

The Ashkenazi Bookdealers in Yemen (1925–1929)

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The article before us deals with Ashkenazi book vendors who penetrated Yemen in the 1930s. The article's primary focus treats on Rabbi Schwager (1882–1961), born in the small town of Husiatyn in Galicia, whence he uprooted and moved to Vienna. Rabbi Schwager visited Yemen on three different occasions, where he blended-in religiously with the community, and where he is known to have been given the honor to act as a godfather in a circumcision ceremony. This stood in stark contrast to other book vendors who were not as observant as him. As a Jewish scholar, Rabbi Schwager developed a strong bond of friendship with the Chief Rabbi of Yemen, R. Yihya Yitzhak Halevi, and with the other great rabbinic leaders, discussing with them on matters of Halacha and Jewish custom, and even providing them with books they requested. The article reviews Rabbi Schwager's travels to Yemen and his encounters with members of the congregation and with its rabbis. The article also briefly mentions other vendors, such as Rabbi Aharon Retter, Rabbi Ya'akov Halperin and his sons, two brothers from the family that founded the Brothers Publishing House and the widow of Romm (editor of the Vilna Talmud edition), among others, about whom we have no information. The article concludes with three different approaches to the phenomenon of trafficking in Yemeni manuscripts and their removal from the borders of Yemen.