

HISTORY

Richard Hull. *Jews and Judaism in African History*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009. xii + 282 pp. Maps. Illustrations. References. Index. \$68.95. Cloth. \$26.95. Paper.

In the forty-plus years in which the discipline of African history has flourished, it has focused on some central themes—the wide array of its peoples, topographical differences, climatic changes, diverse languages, varying and/or often syncretized religions, and complex cultures spanning centuries, if not millennia. Volumes have been written on Africa’s ancient civilizations, Islam in Africa, the trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, European colonization, and Africa’s subsequent decolonization, to name just a handful of topics. What is largely missing, however, is the history of African Jews; whether as indigenous occupants or as migratory residents, African Jews (and Judaism) in Africa have remained marginalized.

To counter this imbalance, the historian Richard Hull has placed African Jews squarely within the discourse on Africa’s past. He writes that his goal was to make available a textbook that could be used for both seminars and conferences, “because of an inability to find a comprehensive historical study of Jews and people of Jewish ancestry in African history” (xix). Having taught, studied, and published in the field for many years, he recognized not only this gap in historical inquiry, but also the influential role played by Jews in shaping and shifting African civilizations across the continent.

Hull is straightforward in explaining his sources for the book; he writes that instead of mining archives or reading primary materials, he culled an extensive list of secondary sources “in order to achieve synthesis” (xix). His intention was not to chart new directions in African history, but rather to fold African Jews and Judaism into the larger discourse. He achieves this goal admirably, neither tokenizing nor objectifying Jews in Africa, but rather painting them smoothly into the larger canvas of the continent’s history. In six detailed chapters, he demonstrates the extent to which keeping Jews on the borders of a broader African scholarship renders the picture incomplete. Each chapter illustrates the interplay, cultural exchanges, and influence of Jews in various locales and under differing historical pressures, paralleling the better known narratives of Africa’s past while also linking and conflating the two. In this way Hull is able to underscore how Jews in Africa undeniably “played a colossal role in the history of the continent, one that is hugely disproportionate to their numbers” (xi).

His work, therefore, is a helpful complement to other historical texts on Africa, and any student of African history will be able to use Hull’s book as a source of tantalizing information demanding future study, whether in a dissertation, a monograph, or conference paper. For example, the author shows, but does not explain, the considerable involvement of African Jews in the trans-Atlantic, as opposed to the East African, slave trade. These

unexplained regional differences, along with other fascinating nuggets of information, act as a kind of historical tease for others to take up where he leaves off.

Yet it is worth asking whether Hull's reliance on secondary sources allows his own book to take African history into a new direction, or whether it merely regurgitates what has already been written. That is, if African Jews have received scant attention to date, why was Hull satisfied with consulting the small body of work that exists? Moreover, the book does not incorporate the most current research on Jews in Africa; for example, the section on Central Sahara and West African Sudan might have noted that al-Maghili's fervent hatred of Jews might have been caused, at least in part, by their having murdered his son. In addition, the examination of Judaism in Africa would have had more nuance if Hull had discussed how, as a consequence of historical factors, the religion has been practiced or abandoned over time.

Nevertheless, while African history is still missing a comprehensive and unified narrative that includes all of its actors in the methodological frame, this is a valuable source for all students of Jewish and of African history.

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George Weller. *Weller's War: A Legendary Foreign Correspondent's Saga of World War II on Five Continents*. Edited by Anthony Weller. New York: Crown, 2010. 656 pp. Photographs. Index. \$18.00. Paperback.

After Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Haile Selassie famously warned League of Nations members that unless they stood up to imperial expansion, they would be next. So much for early warnings. Six years later, Italy's defeat signaled the remarkable resilience of the battered British. What lessons could be taken from that? One, certainly, is that once war gets under way, truth is an early casualty. Rarely acknowledged, the British had a lot of help from a most unlikely source, the Belgian Congo, and nearly all those fighting on both sides were Africans.

George Weller's eyewitness reports bring this lost historical chapter alive. Weller arrived in the Congo in the summer of 1941, soon after a motley cavalcade, drawn mainly from Belgium's notorious Force Publique, had set out on a 2500-mile forced march across Africa to avenge the conquest of Belgium. Leapfrogging the continent in an aging Fokker, he caught up with them at the battlefield, interviewed survivors of the campaign, and then wound up with the Italians in retreat.

Outnumbered and outgunned, the Belgian forces evened the odds by adopting guerrilla tactics: