

Tablet Magazine's Adam Kirsch and the Elimination of Sephardim from Modern Jewish Literature

We have just learned of a new book being published by Norton on the Jewish literary heritage, called *The People and the Books: 18 Classics of Jewish Literature*:

<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=4294992256>

https://www.amazon.com/dp/0393241769/ref=cm_sw_su_dp#reader_0393241769

Here is the description of the book from the Norton website:

Jews have long embraced their identity as “the people of the book.” But outside of the Bible, much of the Jewish literary tradition remains little known to nonspecialist readers. *The People and the Books* shows how central questions and themes of our history and culture are reflected in the Jewish literary canon: the nature of God, the right way to understand the Bible, the relationship of the Jews to their Promised Land, and the challenges of living as a minority in Diaspora. Adam Kirsch explores eighteen classic texts, including the biblical books of Deuteronomy and Esther, the philosophy of Maimonides, the autobiography of the medieval businesswoman Glückel of Hameln, and the Zionist manifestoes of Theodor Herzl. From the Jews of Roman Egypt to the mystical devotees of Hasidism in Eastern Europe, *The People and the Books* brings the treasures of Jewish literature to life and offers new ways to think about their enduring power and influence.

The book written by Adam Kirsch, a prominent name in current Jewish literary circles, examines 18 books from the Jewish past. His study has been effusively praised by eminent figures like Cynthia Ozick, Rabbi David Wolpe, and SHU-favorite Jonathan Sarna.

In addition to running the Master's Program in Judaic Studies at Columbia University, Kirsch is a regular contributor to Tablet magazine, where he is currently writing an ongoing Daf Yomi commentary that seeks to denigrate the rabbinical tradition and present the Talmud as an ignorant and debased document:

<http://www.tabletmag.com/author/akirsch>

Here is a listing of his Daf Yomi posts:

<http://www.tabletmag.com/tag/daf-yomi>

Kirsch has also published extensively with The Jewish Review of Books:

<https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/author/adam-kirsch>

Allan Arkush has just written a glowing review of the book in that same publication:

<https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/2270/from-moses-to-moses-to-sholem-aleichem/>

Kirsch's new book has chapters on Maimonides and Judah Halevi, acknowledging the centrality of Sephardic culture in Jewish history, but as he gets closer to the present Sephardim completely disappear.

This is a typical racist process coming from Ashkenazim who mark the beginning of Jewish Modernity with the apostate Spinoza who repudiates the classic Sephardic heritage, and continues to present a Whites-only version of Jewish Literature that includes Solomon Maimon, Moses Mendelssohn, Nachman of Bratslav, Theodor Herzl, and the ubiquitous Sholem Aleichem.

It would appear that for Kirsch Modern Jewish Literature is limited to Ashkenazim and to European Judaism. Sephardim seem to have died out in the 13th century!

This Whites-only approach to Modern Jewish Literature is consistent with the similarly-tendentious discussion presented by Eva Illouz in her lengthy Haaretz article that I have referenced many times:

<http://www.jpost.com/Experts/Setting-aside-Sephardim-in-a-discussion-of-Jewish-intellectualism-349955?prmusr=4acHjIMzluVq6KlIhpzoIdT9BayopuHBOc6cPv9QW20dH7w5%2f6Grv6LAMyf2vrm>

I have of late been discussing the matter of the Biton Committee and the institution of Sephardic culture into the Israeli school curriculum under the leadership of the radical Right Wing ideologue Naftali Bennett:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/davidshasha/jPOwQi6kJrg/lbJh1g69AAAJ:context-place=forum/davidshasha>

As we continue to process the Biton Committee initiative and its role in contemporary Jewish education, it is vital to critically examine books like the one Kirsch has just written.

The current attempt to bring Sephardic culture into Jewish pedagogy is rooted in a sense of Sephardic marginality that is reinforced by the way Jewish intellectuals like Kirsch and Illouz understand Modern Jewish culture.

Real Jewish Modernity can only come from Ashkenazim.

We have seen how Sephardim like Devin Naar of the University of Washington have so blithely acquiesced to this state of affairs by presenting a "Bourekas and Haminados" form of Sephardic nostalgia that does not at all seek to challenge this Ashkenazi hegemony:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/davidshasha/rlu0vCildLk>

Sephardim are a thing of the past; the present is all about how Ashkenazim have created Modern Jewish culture.

There is no acknowledgment of vital figures like Elijah Benamozegh, Sabato Morais, Yitzhak Shami, Jacqueline Kahanoff, Primo Levi, Elias Canetti, and Edmond Jabes in the production of Modern Jewish civilization.

The idea is to present to the public a version of Judaism rooted in the Shtetl and embodied in Zionism and Ashkenazi Jewish sectarianism.

We can contrast this racist state of affairs with the brilliant portrayal of Arab Jewish culture by the French graphic novelist Joann Sfar in his seminal series The Rabbi's Cat:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/davidshasha/sfar%7Csort:relevance/davidshasha/YupE-S4SELM/MhFD-N3yRGwJ>

Sfar's work presents an alternative view of Jewish Modernity rooted in the Sephardic heritage which might provide a better option for alienated Jews at the present time.

Kirsch's book will surely be hailed by the Ashkenazi Jewish echo-chamber as a brilliant contribution to a Jewish civilization that is currently losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the majority of Jews today.

It is a Judaism that reflects a very "Fiddler on the Roof" mentality that has forgotten the many contributions of Sephardim to Modern Jewish letters and the sophisticated cosmopolitanism of our culture; a cosmopolitanism that is so sorely needed in order to break the dysfunctional hegemony of racist Ashkenazim like Adam Kirsch and his many supporters.

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