

Introduction

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The 2020 year, which brings this 33rd volume (XXXIII) of the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, has been in many ways a world-changer, both in Australia and internationally. A year that began in Australia with fire threatening large parts of the country followed quickly with a global pandemic, sowing chaos across the academic world as universities, libraries and archives closed, international travel was (and remains) shut down, face-to-face social research had to be quickly re-envisioned, educators scrambled to transition their teaching programs to online formats, and declining student numbers threatened department closures and redundancies. As well as all this professional turmoil, private lives were disrupted all across the world, populations faced lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, and anxieties as the shadowy fingers of the novel coronavirus reached out to threaten those near and dear. Amidst all this chaos, the work of academic Jewish studies continued; we co-editors of the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* wish to give our special thanks both to our authors, who worked tirelessly to revise and enhance their papers, and to our peer reviewers, who volunteered their time amongst all these competing pressures to assist authors by suggesting revisions. All these scholars worked through great professional and personal challenges this year, and their efforts in the production of high-quality Jewish Studies scholarship under such pressures are commendable. This volume brings a wide range of innovative, intriguing and intelligent papers to readers. Commencing with an apt pandemic theme, Dr Levi Cooper of Tel Aviv University offers a timely and novel contribution to Jewish studies at this time in *Pandemics in the Promised Land: The Hasidic Experience*. Cooper presents the Hebrew text and English commentary and critical analysis of a letter written out of the Jewish community of Tiberias (in modern day Israel) in 1786, describing how the community grappled with the challenges presented by a plague that hit the region between Purim and Passover, subsiding in the days after the festival. While the letter is primarily an appeal for financial assistance, there are chilling parallels with our current experiences. The letter is largely unknown and has never been made available to an English readership, and we are privileged to be able to bring this resource to a wider audience.

Staying in the land of Israel and fast forwarding 150 years, Dr Dvir Abramovich of the University of Melbourne brings us an exploration of the work of Israeli poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, and the way that the Holocaust loomed large in the poet's style even though he had not directly experienced the tragedy. In *Holocaust representations in early Hebrew poetry: Uri Zvi Greenberg*, Abramovich examines Greenberg's body of works, dating from the 1920s in his former home in Poland to his escape to Palestine, through to his political activism and writings in the new Israeli nation. Through analysis of a selection of Greenberg's verses, Abramovich focuses on the way the grief and guilt of the Holocaust, and a subsequent redemption, restoration and rise from its ashes, underpin his writing.

Continuing the Holocaust theme, independent scholar Samuel Wan presents an extended revision of the essay he delivered at the 2020 Australian Association of Jewish Studies conference in Sydney in February 2020. In *Those days of Holocaust will cease but 'these days of Purim will never cease.'* A practical theology of Purim, Wan explores the relevance of the Book of Esther and the festival of Purim to Jewish experiences of the Holocaust, and the role that the overt and covert messages of Purim play in resilience to suffering. Such themes are timely as the Jewish world comes to terms with the suffering of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On this same theme of suffering, we turn to consider the experience of the Jewish soul, in particular the philosophical conceptualisation of anti-Jewish violence and torture, as explored by Dr Pedro José González Corona of the University of Texas at Dallas. In *The Technology of Torture and the Failures of Human Appropriation: Jean Améry as the Modern Bearer of a Secret, the Jewish Soul*, González Corona considers torture through the example of philosopher and essayist Améry, born Hanns Chaim Meyer. Améry was detained and tortured by Nazi authorities for his part in organised resistance in Belgium, including imprisonment in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. González Corona critically analyses Améry's experiences and writings to argue that the act of torture can be understood as an attempt to render the Jew as abstraction and, through their erasure, to remove what is considered social contamination and evil.

Staying on the theme of Holocaust experiences, Dr Jan Láníček, (University of New South Wales), Professor Andy Pearce, Ms Danielle Raffaele, Keith Rathbone & Edward Westermann explore the challenges of engaging young learners in Holocaust studies, in ways that stimulate interest and relate understandings of the Holocaust to students' own knowledge and experiences, whilst avoiding trivialisation. In *Unusual Approaches to Teaching the Holocaust*, four Holocaust educators (Westermann, Rathbone Raffaele and Láníček) outline initiatives and approaches they take in their teaching to engage students with Holocaust stories and foster understanding of how the events could have taken place. Pearce in turn offers a summary critical analysis of their methods, which range from blended learning with direct primary sources to gaming, of the Harry Potter novels, and an Australian focal lens.

From novel ways of teaching broader Holocaust memory to the work of capturing the stories of individual lives and legacies: Dr Sven-Ole Andersen offers a critical biography of Slovakian sports star turned freedom fighter, Imrich "Imi" Lichtenfeld, in *From Kaiserschmarrn & Sports to Krav Maga': How Political Circumstances and Fascist Terror led to the Creation of a Jewish Hero and his Lasting Legacy*. In the Second World War, Lichtenfeld, a national and international prizewinning boxer and wrestler widely considered one of the best in Europe, secretly organised street brawls to fight back against Slovak and German paramilitaries who had invaded his hometown of Bratislava, becoming an emblem of resistance to young Slovakian Jews in their uprising. Lichtenfeld, who later escaped Slovakia to fight in the British armed forces against the Nazis, eventually emigrated to Israel, where he developed, refined and codified many of the moves and techniques of his street fighting self-defense style into the martial arts form known worldwide today as Krav Maga. Utilizing a blended approach of archival and documentary analysis and personal

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communications with those who knew Lichtenfeld personally, Andersen shines a new light on this fighter and his significant contributions to global Jewish culture and the fight against antisemitism in Slovakia, which sadly in contemporary times is still not yet over.

