

The Philologists' Sorrow and the Failure to Bury Arab-Jewish Identity and Culture

Orit Bashkin, Nancy Berg, Yoram Meital and Yuval Evri

In this historiographical article, we wish to explore the multiple meanings associated with the concept of the *Arab Jew*, and its representations in political, cultural, and academic discourses in Israel. This article is written as a response to the claims raised by Reuven Snir in this issue. We call attention to the multiplicity of Arab Jewish identities, which enrich our understanding of the concept in both the past and the present. We further contend that Arab Jewish identities are modern, national, transnational, and fluid, and that their meanings change according to different economic, political, and social experiences. These identities are expressed in the print media, but also in modern oral and popular cultures mediated by radio, television, and cinema. These identities are articulated in classical and modern standard Arabic (*fusha*); and in local Arabic dialects such as the Iraqi, the Shami, the Egyptian, the Moroccan (*darija*), and so on. Furthermore, we consider these identities in multilingual and imperial settings: we take note of the multicultural societies whose Jewish subjects spoke Ladino, French, English, Ottoman-Turkish, Persian, Aramaic, and other languages, as well as various Iranian, Ottoman, and European contexts. In our closing section, we analyze the relationships between the past and the present, and suggest that Arab Jewish identities are echoed in modern Hebrew literature, as translation permits the fusion of Arabic texts into the Hebrew literary canon and into its margins. The discussion about the relationships between Hebrew and Arabic, and about Arab Jewish identities, inform the formations of new Mizrahi identities, in which writers, artists, and filmmakers commemorate the Arab culture of the past in order to change the present. We wish to analyze, and are inspired by, the writings of Middle Eastern intellectuals, the Muslims, Jews, and Christians who adopted inclusive, rather than exclusive identities; to respect local languages and dialects; and to understand the cultures of Jews of Middle Eastern and Islamic lands in the widest contexts possible, rather than subjugating them to an elitist, monolingual, national model.

Who Needs Arab-Jewish Identity? On Identity Politics, Social Capital, and Academic Ethics in the Post-Truth Era

Reuven Snir

This article deals with the contemporary public status of Jewish-Arab culture, and the question of whether it is flourishing or, conversely, slowly fading and disappearing. In the wake of the political transformations in the Middle East and the emigration of Arab Jews to Israel, particularly during the 1950s, major changes occurred in Jewish-Arab identity and the relevant culture. The most prominent feature of this is that the Arabic language, a language used by Jews for more than 1500 years, is no longer a language used by Jews for daily purposes—certainly not for literary aims. But do these changes herald the end of the road, or rather a new phase foreshadowing continuity even if in different cultural patterns? The main argument of this article is that scholars who insist that Jewish-Arab identity still exists today, and that the relevant culture is still flourishing, are not impartial researchers, but rather make these claims out of foreign motives echoing post-truth populist strategies. Consequently, their interventions on the issue of Arab-Jewish identity are scientifically unsubstantiated. The article will also address a controversy around this issue which emerged from a research group dealing with “Jewish Life in Modern Islamic Contexts”, convened during 2018-2019 at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

**“For I Have Misled Such a Great Nation,
and My Time Has Passed”: Ottoman
Millenarianism and the “True Religion”
in R. Ḥayyim Vital’s *Book of Vision***

Assaf Tamari

The article explores a peculiar dream described in *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* (The Book of Visions)—a collection of events, dreams, and visions by and about R. Ḥayyim Vital (1542-1620), one of the most prominent Kabbalists operating in Safed, Jerusalem and Damascus. This dream, attributed to a figure described as “*ha-palil* Sa‘ad al-Din *dgl*, the impurity of all the Islamic nation”, depicts the dreamer finding both Muhammad and ‘Isa, the son of Miriam, degraded for misleading their believers, and declaring their religions empty and abrogated. The dream goes on to describe the Muslim masses searching for a “true religion”, which they find in Judaism with Vital as its head. The article offers a contextualization of the dream, and of the political fantasy that it raises, both in Vital’s life-long relationship with the *pelilim*, local Muslim clerics, and in the fervent Muslim millenarian discourse of the period and its Ottoman confessional contexts. The article suggests that the dream can be seen as a sensitive Jewish adaptation of a contemporary eschatological counter-narrative, Sufi or other, harnessing this to a Jewish conceptualization of the aspiration for change in the power relations and acknowledgment of the delicate nature of inter-religious relations in the empire.

