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# Vilna as a Centre of Hebrew Literature: The Journal *Hazman*<sup>1</sup>

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*Annotation:* In 1904, a Hebrew journalistic and literary initiative was established in Vilna, headed by the writer and publisher Ben-Avigdor, and the journalist and editor Ben Zion Katz. Vilna was chosen, among other reasons, for being a deeply rooted centre of Hebrew culture, with a long tradition of printing and publishing. The new initiative revived it as a magnet for Hebrew writers and journalists, an impressive team that joined together to create the daily *Hazman* (The Time) and its supplements. The editors' policy was not to impose a binding political line on the paper, but to give an opening to all the factions in the Jewish public, while also hoping to expand the target audience of the paper. The year 1905 was the time of glory of *Hazman*, both for its news and its literary sections. But its momentum was halted during 1906, due to the political storm in Russia and the rapid decline of Hebrew journals, which lost most of their readership to the flourishing Yiddish press. Thus, the *Hazman* affair embodies a dramatic crossroads. It was the beginning of the decline of Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe, alongside the laying of the foundations for Hebrew literature in the Land of Israel during the first two decades of the 20th century. This essay draws an outline of the affair on the basis of a variety of sources, including the newspaper itself, memories of the personalities involved, and correspondence that has survived from those days.

*Keywords:* Vilna, *Hazman*, Romm printing house, Ben-Avigdor, Benzion Katz, Hebrew press.

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## Introductory background

In the summer of 1904, anticipatory rumours had begun to spread among Hebrew writers in Eastern Europe about a rousing journalistic, literary endeavour

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1 All the sources quoted below are originally in Hebrew.

materialising in Vilna. It was a period of growth and prosperity in Hebrew literature, with most of its writers and readers still living in the Russian Empire. Two daily Hebrew newspapers were active that year: the longstanding and established *Hatzfira*, and the young and dynamic *Hatzofe*. Joseph Klausner and Hayim Nahman Bialik edited the esteemed monthly journal *Hashiloah*, and David Frischmann had revamped the appearance of his superb weekly journal *Hador*. Wide-ranging literary annuals, such as *Luah Ahiasaf* and *Sefer Hashana*, housed multifarious literary works. The *Tushiya* publishing house, under the management of Ben-Avigdor (Avraham Leib Shalkowitz), was the leading force in the world of Hebrew publishing, having produced dozens of volumes a year of fiction and poetry, children's books and periodicals, textbooks and non-fiction, covering an array of disciplines. Most of this activity took place in Warsaw, the primary production and distribution hub of contemporary Hebrew journalism and literature; but other places like Odessa, Lvov, St Petersburg and Krakow contributed as well. The mere existence of all these publications pointed to a significant readership in need of Hebrew journalism and literature, consuming it as a crucial component of its spiritual diet.

It was an intense, prolific period, not only in quantity, but in quality too. A new generation of Hebrew writers seemed to appear *ex nihilo* at the outset of the 20th century, elevating prose, poetry, literary criticism and essays to new heights. In poetry, these were the richest, most productive years for Bialik and Tchernichovsky. In prose, readers fell captive to the charms of Micha Josef Berdyczewski. In literary thought and critique, the voices of David Frischmann, Reuben Brainin, Mordecai Ehrenpreis and Joseph Klausner came through loud and clear. Inspired by these authors, a plethora of young voices emerged. Limiting the list to a mere dozen, the most prominent of these writers include the poets Zalman Shneour, Ya'akov Cahan, Jacob Steinberg, David Shimonowitz, Ya'akov Fichman and Ya'akov Lerner, while eminent writers of prose include Yosef Haim Brenner, Uri Nissan Gnessin, Gershon Shofman, Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz, Devorah Baron and Aharon Avraham Kabak. The bounty of writing they produced was met by welcoming publishing platforms. Accordingly, Nachum Sokolow, the editor of *Hatzfira*, who was known for his sharp journalistic senses, decided the same year to launch a special weekly supplement on literary matters, published as a separate booklet accompanying the daily newspaper. The general climate was marked by confidence and conviction. The prevailing sense was that

Hebrew literature had undergone a transformation, and was alive and thriving. There were complex ties between this literary boom and the momentum of the Zionist movement, which under the leadership of Theodor Herzl had been celebrating its existence through impressive congresses since 1897.

This, in a nutshell, is the backdrop to that turn of events in Vilna. Its protagonists were two spirited cultural advocates: the esteemed publisher Ben-Avigdor, and the journalist Benzion Katz. At the time, Katz was just 29 years old, but he was already a renowned writer on Talmud and Jewish history, having been published since he was 19. Nonetheless, his true aspiration was to make his mark in journalism, and to launch his own newspaper. His organisational skills, his innate exuberance, and his ability to negotiate a path through the highest echelons of the Russian administration, led to his success in raising the initial capital and in obtaining the required government licensure. Consequently, the *Hazman* newspaper was established in St Petersburg in February 1903. The newspaper was originally published twice weekly, alongside a quarterly journal by the same name. At the end of that year, Katz was forced to shut it down, due to financial difficulties, but he sought a way to relaunch it in a more ambitious format. This led him to forge ties with Ben-Avigdor, who was hoping to add a Hebrew daily newspaper with a corresponding newspaper in Yiddish to his publishing operations, and to do so with a strong economic foundation. The two were joined by the Zionist activist Fivel Margolin, whose main claim to fame was being married to the daughter of a very wealthy timber merchant by the name of Joseph Eliyahu Rivkin. Rivkin agreed to fund the venture in an effort to please his son-in-law, and was also willing to bear the brunt of the heavy losses the first few years would incur. He used to say: 'Including my son-in-law in my timber business would without a doubt make me lose sixty thousand rubles a year, whereas by involving him in the journalism business I shall lose a mere twenty thousand rubles a year. So at the end of the day, I'm making a good deal.'

### **Location, preparations, participants**

A complex set of considerations led the three entrepreneurs to determine that the newspaper would be positioned in Vilna. Ben-Avigdor wanted to avoid close proximity to the newspapers *Hatzfira* and *Hatzofe*. Benzion Katz wanted to

establish his newspaper in surroundings firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, a lesson he learned from his ill-fated attempts to run the newspaper in cold, estranged St Petersburg. Ben-Avigdor believed that the authorities would be more inclined to provide a license to publish the newspaper in Vilna than they would be in Warsaw, and he assumed that government censorship would be less stringent in Vilna. Another determining factor was Vilna's geographical advantage. The three founders believed that being located in the heart of the Pale of Settlement, adjacent to main railway lines, would facilitate the distribution of the newspaper, enabling its delivery to the majority of its readers on its date of publication. Vilna was also home to the renowned printing house of the Widow and Brothers Romm, which Ben-Avigdor succeeded in enlisting to print the multi-faceted publication he envisioned. For the newsroom and offices, he rented the upper floor of the building in the luxurious apartment with multiple rooms that had belonged to the legendary widow Devorah Romm, who had passed away several months earlier.

Ben-Avigdor, a man whose immense contribution to the evolution of Hebrew culture has still not received the recognition it deserves, was the driving force behind the endeavour. His ambitious vision guided him to establish an entire journalistic, literary enterprise styled after the large European newspapers, designed to eclipse any former, comparable venture in Hebrew periodical literature. At the heart of this vision lay *Hazman* ('The Time'), a large-format daily newspaper, with the intention of including a corresponding Yiddish edition, whose publication was postponed for approximately one more year due to difficulties obtaining the necessary license. In addition to the newspaper, Ben-Avigdor established a monthly literary journal under the same name, as well as an illustrated weekly for children named *Ha-hayim ve-ha-teva* ('Life and Nature'). One of the most significant changes Ben-Avigdor had conceived was the founding of an unprecedentedly expansive and diverse journalistic staff. In November 1904, he described this editorial team in a letter addressed to Micha Josef Berdyczewski, who had been asked to work there as a regular contributor: 'The operation will not be under the autocratic rule of a single omnipotent editor; rather, it will be run by a collegium of nine persons, each working in the discipline in which they are the most highly versed.'<sup>2</sup> Ben-Avigdor selected

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2 Ben-Avigdor's letter to Berdyczewski [Hebrew], 27 November 1904. Ginze Micha Yosef [Berdyczewski Archive], Holon, Ben-Avigdor file.

the staff painstakingly, and made sure to integrate established, experienced writers with young, up-and-coming writers, who would provide the newspaper with a youthful vivacity. He also decided, together with Katz, not to oblige the newspaper to adhere to any particular political ideology. Ultimately, the staff truly was an ensemble of diverse voices on Zionism, socialism, liberalism, territorialism, Bundism, and other sects and trends that were on the agenda at that tumultuous time.

