

ABSTRACTS

A “Jewish” Newspaper or a Newspaper “of Jews”? Language, Communication, and Culture

Israel Bartal

In the opening remarks to the conference marking twenty years of the Historical Jewish Press project, the National Library’s project was compared to a huge, multi-period international newsstand, as well as a national Israeli newsstand. A photograph from the early days of the State of Israel presented at the conference and capturing a typical newsstand in the city of Tel Aviv, illustrates the history of the Jewish print media. The Jewish press, a distinctly modern phenomenon, grew under the influence of Jewish acculturation processes brought about by economic, social, and demographic transformations, as well as language exchanges among the Jewish people.

These processes, which began as early as the second half of the seventeenth century, intensified in the last decades of the nineteenth century, reaching their peak in the second half of the twentieth century. The article shows how the map of the Jewish world in modern times—with its multitude of faces and locations, wide spectrum of languages and cultures, and heterogeneous communication channels—connected ancient communities in the “Old World” with immigrant centers exposed to modernity in Paris, London, and New York. The scene in the Tel Aviv kiosk image encapsulates a world that had changed rapidly within merely a few decades. Thus, in the two-year-old state, one could see Haredi *Loshn Koydesh* journals offered for sale side by side with communist newspapers in Hebrew, newspapers in Hungarian, Yiddish, Ladino and other languages, and magazines in Polish, all published in Israel.

***Ha-Dover*, Baghdad (1863–1871): The Context and Circumstances That Led to the Rise of a Hebrew Newspaper**

Esther Meir-Glitzenstein

At a time when the Arab press was taking its first steps and the earliest Arabic newspapers were appearing in Lebanon and Egypt, a Hebrew newspaper—*Ha-Dover*—was published in Baghdad. Issued continuously for more than eight years, between 1863 and 1871, *Ha-Dover* was the first newspaper to be published in Baghdad and the first Hebrew newspaper to appear among Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa. The very emergence of this newspaper at such an early date, together with its sustained and pioneering character, raises numerous questions regarding the background to its establishment, its characteristics, and its mode of operation. This article is devoted to examining these issues.

An analysis of the historical processes that enabled the publication of *Ha-Dover* at such an early stage—relative to the development of the press in the Middle East

and North Africa—reveals the convergence of three key factors: the penetration of modernization and improvements in transportation and communication infrastructures; the economic interests of Jewish merchants engaged in international trade across the regions linking the Far East, the Middle East, and Europe; and the distinctive personality of the editor, Baruch Mizrahi.

Already in the 1850s and early 1860s, Baghdad had been connected to international maritime routes, through the introduction of steamship lines on the Tigris River, and was linked to global communications via the telegraph. These developments provided the essential infrastructure for the newspaper's existence. The commercial needs of Jewish merchants in India, who sought regular information about developments in the Tigris–Euphrates region, led to the formation of a group of traders headed by David Sassoon, a wealthy entrepreneur born in Baghdad, who together worked to establish the newspaper and secure its financial foundation. To this was added the figure of Baruch Mizrahi, a Baghdadi Jew born in Persia. His position as a migrant not only failed to limit him but rather contributed to his openness and to his extensive network of contacts in both his immediate and broader surroundings in Iraq and Persia. His distinctive personality, his background as a yeshiva student alongside his general knowledge, and his ideological outlook, led to the choice of Hebrew as the language of the newspaper.

In its primary role as a news provider, *Ha-Dover* included local reports, news from the Ottoman realm, and accounts of international affairs gathered from European newspapers or from letters sent to the editor. However, the majority of its articles dealt with events from the daily lives of Baghdad's Jews—men, women, and children from different social strata. Through these reports, a window is opened onto the world of the Baghdadi Jewish community and its place within the Muslim and Ottoman urban framework. The newspaper also addressed the legal status of Jews and the changes brought about by the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, local commercial life and its position within international trade networks, and relations with nearby and distant Jewish communities, as well as reporting on violence against Jews in the Ottoman and Persian spheres and the involvement of international Jewish organizations. As such, the newspaper constitutes an important historical source for the study of Jewish life in Iraq in the mid-nineteenth century, an era of profound transformation. These reports are of particular significance in light of the scarcity of sources available for the study of Jewish life in Iraq during that period.

