TEʿUDA

XXVIII

ESSAYS IN FOLKLORE AND JEWISH STUDIES
in Honor of
Professor Eli Yassif

TEʿUDA

XXVIII

ESSAYS IN FOLKLORE AND JEWISH STUDIES IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR ELI YASSIF

Editors:
Tova Rosen, Nili Aryeh-Sapir, David Rotman,
Tsafi Sebba-Elran

TE'UDA

CONTENTS

ABSTRACTS

Tamar Alexander
Alexander the Great in the Ladino Culture

The figure of Alexander the Great, the king, warrior, and philosopher, was very popular in Jewish as well as Christian and Arab cultures. Hebrew stories about King Alexander are found in the midrashic and talmudic literature and in medieval works. No wonder he appears in Sephardic (Ladino) tradition as well. This article examines the literary figure of Alexander in four genres: stories about Alexander taken from Midrash *Me'am lo'ez*, the most important literary work in Ladino; a magic incantation from Sarajevo performed by invoking the name of Alexander; a proverb included in a story about Alexander; and a romanca (ballad) about Alexander. In the Sephardic as well as Jewish tradition in general, the Alexander stories are used as examples of Jewish values and moral attitudes. These stories about a wonderful hero were used to satisfy the desire to read about adventures, heroism, wondrous places and creatures through a Jewish prism. The authors aimed to draw Jewish readers to Hebrew sources and distance them from reading gentile literature.

Alexander fulfilled the Jewish fantasy of a powerful king who respected the Jews. He asked them questions to learn about the world and its creation. He appreciated magic, which was commonplace in Jewish communities, and even knew how to control it. Aristotle, his mentor, taught him to disapprove of philosophy, which was not popular among the readers of *Me'am lo'ez*, who were mainly women and uneducated men. He discovered that the most important war is the one to be waged against the evil inclination. He comes to despise the scourge of covetousness, and to respect women and the elderly. All these were values that the authors of *Me'am lo'ez* wanted to promote. He even ruled in favor of the Jews against the Muslims.

In *Me'Am Lo'ez* Alexander represents a desired ruler as opposed to the reality they experienced in the Ottoman Empire of the eighteenth century.

In the Sephardic literary tradition, in general, the figure of Alexander the Great was shaped according to Jewish moral values. Through this type of figure the Sephardic Jews fulfilled the wish of a persecuted minority for a powerful ruler who respects Judaism and acknowledges its superiority. A ruler who is also human, and who makes mistakes but knows to correct them with Jewish help.

Nili Aryeh-Sapir
Folk Motifs in the *Babel* Performance Art: Between Folk Culture and Avant-Garde Art in Tel Aviv

This article deals with folk characteristics expressed in the *Babel* performance art which was initiated by the late artist Dani Zakheim in collaboration with his sister, Esti Zakheim. It was performed for the first time in 1984 by a group of artists headed by Dani and Esti as part of the revival of Sheinkin Street in Tel Aviv. This article focuses on the artists' intention to expose hollow and fake political platforms transmitted by politicians during the election process to their electorate. The *Babel* creators claim that such political platforms might jeopardize local and even global order since they are driven by personal interests and not by the general good. The creators of *Babel* used the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis in order to actualize the meaning of the election process. The discussion explores the folk characteristics of key symbols in this performance art that emphasizes the parody, ludicrous and dangerous aspects of election processes.

Haya Bar-Itzhak
Between Hammer and Anvil – The Polish Insurrection of 1863 in Jewish Folk Legends

This article begins with the historical narrative and the narrative that appeared in Polish literature on the 1863 insurrection. Both suggest fraternal solidarity and partnership between the Poles and the Jews in the 1863 Insurrection. This is the backdrop for an analysis of whether Jewish folk legends about this period support this narrative as well.

Jewish legends about the insurrection were collected and published in Yiddish by A. Almi (the pen name of Elya Chaim Scheps). The collection consists of 19 stories about the 1863 uprising told by Chaya Scheps and

Shloyme Hirsh Likerman. This article discusses the genre and content of the legends. It focuses on the Jews' perception of themselves as caught between the Russian rulers and the Polish rebels; the generational conflict between fathers and sons; the spatial opposition between city and forest; the discourse on the Jewish contribution as well as on the figure of the 'trickster', and the theme of the Jew in disguise. What emerges is that even during the Polish Insurrection of 1863 which in the historical narrative was depicted as a period of solidarity and brotherhood between Poles and Jews, the Jews in Jewish legends depict themselves as the eternal Other. The reasons for the disparity between the historical narrative and the folk narrative created by the legends are discussed and show that historical legends are informative about the narrating society by revealing its outlooks, desires, aspirations, and hopes, and therefore should not be neglected by historians.

Ram Ben-Shalom
Isaac Nathan of Arles' Series of Biblical Studies and the Return to Scripture

Although many Jews in the Middle Ages were intimately familiar with Scripture, it was not generally studied as a scholastic discipline in Jewish communities at the time. Scholars point specifically to the role of Profayt Duran (fourteenth-century) as the first one who attempted to change this state of affairs. The aim of this article is to highlight the continued efforts to bring about a change in attitudes and approaches to Bible study in Provence, as evidenced by the intellectual activities of Isaac Nathan of Arles in the mid-fifteenth-century. In addition to creating the first Hebrew Bible concordance, *Me'ir nativ* – which contributed significantly to promoting interest in the Bible among Jews and Hebraists up to the Modern Era – Nathan introduced numerous innovations in the field of Bible studies in a series of essays on Scripture. As the twelve essays included in the appendix to this article show, Nathan ascribed great importance to the division of Scripture into literary units, contrary to the prevailing method of simply interpreting the Bible verse by verse. Influenced by Christian scholasticism, he proposed a new and original division of Scripture, changing the accepted order of the books of the Bible among Jews and Christians. Many of the essays reflect the author's approach to the application of order and method to Bible study, in an attempt to simplify it and make it more accessible to the general

public. For example, he divided prophecy into three basic categories, and explained the ethical rationale behind the order of the laws of the Torah, based on the principles of Platonic political philosophy. His extensive use of taxonomy and classification is readily apparent in his writings, as well as in his identification of types of idolatry and miracles in the Bible. A number of his essays deal with open questions, which he leaves unresolved such as in the book of Job, and with contradictions throughout the Bible that lend themselves to hermeneutic resolution. Nathan believed that the application of his method of critical textual study would reveal further internal contradictions, which would, in turn, be systematically resolved. Nathan's critical-scientific method, as reflected in his writings, represented a striking change at the time, while his historical approach anticipated a number of the characteristics of the critical method employed by Baruch Spinoza.

Daniel Boyarin
Carnival in Pumbedita: Bakhtin and the Talmud

In this paper, an attempt is made to describe certain puzzling features of the Babylonian Talmud, especially its serio-comic (*spoudogeloion*) aspects as a version of a feature of world literature found in Plato and Rabelais, among many others, in which the most highly serious content is delivered with grotesque comic narrative elements as well. This characteristic of the Talmud is interpreted with reference to Bakhtin's construct of the Menippea to produce a double-voicing in the text, one voice advancing and the other critiquing the dominant cultural voicing of the text.

Joseph Dan
Circles of Kabbbalists in the Middle Ages: A Critical Historical Examination

One of the most persistent conventions in studies of the history of kabbalah in the Middle Ages is the designation of groups of kabbalists as circles of writers in a certain time and place. The assumption is that these circles shared common concepts, ideas and terminology, and that their teachings can be described as one unit. In this article, the main circles are examined, especially the 'Gerona Circle', the Cohen brothers of Castile, the *'Iyyun* Circle' and others. It is shown that the members of these circles not only

differed considerably from each other but often contradicted and disputed the ideas of their 'fellow members'. Hence, historical study should treat each writer as an independent, individual thinker, before his links to other writers are examined.

