

FINE, Lawrence — *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship*. Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 480.

Lawrence Fine has spent his entire scholarly career examining the remarkable revival of the Judaic mystical tradition known as kabbala in sixteenth-century Safed. This book marks the culmination of his career, and it is a worthy volume. It studies in depth the life and thought of one of the most influential and enigmatic kabbalists of all time, Isaac Luria.

The challenges facing Fine, or, indeed, anyone attempting to understand Lurianic kabbala, are manifold. Most importantly, very few of Isaac Luria's teachings are preserved in his own words. Mostly, they are preserved in the writings of his disciples like Hayyim Vital and Joseph ibn Tabul, whose versions of Luria's teachings on a given issue are not infrequently contradictory. Fine deftly escorts the reader through this scholarly minefield while not overburdening the book with the nitty-gritty of manuscript evidence. Readers in search of the current state of research in this area are appropriately referred to the work of the Israeli scholar, Ronit Meroz.

Fine's major effort in this book is to understand Isaac Luria's kabbalistic ideas in terms of their social milieu and their major impact on sixteenth-century Jewish society. He thus spends considerable time looking at the ways in which kabbala in general, and the classic book of medieval kabbala, the Zohar, in particular, affected social relationships within Luria's inner circle and among the Jews of Safed. In this context, accounts of Isaac Luria's spiritual gift of being able to diagnose a person's sins and to prescribe a proper penance for them are seen as similar in nature to those concerning the Zohar's major protagonist, Simeon bar Yohai. Similarly, Isaac Luria's group of disciples was apparently consciously compared in the Lurianic tales to that of Simeon bar Yohai. Sensitivity toward the social contextualization of Luria and his group is the book's major contribution to Lurianic studies. It stems, in a certain sense, from the author's formative experience in the intimate spiritual group of young Jews which coalesced in the 1960s as Havurat Shalom in Somerville, Massachusetts (pp. xi–xii).

Equally important and compelling is Fine's judicious treatment of the Lurianic theory of the relationship between God and the created universe. Without unduly simplifying teachings of great complexity, Fine guides the reader toward a nuanced understanding of the meaning and implications of such Lurianic teachings as *zimzum* ("contraction"), *shevirat ha-kelim* ("breaking of the vessels"), and *tikkun* ("restoration") as well as their theological, theurgical, and social consequences. In the same way, Fine succeeds in unpacking the Lurianic meditations and manipulations of divine names (*kavvanot*). These are notoriously difficult to understand, even by those who have considerable experience in reading kabbalistic texts. It must be said that Fine does not do the impossible and make them easy to understand. That would not be true to their inherent complexity. Instead, once again, he has succeeded in guiding the reader toward a sense of their nature and importance in Lurianic kabbala.

This is in every sense an important book. It will soon find its way into the syllabi of many courses and into the footnotes of numerous articles and books. It is the wor-

thy capstone of a distinguished career spent studying the kabbalistic ideas of the sixteenth century and their importance for social and intellectual history.

Ira Robinson  
Concordia University

GANSON, Barbara — *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de la Plata*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 290.

Scholars of Latin America have long needed this book, specifically those who teach on indigenous resistance and more generally the colonial history of the Southern Cone. Barbara Ganson's study is a comprehensive collection of historical sources that explain the conditions of the Guaraní indigenous people in the last half of the eighteenth century and their situation following the collapse of the famous Jesuit missions. More importantly, the author deftly constructed this informative ethnohistory from a broad scope of sources through extensive archival research; this collection of data goes far to demystify the significant historical lacunae that have complicated serious analysis of the Jesuit enterprise in Colonial Latin America. Finally, the outstanding accomplishment of this text is to highlight the role that the Guaraní themselves played as the Jesuit drama unfolded and to document its effects on the indigenous peoples.

By far the strength of this book is the demographic analysis and family history of the Guaraní, who fled the missions after King Charles III expelled the Jesuits from Spain's Latin American territories in 1767. Rather than merely criticize the administrators who took over the missions for their decline, this history shows that, even within the instability that resulted for the Guaraní, the indigenous people played a critical role in shaping their own future. Although the mission natives had generally adapted some European attitudes towards land and private property, they still moulded events significantly both at the missions and in the Southern Cone. Only a dozen years before, in 1753, the Guaraní had rebelled against the crown and had virtually assumed leadership of their mission communities in a military action independent of Jesuit influence. This conservative rebellion, grounded in syncretic Guaraní beliefs, provided the indigenous people with a new sense of identity within the colonial context. Rather than the docile mission Indians they are often portrayed to have been, the Guaraní were strengthened by the rebellion, making their geopolitical position along the critical borderland between Spanish and Portuguese territories such a formidable military force that authorities in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Europe all kept them under serious consideration.

The Guaraní first interacted with the Spanish early in the sixteenth century. While most studies have characterized early encounters between the groups as peaceful, Ganson instead highlights the first encounter as a "shower of arrows" led by the famous Cario-Guaraní leader Lambaré. Rather than the harmonious blend of cultures glorified even in Paraguay, the Guaraní perspective reveals a history of slave raids and exploitation of indigenous labour from the early harvest of *yerba mate* tea