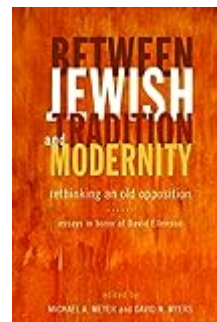




Michael A. Meyer, David N. Myers, eds. *Between Jewish Tradition and Modernity: Rethinking an Old Opposition : Essays in Honor of David Ellenson.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014. xiv + 360 pp. \$39.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8143-3859-9.



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The Virtues of Methodological Variety

A Festschrift should mirror the academic contributions of its honoree. This volume does, capturing the methodologically sensitive, intellectually wide-ranging, spiritually committed, and good-humored sensibility that David Ellenson embodies. Ably edited by Michael Meyer and David N. Myers, *Between Jewish Tradition and Modernity* contains twenty essays by accomplished scholars, divided into four main sections: law, ritual, thought, and culture. Rather than attempt to summarize these contributions and do injustice to all, this reviewer will simply praise one contribution in each section he found especially enjoyable—not an objective standard, but one which I trust Ellenson will forgive. Other readers would no doubt find other essays even more profitable. Anyone approaching this volume should not skip David Myers's intellectual biography. David Ellenson was trained at the College of William and Mary, the University of Virginia, HUC-JIR, and Columbia University. As Myers suggests, Ellenson's predestined career as a lawyer, a typical one for Jewish boys of that generation who liked humanities more than math, probably informed his abiding interest

in halakhah. Similarly, Ellenson's Orthodox upbringing in Newport News clearly fed his abiding interest in tradition and modernity. Ellenson first made a name for himself in the academic world by essays on responsa and German Orthodoxy when this literature was undervalued as a source, and this subject was assumed to be the intellectual property of Orthodox scholars alone. Ellenson mined this material to illuminate the nuances of the central European rabbinate, with special attention to the strife between the traditionalists and the neo-Orthodox. A prolific essayist, Ellenson's books *Tradition in Transition* (1989), *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer* (1990), and *Between Tradition and Culture* (1994) have been seminal ones. Ellenson's role as a teacher, mentor, and leader matches this substantial scholarly legacy.

Jonathan Sarna's *The Touro Monument Controversy* begins with brio: "The Jewish traveler Israel Joseph Benjamin, known as Benjamin II since he followed in the footsteps of the medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela, stirred up controversy in 1860 when he condemned a proposal to memorialize the New Orleans Jew-

ish philanthropist Judah Touro with a public statue (p. 80). Thus Sarna introduces the strange conflict between James Gutheim and Isaac Mayer Wise over how to properly commemorate one of America's greatest philanthropists and a most venerated citizen of New Orleans. Sarna's subtitle "Aniconism vs. Anti-Idolatry in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Religious Dispute" encapsulated the putative halakhic issue. Did Judaism oppose any monuments (Wise) or merely representation of individuals (Gutheim)? Adding piquancy to the debate, Touro, a modest man, clearly would have opposed such a tribute. Nevertheless, Rezin Davis Shepherd, a non-Jew who had saved Touro's life at the Battle of New Orleans, offered \$300,000 from Touro's estate to build the cenotaph. (The number of resolutions passed to build monuments far outnumbered the monuments that were actually built.) Sarna masterfully shows the competing pressures of Jewish law, republican celebrationism, bourgeois success, and protestant aniconism. In the end, memorials were built for many famous American Jews—as so many controversial importations from the external environment, it became normative practice—another example of inward acculturation. I will not spoil the reader's pleasure by divulging the outcome.

David Ellenson's studies of ritual have included discussions of the organ debates, choir composition, prayer book reform, and more. Ellenson has utilized the dichotomy of accommodation and separation, and has illuminated the ways in which external forces shaped seemingly insular Jewish debates. The term ritual suggests stasis, but the essays here break new ground, evident in Dahlia Marx's study of the fate of the Kaddish rite on the kibbutz. Best known as a historian of Holocaust memory and for facing down Holocaust deniers in courts of law, Deborah Lipstadt, in "And It Not Be Stilled: The Legacy of Debbie Friedman," dissects the reception accorded Debbie Friedman, who "changed the way congregations sing" (p. 110). Two points struck this reader, who has heard Friedman's tunes innumerable times. I discovered just how much opposition Friedman initially stirred up on the part of those committed to traditional *chazanut* or on the part of those who expected a *chazan* to possess classical musical training, which Friedman did not. I was also surprised to learn the extent to which Friedman developed in the direction of tradition as her knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew language grew. While this never came at the expense of her creativity, Lipstadt explains how this gravitation contributed to Friedman's elevation to the voice of liberal Judaism—a ritual revolution writ (sung) small.

