

Book Reviews

Shira Klein. *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018. x + 396 pp.

Shira Klein's *Italy's Jews From Emancipation to Fascism* is an engaging, often surprising, and at times heartbreaking social history of the Jewish communities of the Italian peninsula from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Turning her attention to a community whose presence in Jewish studies is generally marginal, Klein examines the changing relationship of the newly-emancipated Jews to the Italian state, the new forms of religious and cultural expression which were fostered in the Kingdom of Italy, as well as the experiences of Italian Jewish refugees in both the United States and Palestine. Often drawing on heretofore unexamined sources, Klein's book does a remarkable job of calling into question certain popular understandings of the role of Italy in the Holocaust and the relationship between Jews and fascist politics.

What is known as the "myth of the *brava gente*" ("good people") – the perception that, for example, racial theory was foreign to Italian fascism, that the racial laws of 1938 were forced on Italy by Hitler, and that non-Jewish Italians in general were sympathetic towards and helpful to their Jewish neighbors – has proved remarkably persistent both in Italy and abroad. Klein's work constitutes a contribution to the deconstruction of this myth, which has begun in recent decades. Klein demonstrates that Italian fascism was racial from the beginning, that the discriminatory laws were implemented on Italian and not German initiative, and that the behavior of the general population was marked by indifference and hostility to the fate of the Italian Jews more often than by benevolence. What is particularly valuable, though disturbing, about Klein's treatment is the way in which she shows how Italian Jews, both as refugees in the United States and Palestine and as citizens of postwar Italy, were active participants in the propagation of this myth. The Jewish citizens of the new Italian kingdom had experienced unprecedented freedom and social mobility in the decades prior to the racial laws, and had become so deeply identified with their homeland

that, even in the midst and the aftermath of fascist persecution, they lavished praise on the Italian state and people, attempting to influence the Allies to act mercifully towards Italy.

No less disturbing is Klein's reassessment of the relationship of Italian Jews to fascism; she demonstrates that in the two decades of fascist governance, most Jews in Italy were at least tolerant of the regime and many actively supported it. Jewish supporters of fascism saw Mussolini's policies as preferable to those of the revolutionary left, the ascendancy of which might have threatened the economic and social interests of a community which had, since emancipation, rapidly become genteel and professional. That so many Jews could have been active supporters of the fascist regime seems incredible in hindsight, but Klein does an admirable job of showing just how rational such a position seemed to the Italian Jews of the 1920s and 30s. Although she draws no explicit parallels between this history and the present day, the story of Italian Jewish involvement in fascism ought, in light of many contemporary political trends in the Jewish world, to serve as a cautionary tale.

Apart from this contribution to a larger movement in the contemporary historiography of Italy, Klein's book sheds light on some aspects of Italian Jewish experience which have hitherto attracted little or no attention, including the development of new cultural and religious practices in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the experience of Italian Jewish refugees in the United States and Palestine. The comparatively small scale of these communities (in both cases measured in the hundreds rather than the thousands) makes possible a very intimate examination of the refugee experience, often based on previously unstudied primary materials and interviews conducted by the author herself.

To a slight degree, the study suffers from a feeling of imbalance. Klein writes that her book "does not propose to be a comprehensive survey of modern Italian Jewish history," but rather seeks "to highlight how Italy's Jews from 1848 to 1938 cultivated a conceptualization of Italy as their beloved home, and how this outlook shaped their reactions to, and postwar narration of, the horrors of 1938-45" (p. 15). This caveat being admitted, the fact remains that six of the book's eight chapters focus on the Second World War and its penumbræ; though her treatment of the near century of pre-fascist development of Italian Jewish culture is very valuable, the reader is left wishing it were more extensive. Also notable is the fact that Klein's

treatment of Jewish religion in pre-War Italy attends almost entirely to the (often idiosyncratic) practices of the laity, without really touching on the development of the modern Italian rabbinate and its participation in the Jewish intellectual movements of the time. For example, despite the fact that the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano was the first modern institution of its kind, it does not feature at all in Klein's story. While the focus on popular practice is a welcome corrective to the more common error of attending entirely to "official" Judaism, the lack of attention to the few figures of Italian Jewry whose impact on Jewish thought is still felt is somewhat striking. Samuel David Luzzato (the premier Italian participant in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement), for example, is mentioned only once in passing, while Umberto Cassuto (a Bible scholar and critic of the Documentary Hypothesis who eventually became Chair of Biblical Studies at the Hebrew University) is not mentioned at all.

These criticisms, however, are minor ones in light of the overwhelming strengths of Klein's achievement. Her book represents a major contribution to the rather underdeveloped secondary literature on Italian Jewry and in particular adds a new perspective to the study of modern Jewish negotiations of nationalism. The field of Jewish studies has traditionally been dominated by the experiences of North American and German Jews, while today the need to attend to Jewish experiences in the Middle East and North Africa is becoming more widely recognized, Klein's work makes a strong case for the relevance of the Italian community as well.

Vincent Calabrese
University of Toronto

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz. *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works: A Literary Study.* Oxford: OUP, 2018. xvi + 307 pp.

Studies of the late fourth century bishop, Gregory of Nyssa, continue to be produced by a number of capable scholars. This plenitude, no doubt, stems from Gregory's many works having been preserved from antiquity, as well as his status as a Father of the Church who has been recognized in the Latin West and the Greek East, both in Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches. The variety of Gregory's writings that have been preserved vary