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SEGULA

THE JEWISH HISTORY MAGAZINE

DESIGNING A STATE
INTERNATIONAL-STYLE

BAUHAUS IN
BIROBIDZHAN
AND TEL AVIV

URI ZVI
GREENBERG'S
RIVERS OF SONG

JEWISH
WARRIORS OF
DURA-EUROPOS

A Brief History of Bauhaus



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16 Building Zion the Bauhaus Way

How do you build a homeland for Western Jews in the malodorous Middle East? Zionist leaders did so by abandoning Oriental influences for the ultra-modern International School of architecture, with its clean lines and hygienic white gleam

// Tamar Hayardeni

28 Designing a New Jew

Stalin thought he'd kill two birds with one stone by establishing a Jewish Autonomous Region in Russia's frozen Far East. Jewish architects flocked to design the JAR's capital in Birobidzhan, but the dream shattered when the dictator changed his mind // Ber Kotlerman

40 Rivers of Poetry

Uri Zvi Greenberg was a poet, not a prophet, yet he anticipated both the 1929 Arab riots and the horrors of the Holocaust. Seventeen volumes of Greenberg's poetry have been published in Hebrew and Yiddish, so how is his work still relatively unknown? // Akiva Goldstein

52 Imperial Synagogue

Syria has long been a battleground, but in the third century, its conflicts fleetingly served to preserve the wonders of the past rather than destroy them. What can the vivid murals of the country's Dura-Europos synagogue tell us about the Jews who prayed there? // Haggai Olshanetsky

60 Rabbinic But Different

Synagogue art in the late Roman period depicted the zodiac, animals, and even the sun god. What was going on? // Haggai Misgav

64 From the Archives

A love match between a Jewish girl and a German Catholic survived a year's separation but not the Nuremberg Laws – or had the relationship already soured before legislation tore it apart? // Janne Moehring



At a Glance

What reform is this donkey braying for?

