

The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism & Jewish Culture

Judith R. Baskin, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism & Jewish Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 716 pp. \$250.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 0521825970.

The title page describes *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism & Jewish Culture* as “an authoritative and accessible reference work for a twenty-first century audience.” The list of contributors shows this is meant for an academic audience; the tone and language overall is scholarly, yet accessible, for college and university students.

In “How to Use This Book,” the dictionary is described as complementary to *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (2010), which Judith R. Baskin co-edited. The articles in this book are short; none is more than 3,000 words. *The Guide* was meant to provide comprehensive overviews of subjects and historical eras. However, there were some topics that space and scope limitations did not permit to include in more than passing fashion. This volume was created to fill in some of those gaps left by *The Guide* (xxix). In doing so, this reference fills in not only gaps in *The Guide* but in Jewish reference works in general. The locations covered go beyond the standard ones to include all the continents except Antarctica. It includes not only major religious and cultural topics but also history, politics, and a wide variety of secular fields: literature, art, music, theater, dance, film, broadcasting, the Internet, sports, science, medicine, and environmental activism.

It is arranged both alphabetically and topically, with most entries being in alphabetical order. However, for major topics that have a number of subtopics, the subtopics follow the main topic in alphabetical order. For example, “Holocaust” is a topic with subtopics that include Holocaust Denial, Diaries, and Literature (with its own subtopics). This type of arrangement is convenient and makes sense logically.

In a volume like this, where issues of transliteration versus conventional English spelling are complex, “A Note on Transliteration” is welcome. This is probably not necessary for experienced readers, but for those who are new to fields of study directly related to Jewish or Biblical studies it will be helpful. There are also maps and an Index of Names, where the reader can find all articles that mention a certain cultural or historical figure. Cross-references to other entries are marked with either an asterisk or all-capital letters.

For a reference librarian, there are many reasons to love this new entry into standard Jewish references, although nothing can be perfect. One glaring mistake is in the List of Abbreviations, where it is stated that “Rev” refers to the book of “Revelations.” Granted, Revelation is not part of the Jewish canon, so this oversight may be forgivable. Still, one would expect someone to have noticed this before the manuscript went to press. There is a section of photographs in the middle. It would seem more helpful if the photos were matched with their articles, as they were in *The Guide*. However, this arrangement may have been necessary because more than one entry can refer to the same picture.

For those concerned with objectivity, this is a Jewish reference and stresses a Jewish perspective. Articles on the Arab-Israeli conflict are where the lack of objectivity is most noticeable. The Palestinian and/or Arab perspective is

noticeably absent. Certainly, the Jewish/Israeli perspective is important, but one will have to look elsewhere for a scholarly and well-stated expression of the Arab/ Palestinian perspective.

Despite these and other imperfections, the reasons to recommend this reference far outweigh reasons against recommendation. The articles are concise, informative, and written by eminently qualified scholars. Its broad inclusion of both religious and secular topics of history and culture make it stand out among most similar comprehensive guides to Judaism. In addition, its treatment of gender as a topic of scholarly study and the conscious effort to highlight the contributions of women are rare in Jewish studies. Because it covers so much ground that is missing in most similar Jewish references, it should be considered not only recommended but essential to any theological library. And don't forget to order *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (2010) along with it: *The Guide* for depth, *The Dictionary* for breadth.

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