

**Yassif, Eli. *Jewish Folklore: an annotated bibliography.*
New York & London: Garland, 1986. xvii, 341 p.***

Reviewed by:

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Scope

The work under review differs from prior surveys and bibliographies of Jewish folkloristics, which the author cites in his introduction and notes, in that it is the first annotated bibliography of major scholarly contributions to the *entire* field. The notable exceptions to the coverage of the bibliography, as articulated by the author, include specialized fields, such as Judeo-Spanish folklore; art and music; biblical scholarship; and contributions in Yiddish and Slavic languages. The author rightly emphasizes that his innovative contribution is the inclusion of Hebrew material. As he explains, "In the last few decades, Israel has become the center for the study of Jewish folklore. Most of the works in the field were published in Hebrew and thus it was almost impossible for folklore students around the world to know and evaluate these achievements" (p. xiv).

In addition to the linguistic and thematic limits of the bibliography, the author also set its temporal borders. Yassif considers Moritz Steinschneider's essay "Über die Volksliteratur der Juden" (published in *Archiv für Litteraturgeschichte*, 2. Bd., 1872) as the "beginning of scholarly treatment of Jewish folklore" (p. xii). His cut-off date is 1980, "when the work of collecting and cataloging was completed" (*ibid.*). Prof. Yassif's bibliography may be described as embracing modern Western and Israeli scholarship in the field of general Jewish folkloristics. Although the scope is thus much narrower than the title of the compilation suggests, the field it embraces is still vast and diverse enough to warrant selectivity. The author stresses that his aim was "not the presentation of everything that has been published, but detailed description and evaluation of the important and representative studies" (p. xiv). Since Prof. Yassif is a scholar in this field, his knowledge and judgment are important factors in determining the validity of the selection.

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Omissions

Certain omissions should be pointed out, however. The four volumes of *The Field of Yiddish*, consisting of studies by Columbia University's circle of Yiddish scholars, published between 1954 and 1980, include important contributions to folkloristics by scholars of folklore, language and literature, such as Florence Guggenheim-Grunberg, Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich, Dr. Edward Stankiewicz, and the Israeli Professors Chone Shmeruk and Dov Sadan. The Hebrew contributions of the latter are, however, prominently represented in the bibliography.

We miss also quite a few contributions from the *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science* (seventeen volumes of which were published between 1946 and 1987) such as "Problems of Jewish Ethnic Character," by Leibush Lehrer (vol. 12, 1958/59) or "Life in a Hassidic Court in Russian Poland," by Ita

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Kalish (vol. 13, 1965). Surprising also is the omission of a book-length monograph—*Geschichte des Niederen Jüdischen Volkes in Deutschland* (New York, 1968), by Dr. Rudolf Glanz, another scholar connected with YIVO. His monograph is an important contribution to the study of the Jewish underworld and its folklore in medieval Germany. The customs and way of life of contemporary American Jews found its eloquent expression in the three volumes of *The Jewish Catalog* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973–80), also not cited by Yassif. Although not designed as a collection of folklore, these volumes are excellent sources for the researcher on varieties of Jewish practices in the celebration of milestones in the life cycle, e.g., naming ceremonies.

Arrangement

Turning to the structure of the bibliography, we find a straight alphabetical arrangement

by author. If the compiler intended "a critical summary of one hundred years of the study of Jewish folkloristics" (p. xi), his purpose would have been much better served by a topical rather than an alphabetical arrangement of his material. A topical arrangement would give the user an instant overview of the important contributions and the state of scholarship in a particular field of interest. Such an approach was used, with admirable results, in the bibliographies by—among others—Beatrice and Uriel Weinreich in their *Yiddish Language and Folklore* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959) and Joan G. Bratkowsky in *Yiddish Linguistics* (New York: Garland, 1988).

The Index to the bibliography does not compensate for the lack of a subject arrangement. In the case of entries for broad subjects such as "Customs" or "Folk-beliefs," the scores of numerical references to items scattered throughout the bibliography become unwieldy for the user who wants to obtain a clear idea of scholarship in a specific subject area. The Index appears to have been constructed rather mechanically, on the basis of a *catchword* principle, i.e., deriving keywords from titles or other elements of a bibliographic record. The author endeavored to include in the Index "every theme, motif and subject, discussed in each study" (p. xiv), which he brought out by means of annotations. The result is uneven treatment, with some general areas such as "American-Jewish culture" and "American-Jewish humor" receiving only one reference each, while other broad subjects are covered very extensively.

Besides the unevenness, the Index suffers from a poor cross reference structure. We find both the heading "American-Jewish humor" and "Humor, Jewish-American," rather than a *see* reference from one to the other; similarly, there is no linkage between "Beliefs" and "Folk-beliefs" or "Legends" and "Folk-legends" in the form of *see also* references. The Index is useful and serves its purpose, however, for specific subjects which have clearly established terminology, such as "Lilith," "The Golem Legends," or the Aarne-Thompson motifs, which are
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**Kratkaia Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia, Yitskhak Oren (Nadel),
editor-in-chief, Jerusalem: Keter, 1976–1986. 3 volumes,
Aaron—Iokhannesburg. ISBN 965-320-000-3.**

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"The Shorter Encyclopedia Judaica in Russia" (as this work's title is translated on the copyright page) is the first Jewish encyclopedia to appear in the Russian language since the classic *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia* of 1906–1913. Three of an envisioned six volumes have been published to date, under the guidance of a distinguished group of scholars, including professors Mikhail Zand (chief scientific consultant) and Shmuel Ettinger (chairman of the editorial board).

The *Kratkaia Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia* (henceforth *KEE*) is an abridged and adapted Russian version of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), designed to meet the specific Jewish needs and interests of Soviet-born readers. *EJ* entries have been re-written so as to include explanations of basic Jewish religious concepts and historical facts which are frequently unfamiliar to Jews raised and educated in the USSR. New entries composed especially for the *KEE* fall into three general categories: (a) those providing definitions and semantic clarifications of fundamental terms such as "Jews," "Israel," etc., (b) those dealing with Russian and Soviet Jewish topics, whether it be specific communities

(e.g., Bukhara), Yiddish literature in the USSR, or Jews who contributed to Soviet politics, science and culture, (c) those covering other subjects considered to be of particular interest to Soviet Jews living in the USSR, Israel and the West (e.g., "Land of Israel" and "State of Israel," which together comprise more than half of volume three).

Unlike the *EJ* and the original *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*, the *KEE* does not include bibliographies at the conclusion of its entries. It therefore cannot be used as a springboard for further reading or research. Author signatures are also absent, although a full list of contributors and an index of names and subjects are promised for the final volume. The *KEE* is a landmark event in Jewish publishing, testifying to the national and religious revival among Soviet Jews during the last generation.

Dr. David E. Fishman is a Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York and is also on the faculty of the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

Abramowicz (Continued from p. 144)
identified by their accepted folkloristic codes.

An author index is absent from the bibliography. Since the main arrangement is by author, this might appear unnecessary, but the work includes a significant number of addenda (under the incorrect rubric "Appendix"). Thus, all the works of primary authors are not together. Access is provided to joint authors through cross references within the body of the bibliography.

Conclusions

Prof. Yassif's most important accomplishments are the identification of over thirteen hundred significant contributions to Jewish folklore, their evaluation through extensive annotations, and the provision of access to the literature on specific subjects in the field through the index. This bibliography is, however, as the author himself points out, "the first stage" (p. xi) in an effort which should provide more comprehensive, as well as more analytical coverage of the field.

Dina Abramowicz is the former Head Librarian and currently serves as Reference Librarian of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City.

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