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Wisse, Ruth. *Jews and Power*. New York: Schocken, 2007. 231 p. \$19.95 (ISBN 978-0-80524-224-9).

This is an insightful and original historical analysis (as opposed to a philosophical or halakhic discussion) of the relationship of the Jewish people to political power in the diaspora and in the State of Israel. The author, a professor of Yiddish at Yale, disputes the common claim that in the diaspora Jews were above (or below) politics. In fact they engaged in negotiations with the rulers of the lands in which they found themselves in order to attain some kind of security. In addition, they adopted the stance of the prophets that political and military defeat and exile were the result of the Jews' own failure to live up to the covenant with the Creator. The author argues that this belief allowed the Jews to maintain a certain spiritual independence and to avoid despair, but it also led them to unrealistically ignore the strength of their enemies. Dr. Wisse further argues that the traditional diaspora Jewish political strategy of accommodation has proved inappropriate for the State of Israel, because, in its Arab enemies, it "confronts a political tradition of conquest and expansion." There is more in this book, notably an analysis of the intractability and persistence of anti-Semitism and a consideration of the position of the Jews as democracy replaced autocracy in the west. It is surprising, though, that there is no mention of the 2005 retreat from Gaza and the expulsion of the Jews from there by the Israeli government, especially as the author does fruitfully discuss the handover of Sinai to Egypt. Dr. Wisse's prose is blessedly free of jargon. Her conclusions may well provoke controversy, but her book is intelligent, clear, sober, and non-polemical. Recommended for all libraries.

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