I am not sure why Steven Lowenstein's statistical-sociological comparison of German and Dutch modernization belongs in the category of "ritual," but it is always such a pleasure to read an essay by Lowenstein that I was not bothered. He compares voluntary residential segregation, marriage age, and rates of religious conversion to challenge the presumption that there is no significant difference between these two Jewries. All modern Jewries are not created equal, nor are all Continental western Jewries.

Twenty-first-century Jews who think about Jewish things are more likely to think about Israel than Zionism. Arnold Eisen's "Zionism, American Jewry and the Negation of the Diaspora" reminds us that Zionism once meant more than a term of international opprobrium. Eisen argues that the novelist A. B. Yehoshua "carries forward a polemic at the heart of the school of thought known as political Zionism," which constitutes a profound and troubling challenge which American Jews "ignore" at our peril (p. 176). Eisen focuses on the political Zionist critiques of survival, collective identity, and personal authenticity, all of which, as he insists, are contained in political Zionism from Herzl to Ben-Gurion, and all of which have been reiterated by Yehoshua to a variety of American Jewish audiences. Sixteen pages may be too little space to give these matters a full hearing—Eisen does a lot of "stipulating"—but he offers a forceful rebuttal to Yehoshua's presentation of these three points as simplistic rather than simply correct. Israeli (indeed, human survival) seems still in doubt; Jewish collective identity in the modern diaspora has been protean for a couple of centuries; if the standard of "no foreign admixture" be applied to personal authenticity, the latter never existed. There seems to be no more neurosis in New York than Tel Aviv, though the particulars may vary. One point that Eisen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary might have underlined, is that the original political Zionist critique (or that of Ahad Haam) was directed primarily at secular Jews. The potential of observant Jewry (Haredi, neo-Orthodox, and traditional) to self-propagate in the diaspora can no longer be doubted, although both Herzl and Ahad Haam did. (Developments in western Europe are another matter.) One of Eisen's strengths as an intellectual historian is to show the periphery's relevance to the center, and to illuminate the big picture with erudite detail—a fair characterization of Ellenson's style too.

"Culture" has become a diffuse category in several disciplines. In history, cultural history seems to cover a multitude of methods. To put it no less cynically, a cultural historian has interest in other disciplines.

This usage diverges from what was once dubbed *Kulturgeschichte*, but this expansion has been salutary. Ellenson, certainly, has been successful in impressing a wide variety of âologiesâ into historical service. The essays in this section all merit reading, none more so than Riv-Ellen Prellâs, âComplicating a Jewish Modernity: The Jewish Theological Seminary, Columbia University, and the Rise of a Jewish Counterculture in 1968.â An eminent anthropologist, Prell displays her ability to cross disciplinary lines, combining microhistory, sociology, and cohort analysis. Prell devotes considerable space to Mark Rudd, âthe most public face of Columbiaâs student protests,â and notes his astonishment upon discovering that the books lining Columbia Universityâs sumptuous presidential office, occupied during the protest, had their pages uncut. Prell interprets this as partly the shocked response of a second-generation Jew-

ish American who discovered the WASP world was not all it was cracked up to be. But Prell does not leave this story on 116th Street. Rather, she travels a few blocks up Broadway to demonstrate how a parallel scene played out at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Once again, power and dissatisfaction with a spiritually ossified institution and its failure to take a stand on the pressing issues of the day provide a backdrop for what becomes a battle over status and power as well as ideas.

One customarily remarks on the uneven nature of collections, Festschriften in particular. The contributions that comprise *Between Jewish Tradition and Modernity* are uneven in terms of approach, material surveyed, and overall conclusions. Readers of this volume will be glad for this diversity, including, no doubt, the honoree himself, who has done more than his fair share in showing the twists and turns of Jewish modernity.

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