Almost none of the team originated from Vilna. The majority had convened in Vilna by invitation of the editors. The more seasoned group included Samuel Leib Zitron, Joseph Elijah Triwosch, Israel Hayyim Tawiw and Israel Benjamin Levner. In memoirs written by the younger staff members, Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz, Zalman Shneour and Peretz Hirschbein, they are described as a very old bunch, in both appearance and behaviour, but in 1904, they were actually all in their forties. Levner was assigned with editing the children's weekly, Zitron was the newspaper's head proofreader, Tawiw was tasked with political coverage styled after the European press, and Triwosch was charged with the translation of news pieces and articles from the Russian and German press. Two younger editors, the authors Isaiah Bershadski and Hillel Zeitlin, played key roles in this endeavour, and in essence functioned as editors, since the two editors-in-chief were mostly absent from Vilna. Ben-Avigdor spent most of his time in his publishing house in Warsaw, and Benzion Katz continued his permanent residency in St Petersburg, where he would report on news that he had collected through his contacts in the Russian administration's corridors of power. The youngest in the group were the industrious and natural journalist Samuel Tchernowitz, who filled the pages of the newspaper with colourful sketches under his pen name 'Sponge', and Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz, who was barely 19 years old at the time, gaining him the nickname 'the baby of the newspaper'. In his memoirs, Berkowitz describes approaching Ben-Avigdor in Warsaw to offer his services for the fledgling newspaper. Ben-Avigdor, who was known for having an eye for detecting young talent, hired him as the literary copy editor for the daily newspaper and the monthly supplement.

An authentic recounting of the writers and journalists surging into Vilna, and of the frantic atmosphere surrounding the newspaper's launch, is expressed in a letter that Berkowitz had written to his friends in his hometown Slutsk in 1904:

I write you at this time in ‘haste’, my shoes at my feet and my cane in hand. As you know, I am travelling to Vilna to work as an assistant at *Hazman* [...]. In short, Ben-Avigdor, alive and well, the one who does not tire of digging and seeking and finding, has partnered with Katz [...] and is now leading an entire ‘suite’ [group] to Vilna. Bershadski has already left. An entire collegium will be working at *Hazman*, a mix, God help me, of Zionists and territorialists and random Jews: Hillel Zeitlin, Tawiow, Triwosch, Bershadski, Katz, Ben-Avigdor (the presiding judge of the *Beth Din*), Tchernowitz (the presiding judge’s associate), and their saving grace, yours truly.

It is clear to me that *Hazman* will be the more pleasant and more reasoned newspaper. Its format will be similar to that of *Der Fraynd*. In addition, a monthly publication twice the size of *Hashiloach*, and this in itself is worthy of celebration. The monthly publication will have two editors, Zeitlin in opinion journalism and analysis, and Ben-Avigdor in fine literature.

My monthly wage is 40 roubles for a five-hour work day, and if I write more than the required number of lines, I will receive separate royalties. My position will be informational, pictures from the province, and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

In his letter, Berkowitz listed most of the paper’s regular contributors; however, the number of those aiding in the preparation and the writing of the newspaper was far more extensive, ‘ten thousand collaborators’, as Berkowitz expressed facetiously in another letter.<sup>4</sup> A large group of writers had relocated to Vilna, or were spending long stretches of time there. The rooms of the Widow Romm’s spacious apartment were a beehive of activity, with permanent columnists, guest contributors, and administrators that had been enlisted by way of their work for Rivkin the financier. The correspondence from that period and the subsequent memoirs chronicle the time that David Frischmann, Reuben Brainin, Peretz Hirschbein, Zalman Yitzchak Anochi, Zalman Shneour, Moshe Ben Eliezer, Devorah Baron, Uri Nissan Gnessin, Aharon Avraham Kabak, Yitzhak Katzenelson and Mordechai Spector spent in Vilna. Sholem Aleichem would also visit Vilna frequently, due to his involvement in preparations for the launch of the parallel Yiddish newspaper *Die zeit*. The esteemed clique congregating around the Widow Romm’s apartment appealed to youngsters

3 Berkowitz’s letter from Warsaw to two of his friends in Slutsk, 21 November 1904, *Genazim*, Vol. 4, Tel-Aviv: Hebrew Writers’ Association and Massada Publishers, 1971, p. 260–261.

