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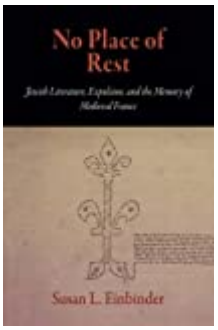

Susan L. Einbinder. *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. 267 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-4115-0.

David Joshua Malkiel. *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000-1250.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. xvi + 357 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5950-2.

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Published on H-German (December, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Reconsidering Medieval Jewish History

Both volumes under review highlight the very considerable development of the art of history writing as practiced in the field of medieval Jewish history in recent years. These scholars draw extensively on both historical and scholarly literature and utilize non-Jewish source materials constructively and creatively to tell Jewish history. At the same time, they raise the bar in terms of use of Hebrew sources, with careful and thoughtful readings of texts–some commonly read and others rarely acknowledged or discussed. The attention to language and narration and the comparative use of non-Hebrew sources to illuminate the Hebrew sources themselves deserve particular note.

Susan Einbinder's *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* tackles a significant theme in a creative way, utilizing a small number of rather fragmentary sources. Tracing narratives of the expulsion of the Jews from France in 1306,

Einbinder sets out on a scholarly and meticulous examination of context and memory, as well as the material history of the manuscripts she mines. Given previous and later expulsions, Einbinder rightly notes, the expulsion of 1306 continued to have resonance in the identity of a variety of Jewish and New Christian groups in the later Middle Ages and early modern period. Throughout the study, Einbinder contends with the dearth of sources, especially the lack of commemorative and liturgical work generally found in large settlements and communities of exiles in other places. She is also forced to reckon with the non-historical penchant for prototypes or typologies, in which core events are raised to the level of cosmic struggles, shorn of specificity.

In chapter 1, Einbinder begins with the precursory expulsion of the Jews of Gascony in 1287, utilizing the poetry of Isaac b. Abraham HaGorni. HaGorni serves as a colorful foil for examining religious and political pressure on the Jews first to convert and then to leave. It also highlights nicely the complex cultural and philosophical world of late-thirteenth-century ProvenÃ§al Jewry. Born in Gascony, HaGorni was a bit of a wanderer, known in later historiography as something of a Hebrew troubadour. Providing a close literary and contextual reading of HaGorni's work, Einbinder concludes that HaGorni was a "temperamental but mainstream member of an intellectual elite" (p. 33). While Einbinder asserts that HaGorni provides a test case for responses to the more complicated disruptions to French Jewish life that followed, the chapter does not address directly the topics at hand, even if the case highlights the analytical style that follows. Here, as elsewhere, Einbinder's attempt to discuss topics not covered in much detail in her sources is not entirely cohesive.

In chapter 2, Einbinder turns directly to the limited number of Hebrew poems that engage the expulsion of 1306. She begins by recalling the rationalist context of the Jewish intellectuals of Provence, noting their penchant for "complex rhetorical forms" over emotional poems (p. 37). Her focus falls on poems by Yedaiah Bedersi and Joseph ben Sheshet Latimi, who she argues responded to historical catastrophe from a shaken philosophical position and viewed events from cities that attracted large numbers of refugees. While these poems inspired later generations, the three poems Einbinder analyzes were penned between 1306 and 1308 in Perpignan and Lerida. While the authors successfully captured a sense of the moral and social upheaval accompanying the expulsion, their texts also reveal a great deal about their own social and intellectual (especially philosophical and medical) contexts and struggles. The texts grapple with tensions between personal and communal responsibility, with particular attention to the sins of failing to care for other Jews and of false oaths, which lead eventually to false beliefs. Here, Einbinder deconstructs images and metaphors and provides a rich context that allows her to peer into the world represented by the poets. Einbinder also deals masterfully with the tension between depiction of actual historical events and a broader philosophical quest for transcendent truths, especially given the medieval understanding of history as allegory. This tension, Einbinder eloquently notes, led to a minimalizing of the very history presented: "Their success came at the expense of their meaning. The early authors' need to embed history in allegory and allegory in pure form contributed rapidly to the erasure of any commemorative impulse, perhaps to the erasure of history itself" (p. 58).

