

**Iris Idelson-Shein, *Difference of a Different Kind. Jewish Constructions of Race during the Long Eighteenth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2014, pp. 267; ISBN 978-0-8122-4609-4**

Iris Idelson-Shein's book is a great contribution to Jewish studies as well as to other disciplines where discourses of race and of the Other, or varied constructions of collective identities, are considered the main issues or, at least, those which should not be neglected. Thus far, except for only a few examples, scholars have focused on the canonical case in which the Jew is found as a great epitome of the Other. Depicting more or less ordinary exemplifications of non-Jewish fears or fantasies about "Jewishness," they have still thought through the same prism, or rather in the same *modus*, in which the Jew is seen as an object of attribution. By contrast, the reviewed book departs from this paradigm and reverses the perspective. The scholarship is based on the fundamental recognition: Jews, usually perceived as those being "between," were not only passive objects in a plethora of descriptions written by members of dominant societies, but indeed they also played an active role in the process of (re)production and transmission of images or visions concerning race. In their manner, they also discussed indicators of racial otherness. Apart from that, even if we take into account (as is undoubtedly necessary) that the Jewish collective imagery was somehow colonized, the field of research still remains worth exploring.

As the corpus of texts, Idelson-Shein has chosen examples of four literary genres which she claims could be considered significant due to the ample presence of race issues and other affinal threads therein. Hence, materials for interpretations are conveyed from folktales, philosophical literature, scientific writings, and children's books. The spectrum of interests is wide, indeed. Iris Idelson-Shein brings out a folktale incorporated into the memoirs of Glikl Bas Leib, analyses a utopia of a widely forgotten maskil Yehudah Horowitz, reveals the challenges of modern Hebrew taxonomy and depicts striking aspects of translation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

What should be emphasized is the fact Idelson-Shein focuses only on secular concepts created among Ashkenazi societies throughout the long eighteenth century. Aware of the implications of potential extension, she does not include Sephardi writings as well as religious ones created by Ashkenazi Jews. This choice seems to be reasonable, especially in the first case. Otherwise, we could have received a vague view with effaced distinctions between the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi which remain relevant in the case of attitudes towards slavery, for instance. Nonetheless, it is a matter of question, or even a conundrum, whether the other extension could be beneficial for the study, or in other words, whether a comparative perspective with the usage of religious texts as the secondary ones could reveal something else.

Above all, the reviewed study is nothing other than an example of great erudition. One of its assets is unquestionable fluency in navigating between close reading and the bird-eye's view. Each piece of analyzed literature is contextualized and shown in all its

complexities, and the balance between ample information and clarity of the discourse is kept. Any mentions such as the fact Jews used to find favor in the environmental theory as well as in albinism are reasonable and rooted in the wider contexts.

Idelson-Shein's work is a painstaking study which not only conveys various examples but also provides readers with profound reflection far from the repetition of previous scholarships.

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