ADVANCING JEWISH THOUGHT

Mosaic

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EDITOR'S LETTER

This week in *Mosaic*

Jonathan Silver looks back at the week

OBSERVATIONS

The Best Books of 2022, Chosen by Mosaic Authors

Featuring wars, peacemakers, two cultures, pogroms, plays, four ages, wild problems, caves, magic, letters, American conservatives, liberal parents, radical children, and more.

The Maccabees, the Greeks, and the Origins of the Conflict Between Hellenism and Hebraism

What the Maccabees called their enemies reveals much about how both cultures saw themselves and what the conflict between them meant for the world.

+ The best of the editors' picks of the week

Dear friends,

Artificial intelligence meets the manuscripts

It seems as if each week one hears of a shiny new technological innovation promising to upend some human endeavor or industry. Artificial intelligence was, until recently, a distant capability that would affect large corporate and mathematical operations, like financial technology. It was abstract, and far from the experience of most people.

That seems to have changed. A few months ago, one started to see AI-generated "art," or at least AI-generated images that reference art, across the most ephemeral and trivial of places: social media. Some program enjoyed a burst of popularity when, scanning a user-provided image or going by a user-provided text prompt, it could then display that person in different artistic styles, with arresting and bold colors—as if a human artist were commissioned, on the basis of a photograph or a description, to render you as a pagan leaf deity.

Then came another program that could write essays on an astonishing array of subjects—indeed, on *any* subject. One need only describe a topic and question and the program would scour the internet or its training database, synthesize information, and produce something that looks disturbingly like an essay. Or rather, an essay composed by AI looks as much like an essay as an image produced by AI looks like art—an amusing trick, but without a human touch and without any of the sign or signal of a soul at work.

It's with that in mind that I was intrigued by the announcement yesterday that the European Research Council has awarded 10 million euros to a group of researchers in France and Israel to develop AI-powered methods to analyze medieval Hebrew manuscripts. It's already possible to undertake relatively comprehensive searches of printed material, but illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, written by hand, have until now eluded that kind of technology.

The project, known by its acronym, MIDRASH, promises to make freely available to the public the ability to conduct comprehensive searches across an enormous corpus of already scanned and digitized collections. Even the National Library of Israel is participating.

Scholars will no doubt gain from this new capacity; for those who learn how to use it, a great many synthetic connections are ripe for discovery. Want to understand how an idea changed over time? Want to understand how a specific ruling was interpreted in one location or another? Years—*years!*—of

labor, and travel, and access could be saved. An endeavor of a lifetime could be done from the kitchen table after you put the kids to bed.

We should gratefully appreciate all that can be gained from the world of letters that is now dawning before us. But we should also linger for a moment on what is lost in transformations of this kind. In all of those years—*years!*—of laboring over handwritten manuscripts, scholars learned languages and mapped the intellectual contours of societies and civilizations. For a scholar to dedicate his life to an abstruse point of legal commentary might seem pedantic and small. But done well, a lifetime dedicated to something pedantic and small is a wormhole into the wider theological and cultural world that produced it. Things can get better and worse at the same time. We can hope that technology can multiply the force of human achievement, and at the same time mourn the eclipse of that deep, slow, life-shaping work that was inefficiency's necessary consequence.

Yavan at Hanukkah

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the defeat of its Greek occupiers. But, actually, as Philologos points out in his column this week, the occupiers weren't Greeks exactly. They were Seleucids, part of an empire named for Seleucus I, a general in Alexander's army.

This reminder provides an occasion for the best language columnist in the world to take up the question of who the Yavanim—the Greeks, in biblical and contemporary Hebrew—were, according to Jewish literary history. It's an example of the kind of writing that requires a lifetime of study to produce, and I doubt that any algorithm could ever knit together sources and ideas with the light touch and penetrating acuity of Philologos.

Mosaic authors recommend their favorite books of 2022

As we always do at the end of the year, we asked some regular *Mosaic* authors to recommend this week the best books that they read this year. Featuring wars, peacemakers, pogroms, plays, wild problems, caves, magic, letters, American conservatives, liberal parents, radical children, and many more themes, too, if you're looking for a last-minute holiday present, here's what Elliott Abrams, Tamara Berens, Andrew Koss, Daniel Polisar, Neil Rogachevsky, Sarah Rindner, and I myself have to recommend.

An evening in Nachlaot

This Wednesday we premiered our dramatic reading of *The Dawning of the Day,* the novel by the Israeli rabbi and author Haim Sabato, the subject of our December essay. Before the reading began, we were thrilled to share not only personal greetings from Rabbi Sabato himself but also a literary parable that he composed just for us. And afterwards, I was joined by the

rabbi Daniel Bouskila and the award-winning novelist Ruby Namdar to discuss Sabato and his work. Subscribers were sent a private link to the recording of the whole program yesterday. Later next week, we'll bring it to the website, too.

If you enjoyed the reading, or any of this work, would you please consider donating in support of *Mosaic*? Your support is crucial to producing writing and thinking like this, and to bringing it to people who need it—who need to understand their connection to Jewish history, to modern Jewish culture, and to Israel.

Next week, we'll be reviewing highlights from *Mosaic* in 2022, from Israeli national security to Jewish culture to American policy and law. I'll see you there.

