

Letter from the Editors

As the “People of the Book” Jews have always engaged with scholarship in different languages, from Hebrew and Aramaic of antiquity to later “hybrid” languages that developed as Jews were dispersed throughout the world as a result of exile, expulsion and migration. The SJM is dedicated to keeping alive the memory of the Holocaust and the rich Jewish life that existed in Europe before its destruction. Lives that played out in a multitude of languages that were at times responsible for the creation of diverse literature, scholarship and other cultural outputs. So too the rich but too often overlooked languages and cultures of Jews in the Middle East and North Africa whose lives were similarly derailed by the Holocaust, the Farhud (1941), and expulsions in the period after the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel. In all of these instances, language provides a prism through which the cultural production of these diverse communities is generated.

But what are “Jewish” languages? Are we speaking only of Hebrew and “hybrid” languages that developed over thousands of years of Jewish living among other peoples resulting in Ladino, Judeo-Arabic and Yiddish? Or might we also include the ways in which Jews (today and in times past) have spoken “non-Jewish” languages, such as the way an Australian Jew might speak English differently to other Australians?

This issue of Musings explores these questions and more under the theme of Jewish languages and cultural productions. Opening this issue is an article by Kip Green on the significance of theatre – written, staged and performed by Holocaust Survivors – as a tool for healing in Displaced Persons camps in post-war Allied-Occupied-Germany. In the wake of the Holocaust, the diverse experiences of the millennia-old Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa were often overshadowed. Eran Asoulin explores the double trauma of Jews from Arab states in North Africa and the Middle East, expelled from their countries of origins and discriminated against by the Israeli State in his article on the Black Panther Haggadah of 1971. Taking a more contemporary perspective, Rebecca Margolis highlights the continued importance of Yiddish in the cultural legacy of Melbourne Jewry, examining two recent English-language Australian texts that integrate the Yiddish language within as a central element of the (Ashkenazi) Australian Jewish experience. Annabel Noar’s article addresses the function of Hebrew as a marker of Jewish culture and identity among New Zealand’s Israeli expat community. Also included is a review of Ofer Idels’s *Zionism: Emotions, Language and Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 2024) by Roni Cohen. Finally, David Horowitz and Kwok-Kam Yeung dive into the Sydney Jewish Museum collection and examine the language and historical context of a ketubah belonging to two Viennese Jewish refugees who spent the Second World War in the Shanghai Ghetto.

Professor Avril Alba
The University of Sydney

Dr Jonathan C. Kaplan,
The Sydney Jewish Museum