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MAX I. DIMONT

JEWS, GOD AND HISTORY

2ND EDITION

EDITED AND REVISED BY ETHEL DIMONT



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PRAISE FOR MAX I. DIMONT'S
JEWS, GOD AND HISTORY

"Done with warmth and vitality. Written for laymen by a scholarly layman who has a passion for his theme."

—MAX LERNER

"By far the liveliest popular history of the Jewish people that I have ever read. In many ways, a strikingly original synthesis of Jewish history."

—RICHARD B. MORRIS,
author of *The Forging of the Union, 1781–1789*
and *Witnesses at the Creation*

MAX I. DIMONT, author of *The Indestructible Jews*, *The Jews in America*, *The Amazing Adventures of the Jewish People*, and *Appointment in Jerusalem*, was born in Helsinki, Finland, and came to the United States in 1930. He taught himself English by reading Shakespeare's plays, the Bible, and American plays translated into Finnish. After serving in intelligence with the U.S. Army during World War II, he worked in public relations and employee relations for Edison Brothers Stores in St. Louis. Following the first publication of the bestselling *Jews, God and History*, he lectured extensively on Jewish history throughout the United States, Canada, South Africa, Brazil, and Finland until his death in 1992.

OTHER BOOKS BY MAX I. DIMONT

Appointment in Jerusalem

The Indestructible Jews

The Jews in America

The Amazing Adventures of the Jewish People

This book is respectfully dedicated to
my late father, Hyman Dimont,
a humanist in the great Talmudic tradition,
who early taught me to cherish the proverb
of Solomon: "To know wisdom and instruction;
to comprehend the words of understanding;
to receive the discipline of wisdom, justice,
and right, and equity."

PREFACE

At the time of his death in 1992, Max Dimont was in the process of updating Jews, God and History. Having worked with him from the time he started thinking about writing this book in 1955, I feel he would have wanted the task finished. I have used as much of his material as possible and tried to keep faith with his ideas, concerns, and beliefs in Jews and Jewish history, but I ask the reader's understanding of what might be obvious differences in style. No one can write like Max Dimont; I certainly cannot.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Max's readers for having made Jews, God and History a classic in its own time, and to have done so while he was still alive to appreciate it.

Just as with all his other works, our daughter Gail Goldey was always there, with her sharp pencil and discerning mind, to come to my aid in completing this manuscript.

—Ethel Dimont
1993

Most history books about Jews are written by Jews for Jews, or by scholars for scholars. But Jewish history is too fascinating, too interesting, too incredible to remain the private property of Jews and scholars. This book is a popular history of this amazing people, written without bowing to orthodoxy or pandering to anti-intellectualism. It will furnish the arguments, the data, the ideas, but the reader will have to furnish his intelligent understanding. The author is not seeking to convince anyone or change anyone's opinion. This book is designed to entertain, to inform, and to stimulate.

The real history of the Jews has not yet been written. It took Europe sixteen hundred years after the decline of Greece to realize that her literature, science, and architecture had their roots in Grecian civilization. It may take an-

other few hundred years to establish that the spiritual, moral, ethical, and ideological roots of Western civilization are embedded in Judaism. To put it differently—the furniture in the Western world is Grecian, but the house in which Western man dwells is Jewish. This is a viewpoint which is beginning to appear more and more in the writings of both churchmen and secular scholars.

Jewish history cannot be told as the history of Jews only, because they have nearly always lived within the context of other civilizations. The destiny of the Jews has paralleled the destinies of those same civilizations, except in one important respect. Somehow the Jews managed to escape the cultural death of each of the civilizations within which they dwelled. Somehow the Jews managed to survive the death of one civilization and continue their cultural growth in another which was emerging at the time.

How did they survive?

To tell this four-thousand-year story of survival on four continents and in six major civilizations, this book makes use of a new method of viewing Jewish history. It presents the general history of each of these civilizations, analyzes Jewish events within the framework of these other cultures, and then examines those ideas, unique to the Jews, which enabled them to survive as a national group and which gave them the vitality to continue as a culture-producing society. Thus *Jewish* history becomes part of *world* history, and the reader will be able to correlate Jewish events with contemporary events.

This book attempts to portray the broad sweep of Jewish history, the grandeur and humor of the Jewish *comédie humaine*, and to present Jewish history through the eyes of a twentieth-century Western man rather than a sixteenth-century ghetto Talmudist.