Yuval Harari
Dreams, Divination and Demons [Jewish Dream Magic 2]

This article is the second chapter of my study on Jewish dream magic, in which I examine the segment of Jewish culture of magic that focuses on manipulating one's own or others' dreams. In this article I concentrate on both magic (*insider*) and non-magic (*outsider*) evidence regarding divination through the agency of demons, mainly from the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The article opens with some brief introductory notes on magic, dreams and dream magic. In its first section I discuss the halakhic attitude toward acts of conjuring demons (*ma'aseh shedim*). In the second section I introduce and examine the handful of magic recipes known to me, which attest to the practice of dream divination through demonic agency. The third section is dedicated to magic sources that deal with demonic divination while awake. In the last section of the article I return to demonic dream magic and take another look at its praxis and theoretical foundations, this time from the angle of the outsider sources.

Galit Hasan-Rokem
Classical Poetry as Cultural Capital in the Proverbs of Jews from Iran: Transformations of Intertextuality

Of the roughly 7000 proverbs included in the Proverb Indexing Project of the Folklore Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, eighty were collected in Israel in the early 1980s in field-work interviews with Jews who had immigrated to Israel from Iran. Twenty-eight are either attributed by name, or otherwise identifiable as belonging to, or associated with, the corpus of Iranian classical poetry.

This article provides a literary, folkloristic, paremiological and cultural analysis of these proverbs, and addresses the following points: 1. Quotes as a proverbial subgenre and their function as 'cultural capital'; 2. Textual analyses of some of the twenty-eight Iranian proverbs mentioned above; 3.

A preliminary socio-cultural interpretation of the use of the classical poetry of Iran in proverbs by Iranian Jews in Israel.

Admiel Kosman

The Young 'Seer of Lublin': On the Literary Design of a Hassidic Aggadah in the *Sippurei Ya'akov* Collection as a Founding Myth

This article discusses a story from the collection *Sippurei Ya'akov* ('Jacob's stories') by R. Ya'akov Chaim Sofer, which tells about the first steps of 'the Seer of Lublin', Rabbi Jacob Isaac Horowitz toward what became his famous position as the founder of Hasidism in Poland.

A number of conclusions are drawn from a close reading of the story. The first is that this story is a founding myth whose role is to explain how God brought the Seer to Lublin in Poland, to turn it into a center for dissemination of Hasidism. More specifically, the hero's depiction as a 'Seer' serves as an important literary motif, and responds to the storyteller's need to stress the profundity of the divine intention in the course of events which 'led' the Seer – acting almost out of complete blindness (like Abraham the founder of the Hebrew nation in the Bible) to his destination. Several links are discussed between the Seer of Lublin and the Biblical figure of Joseph. According to this story, the Seer only achieved 'Malkuth' (Kingship) after having been challenged by several difficult sexual experiences. This is connected to the protagonist's death, as the Seer is considered as 'Messiah son of Joseph'; i.e., the one who paves the way for the future redemption of the 'Messiah son of David'. Another hidden link is revealed in relation to the tragic circumstances of the Seer's death caused by falling out of a window at his home. This fall was interpreted by the Hassidim as related to his attempts to hasten the final redemption.

Rella Kushelevsky

What is a 'Story Collection' in the Middle Ages? A Study of Ms. JTS 2374

This article discusses the survival of a number of prominent story collections in Hebrew in a single manuscript from or after the Middle Ages. Whereas the most reasonable explanation is that the other manuscripts were lost, my working assumption is that this provides only a partial explanation given the features shared by many of these 'one-time' story collections. I argue that this is the key to dealing with a broader issue; namely, defining and characterizing anonymous and eclectic story collections in the Middle Ages, based on three criteria: the perception of the text contained in them, the 'author', and the 'genre.' The answers to the question of 'what constitutes a story collection in the Middle Ages' goes beyond the standard explanation of the survival of certain story collections in only one manuscript. This is exemplified in an analysis of a story collection copied in Ms. JTS 2374, that has not yet been studied, and especially in a close reading of one of the less known stories in this collection, the one entitled 'Shimon ben Antipatrus.'

