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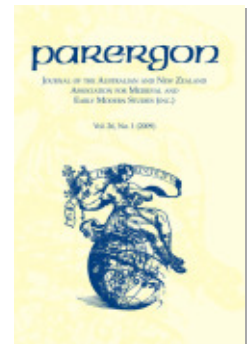
*The Ways of Jewish Martyrdom* (review)

Norman Simms

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concepts need to be more carefully teased out if we are to comprehend the distance between the mental worlds of the two societies.

In contrasting Cook's attitude to mapping with that of the Islanders, for instance, Gascoigne emphasizes Cook's commitment to what is presented as scientific surveying and claims that he failed to appreciate how Tupaia envisaged space, distance and direction. Certainly, this would be the appropriate official account to send to the Admiralty, but coastal pilots in Britain, even down to the mid-nineteenth century, used knowledge, written down in printed or private rutters, that had much in common with Tupaia's mental maps. Did Cook in his time as an apprentice and in merchant ships never encounter this?

This is nevertheless an easy-to-read book that stimulates readers to consider matters they had perhaps previously taken for granted and to go away and look for their own answers. In assessing its success one should, I think, say: 'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?'

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**Goldin, Simha**, *The Ways of Jewish Martyrdom* (Cursor Mundi 2), trans. Yigal Levin, C. Michael Copeland, ed., Turnhout, Brepols, 2008; hardback; pp. xiv, 399; 7 b/w figures; R.R.P €70.00; ISBN 9782503525235.

This is a book that is not like other scholarly books, and it is more important than most. As you can see from the bibliographical title-line above, it is not only a translation from Hebrew, but also a text that required an editor. My suspicion is that the manuscript was two or three, or more, times longer than the text we now have.

It is a book that is not like other scholarly books because, rather than claim objectivity and disinterestedness, it begins with an account of personal experience during the Gulf War of 1991 when Israel was subjected to sustained Iranian missile attacks. It concludes with a discussion of how Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora still remember and talk about their experiences during the *Shoah* when Jews, Judaism and Jewishness were close to annihilation. It is from this perspective that the author looks at Jewish history but also at Christian martyrology and pagan Judeophobia. Simha Goldin feels Jewish history as a Jew.

In a way, most of the chapters are repetitious and confusing, while, at the same time, the argument is intriguing and searching. Goldin is trying to

do many things, if not all at once, then in a process of interweaving and overlapping. The book seeks to explain Jewish martyrdom, *Kiddush ha-Shem*, by placing it in a number of contexts: the pagan and Christian traditions of the ancient and medieval worlds; the developing and shifting circumstances of Jewish life in different parts of Europe and the Mediterranean littoral; the emergent modern world; and contemporary events in Israel. It is for this reason that the same statement must be repeated in each new context, then modified, then extrapolated, and then evaluated.

Under the crisis of overwhelming persecution during the First and Second Crusades, the Jews of Ashkenaz, especially in the Rhineland cities, created new ways of confronting their oppressors and murderers. They constructed a sense of sanctifying the Holy Name through acts of collective suicide, with whole communities, families, and individuals performing these roles in public. But as Goldin shows, it was not so much the performance of these martyrdoms that distinguished Jewish men and women from their Christian or – as the contexts widen ever further – Islamic counterparts; as the way in which these deeds were memorialized, codified in chronicles, liturgical hymns, and other poetry. These new concepts of sanctification became internalized habits of feeling, thought, conduct and theological ideal.

And yet, two other things need to be taken into consideration. First, that previous and subsequent waves of persecution did not necessitate similar acts of self-murder, where mothers killed children, husbands slew their wives, and the surviving killer committed suicide. In other times and other places, Jews did not feel compelled to do such things; sometimes they accepted execution by persecuting authorities, if running away or bribery failed; sometimes they engaged in preventative deceptions, such as conversion or temporising. It depended on the nature and intensity of the threats.

Second, and most important of all, significant because here Goldin comes very close to what I have written about extensively as the process of midrashing, the Jewish response to efforts to make Judaism and/or Jews disappear through conversion, expulsion or genocide were continuous with the way in which they were taught to imagine their place in the world. That is, as a world of history, of Talmudic analysis and discussion, and of covenantal relationship with God and the Law.

Therefore, for all its other merits in historiography – describing, analysing, and comparing medieval texts and their generic relationship to Christian events and accounts – what is most valuable in this book centres on chapter

12 'Memory as Action' and chapter 13 'Theology and Memory' because it is here that the whole subject of *midrash* is focussed on. 'Jewish martyrs,' we are told at the start of chapter 13, 'of the Middle Ages used a variety of images in order to transmit and to internalize the message of sanctification of God's Name' (p. 325). How is explained at length, with many examples. For it is the process of memorialization, and then of transforming memory into a textualized experience that is understood and felt deeply as part of an ongoing rabbinical project of adjusting history to Judaism and Judaism to history.

Nevertheless, rich and exciting as these two chapters are – and they reverberate throughout the book – they do not tell the whole story. Goldin remains too much the professional historian to step very far outside the protocols of his craft to deal with the unconscious, oblique and implied dimensions of midrashing. Readers therefore should do more than stand in awe of the meticulous scholarship this book evinces. We should be provoked – the term to use is not 'joyfully' because of the tragic qualities of the subject – into greater and greater investigations. I cannot recommend this book too highly.

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**Hamrick, Stephen, *The Catholic Imaginary and the Cults of Elizabeth, 1558-1582*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009; hardback; pp. 232; 12 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754665885.**

In his fascinating book, Stephen Hamrick offers a chronological analysis of the poetry written in the first 25 years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign. Hamrick states that this period of poetic history has been much neglected by critics. It is also a time of religious turmoil enabling Hamrick to examine the texts through what he terms '*Reformation Petrarchanism*' (p. 3). Reformation Petrarchanism is a purposefully wide-ranging term that considers both a Protestant and Catholic imaginary within the narrow historical period being examined. It is a term that allows the book to analyse 'how Elizabethan poets ... combined Catholic and erotic discourses to fashion, refashion, and/or reject the political, religious, and courtly identities crafted for the Queen' (p. 2). Hamrick achieves this through combining a historicist, formalist and cultural-anthropological approach to examine the underrated poetry. However, the terms a Catholic and Protestant imaginary (that have psychological