Many dates in Jewish history are subject to controversy, but as long as the logic of Jewish history itself is not affected we have arbitrarily chosen one date without interrupting the flow of the narrative to debate the merits of other dates. So, for instance, we begin Jewish history with 2000 B.C., around which time Abraham is reputed to have left the city of Ur, though some scholars place this event several centuries later. We date the beginning of the Jewish sojourn and subsequent captivity in Egypt from 1600 to

1200 B.C., the beginning of the settlement of Canaan after 1200 B.C., and so on, again with the full awareness that these dates are still debated by some historians. As a rule, the dates favored are those used in *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*.

For the sake of clarity, we have also taken the liberty of Anglicizing the plural endings of several Hebrew, Yiddish, and German words. So, for instance, we have rendered the plural of the word *Hasid* not as *Hasidim* but as *Hasidists*, and the plural of *shtetl* not as *shtetlach* but as *shtetls*. Wherever suitable we have also presented biblical and secular interpretations of the same events to show that Jewish history remains unaffected and equally fascinating whichever viewpoint one adopts.

And now it is my pleasure to make several acknowledgments. First and foremost I wish to thank Mr. Gordon LeBert, a dedicated Episcopalian, an experienced editor, and a scholar in American and English literature, with whom I worked for many, many hours perfecting the manuscript. His fine ear for language permitted no discordant note in a sentence, his talent for organization ruled out any wrong sequence of events, and his insistence upon perfection often led me to rewrite a paragraph endlessly until the idea it contained was comprehensible on the first reading.

My next acknowledgments must go to two scholars. Dr. Julius J. Nodel, Rabbi, Shaare Emeth Temple, St. Louis, Missouri, read every chapter as it was completed, and to his impressive scholarship and unstinting help this book owes much of its strength. Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, Director of American Jewish Archives and Professor of American Jewish History, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, meticulously read the manuscript through the Middle Ages and generously offered many valuable suggestions. The book gained strength not only from their many excellent suggestions, but also from their at times diametrically opposed opinions.

I wish to thank the following individuals: Professors Franklin Haimo and Laurence Iannaccone, of Washington University, St. Louis, the former for help in checking my scientific information and the latter for advice on medieval and modern history; Professor Henry G. Manne, of St. Louis University, St. Louis, for suggestions pertaining to

economic theories; Professor George Kimball Plochmann, of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for clarifying many abstruse concepts in ancient and medieval philosophy; and the Reverend Donald Olland Fatchett, now minister of the Northmond Evangelical and Reformed Church, La Mesa, California, who read all sections pertaining to Christianity and saved me from many errors. I wish to stress, however, that the wording and views expressed in this book are mine.

I take this opportunity to show my appreciation to my wife, Ethel, for the many hours she spent reading each chapter aloud as a final test of its fluidity of language and coherence of thought, and to my daughter Gail whose history major at Radcliffe made her a valuable and perceptive critic of the manuscript. To both go my heartfelt thanks for their patient understanding of my total absorption in this book for the past five years.

I wish to express my profound respect to Joseph Gaer, Director, Jewish Heritage Foundation, a humanist and a scholar, for his and the Jewish Heritage Foundation's interest in this book, and for their sponsorship of its publication.

—M.I.D.
1962

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IT HAPPENED ONLY ONCE IN HISTORY!

A streamlined review of the four thousand years and the six civilizations which have cradled the Jewish people, examining some of the perverse factors in one of history's most illogical survivals—that of a nation which has proclaimed itself God's Chosen People, and almost has the world convinced of it.

There are nearly five and a half billion people on this earth, of whom less than eighteen million—less than one third of one percent—are classified as Jews. Statistically, they should hardly be heard of, like the Ainu tucked away in a corner of Asia, bystanders of history. But the Jews are heard of totally out of proportion to their small numbers. The Jewish contribution to the world's list of great names in religion, science, literature, music, finance, and philosophy is staggering.

The period of greatness of ancient Greece lasted five hundred years. Then that nation lapsed into a people of herdsmen, never again to regain its former glory. Not so with the Jews. Their creative period extends through their entire four-thousand-year history. Their contributions have been absorbed by both East and West, though neither is always aware of it or willing to admit the debt if made aware of it.

From this people sprang Jesus Christ, acclaimed Son of God by more than 850 million Christians, the largest religious body in the world. From this people came Paul, organizer of the Christian Church. The religion of the Jews influenced the Muhammadan faith, second-largest religious organization in the world, with over 400 million adherents claiming descent from Abraham and Ishmael. The Mormons say they are the descendants of the tribes of Israel.

Another Jew is venerated by more than one billion people. He is Karl Marx, whose book *Das Kapital* is the secular gospel of Communists the world over, with Marx himself enshrined in Russia and China. Albert Einstein, the Jewish mathematician, ushered in the atomic age and opened a path to the moon with his theoretical physics. A Jewish psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, lifted the lid of man's mind. His discovery of psychoanalysis revolutionized