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Book Review: *A Jewish Guide in the Holy Land: How Christian Pil- grims Made Me Israeli*

Jonah Rose

Jackie Feldman
Indiana University Press (2016), 222 pages

In April 2018, I stood on the roof of the Tomb of the Prophet Samuel in Jerusalem for the third time in as many months. It was not a religious motivation that compelled my return, though the site is considered holy in both Judaism and Islam; rather, the rooftop of the Tomb is popular among tour guides for its minimal admission costs and sweeping panoramic views of Jerusalem's geopolitical landscape. As with countless other places in the Holy Land, this spot, depending on who is tasked with presenting it, can be leveraged to promote an array of narratives, even ones that appear to contradict one another. In this instance, I was on a tour that was using the site to highlight the misfortune of Arabs and the evils of the Jewish-led municipality, a stark contrast to a previous tour I had participated in that had used the same vantage point to expose the threat Arabs pose to Jewish-dominated demographics. All the while, a third tour had used the Tomb to discuss religious history with no mention at all of any modern conflict.

In his comprehensive ethnography *A Jewish Guide in the Holy Land*,

Professor Jackie Feldman, an anthropologist at Ben-Gurion University, uses his experience as a Jewish tour guide of Christian pilgrimages to explore this complexity of space and perspective in the Bible Land. Feldman provides a thorough description of how a diversity of players, including Christian pilgrims, priests, Jewish tour guides, and Palestinian bus drivers, merge to create the “Bible Land” experience. Further, Feldman details the dispositions of these people in their engagement with one another and the space around them. He writes about a tour guide’s struggle to portray a wholesome and honest presentation of the land without confronting pilgrims’ typically narrow-minded preconceptions, and about an Arab bus driver’s effort to collect an honest living in an often-unforgiving power structure. Finally, and perhaps primarily, Feldman synthesizes his insights and experiences to show how they have shaped his personal identity after nearly 40 years of tour guiding.

Feldman’s account is particularly effective due to his established expertise in the field, as well as his balanced portrayal of issues, exhibited by his willingness to criticize all sides, even his own. For instance, Feldman acknowledges some of the wide-reaching negative consequences of his work as a Zionist tour guide, describing how “the overlapping Zionist and Protestant narratives cement the ties of both guide and group to the land to each other while marginalizing Palestinian Arabs and Muslims” (p. 43). To supplement these subtler demonstrations of balanced authorship, Feldman provides a more forthright confirmation of his ethos, declaring himself “a guide who is ‘in the middle’ – empowered by scripture, but not Christian; Israeli but also American; a citizen but not quite a ‘native’” (p. 62). Though it is a seemingly bold self-promotion, Feldman’s assertion of his own credibility is certainly substantiated through his equitable presentation of the Holy Land.

A Jewish Guide in the Holy Land is not to be mistaken for a page-turning novel or a captivating memoir; indeed, it is to be considered an academic publication authored by a career professor of anthropology. Its structure

reflects this, each chapter essentially serving as an independent essay complete with an introductory overview of the chapter, numerically-organized body paragraphs, and a summarizing conclusion. Despite the addition of several humorous anecdotes, it is clear that Feldman's overall intention is not to entertain his audience. Although at moments it is tedious, the book is impressive in its overall density and scope, covering all corners of the expansive subject in just seven chapters.

Ultimately, this work is to be valued as a reliable resource for academics and students at all levels of higher education seeking to learn more about the political and cultural dynamics of religious tourism. From the Suk (marketplace) in Jerusalem's Old City, to the Church of Nativity, Feldman's stimulating account of the tourism industry's extensive impact on all levels of society is applicable to not only the Holy Land, but to other hubs of religious tourism as well. Pesky details are best left to the academics, not the tourists, as "pilgrimage is far more about the confirmation of faith than about the hermeneutics of suspicion" (p. 90).

Jonah Rose comes from the second holiest city in the Jewish tradition: Boca Raton, Florida. With a Jewish identity as undecided as his major, Jonah's Jewish role-models include Shabtai Tzvi and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He is a freshman in the College.