Jewish Voices in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Lior Sternfeld

Can Iranian Jews speak? Given the social, political, and religious atmosphere in Iran, and the country's high-tension relationship with Israel, what are the options for Jews to speak freely? Are they in a permanent state of *taqiyya* (dissimulation)? Are their public statements and worldviews intended to placate the regime in order to secure their presence in Iran, or can they navigate their ways as Jews living in the Islamic Republic without compromising their sense of belonging and loyalty? This article examines these questions throughout four decades of Iran's relationship with its Jewish communities. The article follows the shaping of the relationship between the Jewish minority and the general society, starting with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, through the election of reformist Sayyed Mohammad Khatami and his "great civilization" project, the subsequent election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, and Iranian-Jewish responses to the latter's holocaust denial. By examining the Jewish community's publications, memoirs, interviews, and newspaper articles penned by Jewish leaders, this article interrogates the relationship between Iran and its Jewish minority. The article concludes that there is no alternative to direct inquiry of Jewish voices within Iran. By juxtaposing writings *on* and *by* Iranian Jews, the article demonstrates the fallacy of portraying a community in constant danger due to their religion. At the same time, it demonstrates the Jews' exceptionally complex realities as a religious minority in the ever-changing Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Social Life of an Illicit Thing: Hashish and Jews in Mandatory Palestine and the State of Israel

Haggai Ram

This article explores the history of, and public discourse about, Jews and hashish in Mandatory Palestine and the State of Israel. Jews in interwar Palestine tended to steer clear of the drug, considering its use a form of “backwardness” linked to the realities of living among Arabs in the Middle East. Colonial knowledge about hashish—technical, medical, social, and aesthetic—seemed to corroborate these fears, confirming that hashish was an Oriental substance that animated the supposed pathologies inhering in Arab mentalities: irrationality, insanity, criminality, inordinate (homo-)sexuality, indolence, and manipulability. This knowledge survived the transition to the State of Israel but responded, among other things, to new realities: the expulsion and flight of the Arab population during the *Nakba*, and the country’s repopulation by Jews from the Muslim world (Mizrahim). Some of these Jews had used hashish in their countries of origin, and brought the habit with them to Israel. Others began to smoke hashish in Israel as a consequence of their socio-ethnic marginalization. Although hashish smoking in Israel in the 1950s and much of the 1960s remained limited to a few thousand members of the Mizrahi underclass, it rekindled Jewish middle-class anxieties about Levantinization-cum-Arabicization. It also assisted in further marginalizing and criminalizing Mizrahim in Israeli society.

Between Tanzimat and Emancipation: Competing Discourses of Modernity in the Writings of R. Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad

Avi-ram Tzoreff

Following the institution of the Tanzimat in 1839, the Ottoman Mashriq evolved into a contact zone where different understandings, interpretations, and discourses emerged regarding these reforms. The European powers saw themselves as defenders of the non-Muslim Ottoman communities, and understood the reforms as part of a transformation from a despotic Islamic polity to a progressive European-Christian one. On the other hand, the discourse advanced by the Sublime Porte framed the reforms as an integral part of the attempt to safeguard the unification of the empire as a political unit. These varying discourses reflected the various understandings within the local communities of their own status and roles within the developing political framework. In this article, I examine this contact zone of Tanzimat discourses through discussion of the writings of one of the well-known sages of the Baghdadi Jewish community, R. Yosef Hayyim (1834-1909). I focus on the various ways in which he depicted the contested discourses of modernity, while also relating to other Baghdadi Jewish perspectives on this issue. I argue that while Hayyim rejected the European emancipatory model—identifying it as a false approach to Jewish redemption—he did adopt, though hesitantly, the Ottoman model of the Tanzimat, which he identified as an initial stage for redemption.

Zionist Apostles? The Arab Emissaries in Yemen in the 1950s

Menashe Anzi

The majority of the Yemenite Jewish community immigrated to Israel during the first half of the twentieth century. However, about 2,000 Jews remained in Imamic Yemen, subject to the rule of Imam Ahmad Hamīd al-Din (r. 1948-1962). The latter group generally maintained good relations with the Muslim majority.

My article explores efforts between 1951 and 1962 to arrange for the Jews' emigration from Imamic Yemen to British Aden, and from there to Israel. The operation was conducted in cooperation with Arab emissaries, able to move freely within Yemen. I uncover the identities of these emissaries, who acted to ensure the operation's success. I also examine the economic and religious circumstances that led to this surprising choice of Arab involvement in a Zionist operation. I argue that the emissaries' familiarity with the intricacies of local Yemenite politics facilitated the mission's success.