With every good wish,

Jonathan Silver
Editor
Mosaic

The Best Books of 2022, Chosen by Mosaic Authors

Featuring wars, peacemakers, two cultures, pogroms, plays, four ages, wild problems, caves, magic, letters, American conservatives, liberal parents, radical children, and more.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS, TAMARA BERENS, ANDREW KOSS, DANIEL POLISAR, NEIL ROGACHEVSKY, SARAH RINDNER AND JONATHAN SILVER

DECEMBER 19 2022

About the authors

Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and is the chairman of the Tikvah Fund.

Tamara Berens, a former Krauthammer Fellow at *Mosaic*, is the director of young professional programming at the Tikvah Fund.

Andrew N. Koss, a senior editor of *Mosaic*, is writing a book about the Jews of Vilna during World War I.

Daniel Polisar is the executive vice-president and a member of the faculty at Shalem College in Jerusalem.

Neil Rogachevsky teaches at the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University and writes a monthly column for *Mosaic*.

Sarah Rindner is a writer and educator. She lives in Israel.

Jonathan Silver is the editor of *Mosaic*..

To mark the close of 2022, we asked several of our writers to name the best books they've read this year, and briefly to explain their choices. Their answers appear below. (Unless otherwise noted, all books were published in 2022. Classic books are listed by their original publication dates.)

Elliott Abrams

For history buffs and Anglophiles, Daniel Todman's two-volume *Britain's War* (Oxford, 2016 and 2020, 1,824pp., $74.90) deserves the prizes it has won. No other book about Britain in the Second World War contains as complete (or as fascinating) a description of how the war was experienced by those living in the UK during those terrible years. Will Inboden's new book about Ronald Reagan's foreign policy, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (Dutton 608pp., $35), exemplifies judicious and balanced historical writing. Organized chronologically rather than thematically, it describes as no other previous work has how Reagan's foreign policy came together and how the great successes (and some failures) of his administration came to pass.

Not having any favorite current novelists, I've been rereading the fiction of Anthony Trollope. Last year, I recommended his Palliser novels. This year

I've been reading his six-volume *Chronicles of Barsetshire series* (Oxford, 1855-1867, $91.70). Trollope's fiction never disappoints. If you've never read it, correct the error. The characters, social commentary, plotting, and wit are endlessly rewarding.

Tamara Berens

Matthew Continetti's *The Right: The Hundred Year War for American Conservatism* (Basic, 496pp., $32) is a masterful history of the conservative movement and Republican politics—spanning the highs and lows of one century, documenting successful and failed attempts to sway conservatism one way or another, and uncovering the smallest (and most important) of details. In his review in *Mosaic,* Rabbi Meir Soloveichik mentions the dramatic image of Ronald Reagan's silhouette that adorns the cover. It is striking that Reagan cuts such a recognizable figure even from the back. Which other president would we recognize from only a suit, a lock of hair, and an ear?

I approached *The Right* hoping to understand better what went wrong with conservatism after Reagan, the man who first endeared me to America itself. Continetti explains that the War on Terror of the 2000s could never be the unifying force that was the cold war in Reagan's day, which brought together the religious right, ex-Communists, neoconservatives, and classical liberals. However, his book also suggests that Reagan himself should be viewed as an aberration for the right, and perhaps even the conservative movement. His sunny disposition and popular appeal held together the disparate factions, which have since splintered almost completely.

Continetti leaves no event, magazine, or person who influenced American conservatism untouched. His treatment of the movement reminds me of a line in a T.S. Eliot poem: "Like a patient etherized upon a table." While Continetti has his own opinions on what directions he would like American conservativism to take, he spares no faction within the movement his criticism, even those he views favorably. *The Right* left me with a much greater appreciation for the magnitude of the right's achievements—good and bad.

I've long admired the work of Gertrude Himmelfarb; *The De-Moralization of Society and One Nation, Two Cultures* are among my favorites. Yet I must admit that I've avoided Himmelfarb's much-praised work on Britain—the country where I was born, raised, and educated—and especially on British philo-Semitism, because I was afraid of agreeing with it. It had been my view that America is the great philo-Semitic nation, and that, unlike other elements of American culture and the American political tradition, English Protestantism has little to do with that.

But this year I finally read *The People of the Book: Philosemitism in England, from Cromwell to Churchill* (Encounter, 2011, 183pp. $23.95), in which Himmelfarb provides a history of philo-Semitism, Zionism, and the eman-

cipation or political toleration of the Jews in Britain. From her treatment of figures from the more obscure Henry Finch and Robert Grant to the more familiar Oliver Cromwell, Winston Churchill, and George Eliot, I came to see that I was wrong about British philo-Semitism. As Himmelfarb states at the book's close, this history should recall England to its past glory—but it "may also recall Jews to a glory they themselves tend to forget."

Reading Himmelfarb makes it even harder for me to contend with modern Britain, which is so devoid of the meaningful philo-Semitism and Zionism that Himmelfarb beautifully explores. While toleration thankfully remains, it has lost its former animating spirit. Even pro-Israel politicians tiptoe around British-Jewish support for Israel, assuring the British public that British Jews have nothing in common with IDF soldiers.