In chapter 3, Einbinder examines a collection of liturgical poems that references the 1306 expulsion and considers how they were transmitted to later generations in different contexts. She begins with the work of Reuben b. Isaac of Montpellier, long popular in southern France and North Africa. The goal of these works, Einbinder contends, was to "reinforce the affective bonds that keep a community intact. Consequently, the 'memory' captured in liturgical verse must be dynamic, even as it involves an idealized and nostalgic past" (p. 63). Einbinder's analysis reveals complex poetry that merges biblical motifs and texts with medieval experience, as Einbinder again expertly weaves in historical context and literary analysis. Einbinder next turns to the well-known figure Simon b. Zemah Duran (Rashbatz), again putting his work in context and evaluating its construction in light of specific circumstances. While these two authors described events at opposite ends of the fourteenth century, Einbinder makes a suggestive argument that they both worked from a particular context while considering specific elements related to certain understandings of messianic time. The response of the authors was "not a finite response to catastrophe, but ongoing and fluid" (p. 76). Ironically, in constructing an identity in a new environment, both authors reconstituted their communities "in the image of the world that had rejected them" (p. 77), stressing the Andalusian and Spanish roots of their communities. Such nostalgia recalled a wishful, imagined experience that helped to inform identity in exile.

In chapter 4, Einbinder turns to two early-fourteenth-century texts penned in Provence by a Jewish physician, Crescas Caslari, who had been expelled from the

region of Narbonne in 1306. The texts deal with the biblical story of Esther and, Einbinder asserts, tell us about the author's engagement and interpretation of biblical and rabbinic stories as well as actual historical events and perspectives. Continuing discussion of the theme of medicine in chapter 5, Einbinder turns to accounts of later-fourteenth-century plagues, with particular attention to Jacob ben Solomon's *Evel Rabbati* (Great Mourning). Einbinder sees this text as wrapped in an attack against allegorical readings that, unlike more literal readings, appeared to some to undermine the idea of plagues as divine punishment and response to disaster as a "trial of faith." For Einbinder, the text also discusses appropriate communal response to plague epidemics. Einbinder's usual careful and detailed textual evaluation and illuminating comparison with Christian and Muslim discussions highlights diverging religious approaches to medicine and responses to contagion. The biblical proof texts employed by Jacob, Einbinder argues, were strategic and quite telling. While it takes some time, Einbinder explains these medical texts, writing that "[t]he great population loss and subsequent displacement of survivors that characterized the Black Death severely tested the ways that communities remembered and reconstructed their pre-1348 past" (p. 116). The "French tradition" to which Jacob subscribed was a religious, not medical, one, and it affected the way that he saw the world, recalled the past, and practiced his profession. Einbinder's close analysis unravels the strands of a French Jewish identity that survived and was transformed by the historical experiences of expulsion and relocation.

In chapter 6, Einbinder both sums up and extends her argument through the review of liturgical traditions of Jews who settled in the region of Piedmont, in northern Italy. She notes that the early-fourteenth-century expulsion was referred to both directly and indirectly in subsequent writings that discussed exile and dislocation. The liturgical laments reviewed in this chapter, Einbinder reminds us, are not generally read for what they can tell us about history and memory. Einbinder, however, again delicately plucks observations from them as she rigorously evaluates them. In assessing the laments, which seem to recall events of the late fourteenth century, Einbinder writes that one author (Peretz Yehiel Trabot) embeds a historical incident in a mythic past, emphasizing "its tragic core while shading delicately allusions to the present through a cautious selection of topoi" (p. 148).

In the end, Einbinder has fashioned a provocative study pieced together by a careful, contextual reading from limited sources and examples. Her book makes a welcome addition to the study of Jewish history and memory, tracing as it does "echoes of expulsion's trauma" (p. 162).