These operations present a vista for exploring the cooperation between the Zionist movement and the Muslim authorities, which encouraged the exodus of the Jews. For the Muslims, the exodus of the Jews made it possible to nationalize their property, to expand residential options, and to eliminate problematic political and religious elements.

Finally, the article shows that the operation was successful; indeed, many Jews did leave Yemen. But this came at a price: some of the Jews suffered losses and their properties were confiscated, while other Jews decided to remain in Yemen and convert to Islam.

Sfaxitude: History, Collective Memory, and the Diaspora of the Descendants of Sfax

Haim Saadon

This article examines *Sfaxitude*: the entirety of the connections, feelings, and longings of Jews, Muslims, and Christians for their colonial-period life in Sfax, their city of origin in Tunisia. Sfaxitude encompasses a complex of previously formed identities, which continued to shape the minds and lives of the people who migrated from Sfax and the lives they created in the post-colonial era. The article elaborates on a number of figures originating from Sfax, in particular Marcel Mahmoud Reggui. Reggui, a Muslim who converted to Christianity, has been a key figure in the formation of the Sfaxian diasporic community since his publication of the yearbook *La Diaspora Sfaxienne* in 1967, consolidating the community around it in the process. The article proposes that Reggui be seen as an “identity broker”, thanks to his actions linking the various groups that emerged from Sfax.

The case discussed in the article enables closer examination of the stages in the construction of a diaspora: life in Sfax during the colonial period; immigration to France, Israel, and other places; ongoing contact with the city; the construction of means of communication between the various diasporic outposts of the community; and the processes of preserving the links and contents of a collective memory. Beyond that, the case of Sfaxitude is special in the sense of vocation held by many of its members: a sense transmitted through a universal message of brotherhood and tolerance between human beings, underpinned by their life experiences in Sfax and the diaspora.

Palestinian Yiddish and its Ramifications: A Telling Case of Arabic Language and Culture in the Ashkenazi Pre-State Community during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Yonatan Mendel

This article discusses two case studies that attest to the presence of Arabic language and culture within Palestine's Ashkenazi community during the pre-Zionist period. These case studies demonstrate the extent to which members of the Ashkenazi community were part of "bnei ha-aretz" ("the people of the land"), a community that was in the process of integrating into the majoritarian local Arab culture. The first case study is of the Yiddish spoken by Ashkenazim during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—a particular dialect called "Palestinian Yiddish". The second case study concerns the influences of Arabic language and culture on the Ashkenazi community in the pre-Zionist period ("the Old Yishuv"). To this end, I draw on historical sources and contemporary interviews I conducted, bringing to light the linguistic realities that existed in the past, realities that have since disappeared from sight and sound.

I also claim that the crystallization of "Palestinian Yiddish" ran against the grain of the hostility, or revulsion, expressed by the Zionist movement towards Yiddish and Arabic, which in time were to become the great rivals of Hebrew. A national movement seeking to assert an exclusive Jewish presence in the country (relying on the principles of "conquest of the land", "conquest of the language", and "conquest of labor") had to distinguish itself from linguistic and cultural phenomena that represented integration and mutual Arab-Jewish life in the land.

The Writings of the Jesuit Father Gaspar Brazeo from Hormuz: Reflections on the Concepts of “Religiosity” and “Piety” in the Sixteenth Century

Leonardo Cohen

This article explores how Gaspar Barzeo (1515-1553)—the first Jesuit to reach the island of Hormuz, in the Persian Gulf—perceived the complex relations between its inhabitants, Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Barzeo arrived in Hormuz in the context of Portugal’s maritime expansion during the sixteenth century. Like all Jesuit missionaries, Barzeo was obliged to report back to the Society of Jesus’ leadership about his performance. To this end, the native Dutchman penned a trove of lengthy letters, which constitute a valuable source for historians of this era. Generally, Barzeo considered Hormuz a wantonly permissive environment, the most iniquitous place he had ever stepped foot in. Nevertheless, the emissary’s dispatches present compelling ethnographic accounts of the island, as well as providing vivid testimony to the high level of mutual tolerance and cooperation existing between the island’s different religious communities, Jews and Muslims.

**“Lord of the War, Expel the Descendants of the
Maid servant”: Attitudes to Muslims and Islam
throughout 1400 years of Jewish *Piyyut***

Hillel Cohen

This article reviews Jewish attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in *piyyutim*—Jewish holy poems—composed in various spaces and localities by Jewish communities under Islamic rule, from the seventh century to the present. It points to the common characteristics of these poems: emphasizing Judaism’s supremacy over Islam and contempt for Muslims; highlighting the suffering of Jews under Islamic rule; and prayers for revenge on the Muslims, including the extermination of them all (or of non-Jews as a whole). These characteristics stand in contrast to chronicles written by Jews under Islamic rule, which refer to periods of peace and refer to “Kings of Grace”. The conclusion is that these poets—even though influenced by the realities of life during distinct periods—do not necessarily reflect social relations between Jews and Muslims or the political status of Jews, but rather Jewish concepts of redemption. In addition, it is suggested that in certain cases, the *piyyutim* served as a tool for maintaining social distance between Jews and Muslims. The ways in which these poets influenced the attitudes of Jews toward Muslims is yet to be studied.

“Bled ma-fihash Yahud ma-fihash Ta’arikh”: Exploring “Our Jews” in Morocco

Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli

Between 1948 and 1967, Morocco witnessed one of the largest demographic upheavals in its history. Within a short timespan most of its Jewish population left the country, leaving behind many voids and unanswered questions. However, and almost in inverse relation to the “dazzling absence” of the Jews, the study of this community in Morocco has reached an unprecedented peak over the past decade. This article addresses the condition of an absence of a community set against a growing number of studies about it, analyzing the perspectives of Moroccans on the Jews of their country as expressed in academic publications from the time of Moroccan independence (1956) to the present. The article traces the connections between the study of Jews in Morocco, and changes in local and global discourses and processes, as well as the ways in which the study of unique cultural expressions has been legitimized. It argues that beyond a clear connection between the study of Jews in Morocco and political processes and events, the research momentum on the subject is also based on a constant dialogue with previous conceptions of Jews and notions of Jewish antiquity. The article argues that “the Jew” of current historiography is a symbol: an integral part of a general nostalgia for Morocco’s past, also mobilized for reimagining a pluralistic Moroccan identity. Despite their almost complete absence from the country, Jews remain a component in the make-up of “Moroccan-ness”, becoming an ideological idea and practice, and a semi-therapeutic means for coping with the sense of loss caused by modernity.

**Bankers into Bureaucrats:
Ottoman Non-Muslim Elites in Syria/Palestine
after the Imperial Bankruptcy**

Aviv Derri

In this article, I explore the nature of the belonging of non-Muslim elites in the Ottoman Empire in its latter decades, by looking at their career options and trajectories. I explore the growing involvement of Damascene merchant-bankers in Ottoman provincial administration following the imperial bankruptcy of 1875. Drawing on the records of civil servants (*sicill-i ahvâl defterleri*), located at the Ottoman State Archive in the Istanbul Archives, I examine the “administrative biographies” of several members of the Jewish Farhi family, who served as local governors from the late eighteenth century. I argue that through lifetime careers in the empire’s fiscal administration, local merchant families managed to maintain their power—even if only partially—despite the crises of that period. For these families, this process entailed a host of new social and political roles, which tied them even closer to the state than before. Finally, I discuss the biography of Abdu Farhi, who worked as a local *wakil* for the Jewish Colonization Association in southern Syria after retiring from the provincial bureaucracy. I use Abdu’s case to rethink the place of local Jews in the changing socio-political landscape of fin-de-siècle Syria/Palestine, from an imperial perspective and away from common Zionist narratives.

Fiction Produces Reality: *The Pictures on the Wall* and the Longing for a “Golden Age” in Iraq

Sigal Goorji

This article explores the reception by Iraqis of the Arabic translation of the Hebrew novel *The Pictures on the Wall* (2015) by Tsionit Fattal Kuperwasser, and the significance of these responses to contemporary Iraqi discourse about Iraqi Jews. The novel tells the tragic story of Nuria, an Iraqi-Jewish woman who rebels against patriarchal society in the Iraq of the first half of the twentieth century. She loses three sons in various disasters; the fourth, born after the death of his brothers, chooses, like many other Jews in 1951, to emigrate with his parents to Israel. After the publication of the novel's Arabic edition, Iraqi intellectuals have made contact with the Israeli author, and have written about her and the novel in the Iraqi media, while she herself has published in Iraqi newspapers. The reception of her novel by Iraqis exemplifies the emergence of a new dialogue in Iraqi society, one that seeks to read and learn about the Jewish minority that lived in Iraq for centuries but left their country of birth during the 1950s. The article demonstrates that Kuperwasser's novel, like other novels penned by Jewish writers of Iraqi origin, is sold, taught, and read in Iraq because it fills a chapter on Iraqi-Jews that has been forgotten in Iraqi history. The author, who was educated in the Israeli education system, experienced a similar trajectory, realizing that the culture and history of Iraqi Jews is hardly taught in Israel. Iraqis, for their part, are not concerned by the fact that she is an Israeli. On the contrary, as an Israeli of Iraqi origin, they consider her novel an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage of her parents, and proof that Iraqi Jews are Iraqi as much as they are Israeli.

