

4-15-2014

The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, Editor in chief: Gershon David Hundert. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. 2 vols. (xxviii, 2,400 pp.). ISBN 978-0-300-11903-9. \$400.00.

James P. Rosenbloom
Brandeis University, rosenbloom@brandeis.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](#), and the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rosenbloom, James P. 2009. "The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, Editor in chief: Gershon David Hundert. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. 2 vols. (xxviii, 2,400 pp.). ISBN 978-0-300-11903-9. \$400.00.." *Judaica Librarianship* 15: 40-41. doi:10.14263/2330-2976.1039.

The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. Editor in chief: Gershon David Hundert. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. 2 vols. (xxviii, 2,400 pp.). ISBN 978-0-300-11903-9. \$400.00.¹

Reviewed by James P. Rosenbloom, Brandeis University

It has been a pleasure to spend time with this encyclopedia in preparation for this review. In two volumes (2,400 pages) it covers just about any Eastern European Jewish topic that one could imagine. For example, the more than twenty pages devoted to general articles under the overall title of Hasidism (including music and dance) are followed by nine pages on Haskalah. A modern-day Rashi could certainly present a good *derash* about the adjacency of these subjects. Many Hasidic dynasties also have their own articles, as do many *maskilim*. Zionism, Bundism, Communism, and all other such “isms” are covered extensively. Here are a few sample topics (presented here in alphabetical order): Family; Historiography; Industry; *Der Fraynd*; Galicia; Gender; he-Ḥaluts, Golem legend; Hungarian literature; Shelomoh Kluger; Language: Yiddish; Literary journals; Painting and sculpture; Photography; Poland before 1795; Population and migration; Printing and publishing; The Rabbinate; Relations between Jews and non-Jews; Russian revolution of 1917; and Samizdat. There are many biographies, as well as a wide range of articles on places.

The volumes are heavily illustrated with over 1,100 illustrations and pictures in black and white. In addition, there are 57 beautifully produced color plates. The pages are arranged in three columns, which allows for comfortable reading. At the end of the second volume there is an extremely detailed index. Maps are scattered throughout the volumes, including seven overview maps near the back. This is not a work farmed out to amateurs; the authors of the articles are a mix of the top people in their fields and up-and-coming scholars. The articles are consistently of good quality. The longer subject articles give a nice overview, and the many short articles represent all aspects of East European life and culture.

This encyclopedia could not have been produced with such success in a previous generation. Today we are fortunate to have a number of schol-

ars, in many countries and with the requisite knowledge of the languages, who are able to research all aspects of society. We are also fortunate that many archives are now accessible to scholars. In many ways this encyclopedia can be seen as a celebration of the maturing of the field of research on Eastern European Jewry.

How do the editors define Eastern Europe?: “. . . the regions east of the German-speaking realm, north of the Balkans, and west of the Urals; that is, . . . Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, the Baltic states and Finland, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.” Chronologically, the coverage is from the earliest periods of settlement to the end of the twentieth century.

Who is a Jew in this encyclopedia? The preference is for inclusiveness. Those who considered themselves Jewish or were so considered by others are included. There are converts and those who did not identify as Jews, if their fame may be tied in with a Jewish background or if they were able to succeed despite this background in an area of anti-Jewish prejudice. Important Jews in many fields, even if they did not stress their Jewishness, are included. For those who left Eastern Europe, the focus is on what they did in Eastern Europe, even if their fame or major accomplishments occurred elsewhere.

The articles are clearly written, with the average educated reader in mind. They are informative and well edited. There are often bibliographic references (including many references to non-English sources). Many of the articles were written in Hebrew or European languages and were translated into English—without the poor English renditions that have spoiled many journal articles and monographs in recent years.

Toward the end of the second volume there is a very useful Synoptic Outline of Contents for all of the articles. Here are two examples:

CITIES AND TOWNS. (These are listed country by country.)

