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FROM DREYFUS TO DESTRUCTION / Gideon Kouts

“From Dreyfus to Destruction: Media and Antisemitism”—that’s the unifying theme of this issue. Articles and documentary material on this topic appear in “Kesher Front Page” and in the Documentary section as well. Antisemitic manifestations and media occupation with them as they develop are as timeless as antisemitism itself. From the standpoint of the Jewish media researcher, one may distinguish between attention to the antisemitic media and press, their messages, and their techniques, on one side, and Jewish media that analyze and combat the phenomenon on the other. We chose the 120th anniversary of the eruption of the Dreyfus affair in France, a milestone in the birth of modern antisemitism in Europe and its manifestations in the media—which proceeded down a road of no return to its ghastly apocryphe in the Holocaust and the annihilation of European Jewry.

The articles in “Kesher Front Page” concern themselves with “the Affair.” Gideon Kouts investigates the influence of Zionist ideology on the responses of the European Jewish and Hebrew press to the onset of the Affair. Yosef Lang depicts the coverage of the affair in the Yishuv press as a mirror of the Yishuv’s attitudes toward France. Uzi Elyada examines the framework of coverage of the Affair by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s newspaper Ha-Tsi in an interview by Nahum Slouschz with the writer Émile Zola, author of J’accuse—an important landmark in the evolution of the Hebrew press in pre-state Israel. And in Europe, Agnieszka Friedrich recounts the reflection of the Affair in the antisemitic newspaper Rola. Malgorzata Domagalska expands the discussion of media expressions of Polish antisemitism to the dystopic fiction about “Poland under Jewish control” that appeared in Polish journals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Next, from antisemitism to anti-Zionism: Simon Meyers describes how the British Catholic press construed the “Zionist threat” as the British Mandate for Palestine was being approved. Menachem Keren-Kratz writes about Hirsch Leib Gottlieb, a pioneer of the Hebrew and Yiddish press in Hungary, who also fought antisemitism by means of satire. Raquel Stepak recounts the technique used by the Yishuv publication The Poland Issue, back in 1940, to tell the Holocaust as it was occurring in Europe: by commemorating the terminated communities. In the Documentary section, Haim Grossman recounts the story of a supportive postcard that a Jewish family in Romania sent to Lucie Dreyfus, wife of the libeled Jewish captain. The Documentary section deals at length with antisemitic cartoons in interbellum Poland through the medium of an exhibition titled “Foreign and Unpleasant,” put on at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; in articles by the curators Grzegorz Krzywiec and Dariusz Konstantynów; and in Palestine in Rachel Hart’s article about antisemitic cartoons in the Arab press during the Arab uprising in 1936, which were influenced by the antisemitic press in Europe. In 1895, as the Dreyfus affair in France commanded headlines in that country and elsewhere, émigré French antisemites published a newspaper of their own in Brazil, an issue of which was found by the researcher Valeria Guimarães.

Also in Kesher is the first of two articles by Moshe Peli about the Viennese journal Bikonrim in 1864–1865. Michal Shahaf investigates the London Jewish Sabbath Journal in
1855 and its readers. Hanah Barcket-Glanzer writes about the ruthless competition that went on between what Nahum Sokolow termed the two "leviathans" of the Yiddish press in interbellum Poland—Haynt and Moment. Eran Eldar probes Ben-Gurion's complex attitude toward Tel Aviv as reflected in the press. Tal Strasman-Shapira publishes initial findings of a study of written sources about an edifying attempt by a committee of editors to censor suicide and rape stories in the Israeli press. Yigal Bin-Nun writes about the planning and implementation of information campaigns in the United States for the right of Moroccan Jews to emigrate to Israel. We continue in this issue to interview prominent veteran media personalities about the history of the Hebrew press—this time with one of the most important shapers of the Israeli press, Uri Avneri.

The regular sections, too, present readers with material that, we hope, will quench their thirst and stimulate their interest until the next issue comes out.


On October 15, 1894, a Jewish officer in the French General Staff, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, was arrested in Paris on charges of treason and passing secret information to the enemy. Tried behind closed doors on December 19–22, 1894, before a military tribunal, he was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. His appeal was promptly rejected. On January 5, 1895, in a humiliating public ceremony conducted in a countrywide atmosphere of unbridled antisemitism, Dreyfus was stripped of his rank. On February 21, 1895, he was transported to Devil's Island (French Guiana, off the coast of South America) to serve his sentence. This concluded the first phase of the Dreyfus affair, which eventually flared anew in 1896 and ended only in 1906 with the full exoneration of the accused officer when evidence showed that he had been the victim of an infamous conspiracy.

French Jewry's two main newspapers at the time, Univers Israélite and Archives Israélites, were cautious in their treatment of the affair in its first phase. While they linked the trial to antisemitism, their premise was that it was the affair that had engendered the antisemitic outburst, and not antisemitism that had caused the conspiracy. Ideologically, both newspapers were intent on defending emancipation, republicanism, and the full integration of Jews in French society as primary values that the affair must not be allowed to be endanger.

In contrast, the main Jewish newspaper in Britain, the Jewish Chronicle, came out firmly in defense of Dreyfus and suggested that French antisemitism was indeed a cause of the affair. However, in a reflection of widely held national and cultural perceptions of France in Britain then (as today), it also cited other deficiencies of France and its judicial system as relevant.

Analysis of the coverage of the initial phase of the affair in the Hebrew press in Europe and Eretz Israel reveals the importance of the ideological orientation of each publication, especially in terms of its Zionist or non-Zionist point of view. The Zionist press—the St. Petersburg-based Ha-Melits and the Kraków-based Ha-Magid (both reflecting the Hibbat Tsiyyon ideology)—argued trenchantly that Dreyfus was innocent and that he was clearly the victim of a malicious plot that reflected the entrenched nature of French antisemitism. In contrast, the non-Zionist Warsaw-based Ha-Tsefira (edited by Nahum Sokolow, later an ardent Zionist), convinced of the Jews' bright future as enfranchised citizens in the countries of Europe based on the French example, tended to accept Dreyfus's conviction and, by so doing, to justify the premise that the Jews' behavior affects the ebb and flow of antisemitism.

The coverage of the affair by the Hebrew press also mirrored the rivalry between the two Jewish dailies in Europe at the time, Ha-Melits and Ha-Tsefira. Ha-Melits had the upper hand because its ideology was borne out by events, while Ha-Tsefira, like most of the rest of the Jewish (and non-Jewish) press, misread the historical truth. The rivalry was also personal, between two major figures in the history of the Hebrew press: Nahum Sokolow, editor of Ha-Tsefira, and Abraham Ludvipol, Paris correspondent for Ha-Melits. Ludvipol emerged the winner in this contest for reasons including the two papers' different notions of how to practice journalism. Ha-Melits reported from the scene of the event; Ha-Tsefira used material that Sokolow obtained via various channels of communication, with all the inherent limitations and distortions involved.

As a Zionist activist who criticized the position of the French Jewish mainstream, Ludvipol was convinced from the beginning that Dreyfus was innocent and that the affair was an antisemitic conspiracy. His diary, published in the Ahiasaf Yearbook in 1898, shows the shaping of his opinion on the affair and his fast understanding of the historical truth, as expressed in his
articles in *Ha-Melits*.

Significantly, when the affair resurfaced in 1896, Sokolow hired Ludwipoal as *Ha-Tsefira*’s correspondent in Paris, and it was he who covered the next phase of the trial for that paper.

By doing this, Sokolow enhanced the professionalism of his publication and, with the renewal of the trial, the circulation of *Ha-Tsefira* passed that of *Ha-Melits*. Later, *Ha-Tsefira* would metamorphose into the main organ of the Zionist movement.

**THE DREYFUS AFFAIR IN THE PALESTINE HEBREW PRESS**

/Yosef Lang/

Between 1894 and 1906, France was embroiled in tumult over a set of treason trials known collectively as the “Dreyfus affair.” The hero of the affair, the French-Jewish military officer Alfred Dreyfus, denied the accusation categorically but was prosecuted anyway, sent to Devil’s Island, brought back, and retired again and again. Others were put on trial as well, foremost Émile Zola. The affair enflamed and divided the country, nearly brought on a civil war, almost destroyed the regime, and threatened neighboring monarchies.

Dreyfus’ Jewishness drew racist anti-Jewish elements and antisemitic reactions that confounded the Jews of France and fellow Jews everywhere, including Palestine.

From the 1850s onward, many Jews in Palestine had studied French and become acquainted with French culture by attending institutions of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. After Baron Edmond de Rothschild of France extended his patronage to the Jewish farming communities of Palestine in the 1880s and placed them in charge of officials who had been raised on French culture, French was also taught in these communities’ schools and outstanding pupils were sent to France for further studies. Even after the communities were handed over to the Palestinian Jewish Colonization Association in 1900, they remained under French influence, if only due to occupational and commercial interests between Ottoman Palestine and France. Zionist societies and associations that stayed in touch with Palestine (where the Yishuv, the Jewish community, was 50,000–60,000 strong at the time) were established in Paris and other cities.

Two regular weekly newspapers (*Havasselet* and *Ha-Tsvi*) appeared in Jerusalem during these years; several journals came onto the scene later. *Havasselet* made little reference to the Dreyfus affair, whereas Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, owner of *Ha-Tsvi*, *Ha-Or*, and *Hashkefah*, and a passionate Francophile, found it an important matter to agonize over.

Thus, from January 1895 onward, *Ha-Tsvi* devoted special departments to the Dreyfus events, e.g., “What Happened to Dreyfus?” and “Trial of the Army Officer Dreyfus.” Ben-Yehuda sided with Dreyfus from the outset and trusted that the officer’s innocence would be proved. He strove to persuade his readers that the French army was not tainted with antisemitism and published reporatge that sought to blur and obscure the bitter truth that had come to light in France. He soon realized, however, that the enlightened French nation had committed a terrible blunder and hoped that it was merely a passing nightmare occasioned by the actions of a few bad apples.

This placed Ben-Yehuda, like many Jews, in a quandary. Obviously, supporting Dreyfus was tantamount to accusing the French army and state of misconduct. For this reason, he tried to skirt the events in France for a while and turned the spotlight toward Austria and the successful election campaign of the antisemite Karl Luger.

Ben-Yehuda was concerned about the antisemitism that threatened the Jews of France and Europe at large; he feared that it would also attack the Rothschild family, patron of the Yishuv. Rothschild, however, held his silence. When the failed assassination of Baron Alphonse de Rothschild became known, the Palestine farming communities celebrated, prayed for the family’s wellbeing, and feted the Rothschild brothers.

Public opinion crossed its watershed with the publication of Bernard Lazare’s book *A Judicial Error—the Truth about the Dreyfus Affair* (November 1896), which transformed “the Affair” into a markedly Jewish cause. As Lazare viewed the matter, Dreyfus was tried not as a traitor but as a Jew. Ben-Yehuda lauded Lazare, of course, especially since Senator Scheurer-Kestner had just proved that the charges against Dreyfus were groundless. Abraham Ludwipoal, correspondent of *Ha-Tsvi* in Paris, described the connection between “the Affair” and Herzl and his *Judenstaat* and celebrated Lazare as the savior of French Jewry.

On January 13, 1898, Émile Zola addressed his open letter, “J’accuse,” to President Félix Faure on the pages of *L’Aurore*, protesting the injustice that had been done to Dreyfus. In the aftermath of the letter he was prosecuted, convicted of libel, and sentenced to a prison term and a fine. Zola’s trial made it easier for many to speak freely about the injustice that Dreyfus had suffered, and Zola himself, the non-Jewish hero of the Republic, became a widespread object of empathy.

Ben-Yehuda was initially horrified by the prosecution of a towering personality such as Zola and regarded it as evidence of
grave moral decline. He issued leaflets about Zola’s sentencing in his newspapers and distributed them in the streets. To keep abreast of developments in France, he introduced a new transmission technology to his newspaper. Learning about Zola’s eventual exoneration, he wrote, “Let us not despair; justice will ultimately appear and Dreyfus will also be acquitted. After all, he was punished solely for being Jewish.” The urban and rural intelligentsia in Palestine was thrilled by Zola’s miraculous deliverance and raised funds to send him a gift as an expression of their gratitude. The money was collected at the offices of Ben-Yehuda’s newspaper.

Later on, Ben-Yehuda met with Clemenceau in Paris (1899) and, “in the name of all the Jews in Palestine,” thanked him for his efforts on Dreyfus’ behalf. During his visit he also met with Bernard Lazare, who had been occupied with the Dreyfus affair. When he found out about Dreyfus’ release on September 19, 1899, Ben-Yehuda wrote to his wife, “What amazing things are happening in France right now! How far the truth has come from the time of Zola’s trial to the present! Zola [..] was a true prophet [...] in the land of freedom of the press! Happy is [that land], a hundred, a thousand times over, happy is she!” (November 1899).

Ben-Yehuda’s exultation was premature. In his retrial in Rennes, which was expected to put an end to the embarrassing affair, Dreyfus was re-convicted but pardoned. “Dreyfus was released,” Havatselet intoned, “but justice was not done.”

On November 17, 1899, Ben-Yehuda’s newspaper opined hopefully, “The silver in the firmament has begun to glow [. . .] with the rays of the dawn of justice.” Little did the publisher know that it would take six additional years for justice to truly appear. After the Supreme Court acquitted Dreyfus, Ben-Yehuda, writing on behalf of the Francophiles in Palestine, described July 13–14, 1906, as “days of total victory for truth and justice in France and among humankind at large.”

The public uproar ignited by the Dreyfus affair and its offshoots in France and elsewhere, and their effects on the French regime and the neighboring neighbors, did not engage the passions of the Jews of Palestine, as the newspapers of the time attest. The affair, which had suspended such a dark cloud over the loyalties of Diaspora Jews and had kindled antisemitic sentiments and actions, left them somewhat indifferent. Ben-Yehuda, horrified by the affair in its first few years, packed Ha-Tsiy and Hashkofa with an uninterrupted flow of information and opinion (his own) in the belief that the Yishuv’s intellectuals would find them of interest. In contrast, J.D. Frumkin, the publisher of Havatselet, and his successor, his son Gad, kept a low media profile and kept their views to themselves. The readers of both papers hardly reacted to the violation and miscarriage of justice that had been revealed and preferred to wait for the affair to end. The readers of Havatselet were probably much more apprehensive about the fate of East European Jewry than about that of the Jews of France and northern Africa. Still, the question remains: were they afraid to speak out because they feared it would bring harm to the Jews of France or of Palestine, or did they refrain from responding so as not to anger “the Baron,” the Alliance, ICA, and other organizations? We found no unequivocal answer. From the standpoint of the Jews in Palestine, the “positive” heroes of the affair were Zola and Lazare. Dreyfus himself refrained from speaking publicly about his national and Jewish sentiments and his attitude toward Zionism and Palestine was reserved and vague. One could rather easily identify with the moral personalities and actions of Zola and Lazare, relate to the affair through them, and take strong positions that were difficult to express against the conduct of government and military officials and personalities who served pronunciably internal French causes while flouting their antisemitism. This may explain why these two men served as natural objects of empathy in Palestine and elsewhere. The fate of the Rothschilds served as an indirect channel of expression; it allowed the Jews of Palestine to express support, empathy with the persecution of Jews at large, and disgust with the hostile climate in France. The affair seems to have preoccupied a small group of intellectuals as opposed to the public at large. The following remark by Itamar Ben-Avi illustrates this well: “Our home, of course, was full of noise and commotion most of Friday night and the following day on the occasion of Ben-Yehuda’s articles about this great event. The whole town—Jews, Arabs, and also Christians—took part in the debates.”