4 Berkowitz’s letter from Vilna to the same two friends, 20 December 1904, *Ibid.*, p. 264.

dreaming of a future in literature. Here, for example, is the emotive account of the writer and prospective educator Nathan Grinblatt (Goren), who in 1905, at the age of 18, was exploring his prospects after having left the world of *Yeshivas*.

Day after day, I would walk past the Widow and Brothers Romm's publishing house, where *Hazman* had put down roots. I would stop by the enormous house, my eyes scanning the windows and my ears alert to the humming of the machines. At the time, in the early days of my youth, the machines' transformation of letters of frigid lead into flickering, captivating lines was so wondrous ... yet I did not dare step inside, to see the artisans' workshop.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, a momentous Hebrew literary clique had emerged *ex nihilo* in Vilna for the first time since the era of Yehuda Leib Gordon, Adam HaCohen Lebensohn and his son Mikha Joseph, Kalman Schulmann, and Samuel Joseph Finn, who in the mid-19th century had created one of the most eminent hubs of Hebrew Enlightenment literature. The only remnant of that legendary group was Joshua Steinberg, Adam HaCohen Lebensohn's son-in-law, who oversaw the *Hazman* enterprise in his role as a censor for the Russian government. Stepping beyond his position of providing political oversight, Steinberg was a self-appointed preserver of the young writers' morals, rejecting anything that he felt would compromise the values of Jewish modesty. In their memoirs, these writers describe a jovial, mischievous youth, the kind that had been emerging at the time in other centres of Jewish ingenuity, such as Warsaw, Lvov, and to a certain extent Odessa. The cheerfulness of youth offset the material plight, especially in the eyes of those young writers who were not on *Hazman's* regular payroll and were getting by with the meagre fees they would receive for their work. Uri Nissan Gnessin and Zalman Yitzhak Anochi shared a single rented room, as well as a single winter coat, which they would take turns wearing when going out. Zalman Shneour slept in his friend Berkowitz's room. Berkowitz, who was a salaried employee, jokingly told his friends: 'In truth, I must say that I am quite intimidated by this wealth [...] and what will become of me if, heaven forbid, I'm seized by the bourgeoisie?'<sup>6</sup> In 1905, the

5 Nathan Goren, 'Shmuel Leib Zitron', 'Characters in our Literature', Tel-Aviv: N. Tversky, 1953, p. 200–201.

6 Berkowitz, *Ibid.*, p. 264.

staff at *Hazman* were secretly keeping tabs on the budding romance between Berkowitz and Ernestina Rabinowitz, Sholem Aleichem's eldest daughter, noticing what was happening even before the couple themselves realised that their lives would be intertwined. Yet another engagement was surfacing between two of the paper's contributors, Moshe Ben Eliezer and Devorah Baron, but it waned a few years later, largely due to malicious and baseless gossip that Ben Eliezer's colleagues at *Hazman* had been sharing with him, questioning his beloved's chastity.

### A pluralist profile

The first daily edition of *Hazman* was published in Vilna in early December 1904. The edition would soon be accompanied by two supplements: the *Hazman* monthly literary journal that had been assigned to Bershadski and Berkowitz, and the weekly children's publication *Hachayim Vehateva*, which was under the sole responsibility of Israel Binyamin Levner. The venture as a whole was an expression of momentum and breadth in an attempt to curtail the stature of the two Varsovian daily newspapers, *Hatzfira* and *Hatzofe*. Ben-Avigdor and his colleagues cast a wide net of local agents in over 100 cities and towns. They yielded roughly 8,000 subscribers, a number that did not cover expenses, requiring that Rivkin provide ongoing support from day one. Benzion Katz continued his permanent assignment in St Petersburg. His role was primarily to supply news items on the goings-on in the corridors of power of tsarist rule during that dramatic period between the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the outset of the first Russian Revolution. Time and time again, Katz demonstrated his exceptional capacity to produce sensational scoops. His two greatest achievements were the first global publication of a draft of the new Russian Constitution, and the first publication of the Vyborg Manifesto drawn up by parliamentarians, dissidents of the tsar, as they escaped to Finland. These were just two scoops out of many. Perusing 1905 editions of *Hazman* leads one to ponder on the stream of news items that Katz had acquired from within the Russian government apparatus by ruse, or through his first-hand contacts with an array of officials. Every few weeks, he would travel to Vilna to check in with his colleagues, spreading good cheer to all of them.

As a whole, the paper's news section was robust and diverse, and hinged on ties with global news agencies and on fast translations of incoming items from the European press. Special sections were devoted to covering news about all corners of the Jewish world, and to descriptions of current events in Vilna itself. For example, the 14 March edition features a vivid, colourful description of a literary evening for thousands of Jews in one of Vilna's largest halls, held by Sholem Aleichem and sponsored by the local company Mishmeret Kholim. The author shot arrows of irony at the patronising local bourgeoisie, which in his eyes lacked an earnest familiarity with the works of the great writer, in contrast with the proletarians who considered him their most beloved, admired author. It was signed by B. Litvak, but Sholem Aleichem guessed correctly that the writer was indeed Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz. This was the origin of their acquaintance, which just several months later led Berkowitz to join Sholem Aleichem's family. Among additional positions he held in the newsroom, Berkowitz was tasked with covering day-to-day life in Vilna, and that year, *Hazman* featured animated descriptions from his excursions through the city's poverty-stricken neighbourhoods. Reuben Brainin, one of *Hazman's* more prolific contributors, also visited these Jewish neighbourhoods under the guidance of the playwright Peretz Hirschbein, and did not spare readers his detailed descriptions of Jewish poverty. In this sense, *Hazman* also served as a local newspaper, coinciding with its objective of providing both global and Jewish coverage.

Among *Hazman's* other assets, and in addition to its robust news section, were its literary sections. The daily newspaper and monthly publication featured the finest Hebrew literature emanating at the time, both young and not quite so young: short stories by Brenner, Shofman, Baron, Kabak and Berkowitz, essays by Frischmann, Brainin, Berdyczewski and Zeitlin, poems by Jacob Steinberg, David Shimonowitz, Zalman Shneour and Ya'akov Fichman, plays by Peretz Hirschbein, and book reviews by Menahem Mendel Feitelson, as well as translations and coverage of current developments in Russian, German and French literature. It is beyond the scope of this essay to concentrate on specific pieces, so I shall only mention a few of the more notable ones. Uri Nissan Gnessin's novella 'Sideways' is without doubt the most precious literary jewel in *Hazman's* crown. The circumstances of its publication are elucidative in their own right. The piece had been floundering in the drawers of the paper for quite a few months. The literary editors Berkowitz and Bershadski had been reluctant to publish it due to its experimental nature and

its esoteric style. When David Frischmann assumed his position as editor of the monthly publication, he was astounded to chance upon Gnessin's masterpiece. He promptly declared it a literary sensation, and published it in the August 1905 edition. Another piece that captured a great deal of attention was Zalman Shneour's short novel 'A Death: Notes of a Suicide', which was printed in the daily newspaper in many instalments. It is a brutal, naturalistic portrait of an uprooted young man who despairs of life, proving that Shneour's reach exceeded his poetry. A translated chapter of Sholem Aleichem's 'Tevye the Dairyman' was published in May 1905, probably Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz's first attempt to cast his future father-in-law's works in Hebrew. Yitzhak Katzenelson's serial 'Within the Borders of Lithuania' brought great joy to its readers: an exquisite, humorous piece combining chapters of prose with poetry, recounting the poet's impressions upon his return to his Lithuanian hometown. An innovation in and of itself is Menahem Mendel Feitelson's original essay 'The Liberated Woman in our Literature', expressing feminist thought in Hebrew literary critique many decades ahead of its time.

Over the course of 1905, *Hazman's* momentum coincided with an escalation of political turmoil in Russia, which Benzion Katz had been covering on a daily basis from the royal capital. It was also a year marked by turmoil and rifts in the Zionist movement, which at times seemed to be irreparably crumbling after Herzl's death. In October, the political tumult reached fever pitch, but temporarily subsided when the tsar signed a manifesto partially submitting to the insurrectionists' demands. In the meantime, pogroms were raging in countless Jewish communities, leaving thousands of fatalities in their wake. *Hazman's* 30 November obituary edition provides a detailed fatality count in 110 communities, designating a general Jewish day of mourning throughout Russia. In addition to the high number of casualties and the devastating damage to property, the events of 1905 dealt a heavy blow to Hebrew journalism in Russia, including *Hazman*, whose number of subscribers was drastically slashed. However, it was neither the censorship nor the government restrictions that practically obliterated Hebrew journalism; rather, it was the internal shifts in the composition and leanings of the readership that had been accelerating in the light of the political circumstances. The palpable draw of the young Jewish intelligentsia to the Jewish socialist parties that were affiliated with Yiddish culture instantly elevated the status of Yiddish journalism, as was the case in Vilna. Almost instantly, not only did an abundance of new Yiddish periodicals

emerge; a new type of Jewish reader emerged as well, who found their primary identity anchored in Yiddish. Young writers who had been working for *Hazman* despaired of Hebrew, and began writing in Yiddish instead. This trend is expressed in Peretz Hirschbein's memoirs, where he offers a crystal-clear illustration of the manner in which his drive to write in Hebrew had dissipated, leading him to devote his creativity wholly to the Yiddish language and literature. At the same time, the long-established Hebrew readership associated with Zionist circles was dwindling, and disengaging from the increasingly intricate nuances of Hebrew Modernism. The refined, sophisticated works of young Hebrew literature, Gnessin's 'Sideways' is a case in point, had been created in a vacuum almost devoid of readers, and continued to circulate among very narrow circles of loyal devotees. The sense of anguish and impending doom consuming these writers from 1905 onwards cries out from every piece of writing we are left with today.

*Hazman*, which had burst on to the scene with tremendous momentum, was losing its readership, and was incurring a larger deficit and more sizeable losses. The children's weekly and the literary monthly ceased publication in 1906, and most of the original staff left Vilna. In an almost desperate move, Katz launched a Yiddish newspaper named *Die zeit*, but it, too, survived only a few months. It was becoming increasingly difficult to persuade Rivkin to continue to support his son-in-law's deficit venture. Ultimately, in 1907, he washed his hands of the newspaper, after incurring an accumulated loss of roughly 100,000 roubles. In his memoirs, Zalman Shneour describes his visit to the *Hazman* office in Vilna in 1909: it had been transferred to a small apartment far from the city centre, and the only columnists remaining from the founding team were Zitron, Triwosch and Tchernowitz. Benzion Katz alone would still wander from room to room at his usual pace, ensuring the publication of the following day's edition. Katz's vigour and perseverance were able to keep the newspaper afloat until the outset of the First World War, but its glorious days of 1905 were never to return.

### **From living reality to distant memory**

The *Hazman* saga exemplifies a dramatic crossroads. It can be viewed as a concentrated illustration of both the pinnacle of Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe and the beginning of its downfall, when at this same time, the foundations

of future Hebrew literature were being laid in the Land of Israel in the period of the second wave of Jewish Zionist settlement, known as the Second Aliyah. Vilna itself would no longer be a significant locale for Hebrew literature, but the newspaper's mere presence at that site during that intimate, literary spring left a consequential mark on the memory and the writings of the collaborators who had taken part in the *Hazman* adventure. Nostalgia for the Vilna of 1905 was already crystallising at that time. An expression of this sentiment can be seen in Uri Nissan Gnessin's esteemed novella 'Sideways'. It opens with the protagonist Nahum Hagzar departing Vilna as he heads to a neighbouring small town in order to commit to the writing of his book about the history of Hebrew literature in a setting free of interruptions. As expected, his plan falls flat. The greater his loneliness, emptiness and uncertainty, the more he longs for Vilna. In his eyes, it was a lost, legendary destination:

And in an instant, the glorified Vilna appeared before him as if it were alive, and he recalled its numerous yeshivas, and the Strashun bibliotheca, and his work at the reading room, and the volume of *Knesset Israel* featuring the handsome picture of Peretz Smolenskin, and the nights of arduous work in his peaceful room there, and his friends who were dreamers just like him, and his anguish swelled to the point of suffocation, and his eyes briefly grew weak, and his ears began to sigh.<sup>7</sup>

In his memoirs, Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz fondly recalls the intimate Jewish warmth that he had discovered in Vilna, which was so different from the severe, estranged urban vibe he had experienced in large metropolitan cities, from Warsaw to New York. His words verge on a sweet romanticisation of the poverty-stricken neighbourhoods:

In those early days, I wandered through its narrow alleyways and streets, inside its dense, unassuming districts, among its impoverished Jews, its magnanimous and virtuous porters and coachmen, and I viewed myself as a man meandering through an ancient, inestimable patrimony. I was particularly struck by the extent of the heartwarming hospitality with which the Vilnaese welcome outsiders. In Warsaw, when you delay a hurried, startled Jew on Nalewki street, hastening to handle his

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7 Uri Nissan Gnessin, 'Sideways', 'The Complete Writings of Uri Nissan Gnessin', Dan Miron, Israel Zmora (eds.), Vol. 1, Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1982, p. 162.

affairs with the edges of his coat flapping in the wind, and you ask for directions, he comes to a brief standstill, bewildered, he angrily growls at you, and he swivels around and bolts. In Vilna, the grocer would pass his stock to his wife, and he himself would accompany you to show you the way, walking alongside you from street to street, not leaving your sight until he has led you to your desired destination.<sup>8</sup>

The clearest expression of a yearning for Vilna in both a real and symbolic sense is seen in Zalman Shneour's poem 'Vilna'. It is a great apotheosis of 'Vilna, my great grandmother, city and mother in Israel / Jerusalem of the Exile, comforter of an ancient nation in the north.'<sup>9</sup> The crux of the poem is composed like a stroll through the different areas of the city, a testament to his exhaustive familiarity with its streets, quarters and suburbs, which he describes with intimate affection. A special spot is reserved for the Romm publishing house, portrayed as a source disseminating Jewish holy and secular literature throughout the diaspora. Upon the descriptive layer lies the contemplative assertion of the poem, which is essentially a bitter lamentation on the humiliated state of the People of Israel living under hostile, oppressive rule, in the shadow of constant terror imposed by Christian anti-semitism. Its conclusion is crafted as a prophecy of consolation and redemption in the style of Isaiah, where the townspeople return to it at the end of days, as a transposed parallel of Jerusalem. Shneour wrote the poem as a persecuted Russian refugee living in Berlin during the First World War, and it is evident that at the time, Vilna served as a comforting, invigorating memory. Despite having lived there for no more than a year, that period had left a particularly profound impression on him. His memory carried the literary, glamorous, exhilarating youth in the heart of the *sui generis* clique that had congregated in and around *Hazman*.

## Conclusions

In the first two decades of the 20th century, Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe produced its best examples of poetry, fiction, essays, literary criticism

8 Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz, 'Our Forebears as Human Beings', Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1959, p. 27.

9 Zalman Shneour, 'Vilna' (1917), 'Poems', Vol. 2, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1951, p. 362.

and journalism. The combination of great writers, an increasingly sophisticated means of expression, a greater attentiveness to the trends in European literature, a wide array of publishing options, and a stable reading public that turned to Hebrew literature for spiritual nourishment, resulted in the establishment of a genuine Hebrew literary and journalistic system. Although the emerging literary centre in Palestine attracted a growing number of writers, it remained largely dependent upon the production and distribution systems of Russia and Poland, with the majority of readers still based in Eastern Europe.

The map of Hebrew periodicals was also redrawn at the beginning of the 20th century. Alongside well-established vehicles, young writers increasingly made their presence felt in newer journals, which provided a forum for the critical polemics between ‘the seniors’ and ‘the juniors’. Their publications also functioned as a conduit for communication among members of the Hebrew literary republic, who were scattered across Eastern Europe and beyond.

The geographical map of this republic contained two main centres. While Warsaw held its place as a dynamic and pluralistic centre of literary and publishing activity in Hebrew, a more elitist and conservative tendency developed in Odessa. Within this dynamic map, Vilna constituted a unique place of its own, mainly due to the presence of *Hazman* within its boundaries, which for a few years almost eclipsed the two more established capitals of Hebrew literature. The profound impression the *Hazman* affair left in the consciousness of a whole literary generation, as reflected in their writings, is the strongest evidence for its long-lasting impact and importance as a vital chapter in the history of the Hebrew press and literature.

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## Vilna kaip hebrajų literatūros centras: žurnalas *Hazman*

### *Santrauka*

1904 m. Vilnoje buvo pradėtas ambicingas, iki tol neregėtos apimties žurnalistinis ir literatūrinis projektas. Du pagrindiniai jo lyderiai – Ben Avigdoras (Avraham Leib Shalkowitz), siekęs į savo spaudos verslą įtraukti dienraščių leidybą, ir žurnalistas, redaktorius Benzionas Katzas, norėjęs atgaivinti savo laikraštį *Hazman*, prieš metus pradėtą leisti Sankt Peterburge.