BIOGRAPHIES. (These are listed the same way, and are followed by supporting articles, listed under such general categories as Religious Institutions and Figures, Hasidic Dynasties, etc. This is followed by a listing of biographies by category, e.g. Rabbinic Culture, arranged by century, followed by biographical listings for Hasidism, Messianism, and Karaites.)

¹ Editor’s note: The *YIVO Encyclopedia* received the Association of Jewish Libraries’ Reference Award for 2008.

One begins to recognize the true breadth of the encyclopedia while browsing through these long, topically arranged lists of articles. The editors did not skimp on a reasonably good depth in major articles, nor did they compromise on a maximum variety of topics.

The more I read in this encyclopedia, the more I appreciate the quality and wide range of material, as well as the careful editorial work. The editor, Gershon Hundert (professor of history and Jewish Studies at McGill University, in Montreal), deserves special praise for the outstanding quality of the editing. I have already mentioned the thoroughness of coverage and the quality of writing and translating. The overall consistency that results is quite unusual for an encyclopedia of such scope and size. It is difficult to even imagine the amount of work that must have been involved in the editing.

This encyclopedia belongs in the library of any university that teaches Jewish Studies or European history and culture. It also belongs in any synagogue and day school library.

Encyclopaedia Judaica. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, editors. 2nd edition. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 22 vols. (18,015 pp.). ISBN 978-0-02-865928-2. \$2,263.00.*

Electronic version published by Gale Cengage Learning (Gale Virtual Reference Library). ISBN 978-0-02-866097-4. From the Gale Cengage website: "Pricing for eBooks depends upon your account type and population served" (<http://www.gale.cengage.com/servlet/ItemDetailServlet?region=9&imprint=000&cf=e&titleCode=&type=4&id=227970>; accessed September 20, 2009).

Reviewed by Faith Jones, New Westminster Public Library, Vancouver, BC

WOMEN

I wanted to approach the coverage of women in the new *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (EJ2) from several angles. Most obviously, I wondered which specific women are included and whether the criteria for their inclusion are the same as those for men. For

example, what is the fame threshold? Do minor men rate entries while women have to be much better known to be included? Are the entries for women as long and thorough as those for men? Are their achievements fairly judged and included, whether they occur in realms of importance to men or not? Another consideration is whether entries on groups of women and phenomena related to women are included, and how thoroughly. For example, do the traditions specific to women's religious observance merit entries? We must also ask whether entries not specific to women have succeeded in incorporating women's experiences, concerns, achievements, innovations, disruptions, and other specific interventions in Jewish culture and the world at large.

I have concluded that in some of these areas the revisions and new material are superb, while in others the material is mired in the past. Where women are concerned, the encyclopedia has almost a split personality.

I was favorably impressed by the inclusion of many more women than previously and by the broadening of criteria to acknowledge women's areas of expertise as equally worthy of consideration. I found many women whom I did not expect to see. Historical female figures have been added to very good effect, and there are new entries for contemporary women artists, writers, scientists, intellectuals, and public figures. But there are some strange tendencies even here. Rebecca Margolis, a professor at the University of Ottawa, mentioned to me recently that she had looked up several women writers and found that their relationships to famous men were always mentioned, but the same does not apply to famous men and their relationships to women. I tried it myself. Sometimes there were two-way cross-references (see, for example, the Yiddish authors Esther Shumiatcher-Hirschbein and Peretz Hirschbein). But more often, I found, Dr. Margolis was right. Looking at Rose Schneiderman (an American labor leader) I read that she was the sister of Harry Schneiderman. I had never heard of him. His entry does not mention his relationship to Rose. Again, I found Anna Margolin's relationship with Reuben Iceland/Ayzland (both were American Yiddish authors) is mentioned, but his entry does not mention her. What is particularly galling in both these cases is that the woman involved is more significant than the man. Yet, the idea that a man could be influenced by a woman, that his relationship to her might be germane to an

* Editor's note: We are pleased to present the first in a projected series of reviews of topics that are treated in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.