

***THE AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL
OF
JEWISH STUDIES***

Volume XXXVI: 2023

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Editorial Jewish Studies as balm

Joshua Nash and Suzanne Faigan

This volume is the first from a new editorial team for *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, which now comprises two editors under the guidance of an editor-in-chief. Dr Jennifer Creese, an alumna of the University of Queensland, and now based at the University of Leicester, UK, has been a member of the editorial team for several years and is now the editor-in-chief. Dr Suzanne Faigan, who commenced last year as Reviews Editor, is now editor. Dr Joshua Nash is a new addition as editor. As a team, we are delighted to present this year's journal, the fruit of our dedicated work together with the scholarship of eminent contributors from Australia and around the world.

We were uncertain about whether our 2023 journal would come to be. The war in Ukraine has been distressing enough, particularly for those of us who are familiar with Eastern Europe through our academic work or personal experience. But, our grief and shock at the brutal October 7 attacks on Israel, and the ongoing hostage situation, war, and upheaval, have been incomparably profound. Australia is a long way from the Middle East. But, and we are sure we speak for most readers of this journal, these events have touched us personally. No matter where we sit in the political spectrum, Israel is close to our hearts. Many of us are Israeli, have lost family, friends and colleagues in Israel, or know others who have been affected by these events.

What can people do in the face of such a situation? In times like those upon us, we as editors hope that the words in our journal offer something to all of our readers and members: words past and words to come. The academic enterprise should at least be an offering of engagement and an invitation to dialogue. It is with such specific summons to reading *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* that the intellect and the intellectual can participate in the possibility of Jewish Studies as balm.

We hope *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* and Jewish Studies scholarship in general, with its broad scope that spans several disciplines, can help readers arrive at sound ways of thinking and feeling about the world. Perhaps words and reflection can act as an appeasement to ameliorate things and, indeed, manage conflict. After all, all skirmishes take root in disagreements, many of which come about through the lack of shared understandings. Surely, it is here that words can be a humble yet hopeful and revolutionary salve. They can be a means to get us out of a pickle, and to move us from where our thinking and feeling are now to where we would hope them to be to gain more appropriate ways of acting.



If the words, ideas, articles, and book reviews in previous, this, and future issues of *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* in any way mend or lessen pessimistic ways of thinking about the state of world Jewry, Jewish scholarship in Australia and elsewhere, cultural and religious conflict anywhere, and internal and external struggles more generally, then this must be a job well done. It is this hope and hopeful effect that make our incumbency worthwhile.

Turning to this year's volume, we first acknowledge that this is a pre-October 7 collection. The volume begins with Kathleen Gyssels's literary study, which moves between France, the Caribbean, and South America, with echoes from Eastern Europe, as it locates the Moulin d'Andé, an old windmill complex with living space for several families, at the heart of a network of literary influence which included writers such as André Schwarz-Bart. Best known for *The Last of the Just* (1959), Schwarz-Bart is shown to have influenced and been influenced by fellow visitors to the Moulin, such as Georges Perec, Arnaldo Palacios, and Robert Bober. In the same way, an important literary relationship for Schwarz-Bart was with his wife, Simone, who would become his co-author.

Next, Rebecca Margolis revisits her earlier work into music and the continuity of Yiddish language and culture in Melbourne by considering specifically the role of rap music in the mix. Unlike previous scholarship focusing largely on the educational context of the children's school as a response to language shift, Margolis proposes a compelling model for intergenerational Yiddish continuity within a collaborative and combined in-person and virtual space that spans family, public performance, and the recorded album.

The next article, by Jacques J. Rozenberg, examines questions in medieval philosophy. On the topics of determinism, divine will, and free will, Spinoza confronted Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers, and Leibniz criticised Spinoza. Rozenberg's article seeks to clarify the foundations of Spinozist determinism and necessitarianism by analysing these notions in the context of the Jewish philosophy that Spinoza attempted to refute. Leibniz employed notions from Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* to oppose Spinozism.

In "The Jew who Fed an Army: Jacob Benjamin and the French Revolution", Ronald Schechter tells the story of just that: how Jacob Benjamin, a Jewish army supplier in the French Revolution, literally fed an army. This archival research is based on rare documents obtained from the Benjamin family and other official records surrounding his involvement in the Revolution.

In the final scholarly article of this volume, John Zeleznikow draws upon family memory in exploring the history of a café which became a cultural icon. Café Scheherazade opened in 1958 and provided more than just food to its clientele—it was also a haven where Holocaust survivors could

meet in a safe, understanding space. That dual role was no accident but was the deliberate aim of the café's caring and community-minded owners, Avram and Masha Zeleznikow.

We present five book reviews in this volume. First, Alexander Green reviews *Maimonides: A Radical Religious Philosopher*, by Shalom Sadik. Based on a series of Professor Sadik's essays, the book argues for a view of Maimonides as proponent of a view of the world in which contemplation of nature is a religious imperative in combination with adherence to Jewish law. Next, Chayyim Holtkamp assesses Maria Ciesielska's edited volume, *The Doctors of the Warsaw Ghetto*, a detailed study into the fate of the more than 800 Jewish doctors in the city's Jewish quarter. Holtkamp details Ciesielska's English-language analysis of the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, and other medical practitioners who kept Jews alive in the ghetto despite epidemics, malnutrition, and cramped living spaces. Third, Peter McNeil reviews *Jews in Suits: Men's Dress in Vienna, 1890-1938*, by Jonathan C. Kaplan-Wajselbaum. Published within the prestigious Dress Cultures series on Bloomsbury Academic, this work uses both written and visual sources to examine the dress politics of the Jewish men who adopted the modern suit in modernist Vienna prior to World War Two. Next, Philip Mendes considers Max Kaiser's *Jewish Antifascism and the false promise of settler colonialism* from a well-informed historical position on Australian Jewry more generally. A punchy review, the reader should become informed about the different wings, factions, and colours of the politics of antisemitism in Australia, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s. Lastly, Ian Young reviews Yonatan Adler's *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal* which employs systematic historical and archaeological methods to discover the earliest evidence for the emergence of practical Judaism within the routine lives of ordinary people in antiquity.

We wish all a prosperous and, most of all, peaceful 2024. We are thankful to Dr Jennifer Creese for her continuing efforts as editor-in-chief, especially during our first go at editing what we hope our readers agree is a worthwhile suite of papers and book reviews for 2023. We thank all contributors to this volume for their submissions. We encourage all Jewish Studies scholars in Australia and abroad to consider submissions for the 2024 volume, either as a standard research paper, review paper, response to a published article, a roundtable, or book review on any topic of relevance to the broad remit of this journal. Please see <http://www.aajs.org.au/journal/> for submission details, and address any enquiries to ajjewishstudies@aajs.org.au.