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## BOOK NOTES / CRITIQUES BRÈVES

Bellaert, Johan, Menachem Ben-Sasson, William M. Brinner, Joseph R. Hacker, Phyllis Lambert, Charles Le Quesne, Richard Pare, Peter Sheehan, John Stewart. *Fortifications and the Synagogue: The Fortress of Babylon and the Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo*. Edited by Phyllis Lambert. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994. 279pp.

Babylon, as used in this book, refers to the Roman fortress whose fall to the Arab army of Islam ushers in the beginnings of a new era in the long history of civilization in the Nile Valley. As the Arabs built the first Islamic city in Egypt, Fustat, the area formerly encompassing Fortress Babylon became a centre for religious institutions: Muslim, Christian and Jewish.

For much of the Islamic period there was a focus of sacred Jewish space on the site known today as the Ben Ezra Synagogue. Evidence exists demonstrating the centrality of this space in the consciousness of Egyptian Jewry at various times and, with the development of Genizah Studies in the twentieth century (based on documents salvaged from this locale's storage spaces), it has become vital in the consciousness of all who study the civilization of the medieval Islamic Mediterranean.

In 1979, following the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, President Sadat invited a delegation of the World Jewish Congress to come to Cairo to discuss issues involving the establishment of an interfaith centre and the preservation of Jewish historical sites. Thus began a process which, continuing intermittently over the next decade, led to the development of the Ben Ezra Synagogue Restoration Project

and, ultimately, to this book of essays, illustrations and photographs which documents the Project and the historical context of its object.

The book examines historical themes (e.g. of Egyptian Jewry, of this particular synagogue in numerous incarnations, of inter-religious relations, of Genizah materials, etc.). It also portrays the day-to-day execution of physical restoration and conservation (e.g. the technical methodology, the social and political contexts, etc.). It offers well-written prose but also has a no less significant component of visual material (plans, engravings and exceptional photographs).

It is a volume which can offer nourishment to lay interest and to professional curiosity in a number of specific disciplines. It is not definitive or comprehensive in any of these areas (although it can be seen as a definitive if incomplete chronicle of the Project itself) but it is delightfully engaging and informative.

The true curiosity is to contemplate whether there is any real connection to Canadian Jewish studies. Canadian connections abound. The World Jewish Congress was represented by its president, Edgar Bronfman. The project head was Phyllis Lambert, a Montreal architect and activist. There were also some other technical and financial connections. None of these Canadian contact points, however, appeared to be substantive. This is, after all, the story of a synagogue in Egypt and its restoration/preservation/conservation in an Egyptian political and eco-context.

I do not doubt that anyone with interests in the history of Jewish institutions and the preservation of significant Jewish sites in Canada could benefit from reading this book. It could offer some valuable insights. I do not think, however, that the connection could possibly be substantive.

This is, in the final analysis, an oversized and expensive volume that won't be out of place on a Canadian's coffee table. If, then, it is picked up and read, it promises to provide some visual enjoyment and intellectual enlightenment. If, in addition,

the reader has an interest in Middle East Jewish history, they can expect a heavy but satisfying meal. A good read!

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Kaganoff, Nathan. *Judaica Americana: An Annotated Bibliography of Publications from 1960 to 1990*. Preface by Jonathan Sarna. Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995. 2 volumes, xii + 917 pp.

The late Nathan Kaganoff, for many years librarian of the American Jewish Historical Society, painstakingly compiled bibliographies of publications relevant to American Jewish studies entitled "Judaica Americana" which were published in that society's journal. The present volumes represent a cumulation of his work and thus stand to serve as an important tool for those engaged in North American Jewish studies. The subject and author indices make the work even more useful. Jonathan Sarna's preface gives us an idea of the importance of Kaganoff and his contribution to the field.

It is clear that Kaganoff's primary focus was the Jewish community of the United States. However a perusal of the subject index will reveal that there are many items of Judaica Canadiana included in this important reference work.

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Whitman, Ruth, editor and translator. *Anthology of Modern Yiddish Poetry*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995. 209 pp.

This is both a limited book and one of great scope. Included is the cream of Yiddish literature. There are, however, glaring omissions such as the work of Soviet poet Perets Markish,