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somewhat confused and inconsistent practice of Judaism developed into a more observant form of Judaism a few years later. As a result, Rodríguez moved his family to an Iberian Jewish community in Bayonne, France, so that he could be circumcised and observe Judaism more fully. Some years later, while traveling in Zaragoza, Spain, on business, Rodríguez de Amézquita reconsidered his religious conversion, turned again to Catholicism, and ultimately turned himself in to the inquisitors.

In his conclusion, Graizbord rejects asking the question “how Jewish” or “how Christian” were conversos (pp. 16, 174), arguing that such a question misreads converso experiences of religion and reifies religious experience in an ahistorical fashion. In this, as in emphasizing the liminality of converso experience, Graizbord reflects and expands upon recent historical work. Graizbord’s own book is unique, however, and his enlightening analysis of the mentalities of these “souls in dispute” makes this a compelling and useful history. GRETCHEN STARR-LEBEAU, *University of Kentucky*.

SHNEER, DAVID. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1919–1930*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. ix+300 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).

In the years following the October Revolution, the Soviet state’s method of creating a citizenry from the multiplicity of ethnicities throughout its vast, multiethnic territories entailed the organization of dozens of ethnically identified Soviet intelligentsias that established cultural institutions that propagated the target culture via the designated ethnic language. In 1919 Yiddish was declared the native language of Soviet Jewry, and the organization of the Soviet Yiddish intelligentsia began. In these early years—before voluntary linguistic assimilation, the Holocaust’s devastation of the Yiddish-speaking populace, and the destructive consequences of both general and specifically anti-semitic Soviet purges had doomed the project—this ethnically conceived and politically defined Soviet Yiddish intelligentsia was systematically constructed and included Yiddish writers, publishers, censors, critics, scholars, intellectuals, actors, editors, painters, composers, and even party bosses and physicians.

In his revised dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2001), David Shneer sets himself the herculean task of analytically disentangling and articulating the labyrinthine web of people, committees, and agencies that constituted the panorama of Soviet Yiddish culture and produced, organized, distributed, published, controlled (and in part even suppressed some aspects of) Yiddish culture during the period here treated. Shneer compellingly argues that this culture was “Soviet Yiddish culture” and not simply “Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union,” as some (particularly Western) scholars have tried to reconceive and “sanitize” it. His admirably researched study does not cover nearly the entire period of the phenomenon but rather is restricted only to the first thirteen postrevolutionary years. His claim that by 1930 “institutional consolidation took power away from the intelligentsia” (p. 219) is, even if true (which is not clearly demonstrated), at best ancillary to the dynamic of continuity in the broad range of Yiddish cultural activities over the astonishingly varied decade that led up to the beginning of World War II. Some chapters are especially effective, for example, chapter 4, on the publishing industry, which explicates the practicalities of the tactical transformation of Russian (Jewish) society. In chapter 3, however, on the Soviet “modernization” of lan-

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guages, a number of misconceptions in cultural history undercut the argument. As writers in every culture and period, Soviet writers of various ethnicities struggled in the postrevolutionary years to adapt their languages to the new political and cultural needs of the society. Shneer seems to adopt the perspective of many of his subjects (in general a problem in the study) when he defines such adaptation as “modernization” and propagates the tired myth of Yiddish as a lowly, primitive “women’s language” in need of radical transformation into a language of culture (p. 90; cf. also p. 33). At that point Yiddish had already functioned as the supple vehicle of a broad and deep literary tradition that had been responding to the cultural needs of each successive generation for more than half of a millennium. While one would expect the author to problematize the common Soviet identification of various politically motivated changes with modernization (e.g., the change from the Arabic to the Roman alphabet for some Central Asian languages; p. 82), Shneer again seems to advocate the position of his subjects that this change in alphabets itself constituted modernization. The focus of chapter 6, on the minor poet Izi Kharik, who is the only writer whose work is quoted and analyzed in any detail in the entire study, seems quite misplaced.

The study suffers from a distracting number of errors: for example, Shneer claims that some ethnicities had languages invented for them, so that the Soviet model of culture building could be applied (p. 21); he refers to the non-existent “Turkic” (p. 82) and “Yiddish” alphabets (p. 84), consistently misnames the Roman alphabet, and assumes that so-called Gothic script/font is something other than a form of the Roman alphabet (p. 82); Shneer seems to advocate the claim that the Hebrew alphabet is poorly designed and inadequate to the task of representing the sounds of Yiddish (pp. 83–84); he calls S. Y. Abramovitch “Mendele Moykher Sforim a.k.a. S. Y. Abramovitch” (p. 141); confuses transliteration with transcription (p. 231); frequently provides imprecise translations—for example, “*One Generation Goes, Another One Comes (Dor oys dor ayn)*” (p. 177); claims that “German . . . serves as the base language” of Yiddish (p. 64); conceives of New Economic Policy as a period (pp. 104, 185); and identifies the hero and martyr Hirsh Lekert as simply “the old Bundist” (p. 112). Most of the errors could have been eliminated by a good editor. As it stands, this otherwise interesting and provocative study often seems rather ragged.

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NIR, RIVKA. *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*. *Early Judaism and Its Literature*, 20. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003. viii+318 pp. \$69.00 (cloth); \$39.95 (paper).

For some two hundred years, scholars have pored over the texts known as the Pseudepigrapha for information about the nature of Second Temple Judaism. For a good bit of this time, it has been the assumption that these works, though preserved and copied by Christian scribes, were of Jewish origin. The renowned scholar Louis Ginzberg, for example, declared confidently in the early years of the twentieth century that the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (also known as Second Baruch) was written by a Jew living in the land of Israel sometime between 70 and 135 c.e. This basic understanding was presumed in