Treating an earlier period, David Malkiel's *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000-1250* focuses on Franco-German Jewry in the first quarter of the second Christian millennium, a period of intellectual growth and vibrancy and also the period of the Crusades. Malkiel presents a systematic reevaluation of the historical image of Ashkenazic Jews of this period as heroic martyrs, first in an effort to recontextualize Jewish and Christian relations and, second, to present a more human, nuanced, and what he considers less anachronistic, vision of Ashkenazic Jewry.

In the first chapter, Malkiel presents a useful, far-reaching look at the historiography of Ashkenazic Jewry, beginning with medieval and early modern representations. He notes that early on Ashkenazic Jews were known for halakhic expertise, but ignorance of other disciplines, including Hebrew language. A non-philosophical image of Ashkenaz also developed at an early stage. As early as the early modern writings of Solomon Ibn Verga (whose *Shevet Yehudah* was first published in 1553), the Jews of Ashkenaz were presented as steadfast in their faith and willing to suffer martyrdom. (Malkiel concedes that not all early modern writers counted Ashkenazic Jews as more steadfast or pious than their Iberian brethren.) This image was strengthened on the heels of the Chmielnicki massacres and at the hands of the *maskilim* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who, like others, presented an image of the past that served their own polemical and identity-building needs. Malkiel continues his historiographic review with a welcome summary of Isaac Marcus Jost's portrait of medieval Jewish history. Jost associated medieval Ashkenaz with ignorance, persecution, insularity, and mysticism. A binary presentation, with Sephardic Jews appearing more worldly and religiously lenient, continued in other historical works, such as those by Heinrich Heine and Leopold Zunz, and Malkiel places the views of the latter firmly within the context of nineteenth-century reform. Malkiel next turns to Heinrich Graetz, who viewed the Ashkenazic Middle Ages as the heyday of creative Talmudic study, if nothing else. Malkiel continues his trek to modernity with an evaluation of the great Jewish historians of the twentieth century, noting their general outlooks and perspectives on medieval Ashkenaz in particular, with a very helpful reevaluation of the complex work of Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer, which led to a standard understanding of the Middle Ages as comprised of

Ashkenazic martyrdom and Sephardic apostasy.

In chapter 2, Malkiel investigates Jewish and Christian relations in early medieval Ashkenaz, particularly during the Carolingian period. Again firmly within a historiographical context, noting that studies leave the impression that the century-and-a-half before the Crusades saw increasing anti-Jewish hostility, Malkiel profitably returns to the primary sources for a careful and nuanced reading. Malkiel finds that common folk and perhaps even nobles did not share the apparent anti-Jewish animus of some churchmen. As others have argued, Malkiel asserts that the very efforts to "stigmatize the Jew and curtail their social interaction with Christians highlight the normalcy of Jewish-Christian relations" (p. 56). To evaluate this theory, Malkiel investigates a Hebrew source that depicts the near destruction, but eventual salvation, of the Jewish community of Le Mans at the hands of an apostate in 992. Malkiel correctly points out that the thinking and writing reflected in the sources are distinctly from a later period, leading him to question the authenticity of the story. Malkiel next turns to a series of events between 1007 and 1012, including a Hebrew narrative, a few Hebrew liturgical poems, and two Latin chronicles dealing with threatened expulsions of the Jews from France and Mainz. Again, Malkiel finds a combination of journalism and miracle tales in the Hebrew that are more optimistic than later Crusade-era writings. Neither do the Latin narratives, according to Malkiel, foreshadow the cataclysmic events of the First Crusade.

