# Migration in Jewish Imagination and Experience

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Edited by

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and Natalie Wynn

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| | |
|---|---|
| Adhan | Islamic call to prayer issued by a mosque, often via loudspeaker |
| Aliyah | Immigration to Israel. |
| Ark | Cabinet in which Torah scrolls are kept. |
| Bar mitzvah | Coming-of-age religious ritual in Judaism. |
| Bimah | Dais from which synagogue services are led. |
| Chevra Kadisha | Holy Burial Society. |
| Etrog (pl. etrogim) | Citron fruit, used during the festival of Sukkot. |
| Goldene Medine | "Golden country" (i.e., the US). |
| Griners | Greenhorns, newcomers |
| Guberniia | Russian governorate. |
| Hakafot | Ceremony during the festival of Simhat Torah. |
| Hanukkah | Festival of Lights. |
| Kaddish | The ritual prayer of mourning. |
| Matzo meal | Ground *matzo* (unleavened bread) used for cooking during Passover. |
| Mikveh (pl. mikvaot) | Ritual bath. |
| Minyan | Quorum of ten Jewish men required for a full prayer service. |
| Mizrahi (pl. Mizrahim) | "Of the East"; used, often loosely, to describe North African Jews. |
| Multikulti | Multiculturalism. |
| Olim | Immigrants to Israel. |
| Peyos (pe'ot) | Sidelocks. |
| Shtetl | Pre-Holocaust East European town with a sizable Jewish population. |
| Sukkah | Booth built to celebrate Sukkot. |
| Tallit | Prayer-shawl. |
| Tefillin | Phylacteries. |
| Tochess | Backside. |
| Tref | Nonkosher. |
| Yarmulke | Skullcap. |
| Yeshiva | Academy for the study of religious and rabbinic literature. |

# INTRODUCTION

MARA W. COHEN IOANNIDES
AND NATALIE WYNN

This volume has been a long time in the making. The editors first met in 2013, at a conference on Jewishness in National Cultures, held at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. Each was presenting on her local community: specifically, these communities' understandings of themselves and their own histories – Mara W. Cohen Ioannides, on Springfield, Missouri, and Natalie Wynn, on Ireland. At dinner, the editors bonded over a shared curiosity about the ways in which their home communities perceived and represented themselves, and the commonalities of Jewish experience in small and peripheral Jewish communities everywhere. Equally importantly, they bonded over similarities in their personal and professional situations.

The editors maintained their fascination with, and critical examinations of, the myths that are generated by small Jewish communities and the "truths" that lie behind them. However, resources prevented the organization of a conference that could investigate and interrogate these oral traditions, myths, and legends on a larger scale, with other like-minded scholars. In 2021, as a consequence of the COVID pandemic, it finally became possible to put together an international conference co-hosted by Missouri State University and Trinity College Dublin, to explore these topics in the virtual world. The conference was given the deliberately provocative title "Jewish Immigration in Myth and Reality," and had two interrelated aims. The first was to uncover stories that have been constructed around Jewish migrations throughout the ages. The second was to explore the "realities" of these migrations: whether in terms of the objective, historical realities that have become obscured by the stories; or the significance and possible functions of these anecdotes as representations and interpretations of "real" events. The conference attracted participants from as far afield as North America, Latin America, Europe, and Israel, exploring Jewish experience from Siberia to Argentina, and this volume presents a selection of essays based on their contributions.

## Migration and Myth

As Dani Kranz observes in her chapter in this book, migration is fundamental to the human condition. It has occupied a vital place in Jewish history and thought from Antiquity to the present day. It is an experience – and, indeed, a concept – that is relevant to all Jews in some way, whether directly or indirectly; as part of recent family history or of Jewish history more generally; and as a factor that has defined and influenced Jewish life and practice in the diaspora and in Israel alike. Migration has been woven into the interpretation of the key Jewish festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot; it is the backdrop to major religious, philosophical, and political texts, from the Hebrew Bible and Babylonian Talmud, to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Joseph Karo's *Shulhan Arukh*, and Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*; and underpins the contemporary Jewish concern for social justice. The scope of its influence on Jewish thought and culture reflects the immense symbolic power of migration as a transformative, often traumatic event in the life of an individual or a group. As a potent symbol in Jewish memory, migration remains central to the way in which Jews are taught to understand themselves and their own history.[1] It has also inspired travel and travelogs, like that of Isaac Joseph Benjamin, whose account of his visit to the United States examined how the immigrant Jews had settled into the New World.[2] The lasting emotional resonances of migration in the history of Jewish experience, from the Babylonian exile of the sixth century CE to *aliyah* in the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, has inspired a wealth of oral and written traditions. The historical significance and psychological resonance of migration has ensured the survival of these traditions, allowing them to retain their hold on the imagination and self-perception of Jews across the world today, and helping the myths to persist largely unscathed by the challenges of critical scholarly research.

Samuel Schrager describes migration as "a slot that has to be filled with a story ... which, in accounting for [one's] initial presence in the locality, links together fundamental matters of personal, family, and community identity."[3] The stories that are generated around migration often contain significant elements of myth. This has caused them to be disregarded by historians, who tend to favor hard "fact" above emotional and psychological

[1] This is a key contention of Yosef Haim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).
[2] I[Saac] J[oseph] Benjamin, *Three Years in America*, 2 vols., trans. Charles Reznikoff (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956).
[3] Samuel Schrager, "What is Social in Oral History?," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 288.

phenomena.[4] The social aspect of myth is also underestimated: its ability to entertain and amuse,[5] which undoubtedly contributes to its enduring popularity. This resonates with the ancient Greek understanding of myths (μῦθοι), as explained by the British historian and broadcaster Bettany Hughes: "memories that mattered, points of information, truths that we really need to understand."[6] Modern scholarship has shown that myth has other, deeper functions that merit more serious consideration; namely, its capacity to express the desires, fears, and identities of individuals, families, and groups. Myth can also be a force to be reckoned with, as a particular perspective on and interpretation of reality, often carrying a moral message that is amplified by its emotional resonance.[7] Belief in a specific myth has the ability to transform fable into "fact" so potent as to wield a decisive and defining influence on the individuals and groups to which it relates.[8] For these reasons, myth is especially significant in the lives of minorities, explaining how and why they came to be in a specific place, and supporting them in the negotiation and maintenance of distinct and complex identities that are both part of, and separate from the majority culture.[9] Like the memory and tradition with which it is intertwined, myth gives the appearance of being a fixed representation of the past, when it is, in reality, a dynamic force that operates in constant interplay with the ever-changing

[4] Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, "Introduction," in *The Myths We Live By*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 3-4.
[5] Hasia Diner, interviewed by Louis Lentin, in *Grandpa, Speak to Me in Russian*, dir. Louis Lentin (Crescendo Concepts, 2006), https://ifiplayer.ie/grandpa-speak-to-me-in-russian/, accessed March 3, 2020.
[6] *Treasures of the World*, series 3, episode 3, "Georgia," aired April 20, 2024, on Channel 4.
[7] Schrager, "What is Social in Oral History?," 285ff.; John Byng-Hall, interviewed by Paul Thompson, "The Power of Family Myths," in *The Myths We Live By*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 216, 220; Alistair Thomson, "Unreliable Memories? The Use and Abuse of Oral History," in *Historical Controversies and Historians*, ed. William Lamont (London: UCL Press, 1998), 31-33; Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 10-11, 13-15; Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 73.
[8] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 67-68, 70; Byng-Hall, interviewed by Thompson, 217.
[9] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222-25; Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 18-19.

demands and needs of the present.[10] Together with other forms of oral tradition, it offers both a counterbalance and a supplement to formal, public and national history, which can, itself, be understood as myth mainstreamed.[11]

The critical examination of myth, as a social, cultural, and historical resource in its own right allows us to investigate the ways in which particular groups choose to represent themselves and their actions, and to discern their unconscious, otherwise unarticulated desires, fears, and anxieties; shared perspectives, interests and identities; and the subtle kernels of historical fact, truth, or memory that are conveyed through their collective memory and imagination. In the Jewish context, myth is closely related to interactions with non-Jewish society. It expresses the desire of Jews to integrate into majority society on their own terms, while reflecting the complex, often messy, realities of everyday life, highlighting the dissonances between reality and representation. The recurrence of particular themes across this volume and across the diversity of settings that the essays represent, demonstrates that Jews faced similar social and cultural challenges wherever they found themselves. These challenges were reflected in the stories that were subsequently created in order to preserve, process, and shape the memory of these experiences. The resultant myths may obscure the realities of what was actually done, by whom, and why, but in doing so they reveal other "truths" – truths that can be uncomfortable and challenging, in contrast to the reassuring, idealized "realities" of the myths.[12]

## Structure of the Volume

This book is divided into three thematic sections. The first, *Recovered Histories*, reclaims the histories of Jewish individuals and communities in Scotland, Ireland, and America, whose stories have been shaped by immigration yet obscured by its mythologies. Harvey Kaplan and Natalie

[10] Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 3-5, 7-8, 20-21; Thomson, "Unreliable Memories," 23-34; Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 66, 69; Byng-Hall, interview, 218-19; "What is Social in Oral History?," 284. Schrager describes oral narrative as an ongoing conversation throughout, as well as about, the history of a particular community.

[11] Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 2-7, 18-19; Paul Thompson, "The Voice of the Past: Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 21-28; Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 72-73.

[12] Samuel and Thompson, "Introduction," 13; see also Natalie Wynn's chapter in this volume.

Wynn discuss the oral traditions that have been constructed around Jewish experience in Scotland and Ireland, respectively, which reflect the movement and exchange that occurred between the communities of Britain's provincial Jewish network at the time of mass migration (1881-1914). These include claims that the Jewish presence in both countries can be traced back to the Middle Ages and the trope of accidental arrival, which holds that more recent immigration was accidental as opposed to intentional. Kaplan presents materials from the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre relating to immigration and integration, while Wynn seeks to understand the ways in which Irish Jewish migration myths reflect the ambivalent realities of local Jewish experience. Mara W. Cohen Ioannides and Bryan Edward Stone transport us across the Atlantic to the United States. Cohen Ioannides considers the question of the kinds of relationships that Jewish fur traders had with the Indigenous people during the Colonial through Western Expansion Periods. She suggests that, because of endogamy requirements, the rare occurrence of long-term relationships was not a matter of colonization, but rather an economic and emotional issue. Stone moves us forward in time with his "bottom-up," individualized historiography of Jacob H. Schiff's Galveston Movement, which was enacted to disperse Eastern European immigrants across the United States from the port of Galveston, Texas. Through his tracing of the movements of individual migrants, Stone queries traditional evaluations of the Movement as unsuccessful, showing how this largely forgotten story is actually a vital part of the history of Jewish immigration to the United States between 1880 and 1912, facilitating the movement of immigrants from the East Coast throughout the Midwest.

The second section, *Cultural Representations*, considers how Jewish communities across the continents present themselves to outsiders, and how the outside world perceives them, through the medium of culture. Sue Vice writes about the literature and poetry that has been generated in response to Brexit by Jewish writers whose parents and grandparents settled in Britain as a consequence of Nazi persecution. These writers consider their relationship with Britain, and their received perception of Britain as a haven from persecution, irreparably altered, if not ruptured by the decision to exit the European Union. Their work reflects on the impact of Brexit and its discourse of separateness on British attitudes towards the "other," which has encouraged some Jews to reclaim the European citizenship that had been removed from or rejected by their parents or grandparents in favor of British citizenship. Verena Hanna Dopplinger examines the Israeli television show *Valley of Tears*, set during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in the context of cinematic and cultural representations of Mizrahim. Dopplinger considers

the complex position of Mizrahi Jews in Israeli society and politics as insider-outsiders, by way of three sequences in *Valley of Tears* that highlight the hybrid, conflicted identities of two of its Moroccan characters, Marco and Alush. Dopplinger's essay demonstrates the ways in which Israeli representations both of Mizrahim and of the 1973 Yom Kippur War have evolved in recent decades, to delve beyond earlier, more stereotypical representations. Jonah Greene examines a series of plays by Mark Harelik that reflect his family's experience in the United States from the arrival in 1909 of his grandfather, Haskell Harelik, under the auspices of the Galveston Movement, to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Through the concept of "performances of assimilation," Greene examines how Harelik's representation of Jewish immigration and integration into American society evolved throughout his lifetime. This mirrors, on one hand, the perceived expectations of non-Jewish Americans, and on the other, the progressive acculturation of Jews into American society. Anna Berezin and Vladimir Levin reassess the Jewish experience in Siberia, interrogating the nature of the differences in character that were assumed to have existed between Siberian Jews and their Russian counterparts. While Siberian Jews adopted a distinctive "Sibiriak" identity, Berezin and Levin find that their material culture, in fact, reflects a selective identification with other Russian Jews. This indicates that their cultural distinctiveness was constructed specifically in relation to the traditional Judaism of the Pale of Jewish Settlement, as opposed to the more "progressive" forms that were found in the Russian heartland.

The third and final section, *Responses to the Holocaust*, examines the symbolic resonance of the Holocaust as a cipher for interpreting migration in the contemporary context. Nicola Woodhead interrogates the evolving mythology of the United Kingdom's Kindertransport scheme, contrasting the perception that Britain has, historically, been a safe haven for refugees with a complicated, often less-than-hospitable reality. Woodhead examines themes of inclusion and exclusion with regard to refugees, Jewish and non-Jewish, from the Second World War to the present day. She demonstrates the different ways in which the Kindertransport has been used, on one hand as an example of British hospitality, and on the other, as a means of advocating for greater understanding and openness towards contemporary refugees. Finally, Dani Kranz considers the history and identity of Jews in modern-day Germany, their relationship with non-Jewish German society, and the differing ways in which the Jewish past and present in Germany have been interpreted by both Jews and non-Jews. In common with earlier chapters, Kranz demonstrates that what has been celebrated as a continuous

Jewish presence, in this case since Roman times, in fact, equates to a history, as well as a present, of continuous movement and multiple migrations.

The overall aim of this book is to show that the stories that are told about Jewish migration are just as important to Jewish self-awareness as "fact-based" history – if not more so. The migration myths that are discussed in this volume say much about the concerns of individual Jewish communities and their relationships with the peoples among whom they live. While this is a volume that critically deconstructs myth, it is primarily concerned with understanding the reasons why certain myths came to be.

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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**Jonah Greene** is a PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of Theater and Dance at the University of Kansas, where he teaches courses on acting and public speaking as performance. He received his BA in Theater and Classics from Tufts University. His research interests include Jewish theater and performance, Jewish American history, and amateur/community-based theater practice. He is most interested in studying the intersections between theater and Jewish identity, history, and community. His work has been published in the journal *Studies in Musical Theater*, and he has presented at conferences including the Association for Jewish Studies, American Society for Theater Research, Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Mid-America Theater Conference, and the Jewish Immigration in Myth and Reality topic conference. In addition, he integrates Jewish education and theory into his theater-making, and has an extensive theatrical background in directing, dramaturgy, acting, and administration with theater companies in Kansas, Massachusetts, Georgia, Arkansas, and Jerusalem, Israel.

**Harvey L. Kaplan** holds an MA in Medieval and Modern History from the University of Glasgow. He is a co-founder of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre in Glasgow, and has been its director since 1987. He is a member of the Working Party on Jewish Monuments in the UK and Ireland, has contributed numerous articles on Scottish Jewish history and genealogy to journals and magazines, and has lectured both nationally and internationally. He is collections supervisor and co-curator of displays for the Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre (SJHC), which incorporates the Scottish Holocaust-era Study Centre, a Heritage Lottery-funded project launched in 2021.

**Dani Kranz** is DAAD Humboldt Chair at El Colegio de México, Mexico City, and an applied anthropologist and director of Two Foxes Consulting, Germany and Israel. Her expertise covers migration, integration, ethnicity, law, state/stateliness, political life, organizations, memory cultures, and politics, as well as cultural heritage. She is a consultant to the high commissioner of the German government for Jewish life and in the fight against antisemitism, member of the Council for Migration (Rat für Migration) and a range of other foundations, museums, and NGOs.

**Vladimir Levin** is the Director of the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Born in St. Petersburg, he holds a PhD from the Hebrew University. Dr. Levin is the author of *From Revolution to War: Jewish Politics in Russia, 1907-1914* (Hebrew, 2016); co-editor of *Synagogues in Lithuania: A Catalogue* (2010-2012) and of a special issue of *Judaic-Slavic Journal* devoted to Jewish history in Siberia; and co-author of *Synagogues in Ukraine: Volhynia*, with Sergey Kravtsov (2017). Dr. Levin is currently working with Dr. Anna Berezin on the book *Jewish Heritage in Siberia*. He has published numerous essays on social and political aspects of modern Jewish history in Eastern Europe, synagogue architecture and ritual objects, Jewish religious Orthodoxy, Jewish-Muslim relations, Jews and Jewish politics in Lithuania, and Russian architecture in the Holy Land. Dr. Levin has also headed numerous research expeditions to document Jewish material culture in Eastern and Central Europe and several research projects in the field of Jewish art, the most important of which is the creation of the Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art – the world's largest digital depository of Jewish heritage (http://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php).

**Bryan Edward Stone** is a Professor of History at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he teaches courses in US History and was named the 2019 recipient of the Aileen Creighton Award for Teaching Excellence and the 2021 Teacher of the Year. He was also a Visiting Professor at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin during the summer sessions of 2009-2012. Professor Stone is the editor of Alexander Z. Gurwitz's historical memoir *Memories of Two Generations: A Yiddish Life in Russia and Texas* (2016) and the author of *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (2010), which won the Southern Jewish Historical Society Book Prize. In addition, he is the managing editor of the annual journal *Southern Jewish History*. His current research focuses on Jewish immigrants who arrived in the United States through the port of Galveston in the early twentieth century. He holds a PhD in American Studies and Civilization from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Sue Vice** is Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffield, UK, where she teaches contemporary literature, film, and Holocaust studies. Her recent publications include the co-edited book *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, with Jenni Adams (2013); *Textual Deceptions: Literary Hoaxes and False Memoirs in the Contemporary Era* (2014); and *Barry Hines: "Kes," "Threads" and*

*Beyond*, with David Forrest (2017). Her latest book is *Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah" Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance* (2021).

**Nicola Woodhead** holds a PhD from the Parkes Institute, University of Southampton, where she was also Ian Karten Outreach Fellow. Her doctoral research focused on the Kindertransport, specifically the transmigrant journeys of *Kinder*, closely examining the experience of twenty individuals. Dr. Woodhead mapped their journeys by using memory and archival materials to highlight tensions within the sources and to provide a more accurate understanding of the specific experiences of transmigrant *Kinder*.

**Natalie Wynn** is a Research Associate of the Herzog Centre for Jewish and Near Eastern Religions and Culture, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, specializing in Irish Jewish history, historiography, identity, and experience from the nineteenth century to the present day. Dr. Wynn is the author of *Community, Identity Conflict: The Jewish Experience in Ireland, 1881-1914* (2024) and co-editor of the essay collections *Reimagining the Jews of Ireland: Historiography and Representation*, with Zuleika Rodgers (2023) and *The Limerick Boycott in Context*, with Seán William Gannon (forthcoming 2025).

# PART I

# RECOVERED HISTORIES

# CHAPTER 1

# JEWISH IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN SCOTLAND: PRESERVING THE HISTORY AND ANALYZING THE MYTHS

HARVEY L. KAPLAN

## Scottish Jewish Historiography and the Contribution of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre

The in-depth study of Jewish history in Scotland is a relatively modern pursuit. In the past, the so-called Anglo-Jewish historians only gave minimal attention to the Scottish experience.[1] Research into the early period of Scottish Jewish history was carried out by Edinburgh's Rabbi Dr. Salis Daiches.[2] Glasgow solicitor, Abraham Levy wrote the first ever history of Jews in Glasgow in 1949, but took the story up to only 1895, and sadly without any footnotes explaining his sources. Levy also researched the early Jewish settlers in Scotland.[3] Edinburgh Jewish community leader, Abel Phillips also omitted his sources in his 1979 book on the origins of the Edinburgh Jewish community.[4]

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[1] Harvey L. Kaplan, "Jewish History in Scotland: Sources and Resources," in *Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry*, ed. Kenneth Collins, Aubrey Newman, Bernard Wasserstein (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2018), 353-55.

[2] Salis Daiches, "The Jew in Scotland," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society,* no. 3 (1929): 196-209.

[3] Abram Levy, *The Origins of Glasgow Jewry, 1812-1895* (Glasgow: A. J. Macfarlane, 1949); Abram Levy, "The Origins of Scottish Jewry," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* XIX (1958): 129-62.

[4] Abel Phillips, *A History of the Origins of the First Jewish Community in Scotland: Edinburgh, 1816* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979).

In recent decades, though, with the foundation of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC) in Glasgow in 1987, a concerted effort has been made to collect, preserve and catalog the records of the Jewish experience in Scotland.[5] The unique and nationally significant collections held by SJAC illustrate religious, organizational, social, economic, political, cultural, and family life. Records of Jewish organizations include synagogue registers, burial records, minute books, correspondence, annual reports, membership lists, photographs, brochures, magazines, and newsletters relating to congregations, charity organizations, friendly societies, cultural groups, youth groups, political groups and politicians, and educational institutions.[6] Artworks include sculptures by Benno Schotz and Hannah Frank, paintings by Joseph Ancill, Hilda Goldwag, Leslie Josephson, and Robin Spark, as well as drawings by Bet Low and Josef Herman. There is an extensive library of books and dissertations on Scottish Jewish themes, and an oral history collection.

A wide-ranging artefact collection includes religious items, ceremonial keys, silver trowels, memorial plaques from former synagogues, tennis trophies from the Glasgow Jewish Athletics Club Tennis Section from the 1920s and 1930s, old charity collection boxes, and war medals; textiles, such as Torah mantles, sashes from Glasgow Jewish friendly societies (such as the Grand Order of Israel and the Order of Ancient Maccabeans), and flags and uniforms from youth groups such as Jewish branches of the Scouts and the Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade.

Perhaps the fastest-growing collections in recent years relate to the refugee period in the 1930s and 1940s, including Kindertransport stories, records of hostels and refugee support groups, interviews, photographs, press cuttings, and memorabilia. There are large family archives going back to the 1800s and beyond, as well as business records. In order to provide greater access to the records of refugees who came to Scotland before, during, and after the Second World War, a Scottish Holocaust-era Study Centre has been created.

The abundance of records now available for in-depth research has led to a renaissance in the study of Jewish history in Scotland. The historian, Nicholas Evans writes: "The expanding scholarship of Jewish historiography in recent years is largely thanks to the work of scholars based

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[5] Harvey L. Kaplan, "The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre: Thirty Years of Preserving the Records of an Immigrant Community," *Scottish Archives: The Journal of the Scottish Records Association* 22 (2016): 136-49.

[6] Harvey L. Kaplan, "Jewish History in Scotland," 353-88. See also www.sjac.org.uk.

at, or connected with, the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre."[7] A number of books and articles have been written by historians such as Kenneth Collins, Ben Braber, Nathan Abrams, Mark Gilfillan, and others.[8]

In 2004, SJAC organized the first ever symposium on Scottish Jewish history (Jewish Settlement, Development and Identities in Scotland, 1879-2004), in partnership with the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at Aberdeen University. In 2015, SJAC became a partner in Jewish Lives, Scottish Spaces, a joint research project led by the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to look at aspects of Jewish migration to Scotland, from 1880 to 1950.

Data and collections held at SJAC were utilized by a project run by the International Institute of Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem with SJAC partnership. The project, Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry: A Demographic and Genealogical Profile, sought to produce new conclusions about the geographic origins of Scottish Jewry, its dispersal and settlement patterns throughout Scotland, and the changes in its demographic composition over two centuries. Two definitive books were published, as well as a *Family Tree of Scottish Jewry*, created by genealogist Michael Tobias and available at SJAC.[9]

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[7] Nicholas J. Evans, "A Staging Post to America: Jewish Migration via Scotland," in *Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry*, ed. Kenneth Collins, Aubrey Newman, and Bernard Wasserstein (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2018), 301-26.

[8] Kenneth Collins, *Aspects of Scottish Jewry* (Glasgow: Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, 1987); Kenneth Collins, *Second City Jewry: The Jews of Glasgow in the Age of Expansion, 1790-1919* (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 1990); Kenneth Collins, *Be Well! Jewish Immigrant Health and Welfare in Glasgow, 1860-1914* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2002); Ben Braber, *Jews in Glasgow 1879-1939* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007); Nathan Abrams, *Caledonian Jews: A Study of Seven Small Communities in Scotland* (Jefferson, NC.: McFarland, 2009); Kenneth Collins, Harvey L. Kaplan and Stephen Kliner, *Jewish Glasgow: An Illustrated History* (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2013); Mark Gilfillan, *Jewish Edinburgh: A History, 1880-1950* (Jefferson, NC.: McFarland, 2019).

