

Dating the Narrated Time and Understanding the Currency in Agnon's Novel "The Bridal Canopy"

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Shmuel Yosef Agnon, 1945 or before, The David B. Keidan Collection of Digital Images from the Central Zionist Archives

Abstract

A storyworld from fiction, even when it purports to represent some given historical environment, is not strictly bound to conform to its realia and material culture. It is nevertheless helpful to identify to such realia, or to identify the contextual historical circumstances, especially as knowledge of these recedes in time, and readers no longer can be assumed to possess it, unlike what could be expected of readers' reception when the literary text made its first appearance. In this short article, we discuss the internal evidence in Agnon's *The Bridal Canopy* for dating the narrated time, and as an ancillary subject, we also discuss currency.

1. Introduction

This article is concerned with the interface between a novel by [Agnon](#), *The Bridal Canopy*, whose setting is historical, the historical narrated time onto which the fictional time is grafted, and an aspect of material culture: currency, the currency in which money comes in the universe of the story. Yet, we only address currency as a subject for added usefulness in making such information readily available, and in this domain we don't claim originality. Rather, our contribution is in marshalling the *internal* evidence for dating of the narrative, even without assuming that Agnon was very precise about the historical context of the chronology.

Still, it is precisely money that, if we are to take the plot at its face value, is the overriding object of the protagonist's quest, and what can make or break the fate of his progeny. Of course, it was unnecessary for Agnon to be meticulously precise about the historical environment from which his fabula, his magic realist plot, takes off. Yet, as we are going to see, he was precise enough for us to be able to situate the narrated time of the given novel with a level of exactitude of about one decade.

This article can be considered to be complementary to the annotated edition—by a professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America¹ in New York, who also was an ordained rabbi, Abraham Holtz (born in New York in 1934, he died there in 2023, but is buried in Jerusalem)²—of the Hebrew text of *The Bridal Canopy*. The annotated edition bears the title *Mar'ot umkorot: Mahadurah mu'eret um'uyeret shel hakhnasat kallah leShai Agnon* [Citations and Sources: Annotated and Illustrated Edition of S.Y. Agnon's *The Bridal Canopy*], published in Jerusalem by Schocken, 1995. It is quite important, because in Agnon's texts, intertextuality is all over the place, and Holtz identifies those references. Reviewing the annotated edition in *Prooftexts*, in the Fall 2003 issue, Arnold J. Band remarked:

The notion that this annotated edition may evoke associations with a traditional religious text is neither far-fetched nor insignificant. Holtz shies away from the term *perush*, and prefers the term 'annotated edition', but both the object of his annotation, Agnon's very layered text larded with biblical and rabbinic terms, and the very format of the book suggest the term 'commentary'.

Holtz's book of 1995 was preceded by Holtz's previous book about Agnon and the same novel: *Ma'aseh R. Yudi Hasid: Me-reshito be-nisim ve-nifla'ot 'ad hakhnasat kallah* [The Tale of Yudi the Pious: From Its Earliest Appearance in Miracles and Wonders, to *The Bridal Canopy*], of 1986.

The present article does not only deal with the work at stake but also considers its historical, sociological and geographical background. Our present scope is however narrower.

2. General Information about the Plot of the Novel

Shmuel Yosef Agnon is known by the acronym of his Hebrew initials as Shai Agnon. He was born Samuel Josef Czaczkes in Buczacz, Galicia, in 1887, but he claimed 8 August 1888 as his birthdate (note the aesthetics: 8/8/1888). He died in Jerusalem in 1970. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966. Agnon lived in Germany in 1912–1924, and in Jaffa and Jerusalem in the Ottoman Empire both before that (in 1908–1912) and afterwards (in Jerusalem, under British rule and then in the State of Israel). The surname Agnon is a penname (eventually also his official name), after the theme, ‘*Agunót* ‘deserted wives’, of an early work, occurring later on as well. The status of deserted wives is a much-debated, always a delicate and nowadays a hot issue in Jewish law³.

