm always include a short teaching session based on the week's portion of the *Torah*. On Saturday mornings at 10.30 am we read from and reflect on the *Torah* itself, with further opportunities to learn about our prayers, rituals and texts before and also after Services.

Interestingly, the album *What's Going On* ends with a reprise of the main track, so ending where it began - just as we do with our cycle of Jewish festivals. Rabbi Michael Marmor refers to the Jewish annual cycle as being a spiral. He says that with each passing year we seek to return to where we felt ourselves to be in moments that have passed. Each year, we hope to merit the chance to come back to the same season or moment, as in years past; to appreciate its beauty and the unique nature of what it might represent although of course we are not the same as we were in previous years. We have changed, evolved just like the world around us but these festivals, these special Jewish moments, open our eyes to the reality of where we are and of what is around us. These moments are so precious - like each track of a great album.

I wish you, and us as a community, health, joy and emotional and spiritual growth over the next twelve months and I look forward to seeing you soon.



Westminster Quarterly

Planning Your Diary

Erev Purim

Wednesday 20th March

Purim

Thursday 21st March

Seder Night

Friday 19th April

Pesach 1st Day

Saturday 20th April

Pesach Last Day

Friday 26th April

Erev Shavuot

Saturday 8th June

Shavuot

Sunday 9th June

Contacting the Synagogue

RABBI	Rabbi Benji Stanley	rabbibenji@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9712
CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE	Jeffrey Ohrenstein	chairman@westminstersynagogue.org
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Gary Sakol	gary@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9713
EDUCATION	Nick Young	nick@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9714
EVENTS & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER	Jon Zecharia	jon@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9711
KIDDUSHIM	Hilary Ashleigh	hilary@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9717
MITZVOT	Maya Kayukwa	mitzvot@westminstersynagogue.org
MEMBERSHIP	Darcy Goldstein	membership@westminstersynagogue.org
LIFECYCLE ENQUIRIES	Ben Shaw - PA to the Rabbinic Team	ben@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7052 9701
CZECH SCROLLS MUSEUM	Jeffrey Ohrenstein	info@memorialscrollstrust.org T: 020 7584 3740
GENERAL ENQUIRIES	Nivi Chatterjee Duari	admin@westminstersynagogue.org T: 020 7584 3953/020 7052 9700
EMERGENCIES	Monday to Friday: In the first instance, please call the Synagogue Office: 020 7052 9710 Evenings and weekends: please e-mail Rabbi Benji Stanley rabbibenji@westminstersynagogue.org	

Please send letters, articles, photographs or other items of interest for publication in the Westminster Synagogue Quarterly directly to the Synagogue office or e-mail to editor@westminstersynagogue.org

