



# Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine

*Nina S. Spiegel*

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From their conquest of Palestine in 1917 during World War I, until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the British controlled the territory by mandate, representing a distinct cultural period in Middle Eastern history. In *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine*, author Nina S. Spiegel argues that the Jewish community of this era created enduring social, political, religious, and cultural forms through public events, such as festivals, performances, and celebrations. She finds that the physical character of this national public culture represents one of the key innovations of Zionism—embedding the importance of the corporeal into national Jewish life—and remains a significant feature of contemporary Israeli culture.

Spiegel analyzes four significant events in this period that have either been unexplored or underexplored: the beauty competitions for Queen Esther in conjunction with the Purim carnivals in Tel Aviv from 1926 to 1929, the first Maccabiah Games or "Jewish Olympics" in Tel Aviv in 1932, the National Dance Competition for theatrical dance in Tel Aviv in 1937, and the Dalia Folk Dance Festivals at Kibbutz Dalia in 1944 and 1947. Drawing on a vast assortment of archives throughout Israel, Spiegel uses an array of untapped primary sources, from written documents to visual and oral materials, including films, photographs, posters, and interviews. Methodologically, Spiegel offers an original approach, integrating the fields of Israel studies, modern Jewish history, cultural history, gender studies, performance studies, dance theory and history, and sports studies.

In this detailed, multi-disciplinary volume, Spiegel demonstrates the ways that political and social issues can influence a new society and provides a dynamic framework for interpreting present-day Israeli culture. Students and teachers of Israel studies, performance studies, and Jewish cultural history will appreciate *Embodying Hebrew Culture*.

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