Himmelfarb's essay on the novelist George Eliot's life and her key Zionist text, *Daniel Deronda*, should be indispensable for all Jewish readers (and students of literature, though the text's Zionist themes were too often disparaged by literary critics). Himmelfarb has a stand-alone book available for purchase, *The Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot*, which is marvelous too. As Himmelfarb points out, Eliot understood Jewish nationality and spirituality better than most Jews. Himmelfarb writes, quoting from Eliot: "Nationality, then, is of the essence of Judaism. The question is whether there are enough worthy Jews, 'some new Ezras, some modern Maccabees,' who by their heroic example would set about making their people 'once more one among the nations.'"

Andrew Koss

While World War I officially ended at 11:00 am on November 11, 1918, the war continued in much of Eastern Europe until 1922, in the form of several overlapping, confusing, and bloody conflicts that are little known in the West. During these wars, soldiers on various sides—sometimes joined by local civilians—slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Jews, first in pogroms and then in what might better be called mass executions. Jeffrey Veidlinger skillfully puts together the wealth of available information about these episodes in his highly readable, richly detailed, and horrifying *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918–1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (Metropolitan, 2021, 480pp., $35). Scholars will no doubt continue to dispute Veidlinger's various interpretative moves, but such debates are only secondary to the great service he has done in telling a story every Jew, and everyone who cares about the fate of the Jews and of Europe, should be aware of. I recommend reading the book alongside Henry Abramson's truly excellent *A Prayer for the Government.*

In an entirely different vein, I'd like to recommend my friend Lazarre Seymour Simckes's two-volume *My Collected Plays* (398pp., $35.64). These plays are simultaneously bizarre, challenging, wildly creative, entertaining, and sometimes downright frustrating. Several take up explicitly Jewish themes—I'm especially partial to "Ten Best Martyrs of the Year"—and

all are a product of what one might call a Jewish sensibility, informed by a professional knowledge of psychology and extensive reading of midrash.

I first became aware of the work of the South African novelist Alan Paton when listening to a lecture by Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, which is alone evidence that he is worth reading. This year, I read Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Scribner, 1945, 316pp., $17), a breathtakingly beautiful and moving work about people caught up in South Africa's tragedy, exposing the many evils of apartheid in a way that is never didactic or propagandistic but always humane. There is a powerful Old Testament feel to the book's style, perhaps befitting a work whose hero is a priest. As it is the story of a righteous man's suffering, it would be easy to compare it to Job, but more than anything it put me in mind of the book of Ruth.

For those who read Hebrew, I'd also like to recommend another classic I finished this year, Rabbi Shimon Schwab's collected writings on the Pentateuch, *Ma'yan Beit ha-Sho'evah* (Mesorah, 1994, 483pp, $29.99). Schwab (1908-1995) was the scion—in a metaphorical rather than genetic sense—of a chain of rabbis going back to Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the founders of Modern Orthodoxy in 19th-century Germany. Himself born in Hirsch's city, Frankfurt-am-Main, Schwab was also educated in East European yeshivas, and combines these two traditions. While I must admit that I find Schwab's opinions about Zionism terribly misguided, anyone willing to look past that will see a unique and truly original religious thinker.

Daniel Polisar

This year, I read a number of new books that will remain with me well into the future. In narrowing the field down to my top picks, I ended up with four, all non-fiction.

Michael Mandelbaum's *The Four Ages of American Foreign Policy: Weak Power, Great Power, Superpower, Hyperpower* (Oxford, 624pp., $34.95), a magisterial work that covers the two-and-a-half centuries from 1765 to 2015, is likely to be the definitive treatment of its subject for many decades to come. Writing in a clear, engaging, and deceptively simple style, Mandelbaum deftly weaves together insights drawn from diplomatic history, military affairs, economics, politics, the biographies of greater and lesser leaders, literature, and culture. For virtually every period and key episode he touches, he provides a readable and often gripping account of the major developments embedded within a powerful theoretical framework and chock full of new understandings of seemingly familiar events. Readers of this work will emerge with a perspective that will guide not only the way they see America's past, but also its current policies and the prospects for its future and that of the world it will continue to shape.

Wild Problems: A Guide to the Decisions That Define Us (Portfolio, 224pp., $27) is a slim volume by Russ Roberts, a friend and colleague blessed with the remarkable ability to offer thought-provoking treatments that draw on

his training as an economist and the breathtakingly wide range of his erudition, honed as host of the EconTalk podcast for over a decade and a half. Like his earlier *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life*, Roberts's most recent book draws on the ideas of great thinkers, the findings of more contemporary scholars, and his own judgment and moral compass, which he combines in order to help readers face the daunting challenge of becoming better, more fulfilled human beings. *Wild Problems* exposes the limits of conventional approaches to making choices based on the accumulation of data and the weighing and pros and cons, and argues persuasively that in addressing the big issues all of us must confront, we need to rely on bedrock principles, tradition, and intuition, and to be guided by a belief in our own fundamental decency, our ability to become what we aspire to be, and the possibilities of our own flourishing. This book is at once deeply inspiring and eminently practical.

Matti Friedman's *Who By Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai* (Spiegel & Grau, 224pp., $27) passed the most stringent test for readability of any book I can recall in the last two decades. I was on an overnight flight from Los Angeles to Israel, had been working and reading non-stop for several hours, and despite my exhaustion decided I would stay awake through the landing rather than falling into the fitful sleep with which such plane rides provide me. I started a number of books, none of which captured my attention or staved off my growing weariness, until I turned to the latest offering by Friedman—whose writing and speaking I have always found to be compelling.

