

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

Volume XXXVII: 2024

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Editorial
Jewish Studies as device

Joshua Nash and Suzanne Faigan

There has possibly never been a time to be alive which has not been strange. Indeed, there has likely never been any occasion in the Jewish world which has not been one of movement and change, perceived either as positive or negative. This year, 2024, is no exception. While the events initiated in October 2023 in the Middle East continue with no end in sight, thinking and writing in all geographical and intellectual locations endure. It is these everythings and everywheres we wish to consider in *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* in the 2024 volume.

We posited Jewish Studies in our 2023 editorial as *balm*, something which could soothe given congenial circumstances. Extending this analogy, we offer Jewish Studies as *device*, a method and tool through which to explore the plurality of ideas, places, and ways of developing the field. We are based in Australasia; we welcome work which is about Jewish matters in Oceania and beyond. Our outlook is here and not-here. We offer Jewish Studies as heuristic device to explore the human condition both intellectually and practically.

How can a conglomerate of articles, apparently disparate and unrelated except that they fall under the rubric of Jewish Studies, be device and amalgamating instead of being divisive and alienating? Because they probe into this Jewish and non-Jewish, Australian and abroad, local and far. While encouraging Australian takes, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* is perpetually all-inclusive, plural in its invitation, trans-, multi-, and interdisciplinary in its inviting. The further and wider we cast our net as editors, writers, and collaborators, the more likely we are to land those articles, thoughts, and perspectives which help us see academic pursuits as more than mere theory.

And this easing beyond plain conjecture should enable a reworked balming and devicing of not only this journal specifically and Jewish Studies generally, but also query how scholarly endeavours can engage outside of the mind and heart and beyond the academy into the world to lead to possible change. Intellectual strivings should sharpen the mind and its discretionary power to help us make right decisions based on the available data and options. We hope the words and topics in this volume go some way to identifying blind spots in our judgments and the dangers associated with othering those we perceive as different (to us).



We are delighted to present this collection of new articles and book reviews in *Jewish Studies*.

The opening article, “Yalla! Is Now the Time for Australia’s Sephardi/Mizrahi Journey?” by Suzanne D. Rutland, Benjamin M. Ezzes, and Michael J. Sassoon, presents new qualitative research undertaken in Sydney’s Sephardi/Mizrahi community. The new data, obtained using social science methods, are set against the history of the Sephardi/Mizrahi community in Australia and enable the authors to look ahead to a future of ever greater representation for this ‘minority within a minority’.

Anne Sarzin takes us back to the Australia and South Africa of 100 years past in her article, “My Grandfather, Reverend Abraham Levy, and the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation”. The contemporary sources—what a good idea to publish the latest rabbinical sermons in the community newspaper—provide a picture of a young, brilliant, dynamic rabbi whose concern for the wellbeing of his congregants and the wider community only deepened as his career continued, though his time in Australia would prove to be much briefer than all had hoped.

In “The Miracle of Speech and Jewish Identity in Russian-Israeli Literature”, Aleksei Surin looks at themes in the prose of authors based in Israel and writing in Russian. Works by Julius Margolin, Yulia Shmukler, Efreim Baukh, and Linor Goralik feature characters who miraculously gain the ability to speak. In the first three cases, the characters’ verbal acknowledgement of their Jewish identity is redemptive. By contrast, in the work by Goralik, which is much more recent, even the miracle of speech cannot ease the characters’ suffering in a post-apocalyptic, dystopian Israel. This evolution of the ‘miracle of speech’ motif reflects a transformation over time in the priorities of Russian-Israeli literature.

In the Book Reviews section, Steven Frankel reviews *Jewish Virtue Ethics*, edited by Geoffrey D. Claussen, Alexander Green, and Alan L. Mittleman, a collection of essays presenting a diversity of perspectives on questions of character and virtue in Jewish literature ranging from the Bible to modern works founded in social justice.

Amy-Jill Levine reviews Isaac Kalimi’s *The Book of Esther between Judaism and Christianity: The Biblical Story, Self-Identification, and Antisemitic Interpretation*, which explores the origins of the Book of Esther and its interpretation and reception in both Christian and Jewish traditions, including the relevance of its themes in the present day.

Joshua Nash considers *Zev’s Los Angeles: from Boyle Heights to the Halls of Power. A Political Memoir*, by Zev Yaroslavsky with Josh Getlin. Zev Yaroslavsky is the son of Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine who in his long career as a public official—he is now an academic in Public Policy and History at UCLA—made a lasting impact on the city of Los Angeles. Intended to be ‘a history as much as a memoir’, the book links the personal story to the larger narrative of post-war LA.

Andre Oboler reviews *Phishing for Nazis: Conspiracies, Anonymous Communications and White Supremacy Networks on the Dark Web* by Lev Topor. Taking into account the history of white supremacy, this book uses the unique approach of ‘undercover cyberethnography’ to shed light on areas of the internet where hatred and conspiracies are able to thrive and spread, and presents conclusions about the significance of these phenomena and how governments must deal with them.

This volume includes an *In memoriam* section, to honour two people who passed away in the past year, both of whom made an enduring contribution to Jewish Studies in Australia.

Rabbi Dr. Raymond Apple AO was the senior rabbi of Sydney’s Great Synagogue for many years, and served in many other important public roles such as chaplain to the Australian armed forces. Among his lifelong work in the sphere of education, he was involved in the founding and ongoing management of Mandelbaum House, which in addition to providing kosher accommodation for students and visitors to the University of Sydney, acts as a venue for academic events in Jewish Studies and hosts visiting scholars who participate in the University’s Department of Hebrew, Jewish, and Biblical Studies. He was a towering presence and a true role model.

Among his many contributions to academia, Emeritus Professor William D. Rubinstein OAM was the author of many books and articles in the field of history, including Jewish history, and was one of the founders of the Australian Association of Jewish Studies, serving as president in the Association’s early years and continuing as a committee member until only two years ago. He regularly contributed articles to *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, and was a member of the *Journal*’s editorial board. With his wide knowledge and academic rigour, he was known for his ability to set the record straight on contentious issues. It was a great honour to have received a positive message from Bill after the publication of the 2023 *Journal*.

This is the second volume under the editorship of the Nash/Faigan team, supported by our editor-in-chief, Dr. Jennifer Creese. We thank all contributors to this volume for their submissions, and to all peer reviewers for their comments on the original article drafts. We encourage all Jewish Studies scholars in Australia and abroad to consider making a submission for the 2025 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.aaajs.org.au/journal/> for submission details, and address any enquiries to ajewishstudies@aaajs.org.au.