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A History of Yiddish (Graphic) Writing

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This presentation will review the history of written Yiddish, from its medieval beginnings until the present day, highlighting the cultural and ideological implications of the various practices used. It will touch upon topics such as literacy, gender, dialect, standardized spelling, and standardized pronunciation. Particular attention will be given to the graphic aspects of writing, i.e., alphabet, font, and vocalization.

The various ideologies that emerged in the twentieth century led to a great deal of interest in Yiddish writing practices, which were affected by landmark events such as the October Revolution, the founding of YIVO, and the establishment of modern Yiddish schools, to name a few. Ideologies ranging from romantic nationalism to the longing for a universal community have played a role in this arena, literally leaving their mark.

More recently, following the digital revolution and the widespread use of email communication and other instant messaging platforms, a new chapter in the history of writing Yiddish began.

Rather than a review of the standard and mainstream Yiddish writing practices, this presentation aims to reflect the broader picture with all its nuances, diverse dynamics and conflicts, including marginal phenomena, liminal scribes, and experimental poetry and journalism.