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ZEF SEGAL

# From a Local Periodical to a Global Enterprise

## Ha-Me'asef, 1896–1914

**Abstract**    This article examines the spatial and social evolution of the network of writers in the Jerusalem-based periodical Ha-Me'asef during the years 1896–1914 as a compelling and dynamic example of transnational Jewish networks. The periodical, which was established by Rabbi Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka in 1896, was exceptional in that it aspired to reach beyond the Jerusalem social circle, from where it originated, and become the center of a global communication network. At its apex, some of the leading rabbinical figures in Palestine, the Middle-East, Europe and America became active writers. The journal eliminated the borders of the isolated spatial unit, in this case Jerusalem, and suggested in its place a new perception of 'place', which would be part of a relational and trans-local network.

By using digital methodologies, such as geographic mapping (GIS) and network mapping (SNA), this article explores the interrelations between global expansion and local networks, and in particular the effects of globalization on the role of Jerusalem. It shows that a noticeable spatial expansion of the network co-existed at first with concealed spatial divides that separated between geographical regions, such as the Levant and Western Europe. Furthermore, it identifies social groups among the participating rabbis, and ongoing changes in the internal hierarchy of the contemporary rabbinical centers, as they were reflected in the periodical. The article shows that the success of the transnational network went hand in hand with the decline of Jerusalem as its center.

## 1.    Introduction*

A fundamental attribute of Jewish society since late antiquity was its diasporic condition. Jews and Jewish communities were scattered throughout the known world, and whatever they needed to share had to be transmitted over non-continuous and expansive space. Under such conditions, communication networks assumed an exceptional significance: they were the means not only of creating an 'imagined community', but were also a central element in maintaining the genuine, real, community. The Jewish people were, historically, 'the people of the network' just as much as they were 'the people of the book'.[1] The introduction of nineteenth-century global journalism to the Jewish sphere added to this network and played a major role in producing stronger connections between distant communities.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several Hebrew journals in Eastern Europe joined a growing network of Jewish journals, who published not only in Hebrew but in Yiddish and other European languages.[2] In the multilingual context of Jewish communities, Hebrew, which was not a spoken language, was not an obvious choice for a journal, compared to other options such as the Jewish jargons (Yiddish, Judezmo and Jewish-Arabic) or state vernaculars. However, one of the advantages of using Hebrew was that it bridged the geographical and cultural distances between Jewish communities. "For Jewish communities – far from their homeland, lacking central political and economic leadership, and spread throughout the world – the Hebrew press functioned as a printed-word public sphere."[3]

Much like the eighteenth-century 'Republic of Letters' or the twenty-first-century 'participatory culture' of the internet, Hebrew journals encouraged their

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1       Menahem Blondheim, "The Jewish Communication Tradition and its Encounters with (the) New Media," in *Digital Judaism: Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture,* ed. Heidi Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2015).
2       Israel Bartal, "'Mevaser U-Modi'a Le-Ish Yehudi': Ha-Itonut Ha-Yehudit Be-Afik shel Hidush," *Katedra* 71 (1994) (in Hebrew); Oren Soffer, "'Paper Territory': Early Hebrew Journalism and its Political Roles," *Journalism History* 30, no. 1 (2004); Israel Bartal, "Mi-Kahal Le-Kehilat Kor'im," in *Ein Le-Falpel! Iton Ha-Zefirah ve-Ha-Modernizatsia shel Ha-Si'akh Ha-Khevrati,* Oren Soffer (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2007) (in Hebrew); Oren Soffer, "Why Hebrew? A Comparative Analysis of Language Choice in the Early Hebrew Press," *Media History* 15, no. 3 (2009); Roni Beer-Marx, *Al Khomot Ha-Niyar: Iton Ha-Levanon Ve-Ha-Ortodoxia* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2017) (in Hebrew).
3       Soffer, "Why Hebrew?"

readers to take an active role in the content of the journal.[4] The publication of letters or 'news items' from private writers in Jewish communities both near and far made up a major part of the early Hebrew weeklies. The Hebrew journals also influenced future writers by opening up new worlds to them, inspiring their imaginations. Issues of these journals found their way to Jewish communities all around the world, thousands of miles away from their place of publication. Consequently, these nineteenth century Hebrew journals offer a fertile lens through which we can begin to engage with the question of how transnational Jewish connections were forged and developed.

A particular case-study is that of the rabbinical periodical *Ha-Me'asef,* which was published in Jerusalem between 1896 and 1914, and which at its apex formed an international network of contributors, spanning from Tashkent in the east to Portland in the west.[5] Unlike many other contemporary Hebrew periodicals, *Ha-Me'asef* was not part of the Jewish Enlightenment literature, did not reflect much interest in political debates, and had no content independent of the letters sent by its readers/writers. Nevertheless, its role in the constitution of a global 'paper territory' (*Admat Niyar*), a shared public sphere that linked Jews from distinct communities, was perhaps even greater than other periodicals of its time.[6]

The network of contributors to *Ha-Me'asef* was extremely diverse and included older and younger rabbis, Hasidic and non-Hasidic, Zionists and anti-Zionists, those who were secularly educated and those who opposed secular education. The various contributors shared with an increasing readership their thoughts and interpretations on Talmudic literature and Halachic questions.

Two main characteristics made it the center of an international social network. First, many contributions were written as a response to previous contributions, with threads that occasionally spanned over many volumes and many months. Second, the founder and editor of the journal did not just aspire to establish an international readership, but rather to establish an international team of writers. Although the journal was studied by several scholars as a locus of halachic debates and as a central piece in the important legacy of Sephardic rabbis

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4    Albert Thibaudet, *French Literature from 1795 to Our Era* (New York: Funk & Wagnalis, 1967); Dan Mairon, *Bodedim Be-Mo'adam: Li-Dyokana shel Ha-Republika Ha-Sifrutit Ha-Ivrit Bi-Tkhilat Ha-Me'a Ha-Esrim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987) (in Hebrew); Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

5    The periodical began as a weekly that was a supplement to contemporary newspapers such as *Ha-Tsvi* and *Ha-Havatselet.* From its third year onwards, it appeared as an independent monthly. This journal should not be confused with the late eighteenth-century German-Jewish periodical, *Ha-Me'asef.*

6    See: Soffer, "Paper Territory."

in Hebrew journalism, it was never researched as a network.[7] How did authorship to this journal transform from a local milieu into a widespread group dispersed across the world, and how did this affect the role of Jerusalem as the center of the network?

In order to answer these questions, this article focuses on the function of *Ha-Me'asef* as a network of authors, and explores the history and development of this network from the establishment of the journal until its premature demise, due to World War One. By combining distant-reading methodologies, such as geographical analysis and network analysis, together with a closer reading of the turning points in the evolution of the network, this article shows the significance of a flexible and pluralistic editorial approach, as well as the importance of maintaining local clusters of writers while creating a broad, transnational and stable network. The following section provides a theoretical and methodological background of the paper.

## 2.     Digitally exploring periodical networks

The growing academic field of periodical-studies is a direct result of advances in digital technology in the last two decades.[8] Keyword-searchable digital archives and algorithmic mining tools have become accessible to an increasing number of researchers, and have transformed our view of journals from mere containers of discrete bits of information to autonomous objects of analysis. However, beyond the study of the periodical as a compendium of textual sources, digital analysis also enables us to trace the nature of the periodical as a social network. The periodical's complex and composite form "embodies the concept of the network on both a material level (in the juxtapositions and interconnections it generates between different texts) and on an institutional level (in the collaboration between authors, editors, illustrators, publishers, and readers, which goes into producing it)."[9] Accordingly, newspapers and journals offer researchers a perspective to engage with the question of how social and intellectual connections are forged, evolve, and diffused within a public sphere. The interest in periodical networks is

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7     Edward Reichman and Fred Rosner, "The Use of Anesthesia in Circumcision: A Re-Evaluation of the Halakhic Sources," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 34, no. 3 (2000); David M. Geffen, "Economic, Social and Religious Issues in American Jewish Life as reflected in the Contributions of American Jews to the Hameassef Journal in Jerusalem (1898–1914)," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1981); Yizhak BeZal'el, *Born Zionists* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2008), 296–298 (in Hebrew).

8     Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, "The Rise of Periodical Studies," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006); Maria DiCenzo, "Remediating the Past: Doing 'Periodical Studies' in the Digital Era," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 41, no. 1 (2015).

9     John Fagg, Matthew Pethers, and Robin Vandome, "Introduction: Networks and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical," *American Periodicals* 23, no. 2 (2013), 94.

seen in special issues dedicated to the topic in *Victorian Periodicals Review* (2011), *American Periodicals* (2013), and *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* (2014).

The periodical, defined by the composite and varied nature of its content and the corporate and shifting nature of its authorship, has a unique relation in maintaining communities of readers and writers across space. A broad understanding of any periodical and its meaning requires the integration of information on society, economy, language and ideas, gleaned from the periodical's textual content, with relevant geo-spatial information. This can be done on the basis of the mature techniques of GIS (geographical information systems). However, the social and communal networks supporting the input and output of the periodical are notoriously difficult to trace and understand. These networks can now be studied with the use of tools for SNA (social network analysis).

SNA views social relationships in terms of network theory consisting of nodes, which represent the actors within the networks, and ties, which are the relationships between the actors.[10] The resulting graph-based structures are often very complex and can be deciphered by using computational measures.[11] SNA is used to answer questions of centrality, connectivity, the diffusion of ideas, and the formation of social subgroups without reducing actors to their attributes, but rather allowing them to maintain their individual complexity. The basic idea is that nothing exists in isolation. A key characteristic of network analysis is its ability to transcend differences in scale, such that there is a place for each individual (as a node), as well as their interactions with other individuals to construct the society they occupy. As Scott Weingart notes, "networks allow us to see the forest as well as the trees, to give definition to the microcosms and macrocosms which describe the world around us."[12]

In this article, I explore the history of a particular journalistic network as a spatial phenomenon. The assumption underlying this approach is that this periodical, *Ha-Me'asef,* connected communities (or at least the religious leaders of the communities), rather than merely individuals. A relatively similar approach was taken by Charles J. Withers, who analyzed the Enlightenment as a geographical phenomenon. In his words: "The Enlightenment was national and local and international. What is important to an understanding of the Enlightenment as a geographical matter is to show how these scales of analysis work and work together and how, if taken only singly, they may produce only partial "maps" of the

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10   *Social Network Analysis: Theory and Applications* (2011), accessed 26 February, 2020, https://www.politaktiv.org/documents/10157/29141/SocNet_TheoryApp.pdf.

11   Charles Wetherell, "Historical Social Network Analysis," *International Review of Social History* 43, no. 6 (1998).

12   Scott B. Weingart, "Networked Society: The Moral Role of Computational Research in a Data-Driven World," accessed 26 February, 2020, http://scottbot.net/2014/09/.

Enlightenment's geographical constitution. Better still, we might explore the re-lationships between such scales."[13] If I replace the expression 'the Enlightenment' with *Ha-Me'asef,* the basic idea of this article can be better understood. It is much less about 'what is written' and 'who is writing', and much more about 'where are they writing from'. Accordingly, in this research, each writer is viewed as a repre-sentative of his geographical location, and his responses to other articles are an-alyzed as responses to geographical locations, from where the original articles were written.[14]

In order to analyze the changing geographical patterns of publication, and the dynamics of the network, each contribution was tagged manually with its date of publication, the location of the contributor, and whether or not it was a response to other articles published previously in the periodical. Consequently, 2821 con-tributions, 940 of which were published as responses, which were published over 19 years in 272 issues provide a database enabling a geographical, statistical and network analysis of the journal's authorship space. These help trace and reveal the patterns and turning points of the evolving network.

As described, the database was not created by data mining algorithms or key-word search engines, and thus did not rely on the existence of large scale digitized archives, which many have described as the basis of periodical studies.[15] Despite its volume, mining the corpus for the attributes of the authors required relatively little time due to the uniform locations of the required data in each article: the location of the writer is always at the top; the writer's name is always at the bot-tom; and the details of the criticized article, if any, are listed in the first sentence. However, the analysis of the resultant database could not have been done man-ually; it was accomplished by using computational algorithms and digital repre-sentations.

However, distant-reading cannot stand on its own since it lacks the ability to explain the phenomenon. As a result, the changes in the development of the net-work are explained by a closer reading of the content of the articles and the bio-graphical notes of the editor. Contemporary Hebrew journals were often one-man enterprises and the framework, as well as the survival, of the journal depended on the editor.[16] *Ha-Me'asef,* for example, was established in 1896 by Rabbi Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka (1867–1936). Rabbi Koenka was one of the leaders of the Sephardic Jewish community in Jerusalem at the time. Among others, he served

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13    Charles J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 7.

14    All the contributors to the journal were men.

15    Bob Nicholson, "The Digital Turn: Exploring the Methodological Possibilities of Digital Newspaper Archives," *Media History* 19, no. 1 (2013), 59–73.

16    Bartal, "Herald and Informer," 164.

as the head of "Tif'eret Yerushalayim" yeshiva, the head of the rabbinical court of the Sephardic community in Jerusalem and later on as a member of the first Chief Rabbinate Council. The story of the journal is intertwined with the life of Koenka, who dedicated 19 years of his life to helping the journal succeed. He described it in his diary: "The work on *Ha-Me'asef* from the beginning to the end was done by me alone. Writing letters and copying them, reading, criticizing, editing, proof-reading, and sending articles; everything was done by me, and to this purpose I dedicated all my power, money, time, pen and energy."[17] During these two decades, he travelled around the world (Egypt, Iraq, India, USA, Algiers and Europe) in order to gain donors, subscribers and authors, not necessarily in that order. As we will see, the geography of the periodical had direct links to the biographical geography of Koenka himself.

## 3.    The initial steps towards the establishment of a global network

The first issue of *Ha-Me'asef* was published on 12 June, 1896, and stressed its global atmosphere from the very beginning. It started with an introduction written by Koenka, in which he repeatedly declared the transnational context of the journal:

> We call upon our great rabbis and wise men of our times in the **Land of Israel and abroad** and all the generous hearts of our people **wherever they may be** to support our work in the wind, in the rain and in any way possible. We hope our wishes will come to light, be encouraged, and our journal will flourish and see fruit for the honor of **Jerusalem in particular and the Jewish people in general**.[18]

Although Koenka's original intention was to make the journal into a center of cross border Halachic debates, the introduction he wrote primarily stresses financial support and not transnational discourse. Accordingly, the first issue's subtitle was "an issue dedicated to Torah and wisdom **published with the help of** our greatest rabbis and the best and wisest of our time in the Land of Israel and abroad." Koenka's objective became clearer from the second issue, as reflected in its new subtitle, which differed by only five words: "an issue dedicated to the Torah and wisdom **of** our greatest rabbis and the best and wisest of our time in the Land of Israel and abroad."[19] International philanthropy was replaced by global communication.

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17    Quoted in: Ezra Batsri, *Ha-Me'asef* 1, no. 1 (1979), 8 (in Hebrew).

18    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, *Ha-Me'asef,* 12 June, 1896 (in Hebrew, bold not in the original quotation).

19    *Ha-Me'asef,* 19 June, 1896, 1 (in Hebrew, bold not in the original quotation).
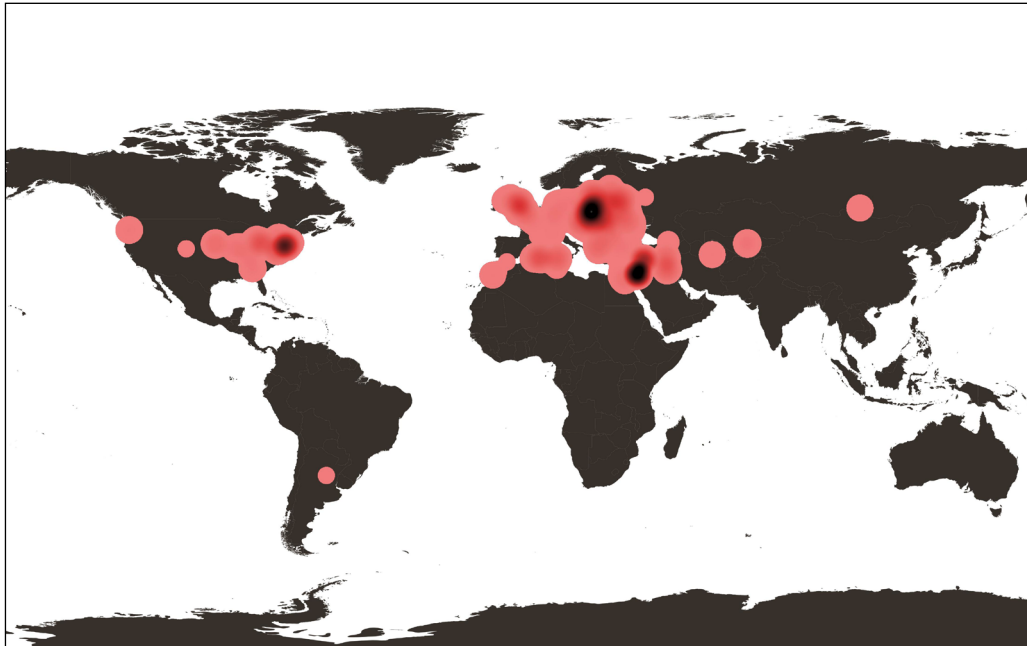
**Fig. 1** A heat-map showing the density of writers for *Ha-Me'asef* between 1896 and 1914. The map was created in QGIS.

Koenka's success in retrospect was tremendous: over 19 years, authors from across the Jewish world published their articles in his journal, as can be seen in Figure 1. The network created between the authors (Figure 2) was dense, entangled and crossed borders that were previously unimaginable. In this network, two nodes that signify locations are connected if an article written in one of them responded to an article written in the other. However, the historical development and spread of this network was gradual, non-linear, and connected to the personal stories of Koenka and his writers.

At the beginning, the journal was supported by all the main rabbis in Jerusalem, and accordingly the group of contributors remained local and Jerusalem-based.[20] Most of the writers were Koenka's teachers (Yitzhak Ashkenazi and Vidal Ben Hanoch Anjil), students (Hananya Yehoshua ben Gabriel and Ben-Zion Uziel), family members (Yitshak Badhab), and many acquaintances from the Sephardic community. With the aim of making the journal friendlier to foreign writers, Koenka made some strange editorial decisions in the first couple of months.

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20    Yitzhak Bezalel, "Ha-Rabanim Ha-Sefaradim Ve-Ha-Itonut Be-Eretz Israel Ba-Tkufa Ha-Othmanit," *Kesher* 37 (2008), 64–70 (in Hebrew).
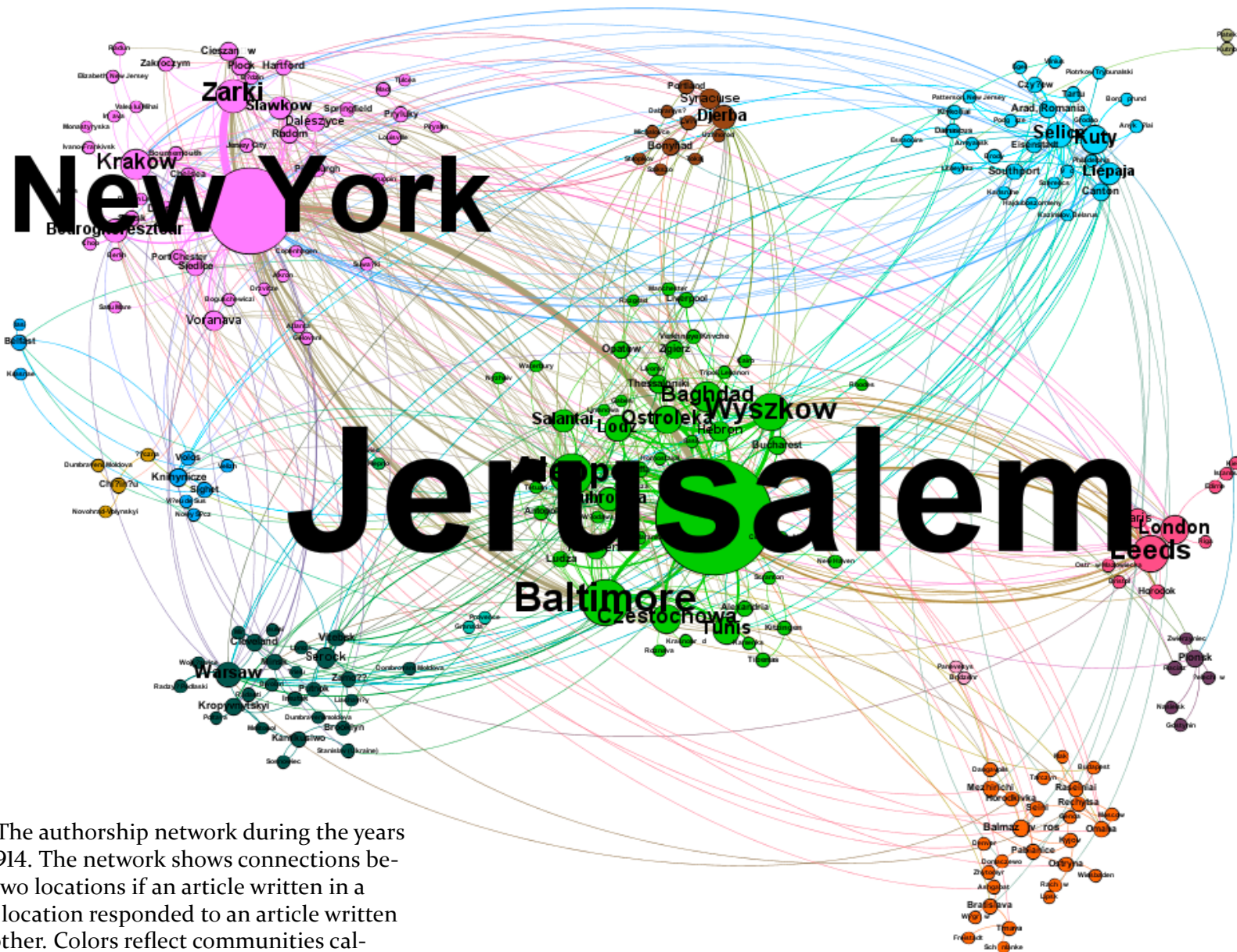
**Fig. 2** The authorship network during the years 1896–1914. The network shows connections between two locations if an article written in a certain location responded to an article written in the other. Colors reflect communities calculated by the Modularity algorithm in Gephi. The graph was created in Gephi.

The first author from outside the Land of Israel was a 19-year-old yeshiva student from Baghdad named Yechezkel Ezra Ben Rachamim, who sent a letter to Rabbi Abraham Bijajo in Jerusalem without any intent of it being published. However, the letter was published in the journal's second issue with an introduction that stated "to my friend the editor of Ha-Me'asef [...] I received this letter from my friend [...] I hope you add it to your journal as I find it a good work."[21] The second contribution written by a foreign writer, who should be considered the first intentional contributor, was published in the seventh issue (24 July, 1896). Hizkiya Moshe David Israel, the chief Rabbi of Rhodes, sent a letter to the editor of the journal, which was published as the first article of the issue.[22] However, the letter did not include any halachic interpretation or new insight, but rather a few words of appreciation to the editor and a commitment on behalf of the rabbi to purchase an annual subscription. This letter bore no resemblance to any of the other articles, and its inclusion could only be explained by the desire to introduce international authorship.

The eighth issue was a turning point in the founding of a global network, since it included the first real contribution by a foreign contributor. Furthermore, from this issue onwards, every issue included at least one foreign writer. The contribution, which opened the eighth issue, was written by Rabbi Shalom Ha-De'iya from Aleppo, and described his motivation as follows: "we received the issues of *Ha-Me'asef* and were delighted at the idea stemming from our friend the rabbi editor."[23] Ha-De'iya stresses the 'idea' that motivated him to send his contribution to the Jerusalem journal and not the contents or debates in *Ha-Me'asef.* The journal was seen as something bigger than merely its contents; it was seen as a social network, rather than a journal. Furthermore, Ha-De'iya refers to himself in the plural. This was not a convention adopted by other writers, and it was not a mistake. He wasn't talking about himself as a singular writer but rather about the rabbinical community in Aleppo as a whole.[24] What he was saying was that the whole community wished to take part in Koenka's project. It is worth mentioning that Shalom Ha-De'iya was not an ordinary Aleppo rabbi, since he had many ties with Jerusalem rabbis. In fact, a year and a half later, Ha-De'iya immigrated to Jerusalem and lived a few houses away from Koenka. The same inter-personal relations that widened the group of writers inside Jerusalem also brought about the first international expansion. The journal was now officially international. The importance of geography was also accentuated by the fact that, from the eighth issue

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21    Abraham Bijajo, Article VII, *Ha-Me'asef,* 19 June, 1896. (in Hebrew).
22    Hizkiya Moshe David Israel, Article XXXIV, *Ha-Me'asef,* 24 July, 1896. (in Hebrew).
23    Shalom Ha-De'iya, Article XLIV, *Ha-Me'asef,* 31 July, 1896. (in Hebrew).
24    The inner unity of the Jewish Aleppo community was also identified by other scholars. See: Zvi Zohar, "Shamranut Lokhemet: Kavim Le-Manhigutam Ha-Khevratit-Datit shel Khakhmey Haleb Ba-Et Ha-Khadasha," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 55 (1993) (in Hebrew).

onwards, the place of residence of each writer was written in the title of the article, not just at the end.

The tenth issue, two months after the establishment of the journal (14 August, 1896), was the first issue written mostly by foreigners, all of whom were from Aleppo and related to Shalom Ha-De'iya. In order to introduce new writers (and limit old ones), Koenka defined a new editing rule – "a single issue between two scholars cannot appear more than three times in Ha-Me'asef."[25] The tenth issue seemed like the beginning of a global journal and this comment was a way to legitimize limitations put upon the Jerusalem milieu of writers, who continuously recycled their internal debates.

However, the editorial notes within the journal remained extremely local. The second issue ended with a comment written by Koenka, in which he apologizes to Rabbi Rachamim Haim Oplatka for delaying the publication of his letter due to the multitude of writers.[26] The comment, in contrast to its content, doesn't indicate the contribution of many writers but rather the small number of writers and the familiarity between them, since the comment is a personal note to a particular writer. The seventh issue (24 July, 1896) includes a sentence describing ways to contact the editor. "Whoever has a thing to say to the editor can meet him on Monday and Wednesday between two and three o'clock Turkish time at Mister Elazar Meyuchas's yeshiva."[27] The meetings between the editor, the authors and the readers were supposed to take place face-to-face in Jerusalem during the editor's lunch break, information that was not relevant for an international authorship. In fact, only in October 1906 did the address appear on the front page, "Rabbi Ben-Zion Abraham Kohenka, Jerusalem". The localness of the journal was not only apparent in the fine print, but also in the actual distribution of writers during the first year. Figure 3 shows that the journal was still Jerusalem based, with a small number of foreign writers.

Gradually, authorship expanded during the first year, as the next series of maps shows (Figure 4). These changes were mostly caused by geographical proximity. There were rarely any sudden spatial leaps to distant locations; the journal's CFP moved by word of mouth until it spread across Europe. Figure 5 shows the consistent rise in the average distance between authors and Jerusalem in every issue during the first six years. The increasing distance was the result of two interrelated developments: new and distant locations were being represented in the journal, and writers from Jerusalem in particular, and Palestine in general, were losing their dominance.

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25    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Te'ana Bi-Ktsara," *Ha-Me'asef,* 14 August, 1896 (in Hebrew).
26    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Te'ana Bi-Ktsara," *Ha-Me'asef,* 19 June, 1896 (in Hebrew).
27    *Ha-Me'asef,* 24 July, 1896, 1. (in Hebrew).

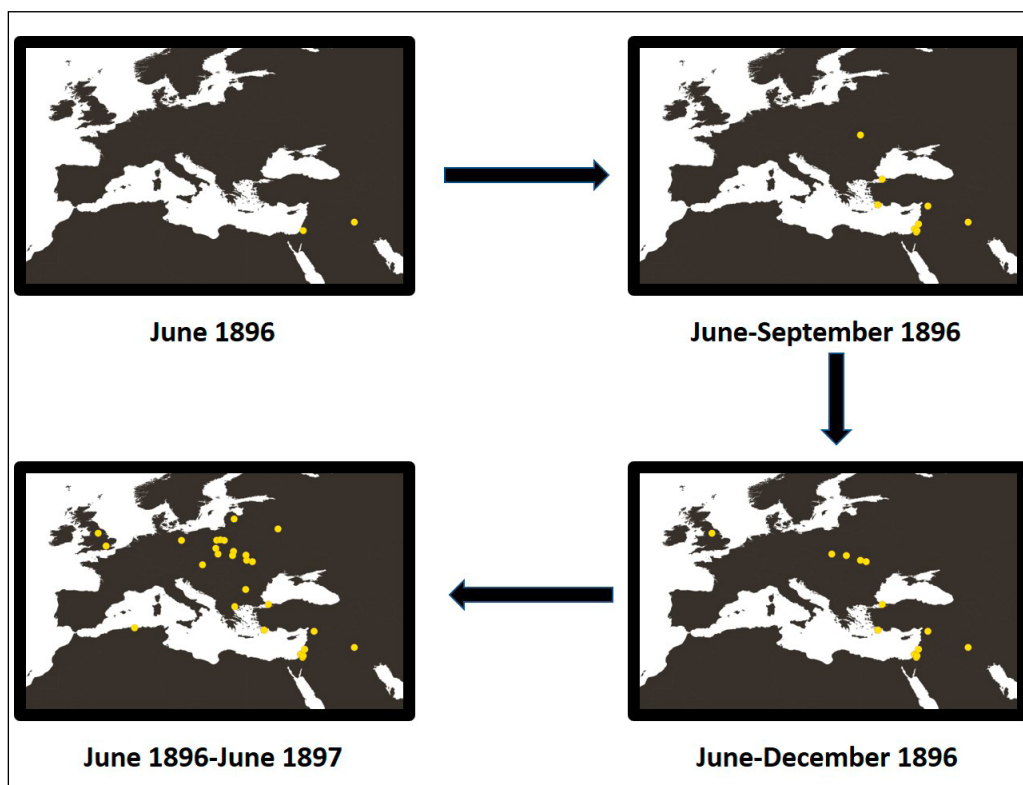**Fig. 3** A heat-map showing the density of writers for Ha-Me'asef in 1896. The map was created in QGIS.



**Fig. 4** Four maps showing the changing distribution of writers for Ha-Me'asef during the first year of the journal. The maps were created in QGIS.

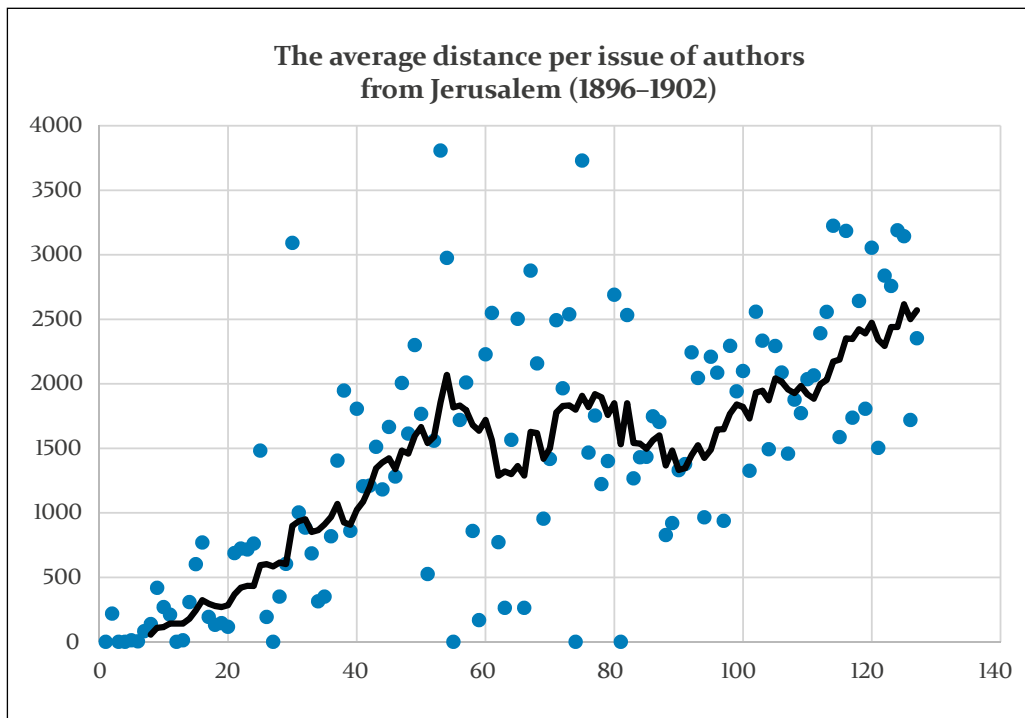**The average distance per issue of authors from Jerusalem (1896–1902)**

**Fig. 5** A graph showing the average distance from Jerusalem (y-axis) of authors in every issue (x-axis). The black line is a moving average trend line (eight issue average) showing the general rise during the first six years.

During the first three years, 139 articles were written by authors from Jerusalem (32 percent of all the articles). In the next three years, only 96 articles were written by Jerusalem authors (22 percent). The number dropped to 34 articles between the 7th and 9th year (eight percent), and a single article in the 19th year. Koenka's international journal was a success, but its spatial expansion came at the expense of the center, Jerusalem.

## 4. A decentralized and ill-connected network (1898–1902)

Centrality is an important concept in the study of social networks in general, and the network of writers in particular. However, there are many different measures of centrality, each with its own definition of 'importance'.[28] *PageRank,* for example, is a metric developed by Google to measure the relative importance of

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28    Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 169.

a webpage based on the quality and number of links to that page.[29] This metric represents the likelihood that a person randomly clicking on links will arrive at that particular page. The abstract idea of a random-surfer provides a basis for analyzing a hierarchical network, independent of the websites' contents. Consequently, in recent years, *PageRank* has become a popular metric for analyzing citation networks among journals, papers and authors.[30] That same metric can be used to measure the centrality and importance of a contribution in *Ha-Me'asef*, if we define quotations and responses as links to the original contribution. The following analysis is limited to contributions that participated in the network of responses. That is, only contributions that responded to others, or were the recipients of such responses.

PageRank measurements from the first three years testify that Jerusalem was gradually losing its superiority (Table 1). In 1896, a random reader moving from article to article by citations had a 41 percent chance of ending with an article written in Jerusalem. By 1898, the chance of ending with an article written in Jerusalem declined to seven percent. The third year (1898) was a turning point as Jerusalem dropped to fourth place. Furthermore, the declining values of the PageRank measurements reflect the decentralization of the network, since higher values reflect higher centrality.

The centrality of Leeds was largely the result of a single contributor, Rabbi Arieh Leib Mendelsson, who published 17 articles between 27 November, 1896, and 1 September, 1899. However, a closer examination of the network shows that the new centers (Leeds, Paris, and London) were not truly global centers and that the network was In fact not an elaborate and dense network which connected the various locations. Figure 6 visualizes the connections between the locations of authors in the first three years of the journal. The coloring of the various nodes

| First year (1896) | Second year (1897) | Third year (1898) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Jerusalem – 0.414 | Jerusalem – 0.235 | Leeds – 0.207 |
| Hebron – 0.351 | Aleppo – 0.109 | Paris – 0.148 |
| Rhodes – 0.233 | Baghdad – 0.08 | London – 0.088 |

**Tab. 1** The top three locations measured by PageRank metrics in the first three years. All measurements were made using Gephi.

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29    See: Lawrence Page et al., *The PageRank citation ranking: Bringing order to the web,* Stanford InfoLab, 1999.
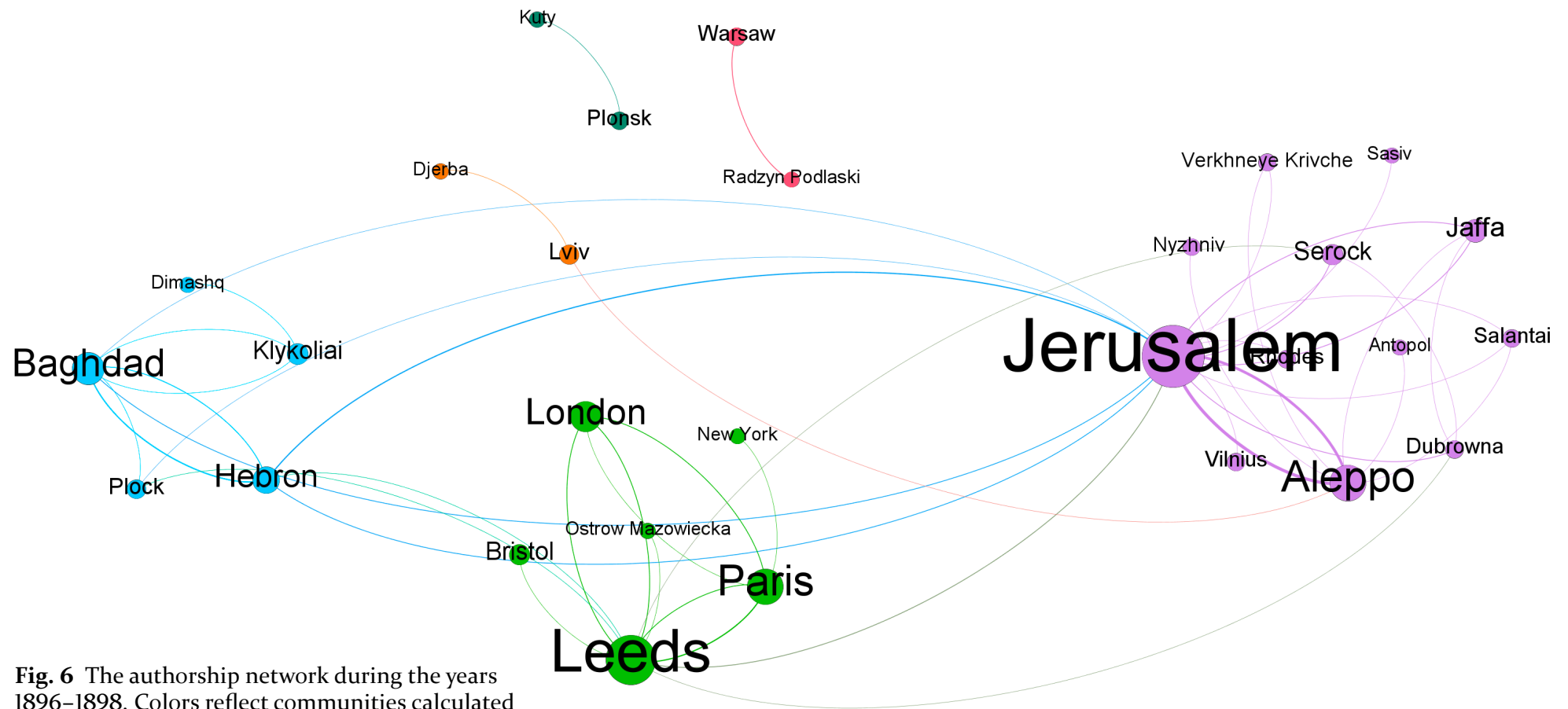30    David F. Gleich, "PageRank beyond the Web," *Siam Review* 57, no. 3 (2015).

**Fig. 6** The authorship network during the years 1896–1898. Colors reflect communities calculated by the Modularity algorithm in Gephi. The graph was created in Gephi.

was done using a clustering algorithm that compartmentalizes the network into sub-networks.[31] Although the network as a whole is mostly connected, some sets of nodes are more interconnected than others. Modularity identifies these subsets and decomposes the network into "communities of densely connected nodes, with the nodes belonging to different communities being only sparsely connected."[32] The image shows that there were three central groups of locations: a Middle-Eastern group consisting primarily of Baghdad, Hebron and Damascus; a West-European group consisting primarily of Leeds, London, Paris and Bristol; and a general group situated around the Mediterranean consisting of Jerusalem, Aleppo and Jaffa. The correlation between the social groupings and the geographical settings shows that the centrality of Leeds was a superficial centrality that resulted from internal West-European discourse, which did not concern the other authors.

A closer reading of the relevant articles shows that they were part of a debate regarding a particular step in the Jewish circumcision process, which deals with the sucking of blood from the wound.[33] The invention of a special glass tube for this purpose in 1898 brought about a heated west-European debate on the different methods of forming the suction. The centrality of Leeds was not a result of rabbinical importance but rather an internal debate among geographically close rabbis. Jerusalem was no longer the focal point of the network but no other true core had emerged. The network was simply too fractured along geographical lines. During the first six years (until October 1902), 97 of the 345 responses (28 percent) discussed a rabbi living less than 120 km from the location of the contributor (local citations), and 58 percent of the responses discussed a rabbi living less than 1000 km from the location of the contribution (regional citations). Despite the geographical span of the network, discussions were mostly local and the network was largely divided by regional boundaries.

## 5.     The new continent (1902)

The next turning point occurred in August 1902. Ben Zion Koenka, the journal editor, traveled constantly around the world to raise funds for various purposes, one of which was the journal. In August 1902, Koenka arrived in the USA and lived there for a year.[34] During that year, he worked as a Posek[35] and was praised

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31     On Modularity algorithms see, Vincent D. Blondel et al., "Fast Unfolding of Communities in Large Networks," *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment* 10 (2008).
32     Ibid, 2.
33     See: Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131–132.
34     Ezra Batsri, *Ha-Me'asef* 1, no. 1 (1979), 7 (in Hebrew).
35     A legal scholar who decides the Halacha in cases where previous authorities are inconclusive or no halakhic precedent exists.
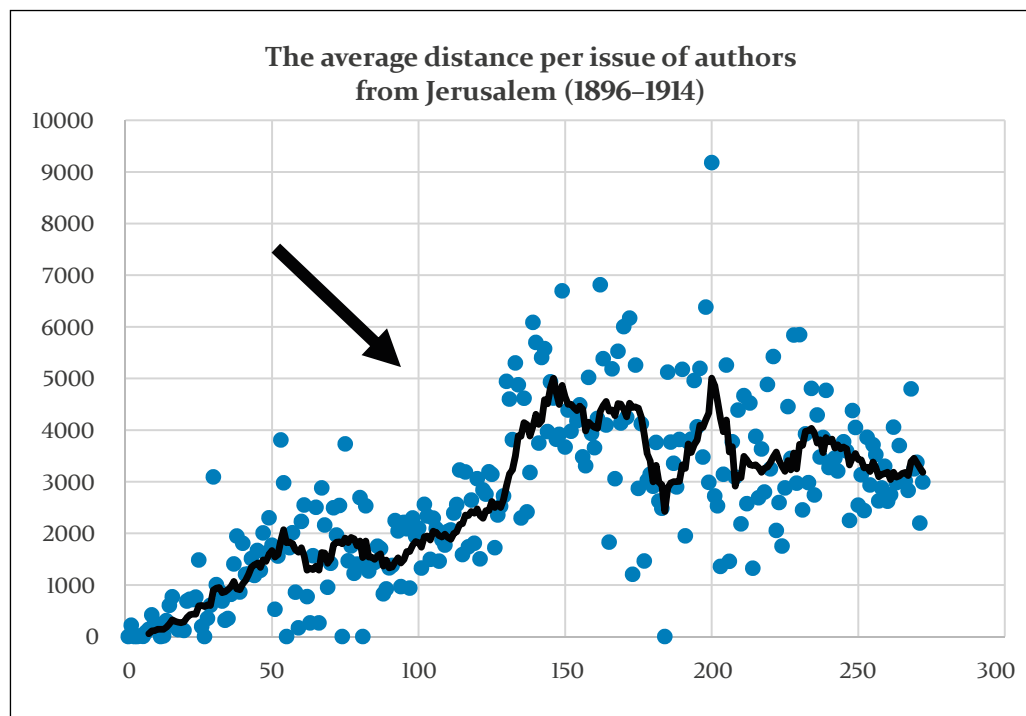
**Fig. 7** A graph showing the average distance from Jerusalem (y-axis) of authors in every issue (x-axis). The black line is a moving average trend line (8 issue average). An arrow marks the sudden change in average distance following the introduction of American authors into the journal (Issue 128, November 1902).

by local rabbinical authorities. By this time, a number of American authors had already published in the journal, but these contributions were irregular, rather than a trend. Following his American voyage, the sporadic contributions became a frequent occurrence. The first issue of the Jewish year 5663 (October 1902) began with 49 greetings and recommendations written by leading American rabbis. In November 1902, three months after the arrival of Koenka in America, the number of American articles was so great that the average distance of an author from Jerusalem, as reflected in Figure 7, had increased drastically, by approximately 1500 km. This was a direct outcome of Koenka's growing influence in America.

In the following three years (1902–1904), the United States became an important center of authorship and many of the articles within the journal discussed American-oriented topics, such as the employment of non-Jews in the construction of synagogues and the usage of new technologies such as electricity and the telephone.[36] However, unlike the story of the exclusive West-European group of

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36     Geffen, "Economic, Social and Religious Issues."

Leeds/London/Paris, the American contributors never formed a clique. On the contrary, the introduction of American authors broke down geographical boundaries between the regions. Between October 1902 and June 1905, the share of local citations (up to 120 km) fell to 17 percent of the total amount. This number dropped even further to 12 percent during 1905–1909, and seven percent during 1909–1914. The share of regional citations (up to 1000 km) dropped from 58 percent prior to Koenka's trip to the US, to 25 percent in the three years afterwards.

## 6.      Maximal expansion and stagnation (1906–1909)

During 1906–1909 the network of writers stabilized and came from numerous centers in Poland and eastern USA, as well as Jerusalem. During this period, the average distance of authors from Jerusalem per issue remained roughly 4000 km, as reflected in the moving average trend line in Graph 2, and the average distance between two debating contributors was approximately 3500 km. This was the maximal geographical expansion of the network, as shown in Figure 8. However, this zenith was accompanied by a systematic stagnation and a general decline in the number of published columns (Table 2). This declined from an annual average of 157 columns between October 1903 and October 1905, to 106 columns annually between October 1905 and October 1909. The stagnation was also seen in a systematic decline in new contributors. The number of new authors in every issue declined from an annual average of 30 between October 1903 and October 1905, to 15 annually between October 1905 and October 1909. The number of new places declined from an annual average of 11 between October 1903 and October 1905, to 6 annually between October 1905 and October 1909. This stagnation was the result of two major factors: the network becoming too scattered, and Koenka himself, who suffered personally from a few difficult years.

In a notice to readers on 3 August, 1906, Koenka acknowledged that the previous year (1905–1906) had been a difficult financial year for the journal, and requested financial as well as spiritual support from his readers and writers.[37] However, Koenka's personal problems soon became a bigger issue than the journal's finances.

In July 1906, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, Yaakov Shaul Elyashar, passed away. The political struggle over his successor affected Koenka greatly and caused him to leave Jerusalem. He wrote in his diary,

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37      Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Ending Comments," *Ha-Me'asef,* 3 August, 1906, 23 (in Hebrew).
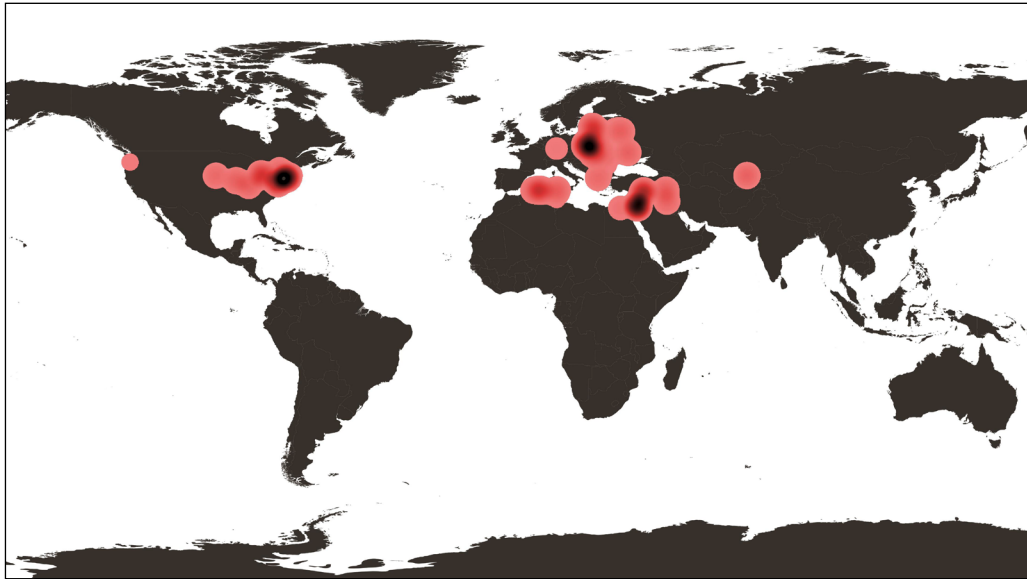
**Fig. 8** A heat-map showing the density of writers for H-Me'asef during the years 1906–1909. The map was created in QGIS.

> During Tamuz 5666, the great Gaon Yaakov Shaul Elyashar, the head of all rabbis and the Chief Sephardic Rabbi, passed away, and then the great controversy over the position erupted. Almost all of the rabbis and the learned men, the elder and the younger, were divided between two factions. I, as always, did not tend to either of the two factions. Once I realized that I was getting dragged into this controversy, I understood that it would be much better for me to leave.[38]

Koenka traveled to Alexandria, Algiers and Tunis, and was later asked to serve as the Deputy Chief Rabbi of Alexandria. He accepted the offer and moved his family to Alexandria for a year, during which the journal was published in Egypt. It is obviously hard to assess the effects of these circumstances on his editorial competency, but it was most likely a time of tribulation in his life. Koenka himself refers to his troubles in a short notice at the end of the 7 June, 1907, issue:

> To all my dearest friends and loved ones who asked me privately to enjoy their contributions and respond to them in my dear *Ha-Me'asef,* I must notify them that I will not be able to fulfill their wishes as of now, although I would be glad to do so, because many different hassles surround me.[39]

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38      Quoted in: Ezra Batsri, *Ha-Me'asef,* 8 (in Hebrew).
39      Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Ending Comments," *Ha-Me'asef,* 7 June, 1907, 30 (in Hebrew).

Although Koenka returned to Jerusalem by the end of 1907, the general state of stagnation of the journal's network did not change. New authors and places were not introduced, and the variety of places per issue remained relatively low (Table 2). Perhaps the lack of innovation was not entirely caused by Koenka's problems, but rather by the spatial diffusion of the network. In his infrequent editorials, Koenka often uses the phrase "my friends" to describe the global network of authors of the journal. However, when he writes about utilizing the network to support the journal, he refers to geographically proximate networks rather than global ones. In the October 1902 editorial, he writes from New York about the

| Year (by Hebrew year) | The total number of articles | The number of responding articles | The total number of new contributors | The total number of new places | The number of different places per issue |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1896 | 80 | 18 | 52 | 8 | 2.00 |
| 1896–1897 | 223 | 61 | 81 | 31 | 3.97 |
| 1897–1898 | 126 | 51 | 23 | 11 | 2.83 |
| 1898–1899 | 137 | 34 | 35 | 19 | 2.54 |
| 1899–1900 | 133 | 28 | 27 | 16 | 3.09 |
| 1900–1901 | 176 | 69 | 28 | 13 | 3.29 |
| 1901–1902 | 139 | 57 | 17 | 5 | 2.91 |
| 1902–1903 | 111 | 15 | 35 | 8 | 2.20 |
| 1903–1904 | 163 | 33 | 29 | 14 | 3.43 |
| 1904–1905 | 152 | 68 | 30 | 8 | 3.23 |
| 1905–1906 | 114 | 47 | 22 | 6 | 2.34 |
| 1906–1907 | 99 | 32 | 12 | 6 | 2.23 |
| 1907–1908 | 118 | 59 | 12 | 6 | 2.20 |
| 1908–1909 | 93 | 41 | 13 | 5 | 2.00 |
| 1909–1910 | 126 | 27 | 21 | 14 | 2.69 |
| 1910–1911 | 188 | 67 | 43 | 24 | 4.09 |
| 1911–1912 | 204 | 77 | 42 | 27 | 4.83 |
| 1912–1913 | 226 | 81 | 55 | 30 | 5.11 |
| 1913–1914 | 212 | 75 | 56 | 28 | 4.89 |

**Tab. 2** Statistical measures of authorship in each year: the total number of contributions, the total number of responding articles, the number of new authors and places per year, and the average number of different places per issue.
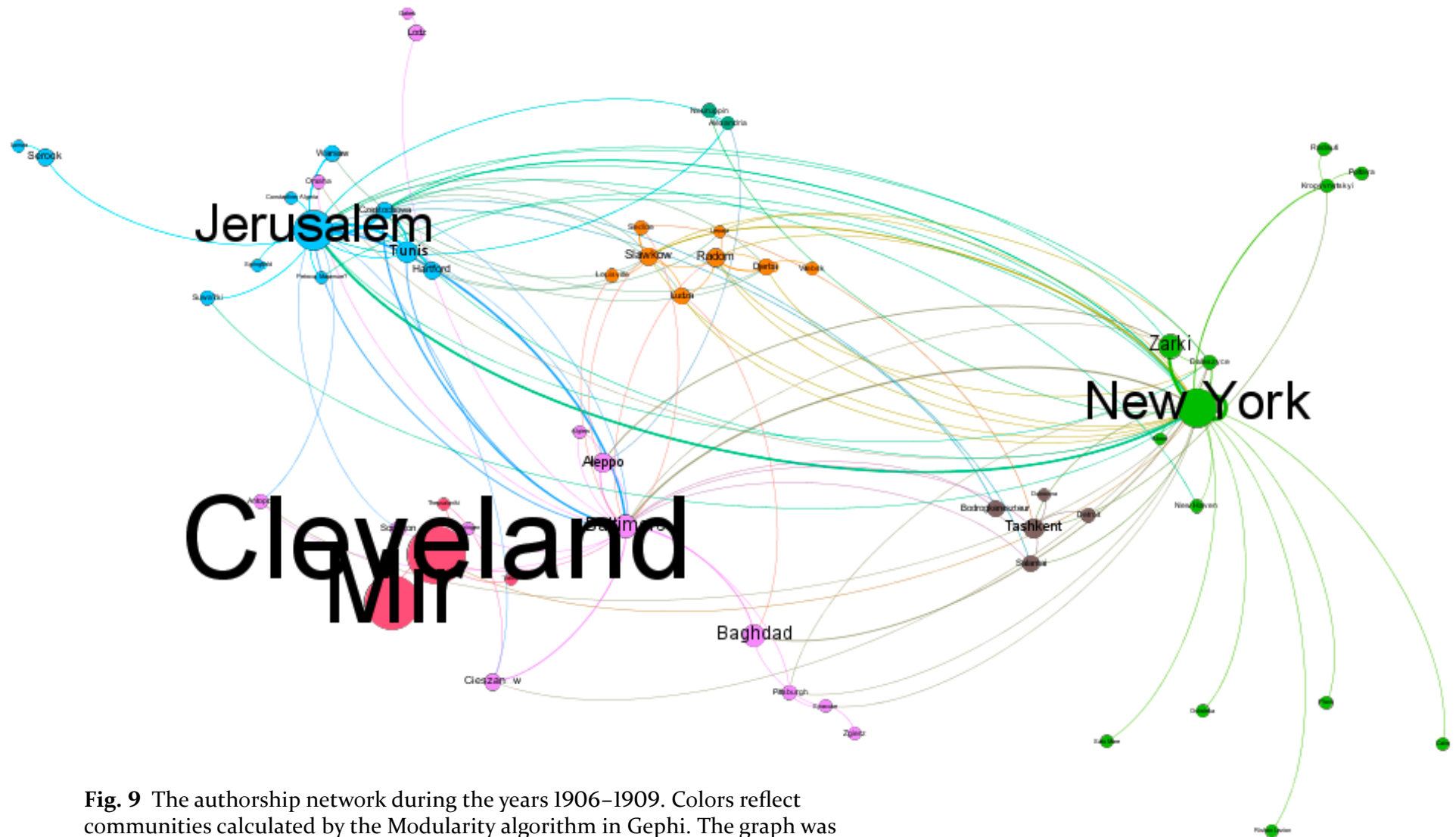
**Fig. 9** The authorship network during the years 1906–1909. Colors reflect communities calculated by the Modularity algorithm in Gephi. The graph was created in Gephi.

things he plans on doing once he returns to "his friends" in Jerusalem.[40] In the August 1906 editorial, he requests all the supporters of the journal to turn to "their friends and acquaintances" for further support. In other words, Koenka understood that this global network depended on local communities. The problem in the years 1906–1909 was perhaps that the network had become so widespread that it lost its familiarity; people were less engaged without their local community.[41]

Despite the general stagnation, the network was much more extensive in its internal connections than in the past (Figure 9). There were five main groups: one surrounding Cleveland and Mir (located in modern day Belarus); a second surrounding New-York that included Daleszyce (located in modern Poland); a third surrounding Baghdad, Baltimore and Aleppo; a fourth surrounding Jerusalem, Tunis and Hartford, Connecticut; and a fifth including Tashkent, Salantai (located in modern day Lithuania) and Bodrogkereszteur (located in modern day Belarus). Regional boundaries were no longer a defining factor of this network.

## 7.    Convergence and the return of internal dynamism (1909–1914)

During 1909–1914, the dynamic nature of the network was restored: the number of new authors reached new heights (56 in 1914), much like the number of new places, which reached 28 in 1914, the number of different places per issue (an average of 14 between 1909 and 1914 compared to 6.5 between 1906 and 1909), and the number of ongoing debates (an average of 74 annually between 1909 and 1914, compared to 46 between 1906 and 1914) (Table 2).

