

Pe'amim

Studies in Oriental Jewry

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The Image as Text

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**Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish
Communities in the East**

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In This Issue

Rotem Preger Wagner's article discusses Moshe Sartel's poem "One Stone I placed from Marmara Marble", which depicts the speaker's dream-like journey back to the city of his birth and childhood, Istanbul. The article traces the poem's fluctuation between remembrance and the revitalization of the sights and sounds from the Jewish community's life in Istanbul, to an awareness of its loss. It illuminates the way Sartel creates an innovative Jewish lamentation, which echoes Hebrew verses of mourning and destruction from the Bible until today, and at the same time is idiosyncratic and personal.

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The illustrated French-language newspaper *L'Avenir Illustré* was published in Casablanca between 1926 and 1940. It stood out in the importance it bestowed upon the visual message and accordingly, each issue assigned entire pages to photographs accompanied by brief texts. This article looks into the visual messages as designed by the photographers, edited by the publication's editorial board, and viewed by readers. The analysis seeks to unveil the ideology and worldviews of the editorial board and the conscious and unconscious messages the newspaper worked to convey to its readership. David Guedj's article focuses on three groups of visual representations: portraits, photography

of the Land of Israel, and photographs of life in Moroccan Jewish communities.

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The life story of David Arusi, the first Jewish photographer in Yemen, is without a doubt unusual and colorful, and the unexpected and surprising course of his life enables us to follow the Jewish San`ani community in its city of origin and its offshoots in Jerusalem and Egypt, and to learn about the life of a Yemenite Jew who lived on the margins of the traditional Jewish norm. The article examines his being shunned by Jewish society in Sana'a and Jerusalem, referring to three circles: his personal life, the political context and the failure of the Ottoman option in Yemen; the article also examines attitudes toward photographs and photographers in Yemen.

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The article examines the encounters between Caucasus "Mountain" Jews and the Zionist movement, and the images that have been shaping these encounters. In particular the article examines the photograph of the delegates of Caucasus Jews to the Zionist congresses with Theodore Herzl. This specific photograph is highly important to Caucasus Jews, although community activists are well aware that it is actually a photomontage. The article analyzes this paradox,

and suggests that this picture expresses different dimensions of authenticity. The power of this photograph derives from the ability to challenge the conventional national discourse and to stress that Caucasian identity, which is expressed in the dress of the delegates, and Zionist identity can be two sides of the same coin.

Dr. Chen Bram is an anthropologist and social historian, a research fellow at the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University, and a lecturer at the Hebrew University and at Hadassah college.
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The article discusses a class photograph of eight 11th graders in the British Unity High School in Khartoum in 1948. Five of them are Christians from three different churches, two are Muslims and one is a Jew. The author analyzes the visible information in the photograph, as well as the invisible and the concealed, thus arriving at conclusions regarding the nature of the British colonial and imperial rule and the cultural implications of the photograph.

Prof. Nahem Ilan is the Chair of the Graduate School of Jewish Studies in Ono Academic College - Jerusalem Campus.
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Out of the 20,000 photographs documenting the dress and lifestyle of various communities in Israel in the archives of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, it is very rare to come across multiple photographs of a woman like Deborah Davidoff, who came to Jerusalem from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, via Moscow in 1929. These photos depict several

periods in her life, which not only illustrate the changes that occurred in her life, but also reflect the traditions and trends of dress in the various regions of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, Russia and Israel among a certain social class of the members of her community. The paper by No'am Bar'am-Ben Yossef reflects the prominent role of the photo archive as a way of reaching a better understanding of the dress and costume collection.

No'am Bar'am-Ben Yossef is a Senior Curator of Ethnography at the Jewish Art and Life Wing in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

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The article by Nina Pinto-Abecasis examines the changes that have taken place in the Noche de paños ceremony, the bride's night (Henna) which is celebrated before the wedding ceremony of the Jews of Tetuan in Northern Morocco. The article analyzes photographs of the ceremony as biographical objects, and discusses folkloric aspects such as material culture, identity formation, representation and identification, as well as the role of Judeo-Spanish, a Sephardic Jewish language spoken in Northern Morocco.

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A close examination of select results from a survey of Jewish cemeteries in Istanbul allows us to explore the culture of the city's Jewish upper class in the 18th century. This study by Minna Rozen centers on the elaborate tombstones of

women of high standing. An examination of the architecture, ornamentation and inscriptions of these stones - using a multidisciplinary approach that combines art history, Jewish studies, Ottoman history, and the social sciences - sheds new light on the connection between the world of the living and their view of death, in particular the ways in which human culture is transmitted from one generation to another through different societies and religions.

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At the focus of this paper are the children's writings found in Ben Zvi MS. 2270 (a collection of Sabbatean liturgical poems), previously not mentioned in scholarly works. Understanding the circumstances which allowed for these scribbles to be written, and dating them can shed some light on the history of the manuscript. Furthermore, this information can be used to further explore different stages in the development of the *Ma'aminim* community of Salonica in the tumultuous period of the first half of the 20th century.