This section is concerned with situating the narrated time of a Hebrew novel by Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *The Bridal Canopy*. It has a frame story, and dozens stories within it. The frame story device in Agnon is of pan-European derivation, even though thoroughly divagating texts in the Jewish tradition are as early as the Talmud. In Hebrew the device of the frame story proper was first applied in medieval Spain, based on Arabic models, the device being ultimately of Indian origin. This is fairly trivial information, yet we take the liberty of quoting an elegant formulation: the device was imported through “the overwhelmingly one-way traffic of seminal commodities, artefacts and ideas that flowed westward from the South Asian subcontinent between at least 3000 B.C.E. and 1400 C.E. Along this stream [...] were borne the Gypsies, the game of chess, the mathematical concept of zero and the notation with which to use it, the literary device of the Frame Story, and a flood of stories to stock it” (in the words of Chicago-based Iranologist John Perry)⁴.

The frame story of *The Bridal Canopy* has a quasi-picaresque pair of characters: picaresque in an improper sense. The protagonist does not quite fit the features of *pícaro* from the original early modern Spanish picaresque novel. Yet, this is a tale of rags to riches, at whose end the protagonist and his family, and even the man who used to drive the coach in which the protagonist was travelling, are materially comfortable. And, like the original picaresque novel, Agnon’s novel we are considering treats what another text could have romanticised as a romance, in quite unromantic manners. This is quite in keeping with premodern Jewish *mores*.

In *The Bridal Canopy*, the quasi-picaresque pair of characters are the impecunious, pious, and blissfully naïve father of three daughters, who is in search of a bridegroom and a dowry for his oldest daughter, and Nate, the coachman he hired for this purpose (and who had been a good student thrown out with his wife by the man who maintained him, i.e., his father-in-law, when the latter, not a learned man himself, found a cantor with a fine voice yet, it turns out, a problematic personality, as bridegroom for another daughter).

Concerning the name *Nate*, the Hebrew text has נטע everywhere, except one occurrence of נטע inside vowelised verse in Book Two, Chapter 6.

Those two adult male characters travel in a coach driven around early-19th-century Hapsburgic Galicia, in a not as yet disenchanted world. The protagonist is the fictional Rabbi Yudl, who only seldom, when official circumstances require so, uses his family name, *Nathansohn*. Yudl's three daughters are aged 20, 19, and 17, and therefore by the standards of the given communal culture, their age was advanced within the span of marriageability.

Yudl eventually betroths his eldest daughter to the son of a wealthy man who mistakes him for the wealthy (and childless) Yudl Nathansohn, also from Brody. As the other man promises a huge sum of money, Rabbi Yudl promises the same sum (as the Rabbi of Apta, who is a historical character, supposedly instructed Rabbi Yudl's wife). Rabbi Yudl can afford the coachman, thanks to the charity of the followers of the Rabbi of Apta.

Rabbi Yudl is able to keep his promise when things seem to turn to disaster, as his daughter, running after the family's cock which should be slaughtered, discovers a treasure in a cave. Social attitudes toward this family are then reversed, and a glorious wedding banquet follows. One of the salient features of this mostly good-humoured novel is that food being eaten (including food at wedding banquets) is pervasively described.

3. Apropos Banquets

Elsewhere, I have discussed food in Agnon and food in literature in general. My own authored or co-authored articles about food in Agnon are the following:

- "Risks of Ingestion: On Eating Tomatoes in Agnon, and on the Water of Shittim". *Revue européenne des études hébraïques (REEH)*, 14 (2009 [2011]), pp. 46–79.
- "What They Served at the Banquet for the Wedding of Shim'on Nathan's Daughter: Considerations on the Sense of *tsvi*, in Sources from East and West". By Ephraim Nissan and Zohar Amar. *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, 26 (2012), pp. 95–129.
- "[Excessive Food Intake and Fatness, as Viewed through the \(Variable\) Lens of Jewish Cultures, III: The Medieval and Modern Hebrew *belles lettres*](#)". *Rivista di Studi Indo-Mediterranei*, 11, 2021, pp. 40–60.

