

cooked erotic' (p. 165), enliven the dense argument that frequently moves from Lacan to a poem and back to Lacan, for the book is to some extent an assessment of the critical theory as well as an analytical study of the poetry.

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**Einbinder**, Susan L., *No Place of Rest: Jewish Literature, Expulsion, and the Memory of Medieval France* (Middle Ages), Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008; cloth; pp. 267; 2 illustrations; R.R.P. US\$55.00, £36.00; ISBN 9780812241150.

Close to half of this book is made up of notes, bibliography and index, but these scholarly materials truly enhance the analyses and discussions of the six constituent chapters, as well as Introduction and Epilogue. By diverting much of the technical matter related to her main argument, Einbinder gives a more powerful flow to her elegant text. In many places, it is eloquent and charming, rather than, as happens all too often these days, full of jargon and ideological sludge.

The main arguments may be set out as follows: the series of exiles and other disasters in the fourteenth century that displaced and shook to its foundations the Jewish communities of what is now the France of the Mediterranean coast seems to have left little or no direct record in the rabbinical writings that have survived. Nonetheless, in indirect form – through seemingly obscure and baroque poetry on biblical themes, especially in liturgical hymns, but also in medical texts and romantic lyrics – the history of people's experiences may be traced out, as can the attempts by communities to reconstitute themselves and their social and individual memories, and the specific cultural strengths of Jewish cultural discourses revealed.

In addition, Einbinder argues that re-examining the documentary record is also illuminating of the dynamics of Jewish cultural memory. In this she means both literary expressions themselves, in the sense of poetic, exegetical or scientific texts, and in the sense of physical manuscripts owned by particular individuals, transferred from place to place in the *diaspora*, and recreated by scribes, redactors and *ad hoc* scribblers of notes on the pages of these manuscripts and later printed versions. By so doing, the author finds it necessary, as she says, to trample modern interdisciplinary boundaries, thus

knocking down paradigms that set Ashekanzi against Sephardic, binary codes established both by the overwhelming of previous models of Jewishness when the Sephardic Diaspora at the end of fifteenth century exploded across Europe and the Eastern world and by the academic penchant for simplified codes to analyse circumstances in which only fragments of books and hallucinated memories of trauma remain.

Still further, this book addresses the problem of how to read poetry in styles the nineteenth-century Science of Judaism could not fathom in their positivistic search for meaning to justify the traditions of their people in Central Europe, and that also present difficulties for modernist literary prejudices and tastes shaped by Romantic and post-Romantic sensibilities. Going beyond Paul Zumthor's ingenious rhetorical readings of Christian ('secular') poetry in the medieval period – something in itself a revolutionary advance beyond the reading technologies of both classical and romantic criticism – Einbinder finds the Jewish search for stability and meaning in a world that appeared to have been shaken from its axis and evacuated of significance in the kinds of creativity most at odds with modernity in all its forms, in acrostics, pantogrammes and micrography. Rather than simplistic or mystical attempts to graft mythic dimensions on to catastrophic events or to replace traumatic memories with familiar biblical promises of messianic and apocalyptic revenge and renewal, these poets sought to make in and of their poetic lines an active, midrashic experience, one that at once generated meaning, stabilized the processes of thought through minimalist language, and 'elevate[d] social chaos to its truer spiritual meaning' (p. 52). The elitist authors and readers 'found in the formal difficulty and monotony of the pantogram a meditative tool, a linguistic challenge and a path to enlightenment' (p. 59).

Yet truth to tell, these efforts for the most part were lost, along with the memories they contained and the hopes they embodied. What did remain as traces, however, were usually occluded and misunderstood – and hence vehicles of a nostalgia and aspiration that could be shaped by subsequent disasters – but can be teased out again, as Einbinder demonstrates, in *piyyitim*, dietary manuals, and other seemingly unrelated documents. As she says, in almost her last sentence in the Epilogue, 'I have tried to convey in these pages that there is a way to read a series of forgotten texts and detect within them the echoes of the expulsion's trauma' (p. 162). She has succeeded better than she allows herself to hope – 'We can only hope that as we struggle to find the past, the future will someday look for us' (p. 162) – because her

models of scholarship to recoup lost histories of event and inscription can be generalized beyond the texts, authors and redactors she studies, and the ways of thinking and writing she begins to illuminate, can once again inspire us in our creative engagement with the traumas of our experience.

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**Ewan, Elizabeth and Janay Nugent**, eds, *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; hardback; pp. 206; 4 b/w illustrations, 3 tables; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754660491.

Scholarship on medieval and early modern Scotland has usually focussed on political, religious and economic studies. Over the last twenty years, social and cultural history has made its mark, followed closely by gender and women's history. However, there is still a huge gap in the historiography and as the editors emphatically state, 'the study of the medieval and early modern family is still in its infancy' (p. 1). This could be perceived as somewhat strange considering the family, as a foundation for order, played a pivotal role as 'the building block of all other social institutions' (p. 8). The interdisciplinary essays in this collection have been combined in a text that assesses the importance of the family by expanding on broader historiographical debates.

Section one's four essays detail many of the sources available to the scholar of the family. Cynthia Neville explores medieval charters to garner information about the local and private concerns of families with regard to land and property. Such evidence demonstrates the patriarchal structures of Scottish society while highlighting the role of women in the disposition of landed estates, as wives and widows. As Neville explains, the emotional side of family life still remains hidden but the charters illuminate other areas of family life, such as religion, kinship ties, and family management.

Marriage is a key to any discussion of family relations, however, as Katie Barclay argues, marital relationships have come under little scrutiny until very recently. Using the medium of ballads, she examines marital relationships between 1650-1750 in order to explore attitudes towards and tensions between