

Yiddish Civilisation – The Rise and Fall of a Forgotten Nation  
by Paul Kriwaczek. Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2005.

A quick assumption from the title is that Yiddish Civilisation is a book about the Yiddish language, and possibly the literature and language to which it gave birth. In actuality it is nothing less than a history of the Jews of Europe from Roman to modern times. Though there is plentiful material about Yiddish, its origins, development and spread, it is not the principle focus.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, each with sub-sections, and though covering well-trodden ground nevertheless manages to bring a freshness and vitality to the subject that are all too often lacking in books on the subject. Paul Kriwaczek writes beautifully, injecting his narrative with information and humour, making Yiddish Civilisation not just educational but a real pleasure to read.

Having read many books of Jewish history over the last 35 years I would state unequivocally that I have not enjoyed any as much as I enjoyed this, nor did I feel as great a sense of understanding of the synchronicity of certain parts of European history as I now do.

This is a book for Jews and non-Jews alike to savour; a great source of material for teaching adults and children, and an invaluable text for those converting to Judaism.

In one word – superb!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh