

Call for Papers: **European Hebrew Text Cultures: Deciphering Entanglements through Close and Distant Readings**

May 26-28, 2025, Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main

Modern Hebrew literature, as has been recognized by its historiography, was initiated in Europe. It is a result of the Jewish interest and interaction with European literature and book culture, and it found its place on the European stage as a minor literature, encompassed by thriving literary cultures for which it longed. Hebrew literature from its very beginning had to define its uniqueness, side by side with creating its legitimacy as a literary culture to stand up in comparison with its neighboring and hosting national cultures. Its language was not a spoken one, rather it has been for centuries a language used for writing and for ritual. Therefore the creation of a literature that is based on this very language tradition was a challenge by itself. The Hebrew reading culture was also a challenge: Hebrew texts were at the focus of the Torah scholarly religious study, and the profanity of the textual literary creation, or even the numbing of the sacredness of the text – was against basic Jewish religious instincts. Nevertheless, being a culture that was textually rooted in its fundamental experience, gave the people of the book an advantage in setting up a thriving literary culture.

This conference aims at contextualizing Hebrew literature and exploring its creation from a European Jewish Studies and Hebrew Literature scholarly perspective. Moreover, we would like to establish a connection with researchers focusing also on the reception and perception of the rising Hebrew literature from the perspective of its surrounding cultures, mainly Yiddish, German, French, and various Eastern European literary traditions.

Exploring the creation of the Hebrew literary cultures from a wide angle of its European encounters, requires a multitude of methods. Close readings of the Hebrew literary texts are the traditional core of the literary scholarly research and will provide important insights. However, broadening the scope is also an invitation to rely on distant readings of various sorts, in order to allow the historical, empirical and geographical perspectives to be present in this discussion. Furthermore, Digital Humanities in general have provided sets of tools which can help create images such as maps and graphs which can visualize efficiently the issues in question. Such research may help in depicting the trends and movements that were present in the heart of the European encounters modern Hebrew literature has faced throughout its crystallization. Therefore, distant reading as a major tool of computational literary research is only one method which could suggest promising insights regarding the topic, and other approaches are warmly welcome as well. Similarly, while the conference focuses roughly on the period from 1850 to 1930, projects that focus on relevant topics but with a focus on Hebrew text cultures in Europe at an earlier or later point in time, are not excluded in order to enable us to understand the long term developments.

Confirmed keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Irene Zwiep (University of Amsterdam)

The organizers plan to publish a special volume with the papers of those participants who want to develop their presentation into an article. We also apply for funding to cover travel and accommodation in Frankfurt am Main.

Please submit abstracts of up to 500 words and a bio-note to Orel Sharp (Sharp@em.uni-frankfurt.de) **and** Judith Müller (jud.mueller@em.uni-frankfurt.de) by July 25, 2024.

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