As in the present paper we are not discussing food any further, it would be beyond the point to delve into the scholarly literature on the subject. Let us merely mention that Michal Arbel recently discussed food in Agnon in her *Katuv al Oro shel ha-Kelev* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006). In particular, she discussed food while interpreting Agnon's stories *Mazal Dagim* (on her pp. 138–139), *Giv'at ha-Hol* (on her pp. 193–194), and (on her pp. 213–214) Agnon's novel *Tmol Shilshom* (*The Bridal Canopy*). Arbel's treatment of the subject in ch. 6 of Agnon's *Giv'at ha-Hol* repeats some ideas from a chapter in Nurit Guvrin's *Dvash Mi-Sela'* ('Kannay, zo'em, ohev — Ya'akov Malkov', in her *Dvash Mi-Sela'*, Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitahon, 1989, pp. 72–73). Gershon Shaked devoted an essay to food in Agnon's *Sippur Pashut*; see his essay 'Bat ha-melekh u-se'uddat ha-'em', in his *Amanut ha-sippur shel Agnon*.

In Nitza Ben-Dov's book "*Vehi Tehillatekha*" (והיא תהילתך): *Studies in the works of S.Y. Agnon, A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 2006), food is discussed in the chapters about Agnon's novel *Shirah*, as well as in the chapter about the novella *Kissuy ha-Dam*. Bear in mind that in the latter, the vegetarian Agnon provides a chilling description of working conditions in a basement *abattoir* of chicken. Agnon's vegetarianism is the subject of Rina Li's book *Agnon Ve-ha-tsimhonut*. It is a subject that impinges on Agnon's literary works in important ways. Several passages in Nitza Ben-Dov's *Unhappy / Unapproved Loves* (אהבות לא מאושרות Tel-Aviv 1997) discuss food in specific passages from Agnon's works, e.g., a gift of meat being useless to a vegetarian protagonist.

4. The Chronology within Which to Situate the Plot of the Novel

Emperor Joseph II's Tolerance Edict was applied to the Jews of Galicia in 1787. The time of the fictional events narrated in Agnon's novel we are considering must be somewhere in the early 1820s, even though this is not stated explicitly. The Rabbi or Rebbe of Apta is one of the secondary characters in the frame story. He is alive, and is accessed three times while in Brody. When the Rebbe of Apta, i.e., R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, died in 1825, he was succeeded in office by his son R. Isaac Meir of Zinkow.

As the setting is in Austrian-ruled Galicia, it would not be relevant to consider the argument *ab silentio* from the Polish revolt of 1831, as that took place in the parts of Poland ruled by Russia.

In Book One, Chapter 17, before Yudi and the coachman part ways, the latter advises the former not to delay his return: "Even though you, Sir, resolved to stay here, I urge you quite frankly to return with me immediately, as if you are not going back with me, you'll end up returning like Napoleon did from Russia, but Napoleon went back with a whip in his hand, whereas you, Sir, will return with nothing at all" (my translation).

Historically, the Rabbi of Apta, i.e., R. Abraham Joshua Heschel (1755–1825) of Apta (i.e., Opatów, known in Yiddish as Apt), resided in Apta from before 1786, was a disciple of R. Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, and was one of the Hasidic leaders active in central Poland during the Napoleonic wars. Abraham Joshua Heschel was the son-in-law of R. Jacob of Turczyn, a disciple of R. Elimelekh of Lyzhansk. In 1808, he was invited to Iași, the capital of the principality of Moldavia, by the banker Michel Daniel (Reb Jehiel Michel ben Reb Daniel), a follower of Hasidism and a community leader based in Iași, and Heschel arrived there in 1809, shortly after Passover. It lasted only a few years, yet his Hasidic court was the first one in Moldavia. In 1813, he became the rabbi of Medzibezh, in Podolia.

Therefore, whereas in the universe of the novel the Napoleonic wars were a matter that had receded into the past, the events in the novel must be earlier than 1825. Note that in a younger generation, there was R. Meir of Apta, who died in 1831, and was author of *Or la-Shamayim*.

In 1813, the 'Holy Jew' of Przysucha had died. And then within the space of one year, 1814–15, three leaders of Polish Hasidism died: R. Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin; R. Israel of Kozienice; and R. Menahem Mendel of Rymanow (who is the subject of an article by Y. Salmon which has appeared in 1996)⁵. The new senior leadership came from a younger generation.

It was then that R. Naphtali Zevi Horowitz of Ropshitz (i.e., Ropczyce), who was born 22 May 1760 (the same day the founder of Hasidism passed away), and died in 1827, became the Hasidic leader in western Galicia (Salmon, 322–323): he had been a disciple of R. Elimelech [Weisblum] of Lizhensk, and upon the latter's demise in 1787, a disciple of the latter's disciple of R. Menaḥem Mendel of Rymanow, who passed away on 29 May 1815.

