

A Short History of the Jews by Michael Brenner.

Princeton University Press 2010.

In spite of its physical weight, which for an A5 size book is considerable, this 'short' history runs to 421 pages, including the index.

Divided into 20 chapters it traces 'Jewish' history from Abraham's beginnings in Ur up to the present day, following the journeys of the Jewish people throughout the world. A clue to an inherent weakness in the book lies in the word 'short' in its title, for a short history of a people that claims to have been around for at least 3000 years must of necessity be selective and subjective, concentrating on the things which the author deems essential to include rather than seeking to include everything.

Inevitably therefore, more serious readers may be disappointed at the amount of space allocated (or not) to certain subject areas, but the author's style, or at least that of his translator, is highly readable, and as a first introduction to the subject of Jewish history Professor Brenner's work has quite a lot to recommend it. Some of the suggestions for further reading are excellent, and will certainly supplement some of the lacunae in the book if the reader is inspired, as they may well be, to pursue certain subjects further.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh