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## BOOK REVIEWS



**Shira Klein, *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 369 pp.**

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In the field of Italian Studies, research about Italian Jewry is often treated as an exclusively Jewish issue and is rarely considered also as an Italian one. Conversely, Shira Klein's *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* demonstrates how the Italian Jewish experience illuminates overlooked aspects of Italian history and politics, such as the reasons behind the formation of a consensus in favor of Fascism during the *Ventennio*. Klein's book expands on our knowledge of Italian Jews by showing their affiliation to Italy as *patria*, and to Fascism as a mode of government that guaranteed them protection as citizens—until the promulgation of the racial laws in 1938.

Klein's book traces a rich and original journey through the political, economic, and social reasons behind Italian Jewish patriotism and adherence to Fascism through little-explored primary sources such as personal journals, memoirs, family letters, as well as scripts of radio shows, original interviews, Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers and magazines, and Italian Jewish literature. Through her use of these sources, Klein offers a history of Italian Jews that moves anecdotally through major historical events as well as aspects of the Jewish communities' everyday lives. Stylistically, this feature makes the book highly enjoyable and accessible. Historiographically, it allows Klein to nuance the unique attitudes and practices among Jewish communities in different Italian cities and articulate how Italian Jews dealt with different governing structures when they moved to Palestine and the United States as refugees.

Italians and Italian historiography have notoriously downplayed the damage of Fascism and Italy's role in the Holocaust through the reiteration of the myth of the *Italiani brava gente*. Klein's inquiry begins with an examination of how Italian Jews relied on and participated in the construction of this narrative. Klein suggests that Italian Jews found emancipation by preserving their sense of *italianità*, which enabled them to establish their own specific Jewish practices through assimilation to Italian culture. Indeed, in the first two chapters, Klein explains how Fascist policies in the 1930s contributed to the Jews' inclusion within the Italian middle class, and how Italian Zionist delegates paid homage to Mussolini and the Fascist Party. At the same time, while Mussolini viewed Zionism as an

antagonistic form of nationalism, he also conceived it as a strategy to facilitate colonial access to the Middle East.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how the life of Italian Jews radically changed after 1938 until the Republic of Salò. Klein enriches our knowledge of this widely studied period and contributes to the oral history of the Holocaust with original interviews, most of which are now part of Chapman University's Special Collections. The anecdotes recount stories of the systemic anti-Semitism that the racial laws exacerbated as well as acts of civil solidarity toward the persecuted Jews. Klein compellingly reconstructs the ways in which this dramatic phase of Italian history impacted the everyday life of Jewish and non-Jewish Italians.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider the persistently romanticized sense of *italianità* that Italian Jews felt as refugees in the U.S. and in Palestine between the late 1930s and early 1940s. With an almost cinematic writing style, Klein illustrates how Italian Jews in the U.S. identified primarily as Italians while denying their support for Fascism. Klein further explains that in Zionist Palestine, as in the U.S., Jews from Italy clung to an Italian imaginary and their Italian past. While elaborating on the difficulties of Italian Jews to adapt to the Socialist Labor Zionist project, Klein further clarifies the reasons behind their affiliation to Fascism prior to 1938: "Italian Jews came to Palestine with no interest whatsoever in socialism. Like most middle-class Italians, they had been more likely to back the Fascist regime than its socialist adversaries" (159). Klein states that Italian Jews not only cherished their Italian citizenship but also their urban, upper-middle-class socioeconomic status.

The two final chapters cover the status of Italian Jews after the fall of Mussolini and in the postwar years. Klein explains that while Jews in Italy initially benefited from the economic support of American Jewry, the relationship between the two communities later weakened when Italian Jews resolved to restore their particular Italian way of life, and were granted the legal protection they had before 1938. For this reason, the Italian Jews' attachment to the Zionist cause did not prevent them from reconciling with their *italianità*, contributing to the rehabilitation of the myth of the *Italiani brava gente*—the conclusion with which the book comes full circle.

*Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* mobilizes several historiographical and theoretical issues, opening up trajectories for future research. For instance, how can one compare the Italian Jewish relationship to Fascist colonization in Ethiopia with its relationship to Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine? How can theories of Jewish transnationalism or critical ethnic and race studies further inform the experience of Italian Jews as refugees? While I hope for a deeper theoretical investment in future investigations on the topic, Klein's book has presented a well-documented, lively untold story that broadens the study of Italian sociopolitical history. With its vast bibliography, the book is also an extremely valuable reference for the study of Italian Jewry, the relationship between Jews and Fascism, and Jewish identity in the first half of the twentieth century.