R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta⁶ would have been a natural candidate for at least the same role, but he didn't become the overall leader of Polish Hasidism because he had moved to relatively remote Podolia⁷. The already mentioned R. Meir of Apta was one of R. Naphtali Zevi's disciples⁸. In 1827, R. Naphtali Zevi⁹ was convoked by the governor of Brody, and had to defend Hasidism from accusers¹⁰.

During the Napoleonic wars, "R. Naphthali Zevi attempted to influence Jewish public opinion in Galicia against Napoleon"¹¹, but the attitudes of different Hasidic leaders differed, and this was at least in part related to how they viewed Napoleon within messianic expectations.

In *The Bridal Canopy*, Book Two, Chapter 6, Agnon mentions the Rabbi of Ropshitz in the present (i.e., by resorting to a Hebrew participle), thus implying that he was alive: "Because I heard that the Saintly Rabbi of Ropshitz says on them [potatoes] the blessing *she-ha-kol* ['that everything becomes as He says'], and everybody else says on them the blessing *bore pri ha-'adama* ['Who creates the fruit of the earth']" (my translation).

Two anecdotes about R. Uri of Strelisk, who died in 1826, are related in the same novel in Book One, Chapter 5, but it is unclear whether he is being referred to as being still alive at the narrated time. In Book Two, Chapter 2, R. Meir of Przemislany is mentioned as being alive: Rabbi Yudel, the protagonist of the novel, could have visited that town, but he didn't, allegedly because R. Meir had moved away from it around that time. R. Meir, who died in 1850, had been a disciple of the Seer of Lublin¹².

These data enable us to situate the narrated time of the novel in the early 1820s. Nevertheless, one should beware of assuming beforehand that the novelist was totally consistent in how he treated his material.

5. The Currency

Reb Yudel can afford the coachman, Nate, thanks to the charity of the followers of the Rabbi of Apta. Reb Yudel's wife and daughters work at home, removing the feathers of geese they are given by clients. In Book One, Chapter 17, Reb Yudel has the coachman take him into a hotel, reckoning that as he (Reb Yudel) is then in possession of 200 golden coins, he should no longer ask for charity (including food and lodging). The coachman warns him that at a hotel he, Reb Yudel, is going to spend everything he has. It is then that Reb Yudel pays him his due for their five months of travel: "a yarmulka (skullcap) full of coins".

Which currency was relevant, for those "golden" coins? The metal was rather likely to be silver. There was little trust in paper money¹³. The currency must have been the Austrian *Conventionsmünze*, reverted to in 1818, and remaining in effect until the Austrian currency

reform of 1858. In 1753, a convention was concluded between many European states. On that year, Austria introduced the *Conventionsmünze* (Conventions-Money) as agreed by the Convention. Upon the partition of Poland, Austrian currency was introduced in formerly Polish lands, too.

With the currency reform of 1858, the Austrian currency (the *Gulden*) was somewhat debased. The *Vereinsthaler* was introduced in German lands and the Hapsburg Empire in 1857. The coin had a silver content of $16\frac{2}{3}$ grams, which was slightly less than 1.5 times the silver content of the *Gulden*. A new standard for the *Gulden* was adopted, containing two-thirds as much silver as the *Vereinsthaler*. The *Gulden* was decimalized in 1857. Until then, one *Gulden* was subdivided into 60 Kreuzer.

In southern Germany, the word *Gulden* was the standard word for a major currency unit. In Austria, the name *Florin* was used for Austrian coins, equivalently to *Gulden*. Hence the abbreviation *fl* for *Gulden*. From 1754, the *Gulden* became the standard unit of account in the Hapsburg Empire, and it was until 1892 it had that role. In 1892, the *Gulden* was replaced with the *Krone*, two of which were equal to one *Gulden*.

