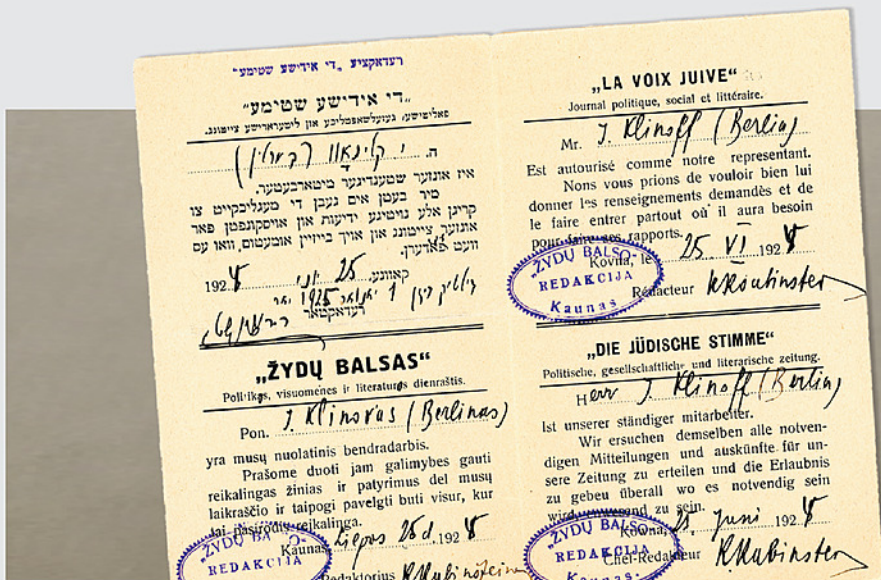


# On the Transcultural Nature of Jewish Periodicals

Edited by  
Susanne Marten-Finnis  
and Michael Nagel



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Mohr Siebeck

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Interconnectivity and Entanglements

edited by

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Portsmouth / Bremen, autumn 2022

Susanne Marten-Finnis  
Michael Nagel



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## Introduction

### Jewish Periodical Cultures in Ashkenaz. Precept and Scope

This volume is thematically concerned with attributing significance to the location of the German-Jewish press at a crossroads in time and space. The present contributions (in English and German) stem from a 2019 conference held at the University of Bremen (24–27 November), in which a team of international scholars sought to map Jewish periodical culture between German Enlightenment and National Socialism. Well-established and early-stage researchers alike from Germany, Israel, Belarus, Ukraine, the UK and the US examine the cultural hubs and transcultural aspects of periodicals, normally in reference not just to a particular city or region but also to a specific time period. The pre-fix “trans” – as opposed e. g. to “inter” – denotes at once cultural fluidity and permeation. Transculturality is thus informed by the view that cultures in the widest sense do not evolve as distinct entities, nor even primarily through the interaction of separate cultural entities, but rather through entanglements and exchange, porosity and hybridization. This understanding demands our attention if we want to transcend the conventional focus on the context of the nation state.

What are the implications for the study of Jewish periodicals? Firstly, it means that we have to move away from the descriptive parameters of single disciplines and proceed with research methods and conceptual frameworks that have common applicability for scholars of both the humanities and social sciences. Secondly, it suggests the application of explanatory models and interpretative strategies that challenge the common reflectionist approach to the relationship between history and culture, i. e. the idea that a text embedded in a particular culture directly reflects the experiences of social groups during a certain period. Thirdly, we also need to emphasize the importance of retrieval and document appraisal. In taking a hermeneutical approach, the contributors to this volume honour the unique textual tradition of the Jewish press, its simultaneous insularity and cosmopolitanism, and thereby reveal its transcultural nature both within the confines of Ashkenazy Jewry and beyond.

## Jewish Periodicals as the Heir of a Unique Textual Tradition: Custody and Curation

The history of the Ashkenazy Jewish press is a history of visions. Understanding the historical narrative of this press involves close study of the visions it advocated. This task represents one of the volume's consistent themes.

Jewish periodicals subscribed to the mission of spreading the word – one of the principal commandments in the Jewish faith. Spreading the word meant sharing ideas and creating textual bonds between the scattered Jewish communities. Hence, besides a history of visions, the history of the Jewish press is also a history of interconnectivity, both geographical and generational. In the absence of an identifiable geographical base, the dissemination of knowledge and ideas for the purpose of education and spiritual guidance was seen as a most effective means for the transmission of Jewish culture from one generation to the next. Texts governed Jewish community life across the centuries of its existence in the European Diaspora. Besides their religious function, texts, whether spoken or written, had both a regulative and instructive role. They were central to Jewish self-understanding and led to the foundation of Jewishness itself in a world of discourse, i.e. a world beyond geography, rooted in a library of texts and their interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

Texts were therefore highly privileged. They could not just be disposed of after they fell out of use. Instead, they were preserved in a place where they could be re-accessed. Usually this meant in the *Genizah* – an area in a synagogue or cemetery, designed for the temporary storage of Hebrew texts. The word means “to put away,” “reserve” or simply “hide”. As time went by, the term came to be used for a place where things were kept safe in the sense of an “archive” or “repository”. All texts, then, were canonized as heritage as a matter of principle, and kept at places from where they could be re-accessed and consulted. The precept of canonization is a point of departure for our examination of Jewish periodical cultures. We explore the nexus between a unique textual tradition as the principle subject of Jewish heritage and the challenging task of text preservation, access, retrieval and curation in the countries of former Jewish residency and migration.

