

*Le yiddish, langue, culture, société*, (dir. J. Baumgarten and David Bunis), Mélanges du CRFJ, vol. 2, Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1999.

In his preface, J. Baumgarten shows to what extent the ways in which Yiddish studies are conducted are indicative of the status and changes in Jewish studies, and one could easily include the various University fields related to it. Linguistics, for instance, has long held a key position both descriptively, but also as a repository for a dying language. The authors cite the inventory and indexing work on Yiddish as a long neglected or undervalued heritage, but argue that it should no longer be approached solely in terms of linguistic occurrences. Rather Yiddish should be viewed as a cultural and political ensemble, inscribed in a specific history and connected in particular to the rise of nationalism in Europe.

This approach departs from two traditions -- the literary tradition, which dominated during the nineteenth century and formed a field in itself unrelated to the cultural and social environment in which these works were written, and the traditional separation of studies on the Ashkenazi and Sephardi worlds. The article by D. Bunis, a scholarly bibliography of literary output in Yiddish and Judezmo from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, exemplifies this new stance. It provides ample proof of the influences of sources outside Judezmo and the many interactions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi speakers. Through transfers and translations of Yiddish works in the Ottoman Empire and later in Italy and in Greece, changes in ceremonial rituals were made on the basis of models in Yiddish publications. However, the influence of the Ashkenazi world on rabbinical literature was greater in the eighteenth century, due to the growth of printing presses in Constantinople and to the arrival of Ashkenazis in the Empire. The secular features of Judezmo are found in Livorno, the crossroads between Eastern and Western Judaism. In the nineteenth century a movement arose here, which would result in a Westernization promoted by Judezmo, in particular through the expansion of the periodical press in this language. D. Bunis' article shows the critical importance of cultural transfers and the absurdity of the view that the Sephardi and Ashkenazi universes were separate and impermeable to each other. Paradoxically and over and beyond mutual influences, both Yiddish and Judezmo shared similar fates as spoken languages but also as regards recourse to writing, and their religious and then secular roles in the Jews' entry into the modern world.

In an article on oral sermons, their translation into Hebrew for purposes of producing written text and their re-translation into Yiddish, C. Turnianski shows how the spoken language (Yiddish) and the written one (Hebrew) long remained caught in an oppositional, hierarchized system until Yiddish was written and became the major vector for the education of the lower classes and women excluded from learning.

One would have liked to go beyond the level of generalities concerning the *Tse'edah ou- re'edah*, and have a closer analysis of these texts to illustrate the specificity of their social role. However these drawbacks are quickly compensated for by Astrid Starck's article dealing with the place of women in Jewish society through analysis of with the religious "vademecum" for women, the *Mayse Buch*. The quotes point to the purposes of this form of edifying literature combined with folk beliefs, which at times hint at the messianic role of women, or at least one she shares with her spouse.

The article by J. Baumgarten investigates the art of the *Badhanim*, who can be found in ultra orthodox communities and in modern Hassidim-- the "true repositories of traditional Jewish observance." Baumgarten describes the history and the creativity of these jesters and poets invited to marriages and whose art consists primarily in entertaining and teaching. Two features characterizing the community's choice differentiate the style of recitation: one form is more modern and distances itself from religious message, along the lines of traditional marriages in Europe. The other preserves the solemnity and mystic dimension of marriage. The description and the detailed analysis of the marriage ritual in the Hassidic community of Antwerp captures the mystical and transcendent dimension of gestures requiring a know-how transmitted from generation to generation, and incorporates (through dancing in particular) a whole scholarly tradition and a cosmogony connected to the Kabala.

The *Badkhan* is a master craftsman who employs a Levi-Straussian "arrangement" to form a ritual by modernizing a pre-existing system. J. Baumgarten's anthropological approach is both descriptive and scientific, and has the value of showing how the texts draw on real life to acquire a sacred dimension.

This Hassidic universe is the background for a historical study reviewing clashes with the *Maskilim*. According to S. Werses, despite the virulent polemic against the Hassidism, pro-Emancipation pamphleteers in fact helped unify the numerous trends in Judaism in Europe in the nineteenth century by designating a common enemy, who paradoxically shored up their argumentation. By holding a mirror up to the *Maskilim*, S. Werses shows the strength of the Hassidic movement, which despite multiple denunciations in the name of reason, spread and attracted growing numbers of adepts. The missing mirror is the one held up to the

Hassidism, who denounced modernity, without theoretical justification for their aversion. Nevertheless, the force of religious conviction, its exalted forms, and the changes in ritual observance made by the Hassidism did not prompt systematic criticism from the *Maskilim*. Rather, the religious observances and the lower social status of the Hassidic followers were the target of satire, one of the dominant literary devices. The sociological analysis of the influence of nascent Hassidism on youth, taken from works by Bick (1870- 1880) provides a fascinating background to those now studying the reiterated forms of orthodoxy. The social features of the rapid change in social status and success of marginal youth or break-aways from the family should elicit comparison. Secondly, the innovative features of Hassidim apparently created a paradox, where to maintain loyalty a ritual is changed, and to be modern one must be the watchdogs of tradition...

In a certain way this issue is also at the center of concerns over linguistic allegiance in Poland in the period between the two World Wars. C. Shmeruk's analysis of this trilingualism, and criticism of the statistical sources enables us to better grasp the ideological stakes involved in the choice of languages taught, the languages which were really spoken, or languages displayed ostensibly as a function of the interlocutor or the educational systems. The data on multiculturalism are illustrative of the political or religious commitments of a group dealing with possible integration into a modern nation, where the choice was constantly between religion and state.

The description of *Yung Yiddish* as a cultural avant-guard at the start of the twentieth century, its vitality and its tragic demise fits this same perspective. Its contribution to Russian and American trends in modernism, its expressionist rhetoric, its graphic art (some examples are included in the publication), its belief in a new art, a true modern messianism are brought to life through strikingly powerful texts, which R. Ertel analyzes with the same degree of communicative fervor. The emotional intensity is only equaled in the paroxysm of violence of the end of a world annihilated by the Holocaust. An illustration of the vitality of Yiddish culture -- freed this time from the Czarist yoke but caught in the stranglehold of civil war -- can be found in the work of Kvido, a Russian refugee writer in Berlin. This constitutes one of the rare documents showing support for the Russian revolution and the German proletarian movement by a Jewish writer. His revisions of his texts and fluctuating literary options testify to doubts and enthusiasms but may also reflect changes commandeered by a system which would annihilate him along with his comrades in 1952.

From ancient Yiddish literature through Hassidism, this volume prompts queries on the fate of a minority culture in the midst of modern states. It has the prime merit of showing to what extent Yiddish culture,

far from being insular, has on the contrary forcefully manifested its contribution to the world.

Laurence Podslever  
EHES