Vilna buvo pasirinkta dėl keleto priežasčių. Po karčios patirties Sankt Peterburge Katzas norėjo šį laikraštį leisti žydų ir hebrajų senųjų kultūros tradicijų aplinkoje, o Ben Avigdoras siekė atsiriboti nuo Varšuvos, jau turinčios du populiarius laikraščius hebrajų kalba. Vilna, buvusi pačiame žydų sėslumo riba apibrėžiamos teritorijos centre, buvo patogiai ir logistiškai, planuojant spaudos platinimą. Vilnoje buvo lengviau gauti laikraščio licenciją, švelniau veikė ir Rusijos vyriausybės cenzūra. Be to, buvo galima pasikliauti gerai žinoma Rommų spaustuve, įsipareigojusia spausdinti laikraštį ir du jo priedus – literatūrinį mėnesinį žurnalą ir vaikų savaitinį.

Ben Avigdoras sutelkė įspūdingą maždaug dešimties nuolatinių *Hazman* darbuotojų komandą, taip pat turėjo neetatinių, reguliariai su laikraščiu bendradarbiavusių talkininkų. Pirmą kartą nuo žydų Apšvietos sąjūdžio suklestėjimo XIX a. viduryje vėl buvo galima kalbėti apie Vilną, kaip apie svarbų hebrajiško kūrybiškumo centrą su bohemiška jaunųjų rašytojų ir žurnalistų kuriama atmosfera, į kurią su visa jėga 1904 m. gruodį įsiliejo ir *Hazman*.

Tuo metu Rusija kentėjo nuo suirutės po pralaimėto karo su Japonija ir buvo krečiama vis smarkesnių revoliucinių neramumų. Žydų pasaulyje dienos irgi nebuvo ramios. Sionistų judėjimą po Theodoro Herclio mirties ir po Teritorialistų frakcijos atskilimo buvo ištikusi sunki krizė. Kita vertus, Bundo vadovaujami žydų socialistų būreliai veikė labai aktyviai. *Hazmano* redaktoriai priėmė strateginį sprendimą skaitytojams neprimesti vienos politinės linijos. Nors ir neišsižadėję savo įsipareigojimo karštai remti sionistų judėjimą, jie laikraštį atvėrė visoms žydų visuomenės politinėms grupėms.

Didžiausias Katzo žurnalistinis proveržis įvyko tuomet, kai laikraštis pirmasis pasaulyje išspausdino naujos Rusijos Konstitucijos Projektą. Be to, *Hazman* sekė žydų teisių padėtį Rusijoje. Laikraštyje buvo solidus įvairių naujienų skyrius, kurio turinio kokybę užtikrino turėti ryšiai su tarpautinėmis naujienų agentūromis ir vertimai iš kitų Europos šalių spaudos.

Literatūrinė dalis buvo antroji *Hazman* laikraščio stiprybė. Dalis kūrinių buvo spausdinami dienraštyje, tačiau dauguma skelbti mėnesiniame žurnale. Čia buvo publikuojami geriausi to meto literatūros kūriniai hebrajų kalba.

1906 m. visi šie darbai sustojo. Taip galėjo nutikti dėl revoliucinių įvykių Rusijoje, po kurių šalį ištiko politinis paralyžius, kilo riaušės ir pogromų banga prieš žydus. Per šiuos politinius neramumus paaiškėjo skaudus faktas, kad hebrajų kalba leidžiamas laikraštis žydų skaitytojui tapo nepatrauklus. Sparčiai augo susidomėjimas, ypač socialistų sluoksniuose, spauda jidiš kalba. Radosi naujo tipo jaunas žydų skaitytojas, kuriam jidiš kalba buvo jo tapatybės atrama, be to, savo estetines reikmes jis galėjo patenkinti skaitydamas ir kitomis Europos kalbomis. Tradicinė hebrajiškai skaitanti auditorija pamažu mažėjo prarasdama ryšį su nuolatinės hebrajiškojo modernizmo kaitos procesais.

*Hazman* atvejis – dramatiškų pokyčių pavyzdys, aiškiai žymintis literatūros hebrajų kalba nuosmukio Rytų Europoje pradžią ir sykiu klojantis pamatus hebrajiškai literatūrai Izraelio žemėje.

*Raktažodžiai:* Vilna, *Hazman*, Rommų spaustuvė, Ben-Avigdor, Benzion Katz, spauda hebrajų kalba.

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