I read *Who By Fire* cover to cover and came away with a far better appreciation for the terror experienced by Israel's soldiers during the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, their human decency and vulnerability, and the breathtaking, understated heroism they showed. I also grew in my appreciation for Leonard Cohen, who for good reason earned iconic status in the Jewish state despite and in some ways because of his complicated relationship with his faith and his people. Friedman's book, like the subjects it describes, is beautiful, haunting, and profoundly memorable.

My final choice is in some ways a new book and in others a classic, *Theodor Herzl: Zionist Writings* (Library of the Jewish People, $134.95) edited by Gil Troy, is a three-volume work whose nearly 3,000 pages cover the rise of the Zionist idea (1894-1896), the creation of the Zionist movement (1897-1900), and Herzl's transformation into a Zionist statesman (1901-1904). As I've lectured and taught about Herzl for many years, I had previously read much of the material in these volumes, but nonetheless found this collection to be a superb vehicle for thinking anew about the once-in-a-millennium leader without whom there would almost certainly be no Jewish state today. The power of this set resides not only in its highly readable and beautifully laid-out translations, but especially in the bold decision to organize Herzl's works chronologically so that the reader can see the development of the man and the movement, with all the drama and complexity this entailed.

Another crucial element that contributes to the reader's understanding are the dozen introductions Troy authored as part of this undertaking, beginning with a lengthy essay on "Theodor Herzl and the Jews' Leap of Hope" and continuing with pieces introducing the challenges, developments, and major writings for each of the eleven years of Herzl's whirlwind of Zionist activity, from 1894 until his untimely death at age forty-four. This collection has the potential to bring back to center stage, for English readers, a towering figure who remains a powerful model for Jewish leaders and for nationalists today.

Neil Rogachevsky

I am exercising my privilege as *Mosaic* columnist to recommend once again Fouad Ajami's posthumously published When *Magic Failed: A Memoir of a Lebanese Childhood, Caught Between East and West* (Bombardier, 256pp., $28). Much more than a simple memoir, the book is an extraordinary meditation on political modernity, tradition, political failure in the Middle East, and the promise of America.

Amid a plethora of new books on the America-Israel relationship, Jeffrey Herf's *Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State*, 1945-1949 (Cambridge, 450pp., $39.99) stands out. Looking at the archival evidence, Herf shows that opposition to Zionism was much more deeply ingrained in the upper echelons of American government after World War II than has typically been understood. U.S. support for the establishment of Israel was in large measure due to Harry Truman's courage and judgment. Herf's excellent history reminds us that strong U.S.-Israel relations were not inevitable.

In *His Greatest Speeches: How Lincoln Moved the Nation* (St. Martin's, 2021, 224pp., $27.99), Diana Schaub presents a line-by-line reading of the Lyceum address, the Gettysburg address, and the second inaugural. These speeches belong not only to America but to the ages, and Schaub draws out the extraordinary subtlety of Abraham Lincoln's views on political and theological matters.

Finally, I'd like to mention Richard Velkley's allegorical tragicomic novel *Sarastro's Cave: Letters from the Recent Past* (2021, Mercer University, 100pp., $20), which depicts the promises and perils of the "philosophic life" in our post-enlightenment age.

Sarah Rindner

Until recently, I was unaware that Cormac McCarthy—perhaps one of America's greatest living novelists—had much to say about Jews or Judaism. But his new novel, *The Passenger* (Knopf, 400pp., $30), published sixteen years after his previous book, concerns two Jewish siblings whose last name is Western. Despite the nominal Jewishness of the main characters, one a deep-sea salvage diver, the other a mathematical savant, McCa-

rthy's intriguing and challenging new novel is a reflection of the crisis and decay of Western, largely Christian, civilization. Bobby and Alicia Western are intimately connected to the central moments of civilizational collapse: members of their family were killed in the Holocaust, and their scientist father worked on the development of the nuclear bomb. The siblings also stand apart as outsiders and observers.

McCarthy's prose is beautiful and measured, employing his characteristic biblical terseness to pack maximum effect into the fewest possible words. In *The Passenger*, and in its newly published companion novel *Stella Maris,* McCarthy seeks to diagnose social and spiritual maladies and even probe the possibility of a cure. It's interesting that he attempts to do this while repeatedly emphasizing the Jewishness of his sympathetic main characters, even if his engagement with the actual substance of Judaism does not stretch far beyond that. As one character observes to the sister Alicia, "an outlier such as yourself always raises again the question as to where this ship is headed and why."

Ruth Wisse's new translated and edited version of Chaim *Grade's My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner* (Toby, 144pp., $19.95), which originally appeared in *Mosaic,* has now been published as a standalone book that includes the original Yiddish. The edition is a gift to students of Jewish literature, and to anyone interested in engaging in the eternal Jewish debate which is adjudicated within. The story tracks an ongoing dialogue between two East European yeshiva graduates as they meet before, during, and after World War II. Hersh Rasseyner is a passionate and principled adherent of the Musar movement, which, as the translation explains, "gives special importance to ethical and ascetic elements in Judaism." His interlocutor, Chaim Vilner, has left his yeshiva past for a more urbane, cosmopolitan life as a secular Yiddish writer. Both suffer greatly in the Shoah, yet their experiences only reinforce, rather than undermine, the firmness of their convictions.