With the emergence of Jewish periodical culture, repositories came to include newspapers and periodicals in all the languages of Ashkenazy Jewry. Ashkenaz refers to the Jewish culture that developed in the German lands, in particular that of the Jews who first settled in the Rhineland area. During the late Middle Ages, the cultural centre of gravity shifted eastwards – to Poland and Lithuania, including present-day Belarus and Ukraine. Following the Polish Partitions, Ashkenazy Jewry found itself under Habsburg, Russian and German rule. Today, the successor states of these empires are the custodians of the Ashkenazy Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Harshav. *The meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1990) 18–19.

heritage, which comprises its memorial, material and periodical culture. Such shared custody holds both challenges and promises: On the one hand, scholars are still playing catch-up after having been separated from the objects of their research for most of the twentieth century. Only the fall of the totalitarian regimes allowed full access to sources and documentary material that had been confiscated and locked away since the early days of Soviet rule.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, opportunities have emerged with the availability of new source material and the potential of new media for electronic data storage and retrieval. Now, we can store texts and study them rigorously within their relevant context. This is significant, as meanings are created by context. The starting point for understanding the historical narrative of Jewish periodical culture must therefore be an agreed historiography, rather than a chronology of visions seen through a teleological lens.

### The Surplus Value of the German-Jewish Press as a Source for the Historical Research

What is the surplus value of the Jewish press to the historical research? What can historians expect from a study of Jewish presses? How are they to make sense of the visions that periodicals espoused? What is the significance of periodicals both as a source and a kind of hub for written and oral history? These questions are the point of departure for Moshe Zimmermann's introductory discussion to this volume. In addressing them, he is able to highlight the key importance of German-Jewish periodicals: first, their contextual knowledge and, second, their transnational character. The latter quality was vital during those periods when German formed the Jewish lingua franca. With respect to these functions, Zimmermann (Jerusalem) links a variety of historical sources: from gravestone inscriptions, judicial decisions and regulations to responses, petitions, minutes and letters, and, lastly, to the prophecies heralded in the press and the lessons scholars of history may have learned from them. His examples on the role of Jewish women and gender issues in general, the significance of sports, and the meaning and connotation of adverts round out the analysis of this introductory essay and prepare the reader for the discussion that follows.

Another valuable source of contextual knowledge for the historian are Jewish obituaries in the German press. How did Jewish agents present themselves beyond Jewish periodical culture? In shedding light on the Jewish participation in the non-Jewish press, David Meola (South Alabama) argues that the demonstration of Jewish cultural capital in local and pan-German periodicals helped lay the groundwork for increasing societal support for Jewish rights among

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<sup>2</sup> Yisrael Bartal, "Back to the post-Communist motherlands. Reflections of a Jerusalemite historian". *Nordisk Judaistik – Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 31( 1) 2020, 52–64.

liberals. Meola reveals how the struggle for Jewish emancipation arising from the corridors of Jewish power permeated the entire public sphere. He argues in favour of including the stories hidden within local German newspapers in studies about Jewish lives and the struggle for emancipation during the 1840s, when periodicals became more political in order to influence their readership.

### Transcending the Focus on the Nation State

While the focus of this volume is on the German lands, the study of Jewish periodicals nevertheless does not lend itself to approaches that confine the inquiry to a precisely defined geographical region. Instead, it is important to recognize that the cultural margins tend to be blurred and normative cultures transgressed. Tools are therefore required that transcend the conventional approach, which focuses on the context of the nation state. An approach is called for that takes account of Jewish mobility between different lands and languages, between cultures and ideas – that enables us to examine the history of Jewish periodical culture in the variety that emerged from inherent resources, mobility, cohabitation and non-negotiable boundaries.