With the introduction of the *Conventionsthaler*, which was in 1754, the *Gulden* was defined as half a *Conventionsthaler*, equivalent to $\frac{1}{20}$ of a Cologne mark of silver, and subdivided into 60 *Kreuzer*. In 'Currencies in Austria and the Tirol', Andy Taylor explains:

[B]y the Convention of 1753 as adopted in Austria was defined thus: 20 Gulden were made from one Vienna Mark (this is a weight standard, of 280.644 gram) of "833 fine" (83.3% pure) silver; it is called Conventionsmünze, abbreviated C.M. This currency standard is also referred to as the "20-Gulden-Fuß" and the currency as Kaiserwährung (Kw). Under it, 1 fl contained 11.6935 gram of silver; 1 kr contained 0.1949 gram.

The Bavarian Conventions-Money equivalent was Reichswährung (or RW; abbreviation rh for rheinische) currency which used a South German Gulden (SGG). The Cologne Mark of 233.77 gram of silver was originally made into 20 SGG, but soon into 24 SGG and starting in 1819 & complete by 1841 into $24\frac{1}{2}$ SGG. In 1816, 24 was in use, a standard referred to as the "24-Gulden-Fuß", and 1 fl rh contained 9.7404 gram, 1 kr rh 0.1623 gram¹⁴.

As to paper money:

Until 1796 the Bankozettel were valued (by the foreign exchanges) at 100/100, ie face value, relative to the Conventions-Münze. The value then began a decline, being 125/100 in 1804, 175/100 in 1807, and 1200/100 in 1811. Physical Conventionsmünze was withdrawn by about 1797¹⁵.

Although coins struck under the Conventionsmünze standard had largely disappeared from circulation by around 1797, the Conventionsmünze itself — that is, the monetary standard defining the silver content of the Gulden and related denominations — remained in force until the Austrian currency reform of 1858.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the amount of paper money was increased, and the gap with silver coins (originally their intended coverage) became broader and broader. Eventually, paper money could not practically be exchanged into metal money. The loss of buying power of the paper money led to an increase of prices, and to the impoverishment of part of the population, in the Hapsburg Empire and wherever its currency was used. For example, in 2007 a webpage about Beethoven's funding, at the website of Beethoven's House in Bonn, was stating:

Upon signing the agreement in the spring of 1809, Beethoven's annual salary of 4,000 florins in Banco-Zettel was equal to 1,620 florins in convention money (silver currency) — the salary of 600 ducats for the position at the Kassel court would have equalled 2,700 florins convention money. By August 1810, it only equalled 890 florins, in December, at the lowest exchange rate, only 416 florins.

Finally, the Austrian government realised that a national bankruptcy was inevitable and followed the advice of Court Chamber President Count Wallis. In 1811 all Banco-Zettel was devaluated. According to the decree of Emperor Franz I from February 20, 1811, soon called "Bankrottpatent", all circulating Banco-Zettel was to be devaluated to a fifth of its face value from March 15 on and changed into "redemption coupons" for the new "Vienna currency" (W.W.) until January 31st, 1812^{[16](#)}.

"On 15 March 1811 the Bankozettel were called in and replaced by a new paper note of the same face value, the Anticipationsscheine or Einlösungsscheine (redemption note), at an exchange of 1 new for 5 old"^{[17](#)}, and the notes returned were incinerated.

The Government promised never to issue more paper money, but the costs of dealing with Napoleon led them to issue more in 1813. These two papers were collectively referred to as Wiener Währung. It in turn suffered inflation, being quoted at 350/100 by 1815. In 1817 the "Privileged National Bank" was created, relying on foreign capital, probably via the Rothschilds, who kept Austria from financial collapse for several decades. The bank issued notes and bought in the Wiener Währung at slightly better than the exchange rate. From 1818, Wiener Währung was not accepted in payment for postage, and rates expressed in it were converted at 300/100 which was slightly worse than the exchange rate for currency^{[18](#)}.

Copper coins were introduced under Maria Theresa. Which coins were most current, apart from copper coins?

The Convention coins remained legal tender until 1858. The design on the reverse showed a cross in the form of an x (the cross of St. Andrew). The 20 kreuzer Convention coin predominated in regular money transactions. The main coin, however, was the Convention thaler. Half of the stock of coins bore the portrait of Maria Theresa's husband, Francis I, Duke of Lorraine; after his death in 1756, a third each of the coins in circulation displayed the portraits of Maria Theresa, Francis and Maria Theresa's son and successor, Joseph II (1764 to 1790).

The Maria Theresa thaler, a two gulden coin, became the most widely known coin of the period. It was highly popular in Levante trade and remained in circulation in Arabic countries and Abyssinia until the end of WWII. This coin, issued in 1780, depicts Maria Theresa as a widow with a veil — it was referred to with discourteous humor by the British as “fat lady” because of the Rubenesque outlines — and was one of the most successful and long-lasting coins in monetary history¹⁹.

This section is unoriginal, yet it makes relevant information about currency readily available, in an appropriate forum, to readers of Agnon, experts included. Nobody is such an expert who would not benefit from a supplement of information.

Jeffrey Saks has pointed out to me that that in the Hebrew text of *The Bridal Canopy* and elsewhere, Agnon's characters refer to the kreuzer as a ל"ט.

6. Evidence from an Intertextual Reference from Another Novel by Agnon

Of Reb Yudi, Agnon in the tragic novel *Only Yesterday* has a descendant of his, the protagonist, Isaac, think in book Two, Sec. 4. Isaac thinks that Reb Yudi was buried in Jerusalem over eighty years earlier. Isaac came to the Land of Israel with the Second Aliyah, of 1904–1914. So Reb Yudi died in the early 1830s at the latest. Presumably Agnon had a clear idea of when the narrated time in *The Bridal Canopy* was situated and the events were unfolding in Galicia, culminating at the wedding (after which, some time later, Reb Yudi moves to Jerusalem).

At any rate, it is not a given that Agnon had to be consistent concerning the dates. If Reb Yudi is made to die in the early 1830s, that is far too close to the wedding of his eldest daughter and to him move to Jerusalem, for *The Bridal Canopy* to have a happy end, which at any rate ostensibly it has.

Perhaps Agnon did not think of that, but if Reb Yudi died around 1835, shortly after the novel whose protagonist he is concluded with an overt happy end, the implication is that by a sad irony, the time of bliss came to an abrupt end in Jerusalem, thus cruelly prefiguring what is going to be Isaac's own abrupt death of rabies a short time after his wedding in Jerusalem.

7. Concluding Remarks

Again, there is no need to assume that Agnon was especially particular about checking all details of the realia. As being a Hapsburg subject from Galicia, he was conversant with the general lines. At any rate, when golden coins are being referred to, in the Hebrew text, silver metal money (or even copper divisional units) can be safely assumed, to the extent that the reader is to map the fictional narrative to a real historical backdrop.

We come away from the discussion in this short paper, with two nonliterary results that are nevertheless practically useful for approaching Agnon's *The Bridal Canopy*: we are now able to more precisely situate its narrated time, and by taking the proclaimed quest of the protagonist at its face value, we better understand the currency he computes when he cannot excuse himself of the task. The tension between the task he took upon himself, and his lack of alacrity gives the novel part of its mordancy.

Jeffrey Saks has kindly referred me to a passage in David Knaani's Hebrew-language book *ShaY Agnon be'al pé* (*S.Y. Agnon, by Word of Mouth*), about things Agnon said about himself, a book published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House in 1972, and accessible at <https://agnonhouse.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Agnon-Kenaani.pdf>. On p. 34, Knaani quotes Agnon as stating about himself: "You (plural) write criticism about Agnon and find whatever you find, but I would have written the most severe criticism about him. All the errors and faulty points, I know them. The Rebbe of Apta died one year before Yudel Hasid left for his travels. Moreover, he [the Rebbe of Apta] could not have given a letter of recommendation as per the version that was printed. [The way it is formulated] it is [in] the language of the Maskilim [the Enlighteners, whereas] the rabbis were writing in quite a different kind of florid Hebrew. They knew excellent Hebrew, but a different Hebrew". A Hasidic Rebbe would not have written in Maskilic Hebrew.

The way Jeffrey Saks put it, in an email in English: "by this testimony of Agnon himself the novel opens in 1826". Rabbi Saks is director of research at the Agnon House in Jerusalem, series editor of the S.Y. Agnon Library (in English) at the Toby Press, editor of the New York-based journal in rabbinic studies *Tradition*, and the founding director of the Academy for Torah Initiatives and Directions in Jewish Education – ATID.

