

key because it was perceived by the regime as a “potential threat” (126).

Shabo Talay, Sebastian Brock, and Simon Birol deal with the literary aspect of the Sayfo. Talay analyzes the three concepts referring to the Assyrian genocide: *sayfo* (sword), *qafle* (caravan), and *firman* (order). In understanding these concepts, he uses the most important contemporary texts, poetry (*memre*), and eyewitness accounts written on the genocide. He argues that despite the different nuances within these texts, all of them share a common assumption that the events of the world war constituted “a general persecution of Christians” (134). Talay argues that based on this approach, the Assyrians viewed the massacres of World War I as “a religiously motivated war of extermination against Christians” (136). In a similar vein, Brock’s essay deals with a section from the diary of ‘Abedmshihō Na’man Qarabashi, titled *Dmo zliho*, the only Syrian Orthodox diary from the monastery of Dayro d-Zafaran (148). In his essay, Brock analyzes a small section concerning the attack on the monastery. Despite this being an important topic, Brock does not provide a conclusion to his essay nor a critical analysis. Other literary productions deal with eschatological interpretations of the calamity. For example, Simon Birol’s essay deals with Gallo Shabo’s poem from Tur Abdin written during the period. What is interesting in Shabo’s poetry is that it sees the genocide not as a calamity that befell the Assyrians but as a divine judgment. Birol argues that the idea that “Syriacs sinned and consequently God punished them with the Sayfo runs through the poem like a thread” (162).

All mass murders leave a traumatic effect not only on the survivors but on their children and grandchildren. Öner A. Cetrez deals with the psychological impact of the Sayfo by concentrating on Assyrian individuals who faced new traumas of the recent Iraq and Syria wars. He argues that the children “become imprisoned in the parents’ trauma, in an imageless, timeless condition, condemned to repeat what they themselves have not experienced” (183). The results of his study indicate that the mistrust that these individuals harbor toward others was ultimately the result of the Sayfo and that “fear is one of the hindrances to attachment with people in the forming of social relations” (199).

While denialist discourse propagated by the Turkish government along with Turkish and some Western “scholars” have mainly targeted the Armenian genocide, Sayfo also had its own share. Racho Donef and Abdulmesih BarAbraham deal with these systematic denial policies. By concentrating on the writings of such denialists as Mehmet Çelik, Bülent Özdemir, and Salahi Sönyel, Donef and BarAbraham expose the historical fallacy of this denialist approach. They argue that these denialists go even so far as depicting the victims as perpetrators. A common theme that runs in these works is the “Assyrian treason” during World War I, implying

that they are to be blamed for their destiny. Christophe Premat attempts to understand how the genocide issue has been dealt with in the political discussions held in two different national traditions: France and Sweden

Overall the book is an important contribution to the study of the Sayfo. Drawing on the expertise of a variety of scholars, this edited volume sheds light on different facets of the Assyrian genocide, a topic that still remains in its infancy. The strength of the book does not lie in one single essay, but rather in its interdisciplinary approach. The book is useful to scholars in the field of Middle East history, genocide studies, and ethno-religious violence. It is the hope of this reviewer that more interdisciplinary research of the Sayfo will shed more light on one of the grimmest phases of modern history.

BEDROSS DER MATOSSIAN

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Yael Zerubavel. *Desert in the Promised Land*. (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture.) Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2019. Pp. xii, 346. Paper \$29.95.

Yael Zerubavel’s *Desert in the Promised Land* begins from the observation that Zionists and Israeli Jews, settling and residing in a climatically varied sliver of land on the Eastern Mediterranean, talked a lot about the desert. Though most of them lived on portions of that land that, geographically speaking, were not desert at all, they invested both their physical space and their national imaginary with symbolic images of the desert derived from a mélange of traditional Jewish, European orientalist, and modern nationalist streams of thought. The desert (*midbar*), also called “wasteland” (*shemama*), was for these mainly immigrant communities the biblical place of Jewish wandering, a site of “oriental savagery,” danger, and exoticism, and an object for “civilizing” development. After statehood, the geographic desert in Israel’s south became the country’s frontier, its site of military conflict, and its location for confronting and attempting to manage Bedouin populations and for coping with environmental challenges. Proceeding both thematically and chronologically through these clusters of symbolism, Zerubavel, a noted scholar of Zionist culture and collective memory, assembles an impressive array of cultural sources from a combination of literary and cultural texts and ideological Zionist and Israeli discourse.

Zionist settlers drew from biblical visions of redeeming (and being redeemed by) a homeland and wandering in a liminal desert outside the homeland. In confronting and thinking about native Arab Palestinians, Zionists recalled the biblical patriarchs’ desert travels but also evoked models of heroic masculinity and symbols of violence and existential threat culled from European orientalist iconography in communicating an im-

perative of and form of settlement. Throughout part 1, Zerubavel emphasizes the role of the desert as the “counter-place,” which signified the opposite of the civilized, the opposite of the national, and the opposite of the productive, while also functioning as a kind of spiritual conduit for self-discovery and national awareness.

Until 1948, Zionist settlement mostly avoided the southern desert region of the country (the Negev or Naqab). After 1948, as Zerubavel shows in part 2, the Israeli state, under the leadership of the Negev-loving prime minister David Ben-Gurion, turned its attention to “Judaizing” areas of the country that retained significant Arab populations after the 1948 War, including the Negev and the Judean Desert. Ben-Gurion declared, “The state of Israel cannot tolerate the existence of a desert within it” (quoted on 109). With Egypt just across the border to the west of the Negev, and with the largest Palestinian refugee population to the east and to the north of the Judean Desert in Jordan, the desert took on concrete security and logistical significance. Residential settlements in this area became, first by happenstance and later by concerted settlement efforts, the state’s front lines. In the 1950s, the government directed water to the south, developed the Red Sea port of Eilat, and further celebrated the desert frontier in song and film. As Jewish immigrants flowed in, many from the Middle East and North Africa, Israel increasingly directed them, often against their will, to development towns, some in the Negev. After 1967, settlement attention turned to the West Bank and Gaza, which absorbed both the earlier symbolic discourses of “desert” space and the post-1948 state programs of settling the “periphery.” West Bank settlements, Negev development towns, and the massively developed city of Beer Sheva thus absorbed thousands of new immigrants, including the Russian Jewish immigration of the 1970s–1990s. Desert spaces inside and outside the Green Line promoted themselves as tourist destinations. Over time, Israel directed its population efforts not only at Jews but at resettling and citifying the Negev’s historically dominant population: Bedouins. It also confronted environmental challenges related to water in this region.

Desert in the Promised Land, written in a straightforward, accessible style, is both an intriguing text for lay readers and a handy sourcebook for teachers of undergraduate courses on the history of Israel and Palestine, Zionism, or colonial/postcolonial studies, as it brings together many examples of teachable texts from across the span of Zionist culture. Its sweeping quality also would make it fitting background reading for courses doing closer readings of the literary texts, historical primary sources, and current events mentioned in the text. These strengths correspond to several weaknesses, however. Although it brings together many fascinating texts in the first part, its treatments of each one are generally too brief to provide real analytical insights. This approach also misses the opportunity to disaggregate

and evaluate differences between streams of Zionist thought, individual thinkers, or the nuances of discursive change over time. The second part weaves together mainly cultural and journalistic sources into a smoothly written account of developments in Bedouin population management, environmental activism, and tourism. This section might have been strengthened through the use of archival materials offering further insights into the history of Zionist and Israeli governmental decisions around these contentious topics. Over the course of the book, the reader learns quite a lot about the pervasiveness of desert symbolism in Zionist rhetoric and about Israel’s real historical engagement with the country’s desert regions and populations, without being asked to revisit existing scholarly arguments. Nonetheless, in bringing together an impressive compendium of materials around the singular but richly multifaceted theme of the desert, Zerubavel has offered a highly useful and readable text.

LIORA R. HALPERIN
University of Washington

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

LINDA CHISHOLM. *Between Worlds: German Missionaries and the Transition from Mission to Bantu Education in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017. Pp. xxviii, 265. Paper R380.

Mission schools loom large in the history of South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle. Institutions like Lovedale and Healdtown in the Eastern Cape, Adams College and the Inanda Seminary in KwaZulu-Natal, and Saint Peter’s in Johannesburg, among others, trained at least two generations of activists, including Nelson Mandela, Albert Lutuli, and Albertina Sisulu. Instituted by missionary societies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the absence of any other concerted effort to make available schooling to Africans, mission schools are remembered now as beacons of intellectual life, which conveyed to the children of African converts a literary, intellectual, and theological tradition that, although certainly contested by pupils at those schools, produced a remarkable collection of African thinkers and politicians. In the mythologies of these institutions and in the national narrative of post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, the death knell of good education for African children and youth was the institution of the 1953 Bantu Education Act, which put into place a system of education aimed at “retribalizing” African youth, fitting them for lives as laborers and semi-skilled workers within the apartheid system. The act removed state funding from mission schools, and every church, with the exception of Roman Catholic churches, accepted that schools would be taken over by the state. The wave of resistance of 1976—when students in Soweto protested the institu-