Before the Jewish Public: The Struggle of Northeast Caucasian Mountain Jews for Representation, Identity, and Modernization in the East European Jewish Press (1863–1904)

Alisa Abramov

This article examines the struggle of leaders and representatives of Mountain Jews of the northeastern Caucasus to secure adequate representation for their community

within the east European Jewish public sphere during the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The article focuses on the role of the Jewish press of the period as both an instrument of and an arena for this struggle in which questions of modernization, enlightenment, and social change were actively contested. Following the annexation of the Caucasus to the Russian Empire and the gradual incorporation of the Mountain Jewish community into the east European media space, the Jewish press began to publish accounts that combined ethnographic curiosity with negative imagery, portraying Mountain Jews as a backward and ignorant community. The response of the Mountain Jewish leadership took shape in two distinct ways: in the 1860s and 1870s, a mode of rabbinic resistance emerged, accompanied by efforts to construct an alternative image and to assert more adequate representation; by the close of the nineteenth century, a critical discourse concerning communal leadership and social conditions had been embraced by the local educational and cultural intelligentsia, which cast itself as an agent of change. This struggle reached its apex in a public controversy over the establishment of modern government schools—a debate conducted across the pages of the Jewish press, which thus became a prominent arena for intra-communal conflict.

Ethiopian Jews as an Object of Idealization and Exclusion in Discourses on Jewish Identity, 1850-1900

Danny Admasu

This article examines how the Hebrew-language press in the second half of the nineteenth century represented Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) in the decades following the first modern encounters between the community and Jewish actors in Europe and the Land of Israel. Situated in scholarship that treats the nineteenth-century Hebrew press as a central arena of the Jewish public sphere, it asks how journalistic practices of representation (naming, visual description, evaluative judgments, and calls for action) defined Jewish belonging and negotiated center-periphery boundaries. The study is based on a qualitative content analysis of approximately one hundred items (news reports, notices, travel accounts, and opinion pieces) published between 1850 and 1900 in major Hebrew newspapers of that time, with a core corpus drawn from *Ha-Levanon*, *Ha-Maggid*, *Ha-Melitz*, and *Ha-Tsfira*, as well as a smaller comparative sample from additional periodicals. Materials were collected through the Historical Jewish Press (JPress) database and, via purposive (relevance) sampling, narrowed down to thirty high-density “discursive nodes” for close reading. Each node is coded along three dimensions: the framing of Ethiopian Jews (for example, brotherhood and redemption versus patronage, suspicion, or exclusion); boundary-making lexicon (naming practices, descriptions of skin color and appearance, and halakhic and Christian missionary vocabulary); and moral-political action proposed to readers (appeals for assistance, warnings, and educational initiatives).

Conceptually, the analysis combines media representation and othering with a historically grounded use of Habermas's public sphere and Edward Said's account of classificatory knowledge; these frameworks are used to interpret texts in context rather than to impose retrospective moral judgment. The findings point to a strong ambivalence. On the one hand, Ethiopian Jews were idealized as a surviving "biblical" remnant that testified to Jewish historical continuity and, as such, were mobilized as objects of solidarity, especially in response to reports of pressure and missionary activity directed at them by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. On the other hand, they were regarded as culturally distant and "premodern," cast as halakhically deficient, and subjected to conditional recognition tied to alignment with rabbinic norms. Discussions of skin color and physiognomy functioned less as neutral descriptors than as symbolic boundary markers mixed with contemporaneous European racial thinking.

Efforts to reconcile kinship claims with perceived visual differences enabled, simultaneously, both inclusion and legitimated distancing. Over time, the press also redistributed voice and authority: early coverage that foregrounded letters and direct appeals increasingly gave way, from the 1860s onward, to representations filtered through European travelers, scholars, and missionary sources, shifting Ethiopian Jews from interlocutors to objects of knowledge. Differences across sources further show how ideological orientation shaped the balance between solidarity and suspicion: liberal and scholarly newspapers more readily framed assistance as a collective Jewish responsibility, but often did so in a paternalistic way, whereas more conservative papers emphasized perceived threats to orthodoxy and highlighted gaps in rabbinic learning and practice.

The article's contribution is threefold: an empirical mapping of a vast press corpus; an analytic account of how naming, visual discourse, and calls for action perform boundary work; and an interpretive argument that peripheral communities functioned as resources through which Jewish centers negotiated competing models of modern Jewishness. It suggests that the collections compiled in this early period provide background for later Zionist and halakhic debates. The study traces discursive patterns in print rather than in reception and does not set out to display or recover Ethiopian Jews' own voice beyond what appears indirectly in the sources.

Inventions, Machines, and Jewish Technological Imagination in Slonimsky's *Ha-Tsfira* Reports: Toward a Post-Humanist Reading Asaf Shamis

This article examines the reports of Chaim Zelig Slonimsky, founder, publisher, and veteran editor (1862–1885) of the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Tsfira*, on technological inventions in his "News of the World and Nature" column. The analysis focuses on the conceptual dimensions of these reports, which have received marginal attention in the existing scholarly literature. The article demonstrates that although Slonimsky

was influenced by prevalent approaches in nineteenth-century scientific discourse, he applied them in a distinctive manner in his interpretation of the nature and implications of new inventions, integrating science, technology, and theology. This perspective generated a worldview that may be called, in contemporary terms, “Jewish post-humanism,” which regards technological inventions as organic extensions of the human body and as expressions of divine forces. Recognizing Slonimsky’s Jewish post-humanist worldview enables a fundamental reassessment of *Ha-Tsfira* itself—not as a passive medium for techno-scientific knowledge but as an active vehicle that Slonimsky deployed to transform Hebrew readers’ engagement with industrial advances.

Textual Space: Constructing a Geography in *Ha-Tsfira*, 1862, 1874, 1883

Zef Segal

This article examines the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Tsfira* as a textual space in which an imagined geography was constructed rather than as a medium merely reporting events located in physical space. While studies of journalism and media history have often focused on geographical coverage or representations of particular regions, far less attention has been paid to the spatial organization produced within the text itself. The article’s methodological contribution lies in proposing the newspaper’s textual space as an object of analysis in its own right.

Focusing on *Ha-Tsfira*, one of the most influential Hebrew newspapers of the late nineteenth century, the article reconstructs the symbolic geography that emerged across its pages by analyzing place names appearing in selected issues from three key moments in the newspaper’s history: its initial publication in Warsaw in 1862, its relaunch in Berlin in 1874, and its ideological reorientation following the pogroms in southwest Russia of 1881, represented here by issues from 1883. The corpus includes 7,505 occurrences of place names, identified through a combination of close historical reading and large-scale textual processing.

Rather than treating place names solely as referential markers pointing to an external geographical reality, the article approaches them as components of a textual spatial system. Spatial meaning is understood as emerging from patterns of frequency, proximity, and repeated co-occurrence within the newspaper’s structure, shifting the analytical focus from what the newspaper reported about the world to how the world was organized and made legible for readers.

Methodologically, the study combines close reading with quantitative and relational analysis, including frequency mapping, co-occurrence analysis, and the identification of textual communities. At the macro level, frequency patterns reveal spatial centers and peripheries; at the micro level, recurring proximity patterns distinguish between narrative axes, news hubs, and stable “neighborly” groupings; and at the meso level,

community detection identifies coherent sub-spaces within the newspaper's imagined geography.

The findings show that *Ha-Tsfira*'s textual space was highly structured and historically contingent. Spatial relations were shaped less by physical distance than by journalistic routines, thematic emphases, and ideological transformations. Over time, the newspaper's imagined geography shifted from a broad, science-oriented global horizon to a more politicized spatial configuration centered on European power politics, Jewish communal spaces in eastern Europe and, by the early 1880s, the emergence of Palestine as a distinct textual space.

By foregrounding textual space as an analytical category, the article offers a methodological intervention particularly significant for the study of Hebrew journalism. More broadly, it demonstrates how newspapers can be read as sites where spatial imaginaries are constructed through textual organization rather than cartographic representation.