Today, we are able to unwrap the various layers of cultural influences prevalent in Jewish periodicals due to the availability of source material, the application of new media for data storage and retrieval, together with the applicability of cross-disciplinary and transparent research methods. Accordingly, the focus of the volume's next section is on the directions and consequences of the periodicals' cultural flow. The four contributions analyse Jewish periodical culture, its sources and incentives from a variety of cultural backgrounds: firstly, because of migrating borders, secondly because of migrating people. Susanne Marten-Finnis (Portsmouth) examines how the resulting dynamism of transcultural exchange invigorates Jewish periodicals over a decade, along with the local Jewish press landscape in Germany and Berlin in particular. She describes how Berlin was a hotspot of communication and outreach for the Yiddish-speaking world. It was also a veritable cauldron of regathering the old world of the Jewish *Shtetl* through a Yiddish periodical and publishing sector, which served as a hub of interconnectivity for the Ashkenazy Jewish communities now separated by oceans.

The following contribution by Anne-Christin Klotz (Berkeley and Washington) scrutinizes some agents of this interconnectivity. She investigates the lifelines and pathways to journalistic professionalization of eastern European Jewish correspondents, which includes well-known figures such as Raphael Abramovitsh, Daniel Tsharni (Leonid), Aaron Levi Riklis (A. S. Lirik), and David Eynhorn. Based in Berlin, these correspondents established a Yiddish newspaper and information system that stretched between Poland and Lithuania to the United States and Palestine. Their linguistic flexibility and participation in both Jewish

and non-Jewish realms allowed these correspondents to access a broad reservoir of knowledge, not only as reporters, but also increasingly as a threatened group in the context of an emergent National Socialism. As Klotz argues, objectivity was thus not on their agenda. Although they focused on the delivery of news items to the Yiddish speaking world in the early 1920s, towards the end of the decade they resolved increasingly to disseminate subversive knowledge on injustice and atrocities towards their group in particular and the Jewish people in general, particularly those from Eastern Europe.

Nicolas Dreyer (Bamberg) and Igor Dukhan (Minsk) next explore how periodicals fostered universalism and cosmopolitanism. Every transcultural process implies a process of translation. Nicolas Dreyer looks at such translation in his discussion of the Russian Jewish periodical *Voskhod*, showing that the publication was a transcultural medium *per se*. Both in terms of its mission and its editorial programme, *Voskhod* strove to infuse the ideals of German Enlightenment into the Russian Jewish public sphere and eventually society at large. Dreyer examines five nineteenth-century Jewish-German short stories published in *Voskhod* in Russian translation. In doing so, he contrasts tolerance and disavowal as structural features of translated historical narratives and their implied visions of an affirmative Judaism. On the one hand, these visions rely on Jewish memory cultures and models of German *Haskalah* universalism; on the other hand, they draw on a wider Jewish and non-Jewish eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticist cosmopolitanism, while maintaining Judaism as a frame of reference.

Preserving the “musk of Judaism” while traveling from one culture to another is the topic of Igor Dukhan’s contribution on the artist-mediator El Lissitzky and his impact on the avant-garde periodicals of Weimar Germany. While Dreyer follows up a direction of cultural flow running from Germany to Russia, Dukhan’s theme is the flow into the opposite direction – from revolutionary Russia to Weimar Germany. He traces the development of the UNOVIS group around Malevich in Vitebsk, proceeding from the Old to the New Testament, from Communism to Suprematism, with its inherent messianic theme from past suffering to future redemption. In his analysis, Dukhan reveals how Lissitzky rehearsed and developed the Suprematist message in both Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals of Weimar Germany, and thereby transgressed both national and linguistic, cultural and religious boundaries.

### Transformed Visions

The following section departs from the investigation of leading literary figures. It focuses on the contextualisation of the Jewish periodicals within the field of cultural activity as well as within the wider field of ‘power’. The latter in-

cludes local Jewish communal structures, civic and state authorities and overseas contacts, and the forces animating them, such as political ideologies and parties. Tilmann Gempff-Friedrich (Frankfurt a. M.) discusses the transgression of ideological boundaries in his contribution on conformity and dissent in the periodicals of the *Central Association for German Citizens of Jewish Faith (CV)*.

The CV was the largest Jewish organization in Imperial and Weimar Germany. While the CV's periodicals reflect a direction of cultural flow from the association's leadership to its members, Gempff-Friedrich demonstrates that they too constantly renegotiate their tone and mission. The focus shifted between reassurance and persuasion; between a purely functional newsletter type of press, an opinion press, and a space of communication for political debate that had to accommodate a range of diverging attitudes. A change of emphasis could be observed after 1922, when the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums (AZJ)* merged with the CV newsletter *Im deutschen Reich (IdR)*. As Johann Nicolai (Warsaw) points out, the AZJ could then claim it was a mouthpiece for the liberal German-Jewish position. Nicolai discusses how this position developed under the conditions of flight and persecution throughout the 1930s. For its part, the CV's publicist network continued to exist in exile and beyond until the 1970s, while profiting from the transcultural experience of a new generation of agents. No longer were they joined in a geographical space, but scattered around the globe.

