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The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450-1800. Edited by Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering. European Expansion and Global Interaction, vol. 2. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001. Photographs. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Notes. Indexes. xv, 567 pp. Cloth.

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The Jews and the Expansion of Europe is a splendid collection of essays on the role of the Jews in the New World colonies and the impact that the American (chiefly the West Indies and South America) environment had upon them. This study of Europe's expansion to the West encompasses two-and-a-half centuries, thousands of miles of land, and an international convergence of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French and future United States Jews and New Christians interacting and influencing each other and influencing and being influenced by their countries of origin. The essays are grouped in seven sections differentiated by chronology and nationality of colony and home country. The opening section is a discussion of the impact of the New World upon European, and especially, European Jewish consciousness. Next is presented the identity crisis and reshaping of Judaism among conversos and marranos in Spanish America. Part 3 focuses on the experience of these enclaves in Portuguese Latin America. Part 4 retains much of the same subject matter in the context of trade in France and Caribbean French America. We next encounter the colonial Sephardim in Dutch America. American Jews and New Christians resurface in the international slave and sugar trade in section 6. The book concludes with an essay on Jews in colonial British America.

The contributions include demography and family, political and economic analysis, and explorations of religious belief and practice, myth, and architectural style. In short, they encompass a vast variety of historical fields and methods and [End Page 780] range from conceptual to descriptive, from superb to serviceable. None, however, is dubious or useless and even those devoted to descriptive detail ("The Participation of New Christians and Crypto-Jews in the Conquest, Colonization, and Trade of Spanish America, 1521-1660," "Crypto-Jews and New Christians in Colonial Peru and Chile," "Atlantic Trade and Sephardim Merchants in Eighteenth-Century France: The Case of Bordeaux," "Jewish Settlements in the French Colonies in the Caribbean. . . and the 'Black Code'") inform on little-known aspects of Jews in the New World.

The Jews and the Expansion of Europe begins impressively with essays by James Romm, Noah J. Efron, and Benjamin Schmidt on the biblical and messianic significance of the New World for the Jews. To contemporaries, Jewish and otherwise, the new discoveries and adventures evoked collective and mythic memory and utopian hope. David S. Katz engagingly traces such yearnings for the past and future to the present. In the felicitous first section, Patricia Seed examines the contributions to navigation of early modern Jewish scientists, and even more illuminatingly, accounts for their relative anonymity.

Several essays in subsequent sections are worthy of mention. Rachel Frankel's exploration of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries in "Jodensavaane," a Jewish settlement in the Dutch colony of Suriname, combines the practical and theoretical, the passionate and analytic, in a stimulating speculation on the anthropological, historical, and religious meaning of the colonial architecture in that place. Seymour Drescher's assessment of the participation of Jews and New Christians in the Atlantic slave trade addresses a historical issue with current ideological ramifications. In an essay distinguished by its nuanced clarity, Drescher shows how the role of these groups was conditioned by different geographical and chronological phases of the trade and how these factors, in turn, interacted with social backgrounds and legal distinctions.

Notwithstanding the high quality of the book, a few problems arise. Repetition is unavoidable. In setting the historical context for their subjects several authors necessarily refer to the same historical events and developments. Substantive problems were rare, but occasionally did appear. An important theme in "New Christians/'New Whites': Sephardic Jews, Free People of Color, and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue, 1760-1789," is that "Sephardic merchants and planters provided a model for another group whose place in colonial society was equally ambiguous: Saint-Domingue's free people of color" (p. 314). John Garrigus demonstrates that both groups were marginalized and that they interacted in business dealing and occasionally even intermarried or at least had common descendants. But he offers no direct evidence that Jews were models for the liberation of free people of color and it is at least as plausible that the evolution toward emancipation of these groups had an identical source and cause in the liberal and nationalist [End Page 781] proclivities that were becoming more pronounced in France as the revolution approached.

"The Jews in Colonial British America," is the sole essay in that area of European expansion and Jewish representation in the New World. Jonathan Sarna writes compellingly about the Jews in British North America. His exploration of the messianic impulse in these Jewish settlements is fascinating in its own right and helps unite the collection by revisiting a topic frequently examined in part 1. Despite its virtues, the analytic schema of "Jew in America" is flawed. Sarna "explain[s] why the impact of the American Revolution is so profound" (p. 522). Yet we are subsequently told that postrevolutionary American Judaism "developed . . . a character all its own: one that had been anticipated in significant respects already in the colonial era" (p. 529). These statements are not absolutely contradictory, but are sufficiently incongruous to require an explanation that Sarna does not offer. Another inadequately pondered paradox arises in the discussion of congregational discipline. Sarna begins with a robust assertion of discipline over wayward members (p. 522). We soon learn, however, that communal consensus and compartmentalization of life into religious and secular sectors imposed severe limitations on congregational authority (pp. 524, 526).

According to the criteria for collections of essays, quality, and unity, Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering have assembled a volume of exceptional merit. Pieter Emmet's "The Jewish Moment and the Two Expansions in the

Atlantic, 1580-1650," coming at the end of part 6, enhances the integration of the collection. The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West will be particularly rewarding to historians of colonialism in general, colonial Latin America and the West Indies, specialists in Jewish studies, racial and ethnic groups and slavery, as well as nonprofessionals interested in Jewish topics.

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