Answer on p. 22

Columns

6 Snapshots

12 This Month in History Adar

14 A Brief History of Bauhaus Architecture

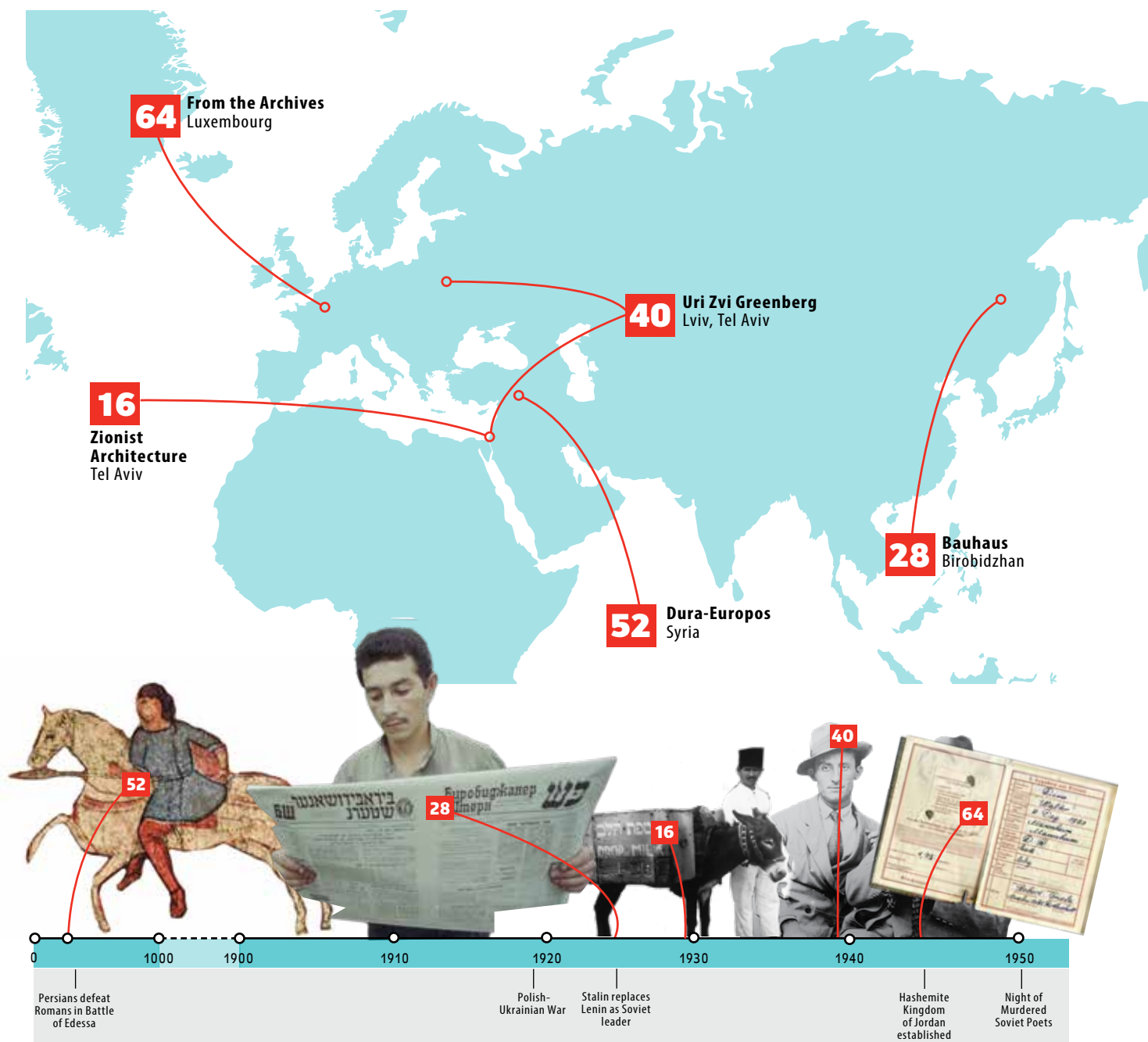
68 History Live Rabbi Berel Wein

72 Quick Looks at Books

74 Portrait of a People Otti Berg

75 What's Next

Cover: Not just Tel Aviv. Polsky House, Ramat Gan, was built in the International Style in the 1920s
Photo: Yuval Benji



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People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present

Dara Horn

W. W. Norton Company, 2021
237 pages



Dara Horn's flowing prose may seem like an irreverent, lighthearted romp through a range of more and less exotic Jewish travel destinations,

but *People Love Dead Jews* has a profound and disturbing insight at its heart. Darting from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam to an ice festival in Harbin, China, to Beverly Hills mansions of the once rich and famous, Horn comes to a startlingly obvious conclusion: "Hating Jews was normal. And historically speaking, the decades in which my parents and I had grown up simply hadn't been normal. Now, normal was coming back" (p. 218).

Striving to pinpoint what makes her uncomfortable about the many municipal Jewish memorials dotting tourist attractions from Europe to Eurasia, the author, leaving the New Jewish Synagogue museum in Harbin, writes: "Suddenly the Jewish Heritage miasma melted away and the realization hit me: Nothing in this museum explained why this glorious community no longer exists" (p. 36).

This book was triggered by Horn's "haunted present," the sudden recurrence of violence against American Jews and synagogues in the last three years – each attack coming closer to the neighborhood in which she and her young family live. Seeking an authentic personal response, she examines her own encounters with anti-Semitism, not as victim but as reader, observer, and chronicler.

Aside from the tale of Anne Frank, the cases Horn chooses have received relatively little publicity – an oversight she rectifies with empathy and insight. But even as she probes Stalin's murder of masterful Yiddish actor Benjamin Zuskin, Varian Fry's valiant efforts to rescue famous Jewish artists from Vichy France, and Jewish literature's lack of happy endings, Horn is a woman with a mission. Peeling back the layers of these stories, she questions Jewish responses to underlying, systemic Judeophobia (as opposed to the kind that smacks you in the face and knocks you down).

Horn's answers – particularly in the essay on Jewish name changes and the myth of Ellis Island – edge toward the realization that Jews have a hard time calling out anti-Semitism, thereby perpetuating it. And her own response is to ditch Shakespeare for *Daf Yomi*, the daily Talmud study program, finding solace in the solidarity of Jews worldwide all turning the same page.