Dekel Peretz (Heidelberg, Berlin) examines how the monthly *Altneuland* (1904–1906) supported ideological transgression vis-à-vis Zionism and German imperialism. *Altneuland* is introduced here as an attempt to reframe Zionist colonization within a German colonial context. The publication's launch falls into the early period of Zionism when German Zionists regarded the settlement in Palestine as an option for the masses of Eastern European Jews suffering from hunger and persecution, rather than for themselves. At the same time, they wanted to secure alliances and influence in Palestine. While the promotion of German colonialism among German Zionists turned out to be the principal aim of *Altneuland*, its editors also transformed an increasingly racial and colonial discourse into more moderate forms of communication. In this way, it utilized the Zionist project as a pathway to secularization, integration and a continued, even elevated, Jewish presence in Germany.

### Permeability: Geographical and Generational Entanglements

As Katrin Steffen (Brighton) explains in her discussion of the *Posener Heimatblätter* (1926–1938) against the backdrop of entanglements between German, Jewish and Polish culture, periodicals are useful for understanding concepts of home at the nexus of settlement and mobility in the Polish-German borderlands. The emergence of the *Heimatblätter* was a result of shifting borders and mobile

populations who retained their use of German. Jewish acculturation of German had taken place in the Province of Posen during the time of Polish partition. Whereas Polish people resisted Germanisation and struggled for their national freedom, their Jewish compatriots welcomed German culture. Eastern European Jews who had inhabited the Province of Posen during the eighteenth century became advocates and guarantors of German culture during the nineteenth century. After 1918, they retained their orientation towards German liberalism, which estranged them both linguistically and culturally from their Yiddish and Polish-speaking co-religionists who moved into the area from other parts of a resurrected Poland.

The end of German rule in the Province of Posen in 1918 and the nationality policy of inter-war Poland caused thousands of German speakers to leave, including many Jews. While the majority moved to the neighbouring provinces of Breslau and Berlin, a large group settled in distant places like Palestine, Britain, Switzerland and the Americas. The *Posener Heimatblätter* brought together this newly formed transnational community. They attest to the expression of a collective vision of home, transformed from one geographical space to another, from one generation to the next. The principal goal was to curate an identity that was shaped in a *kehilla* at the intersection between Eastern and Western Jewry.

As Michael John (Linz) demonstrates in his contribution, the focus on concepts of home in the Province of Posen during the time of post-imperial Jewish mobility contrasted with what developed under stable conditions among Jewish communities in “the Austrian Province”. In his mapping of the Jewish provincial press in post-Habsburg Austria, John provides revealing sets of statistical data. For instance, while the majority of the 200,000 Jews living in Austria during the early 1920s had settled in Vienna, about ten percent were attracted to the Austrian Province. The *Salzkammergut*, in particular, appealed to Austrian, as well as German and American Jews, and later on Romanian Jews. A Jewish provincial press consequently established itself as an outpost to the centre Vienna, concentrating in Upper Austria and its capital Linz. Here, there is an observable change of focus from periodicals serving a well-established network of secularizing Jewish societies and associations before 1918 to an opinion press, dominated by the growing influence of Zionism after 1918. During the course of the 1920s, a periodical culture with a Zionist orientation became the most effective platform for organisations committed to fostering a Jewish consciousness among locals, which was complemented by a flourishing system of clubs and associations directed at the Jewish youth. The periodicals’ cosmopolitanism advanced the consolidation of a Jewish community in which most young people could not resist the vision of the Zionist ideal.

Jewish emigration during the 1930s led to a transcultural network of German-language Jewish periodicals. Although scattered between Britain, France, Uruguay, Israel, Australia, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina, they shared a



similar vision: to satisfy the need for information among Jewish readers formerly living in Germany. In her contribution, Marie Ch. Behrendt (Haifa) sheds light on the performative character of these network periodicals in the aftermath of the Second World War. They were utilized by the *Council of Jews from Germany* as a stage to increase Jewish visibility in the international scene and to articulate Jewish demands for restitution. As an umbrella organisation, the *Council* represented the cultural and political interests of Jewish refugees, the very readers of the periodicals under discussion here. The focus of Behrendt's analysis is on the *Council's* ambition to negotiate between the expectations of this readership and its new form of public relations that created an international Jewish public sphere for solidarity and protest.

In summary, the contributions collected in this volume reveal that within the diverse experience of Jewish editors and readers an attempt was made to establish a broad, even cosmopolitan, community that transcended the dichotomy between rooted and mobile identities. To fully understand this dichotomy, tools are required that accommodate the visionary character of Jewish periodicals, their ability to transcend national and linguistic boundaries, their interconnectivity and entanglements and their permeation of diverse cultures. The contributions here demonstrate how a rigorous mapping of Jewish periodical culture brings us significantly closer to a universal approach to the study of a shared textual heritage and, more generally, the Jewish Question in its historical context.

I. The Surplus Value of the German-Jewish Press  
as a Source for the Scholar of History



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