
Reviewed by Roger S. Kohn, Independent scholar, Silver Spring, Maryland U.S.A.

This volume is the revised edition of the same title published in 1992 by Beacon Press, which then contained 350 pages and had a slightly larger format (27 cm.). Does this second, revised edition add enough to the first edition to justify for an institutional library to buy it? Even more difficult, should an interested individual, layperson or scholar of the field, acquire it, if s/he already owns the first one?

To find an answer to these questions, we shall first turn to the reviews of the 1992 edition and note if the issues raised twelve years ago have been addressed.

The First edition (1992) was received with many accolades and got reviewed in eight publications (American Jewish History, Cross Currents, Library Journal, Ms. Magazine (just a brief mention) Tikkun (also a brief mention), Religious Studies Review, The Women Review of books, and Women's Studies Quarterly). Reviewers were very positive: an "extensive and varied collection… extraordinarily rich collection" (Ackelsberg), "an important addition to women's studies collections" (Glatt), "welcomed collection" (Heschel), "there are many pieces to read, reread and cherish" (Muffs), and "useful for students of women in Judaism or women in religion" (V. Ochs). Charlene Spretnak summarized the anthology in one sentence in her three-page essay in Ms. Magazine with: "piety, the inculcating of spiritual values, and friendship are the informing themes that link the diversity of contributions."

Reviewers noted the main features, first among them, the great variety of documents: poems, prayers, sermons, rituals, letters, diaries, ethical wills, sisterhood minutes, midrashim (no fiction included). Muffs added that she found in the collection "cries of anger, shouts of joy, and calls for understanding." More critically, the reviewers noted that spirituality was broadly defined and included social services and charitable

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activities, that the selection was arranged chronologically, with an emphasis on the most recent period. It was also noted that geographically, the emphasis shifted from Italy, Germany, and Great Britain in the earlier period (roughly the nineteenth century) to Great Britain and chiefly the United States in the twentieth century and focused on the innovation in Northern America for the most recent decades.

Two reviewers (Ackelsberg, V. Ochs) raised the question of documenting spirituality in the first place. In Vanessa Ochs words, "spirituality can exist and be inadequately captured in words. How, for instance, can one document the sophisticated spirituality of illiterate women?" Ackelsberg was more pointed: 'why some sorts of polemical writings are deemed sufficiently 'spiritual' to be included in the book, whereas others--e.g., the writing deriving from the more political activities… of Jewish feminist activism are absent?" Muffs objected to selections from authors for whom Judaism was "an accident of birth." She and Ackelsberg pointed out to two categories of women writings missing or under-represented in Four centuries, Orthodox women and Sephardic women.

Five reviewers (Ackelsberg, Heschel, C. Ochs, V. Ochs, and Muffs) commented on specific selections: the American journalist Ray Frank (1865-1948) was the most commented upon. For Heschel, she typified the "voices of the women in this anthology who are not always feminist" and Muffs found her "to be a bit melodramatic, even anti-feminist." (Frank has two selections instead of three in the 2009 edition.) Two authors found in the 1992 edition are not in the revised edition of 2009: the piece by Itka Frajman Zygmuntowicz "Survival and Memory" which Carol Ochs found "one of the most moving pieces of this anthology" about her experience during the Holocaust. Savina J. Teubal's ritual "Simchat Hochmah" was also removed from the 2009 edition. This might be linked to the review by Muffs who had "great difficulty" with Teubal's ritual, because she "did not find it touched meaningfully upon the feelings, issues, or questions that many of us experience about our own aging." Muffs also commented on a selection retained in the revised edition, "Encountering the Divine Presence" by Laura Geller.
which she qualified as "a major contribution to the understanding of the nature of spirituality within a Jewish context."

The 2009 edition has five parts instead of the four in the earlier edition. The new edition adds an "Earlier voices, 1355-1523." The 1992 edition was strictly chronological while there is now some overlap of dates: the part II, "Traditional voices" which ended in 1800 in the 1992 edition, now ends in 1865 and overlaps with Part III "Innovative voices, 1842-1934." Even more than in the 1992 edition, the revised edition emphasizes the contemporary scene, documenting the expression of renewal and innovation in all currents in Judaism, chiefly in the United States, but also in Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in South America and Europe.

According to my count, there are twenty-one new authors in the revised Four centuries, a net gain of 30%. To quote in the order in which they appear in the book: Abigaill Levy Franks in Part II; the poet Rachel in Part III; in Part IV, 1935-1989, "Urgent voices," German rabbi Regina Jonas; poets Else Dormitzer, Grete Schmahl-Wolf, and Ilse Blumenthal-Weiss, and her daughter, also a poet, Miriam Merzbacher-Blumenthal; new immigrant to North Dakota Sophie Turnoy Trupin; rabbi and author Sandy Eisenberg Sasso; French poet Evelyn Kadouche; Sephardic poet Jennie Adatto Tarbulus; and Israeli poet Yona Wallach. In Part V, 1988-2007 "Contemporary voices," Ahuva Artzi (pseudonym for an Orthodox woman from Jerusalem), Marjorie Agosin (Chilean poet and human right activist), Maya Bejerano (Israeli poet), Magda Herzberger (Holocaust survivor and poet), Yael Levine (Israeli modern Orthodox feminist), Yael Arami (Israeli of Yemenite ancestry), Silvina Chemen (Argentinean Rabbi), Viva Hammer, and Shelley Frier List (two Orthodox activists). From this list, it appears that Umansky and Ashton have responded to the criticism and presented additional Sephardic and Orthodox voices in their anthology.

This 2009 version of the sourcebook is useful for students of women in Judaism or women in religion and is an important addition to women's studies collections.
BOOK REVIEWS OF THE 1992 EDITION CITED IN THIS REVIEW: