

Pe'amim

Studies in Oriental Jewry

137

Society and Literature in the Twentieth Century

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**Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish
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In This Issue

The novel *Outcast* (1991) is the ninth prose book by the author Shimon Ballas, who was born in Baghdad in 1930. Ballas began his career writing in Arabic in Iraq, and continued writing in Israel in the Palestinian press after 1951. In 1964 Ballas published his first novel in Hebrew, *The Transit Camp*. The novel *Outcast* aroused great interest, in part due to its sensitive subject, the story of Ahmad Haron Soussan, a Jew who converted to Islam and remained in Iraq after the departure of the Jewish community; this character is based on the historical figure of Ahmad Nissim Soussa. The article suggests reading the novel *Outcast* as an inverted national allegory: through the prism of the rifts and conflicts of the personal identity narrative, the writer wishes to tear the mask from the coherent national narrative. This is a supposedly national novel written in the “wrong” language, to the “wrong” public, and thus it moves back and forth, split between the possibility of being read as an Iraqi national novel, being read against the backdrop of Iraqi history (an option that is not open to most Hebrew readers), and being read in an Israeli context, as a mirror to Israeli national novels. Thus, in its split context, it creates a rapport between Israeli and Iraqi nationalism, while at the same time criticising and parodying both.

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Isaac Bar Moshe (1927–2004) was born in Baghdad and immigrated to Israel in 1950. This

article deals with his literary world, which is split between realism on the one hand, and fantasy, mysticism and dreams on the other, with both these planes reflecting his perspective on various existential questions.

The article *focuses* on the short stories in his book *Behind the Wall* (1973) which, like many of his other works, are largely anchored in his private life and depict a bleak reality, with dreams and fantasy offering the only hope of escape into a better, more spiritual world. The analysis of Bar Moshe's stories is based on three functions of fantasy literature – 'recovery, escape and consolation' – as formulated by the writer and philologist J.R.R. Tolkien in his book *Tree and Leaf*.

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Doron Bar's article deals with the ways in which Jewish immigrants to Israel from the Muslim world influenced local Jewish sacred geography after 1948. Besides taking part in rituals in the older and more established holy places, such as King David's Tomb on Mount Zion, they tended to adopt and develop holy places where only hints of ancient Jewish sanctity were to be found. This occurred mainly in the social and geographical periphery of Israel, in regions and places where immigrants were usually settled by the Israeli establishment during the 1950s and 1960s. In need of accessible and informal holy sites near their new settlements, they brought about the development of such places as the

Tomb of Raban Gamliel in Yavne, the Tomb of Judah in Yahud, and the Tomb of Benjamin near Kfar-Saba.

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From the 19th century onwards the aspiration of quite a few Jewish movements was to encourage a return of their communities to agricultural work as a means of improving their economic, social and civil status.

The JCA Council viewed the vast territory of the Ottoman Empire as having agricultural potential and investigated the possibility of establishing homesteads there, where Jews could engage in productive occupations. The JCA founded agricultural settlements in the Anatolia region of present-day Turkey, as well as an educational agricultural farm that was called “Or Yehouda”.

This article describes the history of this farm from its very beginning, chronicling events and the difficulties it encountered, as well as its eventual closure.

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Haggai's Mazuz's article traces the history of the custom of growing sidelocks among the Jews of the northern Arabian Peninsula. In addition to references to the custom of lengthening or trimming sidelocks that one finds in the Bible and in Herodotus, testimonies from Islamic sources are provided. On their basis it is surmised that the Jews in northern Arabia did let their sidelocks

grow; that they developed this custom some time after they reached this location between the eighth and the sixth centuries BCE, and that its purpose was to distinguish them from their Arab neighbors, who tended to trim their sidelocks.

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Moshe Magid presents a document in which a *maskil* from the Balkans criticizes the founders of Petach Tikva. Moshe Magid holds a Master's degree from the Department of Jewish History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

This issue of Peamim is being published shortly after Michael Glatzer's retirement. Michael, the Academic Secretary of the Ben-Zvi Institute and Peamim's Associate Editor, has been with Peamim since its inception, and his wisdom, expertise and erudition have made an indelible contribution for over three decades. The Peamim Editorial Board thanks him for his work and wishes him many more years of health and happiness.