Ora Limor

The Tale of the Shroud: An Inter-Religious Encounter in Seventh-Century Jerusalem through the Eyes of an Irish Monk

The story of the Shroud of the Lord is included in the treatise entitled *De Locis Sanctis* ("On the Holy Places"), composed by Adomnán (624-704), the abbot of Iona, an island off the coast of Scotland. The book is based in part on information brought from the East by Arculf, a Frankish bishop who in the late seventh century went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The story tells of the recent finding (*inventio*) or re-discovery of an important relic, the *sudarium* – the head covering Jesus wore in his grave. The shroud, which was held for generations by Jews, was claimed by the Christians. The rival parties appealed to the Muslim caliph Mu'awiya, who ruled on the basis of a Judicium Dei, a sort of trial by fire in the name of Jesus, which resulted in the victory of the Christians. The story draws on the traditional role of the Jews as authenticators of holy places and holy relics and also attests to the new social situation in Jerusalem after the Muslim conquest. After more than three hundred years of Christian exclusivity, Jerusalem once again became a

shared space, hosting the local Christian population, the Muslim rulers and immigrants, as well as also Jews, who were now permitted to return to the city. On an allegorical level, the shroud may stand for Jerusalem itself, thus claiming the Christian right to the Holy City through heavenly intercession.

Avidov Lipsker

From Solomon Buber to Martin Buber: Two Views on the Antiquity of Jewish Texts

This paper focuses on the dividing line differentiating the attitudes of Solomon Buber and his grandson Martin Buber concerning their relationship to Jewish texts. Solomon Buber sought to justify the antiquity of a newly edited text by replacing it in its historical context, and discovering its *Ur-Text*, according to classical-philological reconstruction. This was in fact the main innovation of his editions of the midrashim. Solomon Buber's methodology can be summarized as '*re-contextualization*'. This term refers to the archeological nature of excavating the ancient text from its subsequent layers of history, reconstructing it in a comparative manner to different manuscripts, and in the end, defining its place in the 'actual history' of the 'linguistic community' which compiled it.

Whereas the midrashic *ur-text* of Solomon Buber is a mosaic of *manus-scripts*, the Hassidic *ur-text* of Martin Buber is an imagined mosaic of sounds which he considered to be '*oral-script*'. However, in the absence of real *oral-scripts*, Martin Buber coined the notion of 'inner listening', which is quite close to a mystic religious revelation. This mystic sound, though derived from subjective experience, had to attract the attention of the congregation of listeners, a term favored by Buber, which echoed the Old Testament term 'עֵדָה' (perhaps the Jewish meaning ascribed by Buber to Simmel's term '*Gemeinschaft*'). Whereas Solomon Buber addressed a 'community of text-scholars', Martin Buber addressed a 'congregation of listeners'. By doing so he transformed the role of editor from a scholar of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to that of a Hassidic *maggid* ('teller') whose authority he sought for himself, based on the ecstatic revelations he experienced.

Shoshi Malky-Gamliely

'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue but not obtain': Literature, Folklore and the Law in Contemporary Stories about the Middle Ages

This study discusses the affinity between medieval court scenes, as described in a few works of twentieth century Hebrew literature, and certain aspects of folklore. This affinity distinguishes these literary medieval court scenes from those taking place today, and serves to examine these scenes, and often the literary works themselves, using folklore research methods and terms. This study sheds new light on the choice to include a medieval court scene in contemporary literature, as well as the contribution of folklore to the significance of that scene or the complete work.

One of the characteristic features of folklore is its subversive nature. Here it is argued that the court scenes in these works generate a subversive message of protest and rebellion, particularly against the legal system, but also against the governing authorities as a whole, or an ideological revolt against prevailing social and cultural concepts. One innovation of this article is to reveal the ways in which the description of medieval court scenes written in the twentieth century contribute to insights into the world of law, then and now. Another innovation of this article is the observation through the lens of folklore of works which, until now, have not been examined from this angle. It also reveals their common denominator as Hebrew narrative fiction about the Middle Ages. Finally, this study suggests an extension of interdisciplinary research about law and literature to the field of folklore.