Wisse's updated version is based on Milton Himmelfarb's iconic translation for *Commentary* but also contains key changes, particularly in Wisse's preservation of certain traditional biblical and rabbinic phraseology, giving the language of the story a uniquely Jewish texture that was downplayed in the earlier translation. Wisse also includes the normally excised interlude with Rasseyner's fervent student Yehoshua, which connects the world of *The Quarrel* to the Orthodox world of today.

A pleasant recent day trip to the northern Israeli town Zikhron Yaakov inspired me to pick up a remarkable book by Hillel Halkin called *A Strange Death* (Public Affairs, 388pp., $26). Published in 2005, it depicts the complicated and fascinating recent history that lies beneath this seemingly sleepy pastoral town. Zikhron Yaakov was famously home to the erudite and talented Aaronsohn family, who also joined the Nili spy ring during World War I. Believing Britain would be more sympathetic to the establishment of a Jewish homeland, Nili sought to undermine Ottoman sov-

ereignty in what was then Palestine. The beautiful and courageous Sarah Aaronsohn was famously betrayed to the Ottoman authorities, resulting in her interrogation, torture, and subsequent suicide.

Halkin brilliantly explores the lingering mystery of Sarah's betrayal, possibly at the hands of one of her Jewish neighbors. To do so, he uncovers simmering resentments within Zikhron Yaakov, class tensions among Jewish immigrants of various backgrounds, relationships with surrounding Arab farmers and Bedouin tribes, and local romantic and economic drama. He performs this investigation as a historian, as a close reader of literature and texts, and as a curious neighbor who happened to move to Zikhron Yaakov in the 1970s unaware of this complex history. As a recent American transplant to an Israeli community not too far from this one, I can relate to being a newcomer in a place where past and present seem to coexist simultaneously and where one's casual observation of tension among neighbors may lead to an encounter with the past stranger than anything one would have ever expected.

Jonathan Silver

The need to worship is an inextricable aspect of the human condition. That is why what sometimes looks like secularization is instead the adoption of alternative objects of devotion. In his 2022 book *Bad Religion*, Ross Douthat described how America doesn't have *too much* or *too little* religion, but argued instead that modern political and cultural heresies have coopted traditional forms and institutions.

American Jewry is not immune to this kind of cultural transposition, and no congregation on the denominational spectrum is unaffected by this. Traditional religious communities now face a choice. They can help restore our social order, or they can be force-multipliers of our social unraveling. If the country is going to benefit from its religious congregations, those congregations are going to have to embrace a more confident, countercultural ethos. Religious leaders will need to remember that their highest obligations are higher than America's culture wars. And so my first recommendation this year is a set of weekly parashah commentaries that are self-consciously presented as an alternative and counterweight to the modes and orders of contemporary society. Norman Lamm's *Derashot Ledorot* (Maggid, 1,120pp., $124) are published in five volumes, each corresponding to one book of the Hebrew Bible.

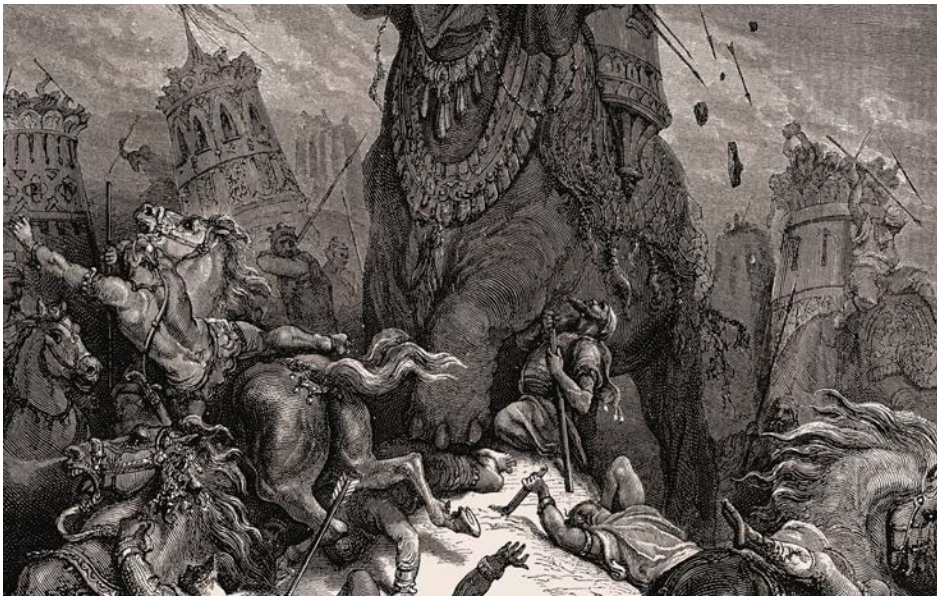
My second recommendation is also related to the American character. Scholars, political figures, and media personalities, no less than social-media conspiracists seem to believe that the enduring strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship is a function of American Jewry. And of course, this is also a cherished fable that American Jews hold of themselves. Walter Russell Mead's *The Arc of a Covenant The United States, Israel, and the Fate of the Jewish People* (Knopf, 672pp., $35) is the latest, and perhaps the most comprehensive, attempt to explain why that isn't so. America's sympathy

for the idea of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel is a fascinating mirror in whose reflection readers can learn about how America understands itself.

