

4-15-2014

Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Edited by Paula E. Hyman, Dalia Ofer. Jewish Women's Archives and Shalvi Publishing, 2006. CD-ROM. (Windows- and Macintosh-compatible.) ISBN 965-90937-0-5. Online version: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia>. Accessed: March 30, 2009.

Yaffa Weisman Dr.

Hebrew Union College - Los Angeles, yweisman@huc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ajlpublishing.org/jl>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Jewish Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Women's History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Weisman, Yaffa Dr.. 2009. "Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Edited by Paula E. Hyman, Dalia Ofer. Jewish Women's Archives and Shalvi Publishing, 2006. CD-ROM. (Windows- and Macintosh-compatible.) ISBN 965-90937-0-5. Online version: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia>. Accessed: March 30, 2009.." *Judaica Librarianship* 15: 38-39. doi:[10.14263/2330-2976.1048](https://doi.org/10.14263/2330-2976.1048).

example, Israel Levin's edition of *Keter malkhut*, by Ibn Gabirol (Tel Aviv, 2005) "did not make use of" *Vat. ebr.* 292, ff. 91r.–99v. (p. 226). For Burton L. Visotzky's edition of *The Midrash on Proverbs* (New York, 1990), edited from *Vat. ebr.* 44, ff. 324v.–355v., we are told that "Visotzky asserts that the text in this manuscript is closest to the original text of the midrash" (p. 30). The description of *Neofiti 1*, the "only extant copy of [an] Aramaic Targum, erroneously listed as Targum Onkelos in earlier catalogues" (pp. 528–529), is a model of the historiography of a manuscript, providing information about critical editions, translations in various languages, partial editions, and facsimile editions.

Neofiti 1 is not the only remarkable manuscript at the Vatican Library. Among many treasures, there are:

- ◇ a manuscript copied in Jerusalem in the 1380s (*Vat. ebr.* 283, pp. 208–210);
- ◇ "Latin translations of kabbalistic works prepared . . . for Pico della Mirandola" (*Vat. ebr.* 189–191, pp. 132–135);
- ◇ a *Sefer Josippon* copied for the Florentine humanist Giannozzo Manetti in Fano in 1443 (*Vat. ebr.* 408, pp. 353–354); and
- ◇ several manuscripts acquired in 1689–1691 from the library of Queen Christina of Sweden (*Vat. ebr.* 436–444, pp. 383–391).

Some manuscripts have interest beyond the study of the transmission of Hebrew traditional texts: *Vat. ebr.* 425 (p. 365) is an inventory of the pawned items found in the bank of a Jewish moneylender in Florence in 1477. *Vat. ebr.* 346 (p. 294) seems to allude to the passage of Halley's comet in 1506 and *Neofiti 26* (p. 548) mentions the expulsion of the Jews from Naples in 1541. There is even a mention of the United States in the travel diary of David Attias, an emissary from Meknes (Morocco) between 1821 and 1834 (*Neofiti 46*, p. 562).

Since I am not able to compare the descriptions in *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library* to the actual contents of the manuscripts, my review will conclude with general remarks. The 617 manuscripts of the *Vaticani ebraici* are not arranged in any order whatsoever, unlike similar larger collections at other major European repositories. For example, the manuscripts at the Palatina Library in Parma are arranged systematically, starting with Bible, and then Midrash, Talmud, Halakhah, Liturgy, etc. This is not the case with the Vatican

Library's Hebrew manuscripts. Thus, a more detailed index than the two pages of the "index of subjects" (pp. 667–668) would have been welcome, especially considering that the "index of titles" (pp. 28*–66*) is not helpful in this matter. There are three-and-a-half pages (pp. 50*–53*) of *perush* ("Commentaries on") and almost a page (pp. 30*–31*) of *be'ur* ("explanation"), but no cross-references to the works that generated the commentaries. This deficiency will soon be remedied, as the entire catalog is to be mounted as a PDF file on the website of the National Library of Israel and researchers will be able to customize their searches.⁵ [7]

⁵ Posting of Benjamin Richler, "New Catalogues and Books Based on Hebrew Manuscripts," *H-JUDAIC*, December 10, 2008. [Editor's note: the catalog is now accessible via the NLI website.]

Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Edited by Paula E. Hyman, Dalia Ofer. Jewish Women's Archives and Shalvi Publishing, 2006. CD-ROM. (Windows- and Macintosh-compatible.) ISBN 965-90937-0-5. Online version: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia>. Accessed: March 30, 2009.

Reviewed by Yaffa Weisman, Hebrew Union College Frances-Henry Library, Los Angeles, California

If one could only find Jewish liturgy that combines the "Shehecheyanu" and "Al Chet"—the life of this reviewer would be made so much easier. Blessing the enormous effort that went into creating the first large—but by no means comprehensive—historical encyclopedia about Jewish women was an appropriate response in 2006, when the CD-ROM was published. Not revisiting the CD-ROM and correcting the omissions and errors between 2006 and 2009, when the online version was released, is where the sins of intellectual and technological negligence come to mind. The following are descriptive and prescriptive observations of the construction and contents of the online encyclopedia.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

846 female and 225 male scholars and writers contributed to the encyclopedia, which includes 330 topical entries and 1,690 biographies on the subject of Jewish women and their work and achievements throughout history. The online version compares itself to a slightly more scholarly version of Wikipedia, using the number of qualified

researchers who contributed to the work and the peer-reviewed articles as the line drawn between the free-form democratic database and their own product. The goal is to “[make] it possible for scholars and more casual readers to propose updates and, in a later stage, to upload new articles” (<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/about>).

The table of contents offers tabs for the following three options: **All articles**, **Survey articles**, and **Biographies**. Each of these is presented in alphabetical order, but there is no comprehensive index of all keywords. One can navigate through a linked alphabet to get to the proximity of a sought-after item—an option available at the TOC but missing from the **Glossary** section. Looking for “zizit” in the glossary requires scrolling down the alphabetized list.

Additionally, the biographies of the contributors and a FAQ page are offered.

FORMAT

In a departure from the confines of the CD-ROM format, the online version uses Web 2.0 technology to allow searches and cross referencing.

Each entry is accompanied by a list of **subject headings**, a **time line**, and **locations** relating to the entry. These are hot links that allow navigation between related terms.

Entries include the option of adding to the **discussion**, making it possible for scholars and more casual readers to propose updates and, at a later stage (it is not clear when), to upload new articles.

“**How to cite a page**” is posted at the bottom of every entry for the convenience of users who wish to use the content in their own work.

There are also links to related content elsewhere on the Jewish Women's Archive website and on the World Wide Web, as well as **bibliographies** and **photos** when available.

Finally, in the spirit of **social networking**, various **icons** allow the user to post an article elsewhere in his or her virtual world.

DULY NOTED

1. Samples of Technical/format issues:

Not all pictures have captions identifying the person(s) in them. In the “Lilith Magazine” entry one can only assume that the picture is that of its first editor. A picture of Aviva Cantor at the bottom of the article is left non-captioned and unlinked to her entry or her

place in that particular article. Many photos have only the name of the photographer and/or copyrighted owner.

Under “Lesbianism,” time period is listed as “0 century,” and while the survey begins with biblical times, the geographical location attached to the entry is “USA.”

2. Samples of Sins of Omission (in no particular order):

Haggadot: one of the most innovative genres created by women in the twentieth century, adding symbols and content to reclaim the ceremony and women's role in the story of Exodus.

Related to that: the San Diego Women's group that pioneered this effort is not to be found.

The Los Angeles Jewish Feminist Center (mid 1980s), a derivative of the University of Southern California's Jewish Women Faculty convened by Rabbi Laura Geller, which later developed under the auspices of the American Jewish Congress to become a major educational resource for women in Los Angeles. (Disclaimer: I was one of the activists of the Center and co-edited, with Rabbi William Cutter, the Women's Haggadah that came out of there.)

Debbie Friedman: composer, singer, liturgical innovator, a source of inspiration to cantors throughout the world. . .

Contemporary Women's writing in Israel is absent, as opposed to articles on Prose in the Yishuv (1882–1948) or Yiddish in Eastern Europe (1862–1903).

CONCLUSION

One hopes that two immediate actions will be taken in the very near future by the editorial board of the encyclopedia: a very clear disclaimer on the front page stating that this is, indeed, a work in progress, not just a finished product requiring minor adjustments, and a major technical and scholarly sweep to correct formatting as well as content-related errors. Other than that, seriously: “Shehecheyanu. . .”