On the topic of notable contributions by Jewish emigrants, independent scholar Rabbi Jeffrey A Marx offers a critical biography of the work of Bert Levy, an Australian Jewish artist, vaudeville performer and social observer who emigrated to the United States of America in the early 20th century to make his mark on the New York artistic scene. In *A Stranger Among His People: The Art, Writing, and Life of Bert Levy*, Marx casts a detailed eye over Levy's life and art, and the contribution his often-controversial commentary made towards debates of the time over Jewish stereotypes, popular antisemitism and the Jewish place in mainstream society – debates of timely relevance in 2020 as the pandemic and US elections have again stirred up ugly narratives against Jews.

We next turn our focus from Levy's new American life to his old home, Australia, where independent scholar Ms Anne F Thompson offers a critical examination of the correspondence of Rabbi Leib Aisack Falk, Acting Chief Minister of the Great Synagogue in Sydney in the late 1930s, and recipient of letters from more than a hundred European Jews pleading for assistance in escaping from the Nazi threat to Australia. In *"Dear Sir Rabbi": The Correspondence of Rabbi L. A. Falk, 1938–1939*, Thompson provides insight into the individual human experiences of Jewish refugees, and considers critically the untold side of the story in Falk's replies and abilities to fulfil their needs. In addition, Thompson brings valuable critical insight into the significance of written letters as testimony, and the challenges for researchers in approaching them as reliable historical sources.

Continuing the theme of Australian rabbis, Rabbi Chaim Cowen offers a history of Australia's longest-standing rabbinical court, in *The Evolution of the Melbourne Beth Din*. Blending meticulous historical research with insights as a scholar of both Australian secular and Jewish religious law, Cowen charts the development of Melbourne's Beth Din, its relationship with Melbourne's various Hebrew Congregations, the key personalities who led and participated in its operations and the communal context within which it operated. Cowen's account covers not only the Beth Din's activities in matters of personal and ritual guidance, but also civil arbitration, offering a fascinating insight into how the rabbinical court functions within the wider Australian legal landscape.

In our final long-form article of this volume, we travel to Baghdad, as Professor Ephraim Nissan of Goldsmiths University offers an insight into the complex, multifaceted timekeeping practices of the Baghdadi Jewish community in *Double-Mode Clock, Arabic Pocket Watch, Jewish Time, and the Canonical Hours: On the Modern Legacy of the Roman Market Hours*. A comprehensive examination drawing on ethnography, family history, documentary analysis and comparisons between cultures, Nissan's contribution is a wealth of knowledge on the everyday practices and customs of an all-but-lost community. Through his one focused example, he highlights the way in which the Jewish diaspora worldwide has creolised their own Jewish culture with

elements of the world around them, bringing diverse and unique ways of “Jewishness” to life.

No volume would be complete without the contributions of our book reviewers; we are fortunate to have four reviews critically examining Jewish Studies books from a broad variety of genres, from fiction to American racial politics, medical anthropology to Holocaust history. Professor Suzanne Rutland reviews Israeli author Emuna Elon’s literary thriller “House on Endless Waters” which explores the experiences and emotions of third-generation Holocaust survivors and family secrets. Dr Jason Schulman reviews Marc Dollinger’s “Black Power, Jewish Politics”, an examination of political relations between African American and Jewish activists and powerbrokers in the 1960s, the echoes of which remain highly relevant to US political events of 2020. Ms Alice Mitzi Leggett reviews Ben Kasstan’s “Making Bodies Kosher”, a highly-detailed ethnographic study of attitudes to reproduction, childbirth, and newborn care amongst Haredi Jews in the United Kingdom, including attitudes to vaccination which are highly relevant to recent COVID-19 vaccine debates. Finally, Ms Alexandra P. Modelska reviews Lukasz Krzyzanowski’s “Ghost Citizens”, an insightful examination of Jewish-Gentile relations in the wake of the Holocaust seen through the lens of one Polish town as its Jewish inhabitants return to negotiate picking up the pieces of their lives and their place alongside their neighbours.

We hope that our readers enjoy this volume’s selection of papers and reviews, and hope fervently that the new year brings better health, academic fortune and freedoms to all. We encourage readers to consider their own submissions for the 2021 volume, either full papers or book reviews, in any topic of relevance to academic Jewish Studies broadly. We especially encourage scholars whose plans to deliver papers at academic conferences were thwarted by COVID-19 to reformat these as scholarly essays for submission to the journal; the editors and peer-reviewers are committed to working collegially with you to ensure that your research dissemination can take a new form. Please see <http://www.aajs.org.au/journal/> for more details on submitting your work to the Australian Journal of Jewish Studies.