There are many religious and cultural affinities between American Christianity and the Israel of its imagining, and these connections are deeply rooted in American history. Mead tells that cultural story well, but his best chapters unspool the American discovery of Israel's political utility during the cold war. If you liked Michael Oren's 2008 *Power, Faith, and Fantasy,* or Samuel Goldman's 2018 *God's Country*, you'll find much to admire in *The Arc of a Covenant*.

My third recommendation honors a writer and friend of *Mosaic* that we lost this year. Newsrooms, universities, and businesses large and small are all beset by a rising generation, implacably devoted to progressive and radical causes, setting their sights on the ideological impurities of their elders. The pattern of the young visiting revenge on the old is not new; it, and its social ramifications, comprise the theme of Book VIII of Plato's *Republic*. But no one in post-war America observed this timeless generational dynamic more accutely than Midge Decter, the author, editor, and essayist who passed away in May.

In *Liberal Parents, Radical Children* (Coward McCann, 1975, 248pp.), she portrays how the parents of the dropouts, druggies, sexual revolutionaries, and radicals of her day were themselves complicit in engendering the habits of mind and heart that most bothered them in their children. The sins of the fathers visited upon the sons, indeed. Though the book is addressed to the rising generation, it can be read with even more profit by all those who have a hand in shaping the tastes and passions of the young.



From Death of Eleazer *by Gustave Doré, 1866. Wikimedia.*

PHILOLOGOS

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About Philologos

Philologos, the renowned Jewish-language columnist, appears twice a month in *Mosaic*.

The Maccabees, the Greeks, and the Origins of the Conflict Between Hellenism and Hebraism

What the Maccabees called their enemies reveals much about how both cultures saw themselves and what the conflict between them meant for the world.

"In the days of Matityahu, . . . the wicked kingdom of Greece rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah," begins Al ha-Nisim, the "For the Miracles" prayer that is said during these days of Hanukkah. The revolt of the Maccabees was of course not a revolt against the country we call Greece, nor did "the wicked kingdom of Greece," *malkhut Yavan ha-r'sha'ah* in the Hebrew of the prayer, rule that country. This kingdom was the Seleucid empire, a monarchy in west Asia founded by Seleucus I, a general in the army of Alexander the Great who took control of most of its vast Asian conquests after Alexander's death in 323 BCE. Although the empire's eastern territories were soon lost, its western half was still intact when Antiochus IV, Seleucus I's great-great-great-grandson and the villain of the Hanukkah story, was crowned in its capital of Antioch in 175 BCE, eight years before the Maccabean revolt broke out.

Indeed, while *Yavan* is the word for Greece in both modern and pre-modern Hebrew, it did not in its earliest usage denote mainland Greece at all. This is clear from the genealogical lists in the tenth chapter of Genesis, which attempt to trace the descent of the known peoples of the earth following its repopulation by Noah's sons after the flood. In dividing humanity into three major groups based on language, race, and geography—the

descendants of Shem or the Semitic peoples of the Middle East, the descendants of Ham or the peoples of Africa, and the descendants of Yefet or the Indo-European peoples of southern Europe and Asia Minor—the Bible says of the latter: "The sons of Yefet were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Yavan and Tuval and Meshekh and Tiras. . . . And the sons of Yavan were Elisha and Tarshish and Kittim and Dodanim. These then split into the isles of the Gentiles, each according to its language and its family."

Putting aside the question of whose ancestors Gomer, Magog, Madai, Tuval, Meshekh, and Tiras were, Yavan is evidently the progenitor of the inhabitants of the Greek islands of the Mediterranean. His son Elisha can be identified with Alashiya, the name of Cyprus in ancient Hittite, Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Egyptian; though the identity of Tarshish is uncertain, Kittim is probably either the Greek-speaking Cypriot settlement of Kition or a scribal miscopying of Kretim (Crete); and Dodanim, spelled Rodanim in a parallel passage in the book of Chronicles, most likely refers to the large Greek island of Rhodes. None of these names refer to anywhere on the Greek mainland.

And with where is Yavan himself to be associated? Here we need to turn from Hebrew genealogical mythology to its Greek counterpart, beginning with the Noah-like figure of Deucalion, who alone survived a great flood with his wife Pyrrha. The two had a son named Hellen (not to be confused with the Helen of the Trojan War), the ancestor of the Hellenes or Greeks, who in turn had three sons, Dorus, Aeolus, and Xuthus. Xuthus fathered Achaeus and Ion, or Iáfon in the name's older pronunciation—and thus are accounted for all four of the population groups into which the ancient Greeks, divided themselves: the Dorians, the Aeolians, the Achaeans, and the Ionians.

From mythology, we now proceed to ancient Greek historical tradition. This held that when the Dorians invaded mainland Greece from the north and overran it, the Ionians or Iáfonians, then living in the Peloponnese and the area around Athens, fled their homeland and migrated eastward across the Aegean Sea to settle on the western coast of what is today Turkey, and on some of the islands that face it. (The Ionian Sea, which lies on the other side of Greece, has no apparent connection with the Ionians and it is unclear why their name was attached to it.)

