

BAT MITZVAH, THE ISRAELI VERSION:
FROM A PARTY TO A RITE OF INITIATION?

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Abstract

The article investigates the evolution of the bat mitzvah in the Old Yishuv and modern State of Israel during the interwar period and afterward. It traces the event's grassroots development as an expanded birthday party to mark a girl's twelfth birthday, copied from the bar mitzvah festivities for a boy's thirteenth birthday—but without the religious ritual. The bat mitzvah thus developed independently of the worlds of the synagogue and Zionist ideology, as a classic product of the festive culture of the Industrial Age—an enhanced birthday party. Attempts by feminists and other activists to transform it into a meaningful rite of initiation came only at a later stage. Thus, the story of the creation of the bat mitzvah and its naturalization by the festive culture of the Old Yishuv illuminates the influence of modern consumer culture on Jewish culture.