Malkiel addresses a key theme of his study in chapter 3: the role of mass martyrdom, due to Jews spurning baptism, as the key to the image of a heroic and devout Ashkenazic Jewry. Here again, Malkiel begins with a constructive examination of the historiography in his attempt to identify possible misreadings or variations of meanings. Malkiel analyzes closely a series of key Hebrew and Latin primary sources as well as standard modern, secondary accounts. He notes that the Latin sources reveal various motives for what in fact transpired–that is, homicide of Jews; they do not portray baptism as a primary goal of the crusaders. Latin sources do appear to be concerned that Jews might slaughter their own children to prevent them from being baptized, but Malkiel asserts that such sources date from the thirteenth century at the earliest. The Hebrew sources, by and large, appear to reinforce this reading. What is more, Hebrew and Latin sources both reveal that whether coerced or not, some Jews apostatized and survived. The themes of this chapter are continued in subsequent chapters. In parts of this chapter, however, a broader social and cultural context to underpin Malkiel's textual analysis is omitted.

In chapter 4, Malkiel pursues a theme articulated in the previous chapter: ambivalence toward martyrdom in late-eleventh-century Jewish society. He admits that some Jews who did not embrace martyrdom were nevertheless martyred. Still, he contends that the proclivity of the Hebrew chronicles is to glorify martyrdom and downplay unheroic conduct, a trend that leads to exaggeration and invention. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, Malkiel examines several cases from the Hebrew narratives. In this context, a more developed discussion of the nature of martyrdom would have been helpful, though Malkiel begins to hint at a fuller discussion in the concluding paragraph of the chapter. In many cases, Malkiel applies a modern perspective by telling his readers how the protagonists must have felt or behaved. Typical is his assertion that "the emotional forces at work must have produced inner conflict and ambivalence toward martyrdom, notwithstanding the protagonists' purported zeal for martyrdom" (p. 103). In the same vein, Malkiel attempts to understand certain behaviors through recourse to psychological factors affecting youths. But here and elsewhere Malkiel has not completely recreated what he terms the social context, let alone a broader cultural context and mental worldview. Malkiel does submit the texts to a fine, nuanced reading, asking why certain words or expressions may have been chosen over others, which themselves conveyed different meanings. Still, the tension between the narrators' work and the actual behavior and beliefs of the people experiencing the events is not nearly as clear or direct as one might like.

Malkiel continues his careful re-evaluation in chapter 5, beginning with historiographical treatments and then the Jewish chronicles from the Crusades themselves, with a discussion of Ashkenazic apostasy. He concludes that the "prevailing vision of the nature and scope of apostasy in medieval Ashkenaz is a romantic one" (p. 117). Underpinning this conclusion is the realization of frequent, easy, and far-reaching crossing of a "Jewish-Christian cultural divide" (p. 118). Malkiel finds suggestive evidence that apostasy in medieval Ashkenaz occurred with more regularity than generally presented and that voluntary, as opposed to forced, conversion was also fairly common. In fact, Malkiel makes a compelling argument for the absence of any unequivocal distinction between voluntary and forced apostasy in the high Middle Ages. In this context, he mines several rabbinic responsa, especially those of Rashi, for information that he argues treats all aspects of Jewish social experience,

even the less heroic. Of course, absent other sources, such responsa can be challenging historical sources. But Malkiel's sensitive reading does not seem to ask more of the sources than they present; he simply pays very careful attention to the ways in which authors treat their topics and the language they employ. In support of this argument, Malkiel finds that reversion to Judaism did not always occur at the first chance and that mourning was not generally mentioned at the time of apostasy (but at death). Malkiel maintains that Jews and apostates continued close social interaction, as has been demonstrated in other historical contexts as well.