Hagit Matras

'I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help': Psalm Verses on Medicinal Amulets

The Book of Psalms accompanies the individual Jew throughout the main events of the life-cycle, as well as in everyday life. In both the oral and written traditions – whether recited in prayers, printed in books or inscribed by hand on amulets made of various materials – Psalm's verses have been used throughout the Jewish world to conjure away misfortune and to increase personal and social wellbeing. Amulets still present in today's folk tradition modern Jewish culture.

Following a short survey of the main research literature on amulets, three main points will be stressed: 1) The meaning of amulets in Jewish society; 2) The healing purpose of 'names' and charm-formulas which include Psalms' verses; 3) Traditional instructions for making and writing amulets as known from Hebrew 'charm books'. (Two such early books are discussed here for the first time).

Ronit Meroz
Semantic Compression as Poetic Feature in *Sefer yezirah*

Sefer yezirah is a short enigmatic book that constituted the foundation for Jewish mysticism in the second millenium. The book's esoteric orientation shaped its tendency for semantically compressed textuality, hence also contributing to its poetic characteristics.

For example, the root חק״ק was apparently chosen because of its multiple meanings. It may signify the actions of hewing and engraving (the Creation; the Tablets of Law), or, simply, the writing of a book. It may denote various ideas, such as Wisdom, thought, the Covenant (also in its meaning of 'circumcision'), the laws of nature (or the book of the laws of nature), or the book of human customs. In *Sefer yezirah* this root is also exploited to denote the needle on a set of scales, probably hinting at the principles of balance and justice in the world.

Similarly, the root ספ״ר is used in *Sefer yezirah* in several ways: as a book (and specifically the Bible; the book of Wisdom, 'the world's books' of astronomy or astrology, cosmogony or cosmology, or the book of human nature and fate). It may also relate to numbers or numeration, limit or border line, or denote the verbs: to count, or to limit. The various meanings of both roots are corroborated by the analysis of the content of *Sefer yezirah*.

David Rotman
Author and Fiction, Lamb and Wolf: Hebrew Adaptations of 'Aesop's' Fables from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Era

In Latin, as well as in vernacular corpora of the High Middle Ages, several versions, under different titles, of 'Aesop' and 'Aesop-like' fables formed one of the cultural pillars of European heritage, second only to the Holy Scriptures. In fact, the 'Aesop' collections were an identifier of literate culture from the High Middle Ages onward that all children (from certain classes and circles) were exposed to. Their popularity is reflected in the multiple versions in which they appeared: in rhymed and metered forms as well as in prose. In Jewish literature, the presence of Aesop-like fables goes back to the Rabbinic literature of late antiquity. Some of these fables were integrated into the narratives of the sages and appeared to be an important part of their cultural tool box.

In light of the above, the relative absence of the genre from medieval Hebrew narratives is somewhat surprising. In fact, with very few exceptions, there are almost no echoes of the presence of Aesop's fables in the medieval Hebrew literature in general or in medieval Hebrew prose-narratives in particular. It was not until the beginning of the age of Hebrew printing, in an anthology of folk narratives first published in 1516 in Constantinople, that the first Hebrew translation of the collection of 'Ysopet' appeared in prose-narrative form, and was presented as 'The fables of Ysopeto'.

It is argued that the changing status of Aesop-like collections reflects a transformation that took place during the first century of the age of Hebrew printing in the status of two components of the Hebrew prose narrative: the concept of 'fiction' as a legitimate part of a literary work, and the concept of 'author' as a creator of stories.

Shalom Sabar
From the 'Cruse of Oil Miracle' to a Rifle's Stock: The Changing Image of the Hanukkah Lamp in Israeli Society

The central object associated with Hanukkah, the Jewish winter Festival of Lights, is a nine-branch candelabrum, traditionally known as Hanukkah lamp, and in modern Israel, a *Hanukkiyyah*. Lighting the lamp constitutes the primary ritual of the holiday, and in contradistinction to historical sources, Talmudic rabbis insisted it commemorated the 'miracle of the cruse of oil' which supposedly took place upon the purification of the Temple by the Maccabees.

