

Pe'amim

Studies in Oriental Jewry

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Jewish Thought

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In This Issue

This issue of Pe'amim opens with Moshe Behar's article on "Flora Saporto". "Flora Saporto" is a 3,700 word story published in February 1914 under the pseudonym Bat Zvi by the feminist and doyen of early modern Hebrew literature Nehama Puhachevsky (1869-1934). Amazingly, during the century since its publication, this story has been neither discussed nor analysed by either critics or traditional scholars of Hebrew literature. Yet the case of 'Flora Saporto' is not a casual omission of just another text buried among numerous others. Rather this is because Flora Saporto can be conceived of as the first feminist-Mizrahi story written in the Middle East in modern Hebrew. It appears to have also embodied a unique feminist-Mizrahi alliance during the late Ottoman period.

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Ofer Elior's paper presents a case-study of attitudes to the relation between religion and science in Jewish philosophy. It deals with one approach adopted by medieval Jewish scholars in discussing the possibility, stemming from Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, that the prophet Ezekiel propounded a theory rejected by Aristotle on scientific grounds; according to this theory, rotations of celestial bodies produce sounds. The paper shows that Profiat Duran, Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi, Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, and Rabbi Yedidyah Rakh, out of a desire to allow Ezekiel

to save face, argued, contra Aristotle, that sounds can be produced as a result of one celestial body touching another.

Dr. Ofer Elior teaches at the University of Geneva and at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, Beer Sheva.

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Yechiel Tzeitkin's article describes the wide usage of Rabbi Joseph Caspi's Biblical commentary by Provençal halachic scholar Rabbi Isaac de Lattes. De Lattes uses Caspi's commentary as a framework for his essay, despite the radical philosophical content of Caspi's work and his outrageous style. Though de Lattes edits Caspi's words, the choice of *Tirat Kesef* as a framework for his halachic essay exemplifies the adoption of philosophical culture and the legitimization of radical philosophical works among Provençal rabbinic scholars.

Dr. Yechiel Tzeitkin is a researcher at the "Mikra'ot Gedolot – Haketer" project at Bar Ilan University.

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The article by Moshe Lavee and Moshe Gan-Zvi reconstructs the literary, historical, and geo-cultural contexts of debates regarding the identity of the prophet Elijah, and the character's affinity with the earlier biblical figure of Pinneas. It traces the growing authority of aggadic midrash and its influence on recensions of the Havdalah poetry, against the backdrop of human and cultural immigration from Christian Europe in the early 13th century.

Dr. Moshe Lavee and Moshe Gan-Zvi are researchers at the Center for Geniza Research at Haifa University.

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The complexity of the book *Shevet Yehuda* makes it almost impossible to refer to it simply as historiography. This article offers the option of not trying to crack the work's opaque literary shell for the sake of exposing the historical events referred to, but of seeing the book itself, first and foremost, as an important event in the history of Hebrew Literature in the Iberian Peninsula. The author tries, by means of literary analysis, to show the sophisticated use of the speaking characters, irony, pseudepigraphy and of an aesthetic of entanglement. This demonstration makes it almost impossible to refer to the book as a collection of historical documents but as respectable example of the Iberian renaissance.

Dr. Peter Sh. Lehnardt teaches at the Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva.

Ephraim Chamiel's paper presents in full Luzzatto's position regarding the development of the Halacha in the Sages' (Chazal) literature, and show that this was not a static position, but rather one which underwent changes. Already at a young age, Luzzatto understood that the laws in the Mishna, Halachic Midrash, and the Talmud differ from the plain meaning of what is written in the Torah – and at times, contradict this meaning. He thus concluded that those laws cannot be said

to have been delivered to Moses orally in Sinai, and do not constitute a commentary to the first meaning of the Torah. Nevertheless, his attempts to understand the Sages' motives throughout the various periods and their source of authority when legislating new laws and interpreting the words of the Torah, constituted a lengthy process. A perusal of his work shows that he started writing preliminary studies on the subject as early as 1829, changed and developed his position at a later stage, and only completed his theory in 1847.

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The article by Guy Bracha deals with the struggle between the leadership of the Jewish community in Beirut and the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Tagger. In the background were the community's attempts to adapt to the new conditions created by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the application of French Mandatory rule, and the establishment of Greater Lebanon. It exposes the balance of power in the community between the Zionists, influenced by the Yishuv in Eretz Israel; the educated, influenced by the Arab Revival, and the Westernized, influenced by French culture.

Dr. Guy Bracha teaches at the Department of Jewish History at Bar Ilan University.
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Rabbi Yehouda Léon (Manitou) Ashkenazi was one of the most important and influential

leaders of French Jewry after World War II. This article examines Ashkenazi's theological understanding of the Holocaust by means of an article he published on the subject. An analysis of his work demonstrates that Ashkenazi developed a unique and fascinating theological approach to the Holocaust. The current article investigates the Kabbalistic and philosophical bases of this approach, and the other influences exerted on this Rabbinic-Mizrachi philosopher, who had to deal with the religious questions posed to European Jewry by the Holocaust.

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The Document section includes three documents: two certificates of appointment to an endowment fund in San'a from the eighteenth century, presented here by Prof. Aharon Gaimani from the Department of Jewish Thought at Bar Ilan University.

The third document records the support given by Vienna's Jewish community to the Jewish community in Bursa, Anatolia, following an earthquake in the mid-nineteenth century. This document is presented by Prof. Yaron Ben-Naeh from the Department of the History of the Jewish History, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Dr. Yochai Ben-Gdaliah, Curator of the Archives at the National Library of Israel.