[9] Kenneth Collins, *The Jewish Experience in Scotland: From Immigration to Integration* (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2016); Kenneth Collins, Aubrey Newman, and Bernard Wasserstein, eds., *Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry* (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2018).

## Jews in Medieval Scotland?

A Jewish presence in England is documented at least back to the Norman Conquest and there has been speculation over the years about a Jewish presence also in Scotland in medieval times. Tantalizingly, an official regulation was passed in 1180 by the Bishop of Glasgow forbidding churchmen from "pledging their benefices for money borrowed from the Jews or other usurers" and this may indeed show that Jewish moneylenders were known in Scotland and may have carried out business trips from communities such as Newcastle or York.[10] The Anglo-Jewish historian Cecil Roth also claimed that Jewish financiers did business from time to time with the Scottish kings. There have been suggestions that when Edward I expelled Jews from England in 1290, a number of them fled to Scotland.[11]

In 2007, an unusual book was published by Elizabeth Caldwell Hirschman and Donald N. Yates, *When Scotland Was Jewish: DNA Evidence, Archaeology, Analysis of Migrations and Public and Family Records Show Twelfth Century Semitic Roots*, in which the authors bring forward a wide range of "evidence" to prove "that much of Scotland's history and culture from the 1100s forward is Jewish."[12] The authors make a number of deductions, based on Scottish personal names, place names and architecture. For example, they allege that the surname Gemmell comes from the Hebrew letter gimmel, while Highet comes from the Arabic word for "life." They suggest that the son in law of King Robert I, Thomas Isaac, has "an undeniably Hebrew surname" (although Scots have often had Hebrew biblical first names and sometimes used these as surnames).[13]

Glasgow's Ramshorn Kirk is said to have been a "crypto-Jewish meeting house," because Ramshorn equates to the Hebrew *shofar*, and the stained-glass windows had primarily biblical themes, picturing Abraham, Isaac, Jeremiah, David, and Solomon. However, the church was named after the lands of Ramshorn, in turn named after a miracle said to have been performed by St. Mungo involving a ram.[14]

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[10] Collins, *Second City Jewry*, 15.
[11] Nathan Abrams and Harvey L. Kaplan, "Jews in Scotland: Myth and Reality," *History Scotland* 6, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 38-43.
[12] Elizabeth Caldwell Hirschman and Donald Yates, W*hen Scotland Was Jewish: DNA Evidence, Archaeology, Analysis of Migrations and Public and Family Records Show Twelfth Century Semitic Roots* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2007), 1.
[13] Hirschman and Yates, W*hen Scotland Was Jewish*, 45.
[14] "The Anecdotage of Glasgow – Story of the Ram's Horn," *Electric Scotland's Classified Directory*, accessed February 17, 2022, http://www.electricscotland.com/history/glasgow/anec13.htm.

Hirschman and Yates claim that Jews fleeing from medieval persecution and the Inquisition in Continental Europe fled to Scotland in large numbers, and were the ancestors of the Scottish ruling class: "We believe that the first members of the Campbell family … arrived in Scotland as a result of anti-Jewish pogroms in France and Spain in the middle of the fourteenth century."[15] Yet if this were the case, we would expect Clan Campbell elders and historians over the centuries to have passed down stories of such a Jewish background or to have preserved writings or artefacts with a Jewish connection.

Jewish influence is said by Hirschman and Yates to have enabled the rapid growth of the medieval Scottish economy. Aberdeen's economic growth in the Middle Ages is attributed to the "fact" that all the major families in the town were of Jewish descent. The authors consider that "a compelling case can be made that Aberdeen did serve as a center of Jewish worship and culture … [from] 1100-1750."[16] If Aberdeen had such a Jewish flavor, why did no Jewish community or writer anywhere else in Europe pick up on this at the time? Problematically, the authors even resort to including images of historical figures in Scotland who "look Jewish," such as Allan Ramsay and George Buchanan.

However, in all this speculation and despite various legends and tales, no concrete evidence has ever come to light. In any other place where Jews once lived, there are usually remains of Jewish buildings, such as synagogues or *mikvaot*, or of Jewish cemeteries. Not a single stone from a medieval Jewish building or cemetery has ever been found or authenticated in Scotland.

In addition, even in medieval times, Jewish travelers wrote about communities they had encountered in far-flung places and rabbis of communities and scholars would correspond across the Jewish world. Had there been Jewish communities in Scotland, someone in the Jewish world would surely have picked up on this. Rabbi Dr. Salis Daiches, writing in Edinburgh in 1929, concluded that: "nothing is known of them in Scotland during the Middle Ages and it is doubtful whether a Jew was ever seen north of the Tweed before the middle of the seventeenth century."[17] Whilst there may have been individual Jews or Jewish families living in Scotland from time to time in the medieval period, we have seen no hard evidence of this, much less of actual communities.