The Contribution of JPress to Research on Early Women's Writing in the Hebrew Press: Sarah Feiga Foner and the Weekly *Ha-Ivri* as Test Cases

Michal Fram-Cohen

At the turn of the twentieth century the Hebrew press in Europe and the United States served as a groundbreaking platform for the publication of women's writings, which until then were almost absent from the Hebrew literary scene. The anthology *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden: Enlightened Women's Writings in the 19th Century*, edited by Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner (2006), includes 28 letters by 22 women published in the Hebrew press in Europe. Nevertheless, academic research has avoided discussing the participation of women in the Hebrew press in the early twentieth century or dismissed its merit. Two recent academic publications examined in this article are *From The Cellar to the Top Floor: The Emergence of the Yiddish and Hebrew Press in the United States, 1870–1900*, by Yael Levi (2024), and *Not Just a Symbol: The Making of Modern Hebrew*, by Meirav Reuveny (2025).

The accessibility of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) searches in scanned Hebrew and Jewish newspapers in the continually growing online databank Historical Jewish Press (JPress), launched in 2005, has contributed and can further contribute to the academic discussion on the participation of women in the discourse on Hebrew in the Jewish press in Europe and the United States.

Two test cases that can testify to the databank's contribution are findings gleaned in the course of writing my dissertation (2016) about the Maskila Sarah Feiga Foner (1854–1937), and those about women's writings in the Hebrew weekly *Ha-Ivri*, circulated in New York between 1892 and 1902; both were briefly presented in the non-academic article "Hebrew Women Writers in America," by Akiva Ben-Ezra (*HaDoar*, 1947).

The first case demonstrates how, besides adding four letters by Foner to the single one by her included in the anthology *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden*, JPress was instrumental in locating an interview with Foner in the Yiddish press which could not be found manually. The findings on Foner can further the incorporation of the female perspective in the current academic discussion involving the Hebrew press.

The second case demonstrates how the databank can contribute to the expansion of the limited existing academic discussion on women's writing in the Hebrew press in the United States during that period, such as "Women in the Hebrew Press—the Beginnings," by Nurit Govrin (*Kesher*, 2000).

The affinity between the two test cases is based on the observation by Yael Levi that the Hebrew press in the United States was initially "an American branch" of the Hebrew Maskilic press (Levi, p. 63). It is therefore possible to regard women's letters in the Hebrew press in America at the turn of the twentieth century as "the American branch" of women's writings in the Hebrew press in Europe during the same period. Accordingly, parallels are drawn between Foner's letters and women's letters in *Ha-Ivri*, and between Foner's engagement in the discourse on Hebrew in the press and the similar involvement of two women in *Ha-Ivri*—Rivka Haya Altman and Sophia Kaplan.

Beyond the Words: Women's Voices in Orthodox Journalism— The Case of Hanna Frumkin

Roni Beer-Marx

The article examines the life and work of Hanna Frumkin Segal, a Hebrew Maskila born into a family of rabbis and Torah scholars within the Lithuanian Orthodox milieu. In 1898, Frumkin published a historical novella entitled *Ha-Kdoshim* (The Martyrs) in *Ha-Yehudi* (1897–1913), an Orthodox journal printed in London.

Ha-Yehudi was founded and edited by Yitzhak Suwalski (1863–1913), a native of Kolno, Poland, and a graduate of the Volozhin Yeshiva who was identified with moderate Orthodox Judaism. Upon his arrival in London, he established the journal to serve Orthodox immigrants from eastern Europe. Its contents included opinion pieces, news reports, halakhic questions and *responsa*, Torah commentaries, literary sections, feuilletons, letters to the editor, and advertisements—almost all authored by men. Frumkin's publication therefore represented an exceptional phenomenon in a public sphere where women's voices were almost entirely absent.

The novella written by Frumkin belongs to the genre of historical fiction and is set in the Jewish community of Worms during the Crusades. Its main protagonists—a man and a woman—respond to a historical crisis through courageous and heroic deeds, ultimately sacrificing their lives for the Jewish nation.