8. The Scholarly Literature about Agnon's Novel *The Bridal Canopy*

On 21 December 2025, the Agnon database of Agnon House in Jerusalem lists (with links) the following scholarly publications about *The Bridal Canopy*, which has been published in Hebrew (as *Hakhnasat Kallah*) by Schocken in 1931 and 1998.

[הכנסת כלה | בית עגנון](https://agnonhouse.org.il/book/40-51504/#text-2028) <https://agnonhouse.org.il/book/40-51504/#text-2028>

Avraham Holtz (ed.), annotated edition of *Hakhnasat Kallah*:

Mar'ot umkorot: Mahadurah mu'eret um'uyeret shel hakhnasat kallah leShai Agnon. Jerusalem: Schocken, 1995.

. מראות ומקורות: מהדורה מוערת ומאירת של הכנסת כלה לש"י עגנון, הוצאת שוקן, 1995

It was preceded by Holtz other book, of 1986, on the same subject:

מעשה ר' יודיל חסיד: מראשיתו בנסים ונפלאות עד הכנסת כלה מאת ש"י עגנון, בית המדרש לרבנים באמריקה, 1986.

It was published by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in New York.

Nitza Ben-Dov ([בן-דב, ניצה](#)/Ben-Dov, Nitza, 2017) has discussed this novel in her 2017 book ["באור הדמדומים" — עגנון וצללי](#)

Also see this other book, by Esther Fuchs: [Ironie Characterization in the Work of S.Y. Agnon](#) By: [פוקס, אסתר](#)/Fuchs, Esther, 1983

There exists an English translation of the novel:

[The Bridal Canopy](#) I.M Lask, 2015, Toby Press, English

Articles in English are listed below.

(Jeffrey Saks adds: "But please note: This is by no means exhaustive. It contains only those items in the public domain or things we have permission to make available.")

- ["Things That Are Better Concealed Than Revealed": An Historical–Biographical Study of Agnon's Attitude Toward the Sabbatean Movement](#) By: [צחי, וייס/Weiss, Tzahi](#),
- [Agnon's Rooster ex Machina and the Miracle of Faith](#) By: [סאקס, יוסף/Saks, Jeffrey](#), 2015
- [An Archaic Novel](#) By: [Kallan, Arthur](#), 1937
- [Analysis of Shmuel Yosef Agnon's Novels](#) By: [Mambrol, Nasrullah](#), 2019
- [Domesticating a foreign genre; Agnon's transactions with the novel](#) By: [מירון, דן/Miron, Dan](#), 1987
- [Holtz's annotated edition of Agnon's "Hakhnasat kallah"](#) By: [בנד, אברהם/Band, Arnold J.](#), 2003 [Band's article was published in *Proof texts*, 23(3), 2003]
- [King of Austria — King of Jerusalem](#) By: [בן-יהודה, עמרי/Ben-Yehuda, Omri](#), 2010
- [Rebellious Daughters and the Literary Imagination](#) By: [מנקין, רחל/Manekin, Rachel](#), 2020
- [Risks of Ingestion: On Eating Tomatoes in Agnon, and on the Water of Shittim](#) By: [Nissan, Ephraim](#), 2009
- [The Art of Agnon Annotation](#) By: [הולץ, אברהם/Holtz, Avraham](#), 2021
- [The BEST: The Bridal Canopy](#) [סאקס, יוסף/Saks, Jeffrey](#), מאת: 2022
- [The Fiction of S.Y. Agnón](#) By: [Wilson, Edmund](#), 1956

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Endnotes

1

It was "founded in 1886 through the efforts of two distinguished rabbis, Dr. Sabato Morais and Dr. H. Pereira Mendes" ([History of JTS - Jewish Theological Seminary](#)). Actually Morais, a Livornese by birth who was acquainted with the Italian republican revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini in London (his father sent him to see Mazzini), even though he was an ordained rabbi, chose not to use his title as a minister of his congregation in Philadelphia.