The new network structure (Figure 10) contained six central groups with no dominant cities, as well as dense ties between the various groups. However, geographically, the direction was reversed (Figure 11). The system converged upon a single geographic center in Eastern Europe, which consisted of many towns and cities, rather than a single center such as Jerusalem, Aleppo, Leeds or New York as in past years. This convergence was manifested in a large decrease in the average distance from Jerusalem (approximately 2500 kilometers on average) and a small decrease in the average distance between debating contributors (approximately 3000 km on average).[42] Correspondingly, the number of regional responses (up

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40    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Akhrit Davar," *Ha-Me'asef,* 3 October, 1902 (in Hebrew).
41    Studies on knowledge acquisition have shown that greater geographical distance decreases knowledge transfer. See: Yukiko Murakami, "Knowledge Acquisition through Personal Networks: Influences of Geographical Distance and Tie Strength," *European Conference on Knowledge Management* (2019).
42    Neta Olevski was a geographical outlier, since he wrote six articles from the eastern city of Irkutsk during the eighteenth and nineteenth years of the journal.
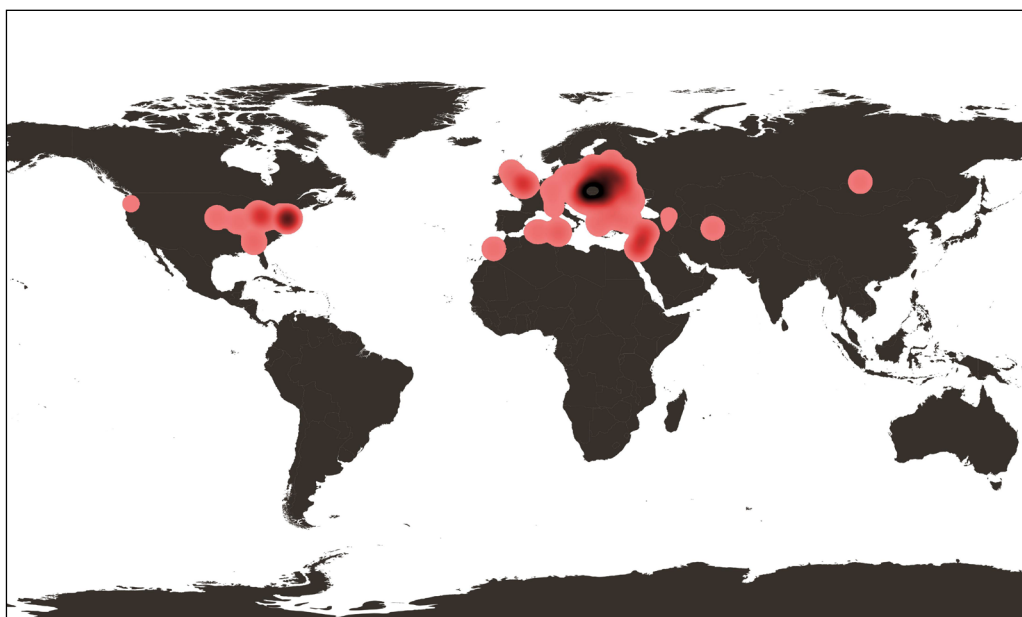
**Fig. 10** The authorship network during the years 1910–1914. Colors reflect communities calculated by the Modularity algorithm in Gephi. The graph was created in Gephi.

**Fig. 11** A heat-map showing the density of writers for H-Me'asef during the years 1910–1914. The map was created in QGIS.

to 1000 km) rose compared to the previous four years (39 percent compared to 26 percent). Dynamism, innovativeness and variety returned due to geographical convergence rather than expansion.

## 8.   The end of the journal

The journal ended abruptly, without warning, in September 1914. In April 1914, Koenka opened his traditional semi-annual editorial by stating that

> Here we are slowly improving Ha-Me'asef in order to enlarge it [...] and we hope that we can add appendixes in most of the coming issues...we will ask all our friends and supporters to try to distribute Ha-Me'asef among their friends and acquaintances so that we increase the number of supporters, benefactors and sponsors.[43]

There is no indication that the journal was about to be closed. However, the September issue was the last one published by Koenka. World War One, which started in July-August 1914, led to the collapse of the social network created by Koenka and his writers. Because of the war in Europe, the postal system did not

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43    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Li-Menuyey Ha-Me'asef Ha-Nikhbadim," *Ha-Me'asef,* 3 April, 1914 (in Hebrew).

operate, and the connections between the editor and the authors were disrupted. In addition, money from subscribers could not arrive. By October 1914, Koenka was suffering from increasing debt. Consequently, Koenka left Jerusalem to live in Baghdad for a number of years, and the journal was terminated.

## 9.    Conclusion

The study of Jewish journalism in general, and journals published in the Land of Israel in particular, has focused almost entirely on Ashkenazi publishers.[44] As a result, the role of journals, such as *Ha-Me'asef,* in the establishment of a global and transnational Jewish community was marginalized. Furthermore, the focus on European-oriented journals led to claims that nineteenth-century journals published in Jerusalem were generally written for the European reader.[45] However, *Ha-Me'asef* did not fit this mold. It was literally and explicitly designed as global, and rather than focusing on readers, it was focused on writers. In the editorial from the October 1902 issue, Koenka states that his mission is far from complete, since the potential rabbis who could add to his creation of the journal "are not located in a single place, but rather scattered at the edges of earth and distant islands."[46] He uses the allegory of a tree, which is planted by a single person but needs many others to provide water and cultivation, in order for the tree to blossom.

The ability of *Ha-Me'asef* to encompass such a wide and heterogeneous group of authors was the result, among others, of its strategic location in Jerusalem, as well as Koenka's editing style. During the late nineteenth century, a varied group of rabbis assembled in Jerusalem: Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Hasidic, non-Hasidic, educated, and Conservative-Orthodox, to conduct a lively inter-communal debate regarding Judaism, settlement in the Land of Israel, and the relation between these topics and the modern world. Zvi Zohar claims that between the anti-modern "Shomrei Emuney Israel" and the liberal-minded people of the Enlightenment, stood the Sephardic Rabbis, represented in the journal by Rabbi Ben Zion Koenka.[47] These rabbis did not wish to shut themselves away inside their community, but rather conduct an open dialogue with other communities, which also included the secular Jewish settlers in Palestine.[48] As a result, *Ha-Me'asef* did not try to impose a Sephardic agenda, and was never committed to

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44    Yitzhak Bezalel, "Ha-Rabanim Ha-Sefaradim."

45    Bartal, "Mevaser U-Modi'a Le-Ish Yehudi," 162; Uzi Elyada, *Ha-Olam Ha-Tsahov: Leydat Itonut Ha-Hamon Ha-Erets Israelit,* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2015), 27–59.

46    Ben-Zion Abraham Koenka, "Akhrit Davar".

47    Zvi Zohar, *He'iru Pney Ha-Mizrakh: Halakha Ve-Hagut etsel Khakhmey Israel Ba-Mizrakh Ha-Tikhon,* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 2001), 353–364.

48    Bezalel, "Ha-Rabanim Ha-Sefaradim," 65–69.

a specific halachic tradition. It was a place for transnational, cross-border, and cross-factional discussions.

The formation of social networks in general and social scientific networks in particular always involves the ongoing rise and fall of network centers. In order for the system to withstand the pressure of continuous changes, it must rely on flexible values that enable new groups to enter without forcing them to assimilate. This was the case with *Ha-Me'asef* in 1898–1900 with the West-European group, and later on in 1903–1904 with the American group. The great success and achievement of *Ha-Me'asef* was partially due to the fact that it never forced topics upon its writers that would be of interest to the Jerusalem community – there was no attempt to channel authors into specific styles of writing. The goal was to have an open environment that could accommodate the many voices and currents that belong to Jewish Orthodox life.

The network was not a success because of its global expansion, but rather mainly due to its ability to break previously existing geographical boundaries. Regional divides ceased being a matter of relevance to authors, especially following the introduction of American authors. The existence of internal groups, schools of thought, and 'hidden colleges' is natural, and is part of the inner-dynamics of every social network, scientific networks in particular.[49] These groups are important factors in the process of advancing knowledge and the creation of a fruitful discussion. However, in order for science, or in this case Halakhic research, to develop, it is important for these groups to consolidate on the basis of intellectual connections, not merely regional constraints and communication limitations. However, geographical expansion cannot expand to such a degree that authors lose all personal ties with the network. This is why the convergence of the system in its final stage revitalized the network.

The local periodical, which started as the dream of a 29-year-old editor who asked his students, teachers and family members to help fill the first printed issues, transformed into a global transnational network of authors. This network connected scholars from across the Jewish world, but simultaneously marginalized the Sephardic community in Jerusalem, from which it originated. The journal peaked in popularity and diversity, but the Sephardic voice that set the tone in the first few years was replaced by English/American/East-European voices that discussed different topics in a different dialect.

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49    See: Diana Crane, *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1972); Christine L. Borgman and Jonathan Furner, "Scholarly Communication and Bibliometrics," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 36 (2002).

On a broader level, this study demonstrates the advantages as well as disadvantages of computational and quantitative tools for analyzing the 'biographies' of periodicals. By combining distant reading methods such as spatial analysis of the journal's authors with network analysis of the ongoing discussions, as well as closer readings of the significant contributions and the editor's biography, *Ha-Me'asef* can be understood as a multilayered and dynamic phenomenon. The history of a journal is a history of communication, which is no less a history of space and social networks than it is a history of content and ideas.

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