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[15] Hirschman and Yates, W*hen Scotland Was Jewish*, 50.
[16] Hirschman and Yates, W*hen Scotland Was Jewish*, 152, 155.
[17] Salis Daiches, "The Jew in Scotland," 196.

## Jewish Immigration to Scotland in the Nineteenth Century

Formal Jewish communities were established in Edinburgh around 1817 and Glasgow around 1821.[18] In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, further small Jewish communities were established in Dundee, Aberdeen, Ayr, Dunfermline, Falkirk, Greenock, and Inverness. In 1881, there were just under 1,700 Jews in Scotland, but by 1911, there were around 11,800.[19] The main reason for this increase was the arrival of large numbers of East European Jewish immigrants.

David Cesarani notes that in oral history accounts of emigration from Eastern Europe, "four main reasons recur as the trigger for departure: pogroms, religious persecution, poverty and the fear of military service."[20] Many Jewish immigrants to Scotland indeed claimed they were primarily fleeing from pogroms. Dr. Ezra Golombok stated: "my father was from Russia … when he came to Britain … in 1902, he came to … escape the pogroms in Lithuania."[21] Anne Berman related how: "my father made up his mind he was coming to this country, away from pogroms."[22] Robert Spence wrote in a memoir: "Like a large number of other Jewish inhabitants of the Gorbals my father and mother had fled from the Russian pogroms. They emigrated from Lithuania about 1885 and arrived in Glasgow."[23] In truth, though, many Jews who emigrated to Scotland at this time came from what is now Lithuania or Galicia, where there was little or no anti-Jewish violence.[24]

Others, however, did flee areas where there were pogroms from time to time. Abraham Lewis Greenberg came to Glasgow from Chadatowitz, Minsk *guberniia* (now Belarus). He wrote in *The Biography of My Life* in

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[18] Michael Tobias, "A Study of Nineteenth Century Scottish Jewry" (MSc thesis, University of Strathclyde, 2012), 32-33.
[19] Collins, *The Jewish Experience in Scotland*, 30.
[20] David Cesarani, "The Myth of Origins: Ethnic Memory and the Experience of Migration," in *Patterns of Migration, 1850-1914*, ed. Aubrey Newman and Stephen W. Massil (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1996), 248.
[21] Ezra Golombok, interviewed for Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC), October 17, 2013.
[22] Anne Berman, interviewed for SJAC, January 19, 1989.
[23] Robert Spence, "The Robert (Spilg) Spence Story," unpublished manuscript (c.1970), 3 (Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC), OHP 1-5).
[24] For analysis of the origins of Jewish immigrants to Scotland, see Michael Tobias, "The Project Methodology," in *Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry*, ed. Kenneth Collins, Aubrey Newman, and Bernard Wasserstein (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, 2018), 65-67. For locations of pogroms, see Cesarani, "The Myth of Origins", 248-49.

1942 that his mother died in a pogrom: "my mother, her husband and my little sister were murdered in their house, and the house was burned to the ground … sometime later, my father left Russia and went to Glasgow."[25]

From the 1890s onwards, a number of immigrants came from Ukraine. This author's grandfather Rachmiel (Robert) Felman married Hinde (Annie) Miler in Kamenets-Podolsk in November 1903.[26] Just after this, Rachmiel emigrated to Glasgow. His wife, son and sister followed him to Glasgow in 1906. Although the family does not appear to have personally experienced pogroms, they would surely have been aware of the pogroms in the surrounding area.[27] For example, the community must have heard about the horrific Kishinev pogrom (187 miles away) in April of 1903. David Cesarani describes a conscious or sub-conscious attempt by immigrants to portray themselves as escaping from pogroms in order to validate their claim to asylum in Britain: "The immigrants were characterized as 'refugees' and it was said to be 'asylum' that they sought in Britain. This formula was designed to appeal to liberal opinion and to mask the underlying economic opportunism behind the steady stream of emigration which had been underway since the 1860s."[28]

Nevertheless, many came to Scotland because life was generally hard for Jews in the Pale of Settlement, due to state- and church-sponsored antisemitism, discrimination, conscription, poverty, and overcrowding. Isaac Hirshow (Izaak Hirszow) from Vitebsk, Belarus, came to Glasgow in 1922 to be a synagogue cantor in Glasgow: "I was born, brought up, and shared the fate of my Jewish brethren in a country vast and rich. Yet, vast and rich as the country was, the Jew was cast into a corner like into a dustbin – in want, in misery, in darkness and fear."[29]

Evasion of conscription is often mentioned as a factor. J. Philip Jacobson remembered:

> My father … was conscripted into the Russian army, and when the Russo-Japanese War broke out, or was about to break out, and they started conscripting, like a lot of Jewish young men of the time, he wasn't particularly fond of serving in the Russian army, with the history of the

[25] Abraham Lewis Greenberg, "The Biography of My Life," unpublished manuscript (1942) (SJAC, OHP 1-5).
[26] Now Kamianets-Podilskyi, Ukraine.
[27] There were pogroms in Odessa in 1871, Kishinev in 1903, and Melitopol, Simferopol, and Zhitomir in 1905, amongst many others; see Martin Gilbert, *Jewish History Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld, 1969), 75.
[28] Cesarani, "The Myth of Origins," 249.
[29] Isaac Hirshow, speech to mark his twenty-fifth anniversary as cantor of Garnethill Synagogue, Glasgow (1950) (SJAC, PER.Hirshow Collection).