Over the centuries the Hanukkah lamp became an artistic Judaic object. Cast in bronze or copper alloy, lamps appeared in late Medieval Europe for the first time with a back panel that is often intended to evoke Messianic Jerusalem and the rebuilt Temple. Other European bronze and silver lamps show not only the Temple that was usually modeled after the most important structure in a given city or land, but also added other contemporary decorative features. These primarily included the emblem of the ruler or host society (e.g., double-headed eagle in Poland). Similar features appear on lamps produced in local styles in North Africa, Iraq, Syria, and Eretz Israel of the Old *Yishuv*.

With the advent of the Bezalel art school in Jerusalem in 1906, new types of Hanukkah lamps became increasingly common. Under the influence of the Zionist movement and its concept of the 'New Jew', the heroism of the Maccabees, which had largely been belittled in the previous generations, came to the fore. This trend continued throughout the twentieth century and culminated in the young state of Israel of the 1950's and 1960's. In this period the Hanukkah lamps proudly showed the heroic, ancient-like figures of the Maccabees, roaring lions, as well as the new pioneers (*halutzim*), contemporary Jewish and Israeli soldiers, sacred historical monuments that reflected attachment to the past as well as strength (e.g., David's Tower), and prominent emblems of the State such as the seven-branched Temple-lamp (Menorah). Moreover, in some lamps the candleholders were actually repurposed gun shells or the main section was crafted from a gun stock. Examined here is the meaning of these dramatic changes in the modern development of this naive-looking object.

Tsafi Sebba-Elran

Isaac Margolis' *Sippurei Yeshurun* and the Modern Hebrew Anthology

Isaac Margolis' *Sippurei Yeshurun* (Berlin 1877) is one of the first Hebrew collections of Jewish folk narratives that reflect the modernization of the European Jewish society of the time. This article discusses this anthology's main innovations in its historical and cultural contexts, with a focus on the anthology's affinity to parallel European collections, the significance of its editorial principles, and its unique formation of folk genres. Margolis' attempt to adapt the rabbinic texts to various audiences such as children, historians and Jewish preachers, and to bridge the gap between orthodox and liberal Jews of his time, resulted in a diverse and original compilation, which nevertheless elicited unfavorable criticism and rejection.

Aliza Shenhar

'We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth' (Genesis 24, 57)

There are few women in the Bible whose stages of life as girls, women, and mothers can be followed. The exception is Rebecca. This article traces the shaping of Rebecca's image in the Biblical story from both the literary and conceptual perspectives as the girl by the well, the wife of Isaac, and the mother of Jacob and Esau. Emphasis is placed on her courage, assertiveness, her manipulative nature, her vigor (in contrast to Isaac's passiveness), and her determination. Her strong will to turn Jacob into the son who will continue the lineage is seen as justifying her intrigues and her risk-taking. The image of Rebecca is then explored from the standpoint of the Sages, where she is presented not as being guilty of stealing the birthright, but as an altruistic woman acting to preserve the future of the People of Israel. Concluding the article is a discussion of views and attitudes toward Rebecca in a range of works in Modern Hebrew literature.

Dina Stein
Biographical Legends, Midrash, and Reflexivity: Abram and Sarai at the Pillars of Egypt

The epistemology that underlies the rabbinic discourse par excellence – the Midrash – is reflected in the way in which rabbinic biographical legends of biblical figures (in this case Abram) are portrayed in rabbinic literature. This epistemology, which contains a strong reflective element, is embodied not only in the thematic characterization of the figure but in the narrative as a whole. Thus, the narrative itself, including its poetic traits, as well as its protagonist, is a cultural hero of sorts. This article addresses the scene in which Abram and Sarai reach the pillars of Egypt, as told in three different texts – *The Genesis Apocryphon, Sefer Hayashar, Midrash Tanhuma*. Set against an earlier second Temple text and a later Early Modern text, the rabbinic Abram and the narrative in which he is embedded imply a distinct, reflective, epistemology.