



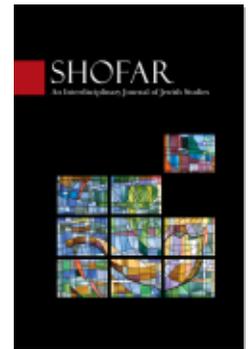
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The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image by Daniel B. Schwartz (review)

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ment scholar Bart Ehrman and his opus should have been referenced. The book under review contains illustrations, a bibliography, an index, and an introduction.

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THE FIRST MODERN JEW: SPINOZA AND THE HISTORY OF AN IMAGE
Daniel B. Schwartz. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. 270 pp.

Daniel B. Schwartz's *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* is an important addition to the ever-extending list of new thinking about the life, works, and reception of Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza, the seventeenth-century philosopher, political theorist, and biblical exegete, who was excommunicated by Amsterdam's Sephardic Jewish community. The interplay of his book's title and subtitle indicates Schwartz's primary concern and contribution. Rather than engaging in a history of ideas, he examines the constructions of a conjunction—the figure of “the first modern Jew” (as the cover emphasizes) and its identification with the figure “Spinoza”—and the diverse purposes they served at crucial moments in the history of contestations over Jewish identity.

As it moves from Spinoza's first biographers (J.-M. Lucas, P. Bayle, and J. Colerus) at the turn of the eighteenth century to the turn-of-the-millennium efforts of Y. Yovel, S. Nadler, S. B. Smith, and R. Goldstein, *The First Modern Jew* delimits its purview to critical essays of the role of Jewish tradition and social location on Spinoza's work. Further, aside from those early Gentile readers who addressed the question of Spinoza's Jewishness, he focuses almost exclusively on Jewish authors and what he identifies as the “Jewish reclamation of Spinoza.” Not all Jewish readings sought to “reclaim” the apostate (although he never converted to Christianity) for the Jews; consequently, what distinguish the authors Schwartz analyzes are not only their ethnic or religious provenance but their motivations as well: “to validate—and in some cases critically interrogate—their own identities and ideologies” (3). Ultimately, Schwartz directs his attention at those for whom this reclamation project was also the means by which they generated genealogies of how to embody “modern” and “Jew.” His choice of “modern” rather than “secular” is also apt, since the identification of the “secular Jew” with the “modern Jew” has become a commonplace; however, as Schwartz demonstrates, the identification of the “modern” with the “secular” is only

one of a number of diverse identity choices Jews have made since the eighteenth century.

Given the many different life-worlds in which reclaiming a Jewish Spinoza as the first or prototypical modern Jew played a significant role in grounding a modern Jewish identity over and against a hegemonic traditional one, Schwartz selects four moments that vary in time, place, language, and religious observance/notion of religion: 1830s Germany, 1850s Galicia, 1920s Palestine, and 1920s Warsaw/1940s New York. Prior to his case studies, Schwartz describes how in the first century after Spinoza's death, as the greater Jewish community remained virtually silent, his Jewishness was being constructed by Gentile commentators along two trajectories: ex-Jew and eternal Jew. The second chapter takes up the breach of Jewish observance of the ban on discussing Spinoza by the other usual contender for the title "first modern Jew," Moses Mendelssohn. In his first (*Philosophical Dialogues*) and last (*Morning Hours*) works Mendelssohn situated Spinoza ("someone other than a Christian"; cit. 39) in the progressive history of metaphysical thought and, if his work were to be properly "refined" (52), as not incompatible with Judaism. The initial identification of Spinoza as the "first modern Jew," however, only emerges in the Bildung-intoxicated, early-nineteenth-century German-Jewish community on the cusp of Emancipation exploring religious reform and seeking social integration portrayed in chapter 3. While detailing a number of Jewish engagements with Spinoza from Saul Asch to Moses Hess, this chapter turns on a discussion of how liberal humanist author Berthold Auerbach, with the publication of his Spinoza novel (and of his translation, the first complete German one, of Spinoza's works, both in 1837), proffers a Spinoza incarnating a universal Judaism that portended the modern ideal of a universal human community.

In his next chapter Schwartz moves eastward to the Hebrew Haskala and its pursuit of other intellectual models immanent to the Jewish tradition. Salomon Rubin's *New Guide to the Perplexed* with its partial Hebrew translations of Spinoza's works comes to exemplify, against the background of earlier maskilic Spinoza discussion and by the response Rubin's work generated, how the reception of Spinoza mediated East European attempts at forming a Judaism both enlightened and ethnically Jewish. Yosef Klausner's lifting of Spinoza's *Herem* at Hebrew University's commemoration of his two-hundred-fiftieth *Yahrzeit* on Mount Scopus sets the stage for Schwartz's discussion of the reclamation of Spinoza by both cultural and political Zionism in their search for a usable past, in general, and of the invocation

of a passage in the third chapter of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in particular by political Zionists (from L. Pinsker to D. Ben-Gurion), as having opened the possibility of the restoration of a Jewish state. In his concluding case study Schwartz addresses how opposing engagements with Spinoza shaped the formation of the Yiddish-speaking individual over and against the community of tradition. He analyzes how I. B. Singer shifted from the young Spinoza enthusiast in Warsaw to, in “The Spinoza of Market Street” and *The Family Moskat*, the critic of the Spinozist as idolator alienated from self and community.

My one reservation is that Schwartz pays insufficient attention to the role of the Jewish rehabilitation of Spinoza in Jews’ reclamation of their identification from non-Jews. While Schwartz does note that Gentile constructions of Spinoza before 1830, such as the “god-intoxicated” “good Jew” of Goethe and the German Romantics, catalyzed German Jews’ engagement with Spinoza, he omits the no less significant role of Kant’s and Fichte’s appropriations of Spinoza for their negative depictions of Judaism, nor are the possible effects of subsequent Gentile “Spinoza”’s addressed.

Schwartz’s epilogue briefly discusses contemporary Jewish writers confronting historical circumstances that differ from those encountered in the preceding chapters. They, he suggests, are now turning their attention to Spinoza’s life and thought in order to work through a modern Jewish identity in a life-world in which a secular notion of modernity has become hegemonic and traditional Judaism a memory. Now joining this modern Jewish project is Schwartz’s exemplary examination of how the identification of Spinoza as “the first modern Jew” functioned in contestations over Jewish identity.

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THROUGH AMATEUR EYES: FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN NAZI GERMANY
Frances Guerin. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
342 pp.

In *Through Amateur Eyes*, Frances Guerin pursues deeper and more nuanced interpretations than those that are usually gleaned from amateur film and photographs taken by Germans during the Nazi era. Her extensive archival work and ensuing analyses have brought her to the conclusion that such amateur artifacts can act “as agents in processes of witnessing and remem-