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Kabbalistic diagrams have, until recently, been used primarily to decorate works of scholarship

rather than as objects of scholarship. This essay uses one early Lurianic diagram as a prism through which fundamental questions relating to the study of kabbalistic visual material can be refracted. How are we to understand their signification? What did kabbalists believe diagrams contributed to their works? What was their epistemological status and the nature of the knowledge they were to visualize?

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This article deals with the important role of two kabbalistic diagrams (*Ilanot*) that were created by R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal) at the beginning of the 18th century. The *Ilanot* are examined within the context of a treatment of visualization in Ramchal's intellectual world and, more broadly, in the kabbalistic literature in this period, including Sabbatean works. At the center of kabbalistic activity, Ramchal posits the kabbalist who "sees" the upper worlds; alongside him are the kabbalists who attempt to reconstruct this vision. This reconstruction is facilitated by commentary, as well as by the visualization inscribed in the *Ilan*. In this way we can understand how the *Ilan* served as a tool for kabbalistic-prophetic activity, as well as the discourse of divine corporealization that developed in the circle of Luzzatto.

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In recent years there has been a growing interest in the imagined identity of Jews as nobles and knights, both in texts and in Jewish medieval art. The article by Sara Offenberg deals with the visual and conceptual distinctions between violent warriors and the positive aspects of knighthood, taking as a case-study the illustrations of knights from a Catalonian Haggadah from the late 14th-century known as the Barcelona Haggadah.

Dr. Sara Offenberg is a senior lecturer in the Department of Jewish Art, Bar-Ilan University.
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Maimonides's Commentary on the Mishna survived in four volumes, two of which were purchased by the National Library of Israel and the other two are preserved at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Edna Engel's article attempts to demonstrate some new palaeographical perspectives for establishing the opinion of those who claim this manuscript to be Maimonides's autograph. Classifying his writings, known from hundreds of Genizah fragments, and tracing the chronological changes in his handwriting enable the author to provide another argument proving this hypothesis.

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The article discusses Yefet ben Eli's conception of the authorship and editing of Proverbs. Yefet saw in King Solomon the book's major author who composed it orally, though he also

contends it contains materials from figures who preceded him, such as the Patriarchs and his mother Bathsheba. The book was finally collated, edited and put into writing by prophets who lived in the time of King Hezekiah. Such radical ideas concerning biblical composition represent the Karaite breakthrough in medieval biblical exegesis.

The late Dr. Ilana Sasson was a Fellow in the Biblia Arabica project at Tel Aviv University and a lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary and at Sacred Heart University, CT. The editorial board is grateful to Prof. Meira Polliack for her kind assistance with this article.

The article by Jonatan Meir deals with the East European tales in the collection *Ma'ase Tzadiqim* by Avraham Kalfon of Tripoli (HaAvreKh, 1735-1819). This manuscript includes a number of early stories about Israel Baal Shem Tov (the BESHT), Rabbi Ya'aqov Yosef of Polna and other Eastern European figures. These tales were related to Kalfon during the second half of the 18th century by wandering sages and emissaries collecting funds for the Jews living in the Holy Land and can be instructive regarding the oral transfer of stories in this period. Kalfon recorded in writing for the first time many tales which he heard, different versions of which were printed throughout the nineteenth century. Thus his anthology is unique, providing the earliest written versions of many well-known tales. In addition it originates from a critical chronological (before the wave of printings of Hasidic hagiographic literature) and geographical (which enabled him to collect stories

from a range of geographical areas) point. Even if few of the tales in the collection concern Israel Baal Shem Tov directly, the Eastern European stories therein can be extremely enlightening regarding how tales concerning Hasidic figures were related at their earliest stages, as well as the wide geographical space through which the oral stories traveled and developed.

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Tamar Alexander's article deals with praise legends, including personal stories and memorates, recorded from members of the Georgian Jewish community in Israel. The article focuses on stories about two rabbis: Rabbi Ben Zion Efraimshvili and Rabbi Ya'acov Davarshvili. These stories show that each rabbi represents a different type of religious leader. Rabbi Ya'acov's main forte is sermons, while for Rabbi Ben Zion it is healing and performing miracles. The stories can be divided into two basic categories: stories they told, which consist of memories; and stories told about them, which are praise stories. All the stories were related orally; they are presented as true stories reflecting the reality of the occurrence in line with the perception and belief of the members of the group. These stories became part of their ethnic identity and a source of group pride. They are intended to promote and glorify the figure, the group's image, the values of Jewish culture in general and the group's values in particular. The

stories on and of the two figures of these rabbis remained within the group framework. However, the stories about Rabbi Ben Zion, even though rooted in the reality of his time and place, are influenced by typically Jewish motifs. In contrast, the stories about Rabbi Ya'acov are distinct, not only to the Jewish group that lived in Georgia under communist rule but even unique to him alone, to his biography. Despite their being more specific, they are more widespread among group members than those about Rabbi Ben Zion. These are decidedly hagiographic stories related by his admirers; most of the stories of Rabbi Ya'acov are personal stories and memorates that he tells about himself. This customary distinction between the two genres is not clear-cut, since the personal story is also a type of a praise story, even if not declared to be so and even if the teller himself is not aware of it as such.

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This issue also includes Dr Yitzhak Bezalel's review of the book by Arye Elyassaf about the Bukharan Neighborhood in Jerusalem.