The article focuses on the novella within the historical and cultural context of its publication. By analyzing Frumkin's life and literary work, it traces the intellectual

and spiritual development of a Hebrew Maskila committed to the Jewish nation and the construction of a modern national identity.

A careful reading of the novella further reveals a gendered dimension: Within the framework of Orthodox discourse, Frumkin subtly yet deliberately sought to carve out a space for women's voices, to restore their presence in historical narratives, and to highlight their contribution to the collective experience of the Jewish people.

Although her messages were expressed with restraint and caution—an inevitable result of the social and religious context in which she dwelled—they reflect her engagement with the cultural challenges of her time.

The very fact that an Orthodox periodical served as a platform for such expressions invites a re-examination of the Orthodox perception and of the ways it responded to the challenges of modernity. Rather than representing a monolithic resistance to change, Lithuanian Orthodoxy emerges here as a dynamic cultural framework that allowed for limited yet meaningful negotiation with new ideas, including those concerning women's roles and voices.

The Historical Jewish Press Project as a Resource for Women and Gender Research: The Case of Argentine Jewry

Jacqueline Laznow

The study of women's roles and activities gained significant momentum in the 1970s, following increased awareness of their historical "invisibility" within traditional, male-centric historiography. In the context of Argentine Jewry, a major historiographical shift occurred in 1997 with Sandra McGee Deutsch's seminal article "Women: The Forgotten Half of Argentine Jewish History." Although Deutsch's later work, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955* (2010), drew on extensive archival research, the potential of digitized press archives regarding Jewish women remained underexplored for many years. This article argues that the Historical Jewish Press (JPress) project offers a transformative resource for recovering women's public presence, and enables a reassessment of the status, representation, and activism of Jewish women in Argentina.

As the largest Jewish community in Latin America, Argentine Jewry developed a vibrant journalistic tradition beginning in 1898. Published in Yiddish, Hebrew, Spanish, and even Arabic, this press served as a central arena for intra-communal debate and identity formation. Yet it was also a distinctly masculine domain, reflecting the patriarchal norms of twentieth-century Argentina. Women were often confined to "family" or "fashion" sections, while their broader social, cultural, and political contributions appeared only gradually. By leveraging the JPress digitization project, this study employed targeted keyword searches and filters to extract traces of women's voices from institutional discourse, repositioning them from the margins to the center of the historical narrative.

The article presents several case studies reflected in the Hebrew and Yiddish press that illuminate the tension between tradition and modernity in women's communal roles. The Hebrew-language newspaper *Ha-Bimah Ha-Ivrit* (1921–1930), for example, documents how figures such as Dina Buchbut and Taybel Fox challenged the exclusion of girls from Hebrew education. Their writings reveal a discourse that placed women, and especially mothers, as essential agents in the revival of the Hebrew language and in broader social and educational reform within this community.

A key methodological advantage of JPress lies in its capacity for diachronic and geographic cross-referencing. This is demonstrated through reconstruction of the internal rift within WIZO Argentina in the 1960s, a crisis minimized by the local and Israeli leadership but exposed through reports in both the Argentine and Israeli press. The digital archive also enables tracing transnational narratives, such as the life story of Adina Kahansky, whose family's journey from Argentina's agricultural colonies to Mandatory Palestine can be followed through letters and articles published across multiple Jewish newspapers. The article proposes a methodological framework for identifying trans-communal gender discourses within digitized Jewish press collections.

While many significant Jewish Argentine publications have yet to be digitized, the existing JPress corpus already provides unprecedented opportunities to illuminate initiatives, achievements, and shared challenges faced by Jewish women in Argentina and across global contexts. Through digital newspapers, we can amplify the voices of those historically silenced and construct a more inclusive and nuanced historiography of the Jewish experience.