2

See an obituary of Avraham Holtz at <https://www.jtsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Professor-Holtz-eulogy-updated.pdf>. The eulogiser, Chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz, explained:

His ultimate object of lifelong fascination was the Nobel-prize winning Israeli author SY. Agnon, and he painstakingly worked to recreate the life that Agnon wrote about. Professor Holtz produced the fully annotated and illustrated edition of Agnon's *Hakhnasat Kallah*, *The Bridal Canopy*, the first critical edition of a Hebrew novel. He had been working for decades on a parallel edition, fully annotating Agnon's *T'mol Shilshom*, *Only Yesterday*, which is perhaps Hebrew literature's most significant novel of Eretz Yisrael. I remember inviting him to present to my undergraduates his work on these critical editions. Students were riveted by his enthusiasm and excitement for his topic and awed by his painstaking attention to the tiniest detail. He'd track down a photo of the type of pants, hat style, and utensils that Agnon was describing and, in the process, recreated the world that Agnon wrote about.

3

See, e.g., Bernard S. Jackson, '[Agunah and the Problem of Authority: Directions for Future Research](#)', *Melilah*, 1.1 (2004), 1–78; id., '[Mishpat Ivri, Halakhah and Legal Philosophy: Agunah and the Theory of 'Legal Sources](#)', *Jewish Studies: an Internet Journal*, 1 (2002), 69–108.

4

On p. 63 in John Perry, '*Monty Python and the Mathnavi*: The Parrot in Indian, Persian and English Humor', *Iranian Studies*, 36.1 (2003), 63–73.

5

Salmon, *infra*, 323, 332, 336. See: Yoseph Salmon, 'R. Naphthali Zevi of Ropczyce ("the Ropshitser") as a Hasidic leader', Chapter 19 in: *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. A. Rapoport-Albert (London & Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, for the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization,

1996, pbk 1997), pp. 321–342.

[6](#)

For a biographical study of the Rabbi of Apta, see: Moshe A. Braun, Rosalind Zuger and Martin Zuger, *The Heschel Tradition: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997); Y. Alfasi, *Ha-Rav me-Apta, ba'al "Ohev Yisra'el": Toldotav, korot hayyav, imrotav, banav ve-tse'etsa'av* (Jerusalem 5741 [1981]), R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Igrot ha-"Ohev Yisra'el"* (Jerusalem 5760 [2000]).

[7](#)

Salmon, 337.

[8](#)

Salmon, 338.

[9](#)

See on him the book: Shelomo Tal, *Rabbi Naftali Tsvi me-Ropshitz* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kuk, 1983), as well as Salmon, *supra*.

[10](#)

This is stated in Salmon. Strangely for a paper devoted to this personality, Salmon, who states his year of birth, 1760, does not state that he died in 1827, but mentions that other important event that involved him inasmuch a leader in that year.

[11](#)

Salmon, 339.

[12](#)

Also famous was R. Menahem Mendel of Przemislany, who left for the Land of Israel in 1764. Information about Hasidic dynastic genealogies can be found, e.g., in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), i, 160–167.

[13](#)

Paper money called *Bankozettel* was issued by the Bank of Austria starting in 1762. Initially such paper money was only valid in parts of the empire.

[14](#)

From Andy Taylor, 'Currencies in Austria and the Tirol' webpage at the 'Old Austrian Letters' site (<http://www.kitzbuhel.demon.co.uk/austamps/altbrief/currencies.htm>). Accessed in March 2007, and previously last updated on 1 June 2006. However, in 2025 it is only possible to access that address through the Wayback machine, where it was copied two times: on 24 November 2006, and 16 February 2007. The latter can be accessed in 2025 at: [Currencies in Austria and the Tirol](#).

[15](#)

Ibid. (Andy Taylor, 'Currencies in Austria and the Tirol').

[16](#)

From '[Beethoven's work-scholarship granted by Prince Lobkowitz, Prince Kinsky and Archduke Rudolph](#)' at the [Beethoven-Haus Bonn](#).

[17](#)

See Andy Taylor, 'Currencies in Austria and the Tirol' (fn. 12, *supra*).

[18](#)

Ibid. (fn. 12, *supra*).

[19](#)

From Section 'The Convention Coins' in 'Reform and Crisis – the Era of Convention Coins' (http://www.oenb.at/en/ueber_die_oenb/geldmuseum/oesterr_geldgeschichte/konventionsmuenzen/reform_and_crisis__the_era_of_convention_coins.jsp), a webpage (accessed in March 2007) at the 'History of Austrian Money' website of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank. Wayback Machine has not archived that URL. Therefore, I was unable to access it again in 2025.

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