

Christoph Jahr, *Paul Nathan. Publizist, Politiker und Philanthrop 1857-1927* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2018), pp. vii+302.

by *Johann Nicolai*

Christoph Jahr's monograph about Paul Nathan deals with the personal history of this representative of liberal-bourgeois German Jewry from the middle of the 19th century to the interwar period.

A contextual-narrative bracket is Nathan's sudden death and funeral in 1927. In the introductory chapter, *Aus dem Leben gerissen* (*Torn out from life*), (pp. 9-22) and the two final chapters, *Erbe* (*Heritage*) (pp. 223-23) and *Erinnerung* (*Memory*) (pp. 233-245), Jahr points to the main aspect to his research concerning Paul Nathan: his remembrance. The prologue by Peter Raue already highlights the fact of the German Jew Nathan falling into oblivion in the German context (p. 7). This matter marks a major motivation for the creation of this monograph. In contrast to that, Alfred Wiener's commemorative article to his close friend Nathan in the *AJR*-Journal of April 1957, discussed in the "Memory" chapter (p. 235), highlights the fact that Paul Nathan was at least not unknown among the German-Jewish emigrants in London. Hence, the notion of the all-forgotten Paul Nathan appears to be a particular German perspective at this point. On the other hand, this point of view convincingly reflects the sluggish appreciation of accomplishments by Jews from Germany in their home country even in the second half of the 20th century. This phenomenon is also documented in the treatment of the entrepreneur, philanthropist and likewise close friend of Nathan, James Simon (1851-1932).

Simon came only slowly back to public memory after the naming after him of a recreation area near the Burgstrasse in Berlin (2007) and the James Simon Gallery on Museum Island (2009).

A similar recognition was not given to Paul Nathan, who served his home city as a publicist and publisher, as a left-leaning liberal and later social-democratic politician and, finally, as the founder of the philanthropic *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* (Aid Association of German Jews), 1901-1938.

Not even in Israel, where Nathan laid essential foundations for the Technion University in Haifa, is there any street named after him. However, at least a relief from 1959 honors the engagement of Nathan at the entrance of the Old Technion.

Another source of reference for the monograph about Paul Nathan is Ernst Feder's biography from 1929, which was a valuable source for Jahr's own research, but also a matter of methodological distinction. Explicitly Jahr acknowledged the use of Feder's biography as a source for those documents that were lost or dispersed during World War II (p. 16.). At the same time Jahr criticised Feder's handling of the sources as "journalistically generous" and "not in accordance with strict scientific criteria of a biography" (p. 17). This criticism underlines once more the necessity of Jahr's own analysis of the life of Paul Nathan as a first strictly scholarly biography. Jahr's approach focusses on two main aspects: first, the linguistic accessibility of the monograph, compromising "dust-dry scholarliness" and "imaginative storytelling" (p. 21). Second, it should be a discussion of Nathan's *vita* in his life contexts and networks. As a consequence, the monograph is not a strictly linear narrative that tells Nathan's life from birth to death. Rather it is a segmentation into different thematic blocks, which focus on several stages of life and thematic facets.

The first of these thematic blocks is the chapter entitled "Zeit und Mensch" (Time and Man) (pp. 23-86) that covers family and social structures as well as historical contexts in which Nathan acted. For the sake of readability, this chapter is again subdivided into the short passages "1857" (pp. 23-31), "Familie, Kindheit, Jugend" (Family, Childhood, Youth) (pp. 31-35), "Kindheit und Schule" (Childhood and School) (pp. 35-42), "Körper und Geist" (Body and Mind) (pp. 42-56), "Freunde" (Friends) (pp. 57-72) and, finally, "Werte" (Values) (pp.73-86). This structure makes it possible to some extent to locate specific passages in an encyclopedic way. Yet the language flow also allows a continuous reading experience of the entire chapter.

The following second thematic block, "Publizist" (Publisher) (pp. 87-119) deals with the professional field in which Nathan happened to be most successful: his profession as a journalist and publisher. Again the chapter is subdivided into the passages "Schreiben für die Nation" (Writing for the Nation) (pp. 81-102) which predominantly covers Nathan's work for the newspaper *Die Nation* founded by the liberal Theodor Barth. In this context Nathan became visible mainly as a protagonist of political left-liberalism during the time of the German Empire.

