

WHAT'S IN *KESHER* 64

Marking Two Decades of the Historical Jewish Press Website

This volume of *Kesher* celebrates twenty years of the Historical Jewish Press project (JPress), a collaboration between Tel Aviv University and the National Library of Israel. Beginning as a modest, low-budget digitization venture, the website evolved into a research platform that has altered the role of the print press for the study of modern Jewish history and changed the way we understand Jewish culture in general, and the Jewish press, in its various languages, in particular. The textual resources available in this huge database of scanned sources have significantly broadened the “what” of research, while the advanced search technologies have broadened the “how.”

In fact, it is hard to imagine a scholar of modern (or even earlier) Jewish culture who does not use this website—for reconstructing events in their cultural context, for understanding public discourse at certain points in history, or for assessing the role of the Jewish press in socio-historical processes. The website’s status as a living, still growing database only enhances its importance and its continuous appeal to academic researchers, as well as to the general public.

In May 2025, the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem held a fascinating, multifaceted conference marking the twentieth anniversary of the project’s debut. Much was spoken about the advantages of “big data” offered by the Historical Jewish Press website for the purpose of broad historical research. Other speakers highlighted the potential of an inward gaze, a “zooming in,” if you will, demonstrating how advanced digital searches can illuminate micro-historical issues in various fields of knowledge.

Most of the articles published in the present volume of *Kesher* are based on lectures presented at the conference. We thank the contributors who accepted our call to adapt their oral presentations into written papers, as well as the organizers of the conference for allowing their publication. We added several other studies as well, all dealing with the print press within a Jewish or Israeli context and demonstrating the enormous contribution of the Historical Jewish Press project to such research.

An overview of the articles in this volume underscores the significance of the Historical Jewish Press website for generating new knowledge concerning matters of everyday life, as well as cultural, social and spiritual aspects of peripheral Jewish communities which, for lack of exposure, have been undeservedly marginalized and silenced; thankfully, these findings have now been transformed into vivid stories which, like newly-discovered mosaic pieces, help to form a larger picture. Finally, some papers in this volume stress the transnational nature of the Jewish historical reality, thus highlighting the pivotal role of Jewish newspapers as a bridge connecting continents and diverse diasporic Jewish cultures.

We are most grateful to Eyal Miller, director of the Historical Jewish Press project in the National Library in Jerusalem and one of the initiators of the conference. Thank you, Eyal, for your many years of contribution to the website, and for the opening words you wrote for this special volume.

To Ronald Zweig, for the memories you brought up at our request about the pre-history of the Historical Jewish Press website.

Thank you, too, Yaron Zsur, the founding father and academic director of the website, for an article that looks at future tasks; also, to *Haaretz* newspaper, for their permission to publish his article in this volume of *Kesher*.

This volume marks a new chapter for the journal itself, as we part from its longtime editor, Gideon Kouts. It is by no means easy to say goodbye after a span of two decades during which Gideon edited *Kesher*; he was strongly identified with the journal and was known as its living spirit. We thank Gideon wholeheartedly for his devotion to the task, which was always carried out generously and driven by a profound knowledge and genuine love for the field. We wish him good health and further fruitful research in the years to come.

Finally, I wish to bid farewell to a member of *Kesher*'s advisory board, Zohar Shavit, who passed away on February 4, 2026. Shavit, Israel Prize Laureate in Culture and Art Research for the year 2025, made a substantial contribution in her vast research to an understanding of an elusive socio-cultural process: the shaping of Hebrew culture. Among other topics, she explored the critical role of the Jewish press in the grand project of reviving the Hebrew language and building a nation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these studies have been published in *Kesher*. As a decades-long teacher at Tel Aviv University, Shavit raised generations of scholars who continue to follow in her path. I am grateful for the privilege of being one of them.

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