The Politicization of Sports Coverage during the Yishuv Period: The Case of Lipa Levitan

Udi Carmi and Anat Kidron

This article explores the life and career of Lipa Levitan, a dynamic and controversial sports journalist who was active in Revisionist circles in Palestine during the 1930s and 1940s. Like many journalists of the *Yishuv* period, Levitan was deeply engaged in public life and passionately advocated his political views. He operated in a politically charged environment marked by ideological polarization and the sectoral nature of Jewish society in Palestine. The public sphere served as an arena where rival groups vied for influence over the Yishuv's character. Levitan went beyond reporting events "from the field"; he positioned himself at the heart of public affairs, often becoming the subject of news himself. The article examines key moments in Levitan's professional and personal life, highlighting how the two became deeply intertwined and eventually cost him for his outspoken and involved journalism.

An energetic writer and author of several books on sports, Levitan used sports as a platform to voice political opinions and to criticize his opponents, particularly the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) and the Hapoel sports organization. The

division within sports bodies and the establishment of Hapoel greatly troubled him, as he had fought for the idea of apolitical sports. However, as sports in Palestine became increasingly politicized, he embraced extreme Revisionist positions. These controversial stances led to significant consequences, including a boycott against him by his peers, dismissal from employment, and imprisonment. Levitan's life ended prematurely under mysterious circumstances in Germany, leaving his unique journalistic legacy of straddling the intersection of sports, politics, and public discourse in a turbulent era.

From Expectation to Disappointment: The Decade Exhibition through the Lens of the 1950s Hebrew Press

Galia Limor-Sagiv

The Decade Exhibition was held in Jerusalem during the summer of 1958 to mark the tenth anniversary of the State of Israel and celebrate its achievements. The initial atmosphere was festive, with enthusiastic coverage in the Hebrew press. However, the high expectations surrounding the exhibition quickly gave way to widespread and pointed criticism once it opened. A close reading of contemporary newspapers reveals that the criticism transcended political affiliations; was openly expressed; and addressed a wide range of organizational and conceptual issues. Even *Davar*, the leading government-affiliated daily newspaper, known for downplaying problems, did not withhold its disapproval, testifying to the exhibition's evident shortcomings. Most critiques focused on operational failures and unfulfilled promises rather than on the exhibition's overarching goals or symbolic messages. A notable exception was the weekly *Ha-Olam Ha-Zeh*, which portrayed the exhibition as a mirror of state power.

The article demonstrates that the Hebrew press of the 1950s did not shy away from exposing the flaws of Israeli leadership, each outlet in its own way and within its ideological framework.

“The first draft of history”? On the Study of Newspapers and Journalism

Gilad Halpern

The digitization of large swathes of historical newspaper content has rendered the work of historians significantly more efficient; but alongside this important development numerous methodological issues have emerged. This article focuses on one in particular: the challenge posed to historians by the sheer abundance of newspapers when using them as sources. Source criticism is the historian's bread and butter, yet the dramatic increase in the volume of sources, as well as their much-simplified accessibility, has had a considerable impact on the practice. This is all the more relevant when it comes to newspapers, where two factors enhance the temptation

to treat them as exceptionally reliable: their temporal proximity to the events, on the one hand, and the objectivist ethos of journalism, on the other.

The digitization of newspapers has therefore underscored a distinction that existed in the pre-digital age, between what I shall call historians of journalism and historians of newspapers. For historians of journalism, the newspaper is not merely a source of information but an object of study itself. The aim of historians of journalism is to decipher the “black box,” in Bruno Latour’s terms—to unravel the hidden process at the end of which the newspaper page appears as it does. They seek to establish the considerations that lay behind the editorial, stylistic, and layout decisions. To this end, historians of journalism are compelled to juggle between the newspaper issues themselves and other archival sources, such as internal communications among the editorial staff, memoirs, public lectures, and more.

I propose in this article that the study of journalism complement the study of newspapers. For myriad reasons, technical or other, newspaper articles fail to convey the full story. Insight into the editorial process—understanding the rationale behind what material to leave in, and no less importantly, to leave out—can and should be an aid in the undertaking of source criticism, a particularly useful one in light of the confusion engendered by digital abundance.

In order to support this theoretical proposition, I build upon two examples drawn from *The Palestine Post*, an English-language daily published in Jerusalem (1932–1950): the suppression by British censors of an editorial column on Christmas Day 1940, and coverage of the 1949 Tobiansky affair (the execution of an IDF officer wrongly accused of espionage).