Malkiel next addresses the significant theme of deviance–that is, the degree of (dis)obedience to Jewish law and rabbinic leadership–in chapter 6. Here again, Malkiel confronts head-on a historiographical tradition that represents medieval Ashkenazic Jewry as heroic, in particular in this case as uncompromising and complete in its ritual and legal observances. Malkiel notes, however, that the rabbinic literature of the period itself depicts a broad range and comparatively larger number of cases, given the limitations of the sources, of non-halakhic behavior. Malkiel cautions that deviance is in part defined by regnant rabbinic and communal norms. He argues in particular that "although it is not uncommon to find Jews contesting halakhic authority while confident of the probity of their actions, this phenomenon may have been especially common in the tenth and eleventh centuries, before the code of appropriate conduct became increasingly homogenized, as the various fields of human activity were mapped out by legal codes and manuals of ritual" (p. 151). Malkiel sees an eventual significant decrease in flagrant defiance of communal authority, reflecting that authority's growing legitimacy, especially at the local level. On the one hand, some observances, including those related to wine and the employment of a *shabbes goy*, were non-halakhic in that they entailed not transgression of burdensome precepts but uncalled-for supererogatory stringencies. In a particularly intriguing analysis, Malkiel examines what he calls "women's law," in which certain non-rabbinic behavior must be seen in the context of an extra-rabbinic framework. In several cases where women's practices could not be traced to canonical sources and were therefore not "legitimate," rabbinic authorities accepted them rather than attempt to eradicate them. In some cases, rabbinic justification for not correcting such behavior was that it was better for people to err unwittingly than intentionally. At some times, legends were introduced to explain contemporary behavior of a non-halakhic nature. At other times, certain autonomy was granted to women with the argument that Jewish women were "daughters of prophetesses."

Malkiel next turns to deviant behavior among male Jews. Through a close consideration of terminology and careful reading, Malkiel uncovers significant strata of unlearned men in Ashkenazic society. The sources also reveal a range of lawless Jews, from those who might commit bodily harm to those involved in whoring and dicing. Malkiel also discusses the case of fools, including pious fools, whose well-intentioned acts of piety were misguided. Malkiel divides male deviant behavior into two categories: those that related to Jewish-Christian relations and those that related to religious ritual. He asserts that the authority of Talmudic tradition and rabbinic leadership "was never more than partial in medieval Ashkenaz," making his historical protagonists rather contemporary in many ways (p. 180). Again paying close attention to the language employed, Malkiel deduces the presence of recalcitrant Jews who transgressed Jewish law, but also notes a great power attributed to the authenticity and legitimacy of customs, even those aberrant in terms of Talmudic law. In the category of religious ritual, Malkiel argues that commandments related to *tefillin*, *tzitzit*, and *mezuzah* were not always well understood or observed.

In chapter 7, Malkiel reviews the historiography that grapples with the nature of medieval Jewish-Christian relations, with a special focus on Salo Baron's call for an anti-lachrymose approach. Malkiel asserts, as many scholars have recently, that Jews and Christians engaged each other daily, at many levels and with a range of interactions from intimacy to violence, depending upon various social and historical contexts. Despite examples of legal distancing and religious polemic in Jewish sources, Malkiel massages the Crusade chronicles and other rabbinic sources to reveal more sympathetic representations of non-Jews. In other cases, Malkiel reads insults of Christian sacred symbols as evidence of a perceived need by some medieval Jewish writers to combat "excessively intimate intercourse between Jews and Christians" (p. 205) and he sees certain warnings issued by the tosafists as implying the existence of good relationships between Jews and Christians. Here, Malkiel, like other recent historians, does reach a bit. Understanding from silence or argument from the negative may seem persuasive, but remains rather difficult to prove with such limited sources. What is more, here his analysis at times turns to a more impressionistic feel, different from his more rigorous linguistic evaluation. He writes, for example, of a conver-

sation in the thirteenth-century *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanneh* that "[t]he anecdote seems factual because it is so concrete and because, content aside, it is the kind of casual exchange one can readily imagine between a Jew and a Christian in the course of daily life" (pp. 206-207). While much material suggests the possibility of this reading, the evidence seems to be measured on a different scale than other material reviewed. Malkiel does present a brilliant, nuanced recontextualization of various medieval legal discussions, noting the limitations on what such discussions may tell us about contemporary Jewish-Christian relations, given various biblical and rabbinic precedents and language and the use of Christians as moralizing foils in such works as *Sefer Hasidim* (thirteenth century).