The Letters Project: A Daughter's Journey

Eleanor Reissa

Post Hill Press, 2022
254 pages



The power of this book lies in its being above all a work of repair and restitution, a daughter's labor of love and regret.

Yiddish playwright and performer Eleanor Reissa barely knew her father, Chaskel Schlusberg, though she'd spent many Sundays with him after her parents divorced. She was neither willing nor able to access the dapper, resilient man he had been before coming to America. At sixty-four, however, Reissa translated the fifty-six German letters he'd written to his future wife before joining her in Brooklyn. These letters had sat in her mother's drawer for thirty years after the divorce, and it took the author another two decades to face them.

The effort led her to Schlusberg's last home in Europe – Stuttgart, Germany, where he rebuilt his life after four years of forced labor, culminating in Auschwitz and a series of death marches.

Here she finally learns of her father's tragic life. Not only had he lost everything – his business, livelihood, wife, daughter, and



Playful perspective. Author Eleanor Reissa's parents, Chaskel Schlusberg and Ruth (Ruche) Hoff, courting in Ulm, Germany, after the war

freedom – in what Germany's postwar Central Bureau of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes called “the persecutions,” but he sacrificed all he'd reconstructed in Stuttgart to be with his new love. And as Reissa, who dropped the name Schlusberg in favor of the middle name she inherited from her maternal grandmother, starkly puts it:

How many times can you say goodbye to loved ones? My poor father: goodbye, goodbye; gambling that this new unknown life with strangers will be better than his known life with friends. Risk/reward. The Devil you know. How do you calculate that? Especially in 1949. Of course, he couldn't see into the future, but I am here to tell you that nothing was improved in this trade-off for him. Nothing. Except if you count me. I was all he got out of this deal. (p. 125)

Retelling her father's tale within that of her own four-day trip to Germany, the author neglects to point out that he actually got something more. Finally, the daughter who saw him only as a

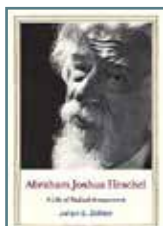
greenhorn yet preserved his Yiddish heritage – through her masterful storytelling – has given him back his story.

The Letters Project – marked by “a certain sadness” Schlusberg constantly carried with him, as he testified to the German investigation bureau – is Reissa's tribute to the father who turned out to have been so much more than she'd ever dreamed he could have been.

Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Life of Radical Amazement

Julian E. Zelizer

Yale Jewish Lives, 2021
297 pages



This highly appreciative biography of Heschel benefits from hindsight throughout. Even if the rabbi himself had no idea where he was headed in life as he left Warsaw for Vilna, Berlin, and ultimately America, Julian E. Zelizer is perfectly clear. Zelizer's constantly looking for early signs of his protagonist's radical social activism, for his

Heschel is not only the author of the highly influential *Prophets*, he is also driven – like the subjects of that work – “to communicate God's anguish to the world” (p. 118).

Acknowledging Heschel's background as scion of the Apter Hasidic dynasty, Zelizer quickly moves on to the U.S., where – as far as he's concerned – Heschel becomes both prophet and role model. Although Heschel's books – notably *The Sabbath*, *Man Is Not Alone*, and *God in Search of Man* – memorably sought to capture and restore the soul, to fill the emptiness of American Judaism in a way that remains supremely relevant today, Zelizer is more concerned with what this most prominent and controversial lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary said and did. The author thus quotes more from Heschel's speeches than from his superbly crafted written works.

Every chapter in this book leads to Selma, to the moral and religious conviction and biblical rhetoric Heschel brought to the civil rights struggle. Marching from this Alabama town along with Martin Luther King Jr., he “felt [his] legs were praying” (p. 161). The road to Selma led straight to the anti-Vietnam War movement, a cause Heschel adopted very early on and in which he played a more major role.

Speaking in 1971, Heschel claimed that faith and dissent were Judaism's two essential ingredients. “The greatness of the prophets,” Heschel added, “was in their ability to voice dissent and disagreement [...] with the cherished values and habits of their own people” (p. 212). Zelizer convinces us that Abraham Joshua Heschel made this greatness his own.



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