The Exodus from Egypt: A Jewish-Egyptian Memory in the Circle of the “Jewish *Nahdah*” in Egypt

Guy Bracha

Between 1920 and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a circle of Jewish intellectuals, writing in literary Arabic, operated in Egypt. This circle was part of a wider intellectual group, spread across the Arab Middle East, influenced by the *Nahda* movement and Arabic nationalist thought in the post-WWI era. This circle of Egyptian intellectuals formed a “Jewish *Nahda*”, an expression of Jewish culture in literary Arabic, using the tools and genres of their contemporary Arab intellectuals. The main project of the group was the promotion of local Egyptian nationalism, combining this with their Zionist affiliations and Jewish religious identity.

As a case study, the article discusses the ways in which this group described the story of Passover, i.e., the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt, Moses, and the Exodus. According to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Passover has played an exceptionally important role in Jewish memory. This memory is comprised of symbols of the eternal salvation of the Jewish people, and marked Egypt as the ultimate exilic space. These Jewish intellectuals tried to turn Passover into a story of national and cultural attachment between Israel and Egypt, while also emphasizing religious and Zionist affiliations. The aim of this article is to examine the various tools that they used in order to express this agenda.

Traditionalism as History, Culture and Theory: Some Reflections on the Writings and Biography of Elie Kedourie

Haya Bambji-Sasportas

The Jewish intellectual Elie Kedourie was a leading historian of the modern Middle East, and a political scientist who studied nationalism and European modern political thought in the post-WWII British academia. In this article, I demonstrate that traditionalism as a historical-cultural context, an expression of Jewish modernity in the Middle East, and as a theoretical means of explication, opens up possibilities for an innovative reading of Kedourie's biography and evolving perceptions. Traditionalism, as an "in-between" position, facilitated Kedourie's critical observations, which ran against the grain of prevailing discourses in which tradition contradicted modernity and progress. The category of traditionalism will support my contention that, in spite of his conservatism, Kedourie's ideas corresponded to salient critical academic discourses—first and foremost the critique of secularism and modernity. Traditionalism also enabled Kedourie to undermine, deconstruct, and reconstruct common modernist dichotomies and conceptualizations. This ability was also a product of a series of historical circumstances that formed his cultural and intellectual worldview. It included the social and cultural history of Baghdadi Jewish elite families; and the experience of political and cultural transitions, from the Ottoman and British imperial worlds to nation states, with their extreme manifestations in the Iraq of the 1930s and 1940s. An additional context was the complexity of modern Jewish-Iraqi self-perceptions, blending Babylonian, Arab, Spanish, and English elements. Kedourie's awareness wandered between ancient Jewish Baghdad, al-Andalus, Christian Spain, and the London of modern times.

English Abstracts

A Translator against His will: Samir Naqqash as a Multilingual Writer in an Age of National Partitions

Almog Behar and Yuval Evri

This article focuses on Samir Naqqash's multilingual poetic style. It examines this style as a case study of multilingual writing in mono-national and monolingual literary realities, where there is a sharp gap between the language of the text and the expectations and lingual habits of readers. The article explores the interrelationship between languages in Naqqash's work against the backdrop of colonial and national processes, which were dominated by linguistic and cultural partitions between Jews and Arabs, Hebrew and Arabic, and between spoken and written Arabic. It explores the extent to which Naqqash's poetic style resists these separations, rather re-illuminating the intersections between Arabic and Hebrew, between literary and spoken language, between Islamic and Jewish traditions, and of Judeo-Arabic as a minority language in relation to the Muslim majority. Alongside the multilingual poetic model, this article examines Naqqash's use of translation in his work; not only the translation between Arabic and Hebrew as two distinct languages, but translation as an integral part of writing and speaking. The multitude of linguistic registers in Naqqash's writing produces multiple spaces of translation, some within the text itself, between spoken and written languages, intermingled within the text and within the language and consciousness of the speakers. Sometimes the translation occurs in the meeting point between two characters, and sometimes in the seam between the author and the text and the reader, echoing the gap between speech and writing.