Malkiel traces a range of social interactions and discussions of social interaction before turning to intellectual interactions, which he argues reveal a significant extent of Jewish participation in medieval European culture. Jewish writers and polemicists appear to have had a fairly thorough understanding of Christian thought and imagery, for example. Malkiel begins this analysis with another excellent review of the rich historiography of the past several generations, with particular attention to biblical interpretation in twelfth-century France. Drawing from an extensive range of scholarship in this context, Malkiel presents literalism as in service of a Jewish polemical response to Christianity and the development of rationalism as a common orientation shared by high medieval Jews and Christians. These notions reinforce Malkiel's assertion that insecure or even hostile intellectual relations belie the intimacy of Jews and Christians as opposed to their alienation.

In the concluding chapter, "Sepharad," Malkiel reflects on the value of a separation of the typological dichotomy of Ashkenaz and Sepharad. In the same way that he has attempted to emphasize the humanity of Ashkenazic Jews, while downplaying their saintliness and heroism, Malkiel seeks to bring the image of Sephardic Jewry closer to one of fidelity and orthodoxy. Malkiel suggests that Spanish Jewry was more indebted to its Islamic roots and milieu in certain areas. So, for example, regarding apostasy, he argues that Sephardic actions should not be seen as philosophical at the expense of religious commitment; rather, they shared similar characteristics with Islamic penchants for prudence and dissimulation. What is more, even if one were to assume that philosophical orientations might lead to mechanical or empty religious life, it does not make sense that its adherents would embrace Christianity in moments of crisis or that they would encourage other Jews to adhere to such a lifestyle. Malkiel next asks whether Sephardic Jews were less devout, and he discusses directly the impression from historical writing and historiography that their religious behavior was particularly suspect in the area of sexual mores. In contextualizing the response, Malkiel points out that prostitution, for example, is generally more related to economic distress than dearth of religious commitment, that courtier culture is not a necessary condition for sexual improprieties, and that Spain's Andalusian heritage, in which concubinage was acceptable in Islamic society, is no indication of licentiousness. Malkiel concludes by unpacking and reconsidering Gershon Cohen's classic distinction between Ashkenazic and Sephardic eschatology (along with martyrdom and apostasy). This chapter, isolated as it is, is less complete and persuasive than the primary theme of the book, and might profitably be reconceptualized and expanded later.

Malkiel has crafted a remarkable book that reconsiders long-held assumptions, while reviewing the very sources upon which such assumptions have been constructed. As in Einbinder's book, Malkiel pays careful attention to context and historiographical conditions. And, like Einbinder, Malkiel provides meticulous reading of a range of sources. On a few occasions his conclusions seem a bit stretched and hard to prove. But in most cases, Malkiel's sophisticated reading, thoughtful analysis, and consistent methodology open vistas to important new and corrective conclusions. His highly innovative work will force historians to redraft their understanding of medieval Jewish history and to reflect on the sophisticated ways that a limited body of sources can be made to yield fresh and important new insights.

Both scholars begin with an admirable willingness to test long-standing views and traditional notions, leading them to alternate readings and new understandings of complex medieval social and intellectual conditions. Of course, something of a danger lurks in this exciting and provocative approach, as well. Despite the high level of scholarship, at times modern sensibilities creep in to inform approaches and conclusions. That is not surprising, since history really is about those writing it much more than it ever is about the past itself. The medieval Jews researched in these and other recent works have a remarkable currency, a characteristic which makes them both human, in the sense of understandable to us, but also somehow perhaps less "historical."

The conclusions of each of these books, despite the source limitations noted above, have the potential to be

very far-reaching. Both Einbinder and Malkiel provide extensive context and a good deal of comparison. Their work lays the groundwork for even further and more integrated history that may be quite useful in framing, not merely drawing from or comparing, broader medieval history as well. In many ways, these volumes represent a new generation of scholarship–fresh, innovative, informed by more general historiographical issues, but also rooted in careful and thoughtful work with intriguing and important historical sources.

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Citation: Dean Phillip Bell. Review of Einbinder, Susan L., *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* and Malkiel, David Joshua, *Reconstructing Ashkenaz: The Human Face of Franco-German Jewry, 1000-1250.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. December, 2009.

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