> persecution. And whenever they began to mobilise the reservists, many of them thought that was the time to get out and leave. He was one of the ones who decided that was the time to get out of Russia and come to this country.[30]

Similarly, Robert Epstein wrote that three of his older brothers had left Russia to evade military service.[31] Analysis of conscription at this time, however, has highlighted the fact that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the laws of conscription had been changed and the length of service reduced. Jews were no longer victimized as in the days of underage conscription and there was widespread bribery to avoid conscription.[32] Some emigrants feared being arrested for their political views and activities. Helman Wolifson tells about his relative Moses Sklair, who had attended some political meetings addressed by the revolutionary Mikhail Bakhunin and had therefore come to the attention of the police, prompting him to leave.[33]

Scotland was an attractive destination for immigrants in the nineteenth century, with its economic expansion, growing Jewish communities, and a historical absence of serious anti-Jewish prejudice or violence (see below). Glasgow, in particular, claimed to be the second city of the British Empire, growing rapidly because of its success in areas such as manufacturing, railway engineering and shipbuilding, commerce and retail.[34] Scotland in general was thriving and there were plentiful employment opportunities. Hillel Meir Langman came from Vandziogala, Lithuania to Scotland in 1880 and lived for a time in Edinburgh and Dundee, before finally settling in Glasgow. He reminisced about coming to Scotland after hearing of "the great wealth that existed in Britain."[35]

Scotland was also a center for transmigration, with Glasgow accounting for almost 10 percent of the passenger trade from Britain between 1843 and 1913.[36] Jewish immigrants could, therefore, be reassured that if Scotland or Glasgow did not suit them and if they were unable to make a good living,

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[30] J. Philip Jacobson, interviewed for SJAC, May 11, 1989.
[31] Robert Epstein, "Memoirs of Robert Epstein," unpublished manuscript (1962) (SJAC, OHP 1-5).
[32] Cesarani, "The Myth of Origins," 250, 254.
[33] Helman Halm Wolifson, unpublished memoir (1986), 1 (SJAC, OHP8).
[34] William Kenefick, "Jewish and Catholic Irish Relations: The Glasgow Waterfront c.1880-1914," in *Jewish Culture and History* 7, no. 1-2: 215-17.
[35] Hillel Meir Langman, speech at ninth birthday celebrations (Glasgow, 1939) (SJAC, PER.LA 0001).
[36] Nicholas Evans, "Aliens en Route: European Transmigration Through Britain, 1836-1914" (PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2006), 62.

there were ample opportunities to move on by ship from Glasgow to the United States or elsewhere.

Often, one member of the family came over first and then wrote back home that he was doing well, encouraging other family members and friends to follow. J. Philip Jacobson stated: "My father had an older brother who had already emigrated to Scotland and established himself quite successfully in a jewelry business in Glasgow, so it was natural for my father to come to Glasgow."[37] The situation was described by another immigrant from Lithuania:

> My elder daughter Pessl married twelve years ago, and she married a very fine husband, a very good man, and she went away with him to Edinburgh, and all is going well with her. My second daughter Chaye also got married, and her husband went to join them. My third daughter Rivele also went to them. Two years ago they started to write letters that we should all go, and we let ourselves be persuaded, and we went, and my Chaye also went with us to Edinburgh. We do not regret having left Russia, and we are making a fine life.[38]

## Destination America?

For many Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe, of course, the United States was the destination of choice – the so-called *Goldene Medine*. Family legends often state that East European Jewish immigrants arrived in Scotland thinking they were already at their intended destination of the United States. Robert Spence remembered: "At that time, various agents were spiriting the Jews out of Russia and adjacent countries. In some cases, they promised the emigrants that they'd be taken to America and secured big fees for the voyage, but many Jewish families found themselves sailing up the Firth of Clyde into Glasgow, instead of up the Hudson River into New York."[39]

In actual fact, immigrants arrived at the east coast ports, such as Hull, Grimsby, or Leith and reached Glasgow by train. It would not have made sense geographically for immigrants from Eastern Europe to arrive in Glasgow by "sailing up the Firth of Clyde" (although this is another myth which persists). Symie Miller, born in 1905, remembered that his father, Mordecai Mosewitzky (Max Miller) had emigrated to Glasgow in 1898

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[37] Jacobson, interview.

[38] Sheine Freide Hoffenberg (Edinburgh), Letter to Nechama Pessil Bushell (her niece in America), November 30, 1910 (Rifkind Family Archive, privately held).

[39] Spence, "The Robert (Spilg) Spence Story," 3.