This migration was probably concluded by 1000 BCE, by which time the Ionians were firmly established in their new home. Sailors, traders, and merchants, they came to be among the wealthiest and most cultivated of Greek speakers, and their main cities, such as Miletus and Ephesus, were cultural and intellectual centers of the ancient Greek world; the 8th-century Homer was an Ionian, as were such 6th-century pre-Socratic philosophers as Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Anaxagoras. Although, politically, there was never any kingdom of Ionia, the separate city-states of the region were organized in an Ionian League that kept its independ

ence until conquered by Cyrus the Great in 546 and incorporated into a Persian satrapy known in old Iranian as Yauna.

Yauna resembles Yavan, as do other names for the land of the Ionians—or for the ancient Greeks (or for Greece itself)—in various ancient tongues and their modern derivatives. The Assyrians knew of a people living on the coast of Asia Minor called the Ia'amanu. To the Babylonians, these were the Yamanaya. Egyptian texts speak of seacoast-dwellers to the north called the Ywnj (ancient Egyptian was written without its vowels). When Alexander the Great invaded India, the Greeks under his command were termed Yavana by the natives, and an Indo-Greek kingdom with the Sanskrit name of Yavanarajya, the kingdom of the Yavana, reigned until the start of the Common Era. Greece itself was (and still is) Yunan in Arabic and in many of the Arabic-influenced languages of southeast Asia.

What happened, it would seem, took place in three stages. In the first of these, ancient peoples living in geographical proximity to the Ionians learned that they called themselves Iònes or Iáfones. It was at this stage that the name Iáfon must have become known to the authors of Genesis, since the "v" of Yavan is the not-yet-elided "f" of Iáfon.

The Ionians were the first Greek speakers encountered by the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean—who, subsequently coming into contact with other Greeks, called all of them Ionians and passed the term on to the interior of Asia. This was stage 2 of the process, as can be seen in the Indian term "Yavanas," though Alexander's soldiers came from mainland Greece. This was also the time of the composition of *Al ha-Nisim*, in which *malkhut Yavan* refers to a Greek-speaking monarchy in Syria. Only in stage 3 did Yavan come to signify, as it does nowadays, mainland Greece.

The ancient Greeks themselves, with their wanderlust and love of planting new colonies all over the Mediterranean world and beyond, were indifferent to the distinction between mainland Greece and its offshoots. Greece was not so much a physical place for them as it was the home of a language and a culture, and wherever these struck root, so, from their point of view, did Greece. "One by one," wrote the historian Will Durant, "these [Greek] colonies took form until Greece was no longer the narrow peninsula of Homeric days but a strangely loose association of independent cities scattered from Africa to Thrace and from Gibraltar to the eastern end of the Black Sea. . . . Through these busy centers of vitality and intelligence the Greeks spread the seeds of that subtle and precarious luxury called civilization, without which life would have no beauty and history no meaning."

The Maccabees were not worshipers of beauty and thought the meaning of history lay elsewhere. But for them, too, Greece, or Yavan, to use their word, was less a place than a culture and spirit that they stood in opposition to. They had their own idea of civilization, and the conflict between Hellenism and Hebraism, so fecundating for the development of the Western world, started with them.

Reforms to the Law of Return Are Not an Attack on American Jewry

DECEMBER 22, 2022
From Eugene Kontorovich at *Times of Israel*

On the agenda of the new Knesset, which will first convene on Monday, is a bill to narrow the scope of the Law of Return, which at present guarantees citizenship to anyone with a single Jewish grandparent. Opponents of the reforms in both Israel and the U.S. have condemned the proposed changes in harsh terms, and claimed that it will drive a wedge between Israel and the Diaspora. **Eugene Kontorovich** argues that the facts do not support such assertions:

> [The] original law of return was adopted in 1950 and is part of Israel's foundational principles. It allowed anyone who is Jewish or has a Jewish parent to receive citizenship upon immigration. In 1970 that law was broadened to include people with only one Jewish grandparent, regardless of whether they were considered Jews under Jewish religious law, and it is that amendment that is being debated. Critics of the reform . . . are relying on several misrepresentations about the proposal.
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> The first myth is that the amendment would change Israel's definition of who is a Jew, disqualifying people currently considered as such under Israeli law. This is simply not true: the grandparent clause does not relate to the question of "who is a Jew," the status of Reform conversions, or other sensitive topics. That is because the 1970 amendment does not define the patrilineal grandchildren of Jews as "Jews," but rather specifically as non-Jews who are nevertheless included in the Law of Return. The amendment made no change to determinations of status, nor would its removal.
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> A second myth is that the amendment would be an insult to American Jews, or dampen American *aliyah*. . . . Tens of thousands of Jews have made *aliyah* from the U.S. in the past decade—and only 67 of them did so under the grandparent clause, according to new research by my colleague Netanel Fisher. Many of those 67 would have been independently eligible for citizenship through other family ties.
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> The proposed amendment is motivated largely by immigration from Eastern Europe. . . . Today, the law is principally used by people from the former Soviet Union. Close to three-quarters of recent immigrants from these countries are not Jewish. The result of this in recent decades has been significant growth in a population in Israel that not only is not halachically Jewish, but much of which does not regard itself as Jewish. Indeed, some of them are practicing Christians.