It is noteworthy at this point however that Jahr used a wordplay at this point referring to the name of the newspaper *Die Nation* as well as to the term "*nation*" in its original meaning, implying the patriotic notion of Nathan's journalistic work.

The next passage, “Schreiben gegen den Antisemitismus” (Writing against Antisemitism) (pp. 103-119) deals with Nathan’s alignment with the Centralverein (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), which was Germany’s by far largest Jewish organization until the November Pogrom of 1938. Its original intention was to defend German Citizens of Jewish Faith against antisemitism by themselves. In the course of the expiring 19th century, however, the Centralverein extended its internal debates about its own positioning. Since Paul Nathan himself acted “noticeably discreetly” (p. 106), it is even more notable that he even became the deputy chairman to the longstanding Julius Brodnitz in 1920.

Another, yet much less successful professional field of activity reflects the thematic block “Politiker” (Politician) (pp. 121-170) that obviously deals with Nathan’s political involvement. Jahr discusses this topic in three divisions in accordance with Nathan’s political affiliations, illustrating the intensity of the breach of the party change in 1921: “Liberale Politik” (Liberal Policy) (pp. 122-133) and “Sozialdemokratische Politik” (Social democratic policy) (pp. 133-141). The brevity of the passages shows that Nathan’s political leanings were not particularly pronounced. In political liberalism he quickly reached the limit of his ambitions because of the fear in the party of antisemitism, should there be too many Jews on the candidate list (p. 130). Whereas in the social democrat party, against which Nathan polemicized in 1890 as being “state despotism” (p. 134), he never really found a political home owing to his bourgeois lifestyle. In a letter to his friend and fellow liberal Hugo Preuß in 1920, Nathan began to transfigure central aspects of the party’s ideology: “the term ‘class struggle’ has only the function of a political relic” (p. 138). Only in the last passage, “Nationale Politik” (National Policy) (pp. 142-170) does the author begin to discuss Nathan’s political success in relation to his response to the Jews of Czarist Russia being threatened by pogroms, which constituted the core of his political work. This section is very closely connected to the final thematic block, “Philanthrop” (Philanthropist) (pp. 171-222). As in the chapters before, this block is structured into three subchapters, “Wohlfahrt organisieren” (Organising Welfare) (pp. 171-182), “Wohlfahrt für Palästina” (Welfare for Palestine) (pp. 183-208) and, lastly, “Gute Fahrt in die neue Welt” (Safe journey into the New World) (pp. 208-222).

The first passage introduces to the beginning of Nathan’s involvement in welfare and his international work with the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in France, the Anglo-Jewish Organization in Great Britain and US-American philanthropic networks mostly linked to Jacob Schiff. Nathan’s particular engagement for Palestine under Turkish rule was mostly focused on education, where he quickly

came into competition with French and British welfare organizations. The peak of the cultural conflicts was the war on languages in 1913 at the Technion in Haifa. The last aspect of this thematic block covers the organization of transatlantic emigration from Eastern Europe to North America, which became a major task of the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden until the beginning of World War I. Paul Nathan was a frequent traveler to Poland, Romania and Russia and well knew the effects of the pogroms that were regularly ravaging these lands. To prevent similar effects in Germany, he decided to establish an organization that would lead East European Jews as quickly as possible through Germany to North America, where they were welcome as new emigrants.

In sum, Christoph Jahr's monograph on Paul Jahr has recorded more than the long-awaited story of an unjustly forgotten German-Jewish personality: it is a biography, a political and historical lesson and a piece of excellent literature in one. It falls into the line of literature following Abraham Barkai's monograph of 2002, *Wehr Dich!*, on the history of the Central Association of German citizens of Jewish faith that opened up a full new discussion on non-Zionist Jewry in diaspora.

And for the introductory investigation into the work with refugees in the early 19th century by the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden—which deserves its own monograph (p. 21)—Jahr's work also has astonishing relevance for questions of migration policy in our own days.

Johann Nicolai, currently an independent researcher (PhD-degree from the University of Potsdam, Germany, last affiliated with the University of Haifa, Israel as a Post-Doc)

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