Breaking the Idols of Oslo Made the Abraham Accords Possible

DECEMBER 20, 2020
From Jonathan Tobin at *Commentary*

On the American side, the three key players in one of the greatest diplomatic breakthroughs in the history of the modern Middle East seemed to have singularly insufficient qualifications: Jared Kushner was then-President Trump's son-in-law; David Friedman and Jason Greenblatt had served as Trump's lawyers before he entered politics. **Jonathan Tobin** reviews the three men's memoirs, along with that of one of Friedman's aides, and compares their achievements to those of their supposedly better-equipped predecessors:

> The American foreign-policy establishment called the shots on Middle East issues in every White House and State Department up until January 2017. And its members believed that the conflict between Jews and Arabs over possession of the tiny strip of land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River was the key to getting Arabs and Muslims to drop their hostility to the United States.
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> The Middle East experts who served in each of [the previous] administrations, as well as those who filled Washington's think tanks and mainstream and elite media, shared the belief that there was only one way to achieve that goal. They pushed a policy that would exert the right amount of pressure on Israel to cede the land it had won in a defensive war in 1967. This, they said, would result in a Palestinian state that would make everyone in the region happy.
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> And they all failed. In their memoirs, none of these leading lights—former secretaries of state Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton, and John Kerry, as well as numerous lesser officials tasked with fixing the Middle East, such as Aaron David Miller, Dennis Ross, Martin Indyk, and Daniel Kurtzer—display any doubt about their investment in the basic Oslo formula. Like almost all of the experts who produced literature about Middle East diplomacy in the past three decades, these notable figures worshipped at the altar of land-for-peace, and they never took a moment to wonder whether they might have been idolators kneeling before a false god.

Israel's Proposed Sex-Segregation Law Would Expand, Not Restrict, Freedom of Association

DECEMBER 19, 2022
From Ruthie Blum at *JNS*

Among the pieces of legislation Orthodox parties wish to advance in the new Knesset is one that, according to its critics, threatens to impose on Israeli women a situation akin to that found in Iran or Saudi Arabia. **Ruthie Blum** explains that it will do nothing of the sort:

> The Religious Zionism and United Torah Judaism parties are demanding that legislation be enacted to enable the separation of men and women at publicly sponsored events without its being deemed discriminatory. The purpose of the move is to prevent a repeat of a ridiculous 2019 court-ordered cancellation of a sold-out concert by the renowned ḥasidic singer Motty Steinmetz at the Afula Municipal Park.
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> The ruling was spurred by a "Women's Lobby" petition challenging the separate seating that had been arranged ahead of the much-anticipated musical happening. That this was at the behest of a mainly-ḥaredi audience made no difference to its detractors. Ditto for the many other similar anti-Orthodox appeals over the years.
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> Contrary to the claims of disingenuous fear-mongers, the religious parties do not intend to impose gender segregation on the general public. They simply aim to allow for it among those whose interpretation and observance of certain talmudic decrees requires it. [Meanwhile, their opponents are] mum about gender segregation in the secular sector. The latest case in point is a "women only" cruise along the Yarkon River, which took place on Friday under the auspices of and advertised by the Tel Aviv municipality.

An Insider's History of Five Decades of AIPAC

DECEMBER 19, 2022
From Lenny Ben-David at *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*

When **Lenny Ben-David** first began working for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in 1972, it was less than a decade old, and had a staff of about ten people and a shoestring budget. Since then, AIPAC has grown immensely, but has repeatedly had to change its tactics to keep up with a changing political climate, while its influence waxed and waned. Ben-David provides a richly detailed account of how this happened, and notes that some of the most profound challenges the organization wrestled with had little to do with attitudes toward the Jewish state:

> In the 1970s, AIPAC and [its founding leader Isaiah "Si" Kenen] faced some heavyweight issues: the divisive 1972 U.S. elections, foreign-aid loans and grants to Israel, the Arab boycott, and the Yom Kippur War. Kenen didn't have to prowl the halls of Congress to meet with elected officials and twist arms. He consulted with two handfuls of congressional titans, and they set the legislative agenda and rounded up the votes on the Hill. . . . These giants' congressional power and their rules would dissipate in the 1970s.
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> Long-serving chairmen of important committees possessed the power to promote legislation or crush it and the ability to do the same to the career of a junior committee member. Once a chairman decided, that was final. Their positions were protected by their droit d'seniority—until younger members of Congress finally rebelled.
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> After the Vietnam War, Congress was determined to challenge presidents and their administrations on foreign policy, budget, and defense issues. But Congress had to develop its own expertise. . . . In the ruins of the seniority system, another power nexus was established with AIPAC's expansion of the lobbying department. More offices and new members of Congress had to be contacted; more issues deliberated by Congress were on the agenda. A new aspect of AIPAC's lobbying expanded as well—the provision of timely, accurate, well-researched, and helpful information. AIPAC met all the tasks.

What Biblical Heroes Can Teach That Philosophers Cannot

DECEMBER 19, 2022
From Leon Kass
at *Meditations with Zohar*

In a wide-ranging conversation with Zohar Atkins, **Leon Kass** discusses his own moral and intellectual formation, why political liberalism needs to be sustained by tradition and private virtue, and the significance and development of the biblical Isaac. Kass and Atkins also compare Jacob and Moses, respectively, to Homer's Odysseus and Plato's philosopher-king—among much else. (Audio, 80 minutes.)