

François Guesnet (Hrsg.), *Zwischen Graetz und Dubnow: Jüdische Historiographie in Ostmitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2009, pp. 297

by *Mirjam Thulin*

In the Festschrift for Simon Dubnow's seventieth birthday in 1930¹, Ismar Elbogen, then director of the "Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums" in Berlin, revisited Jewish historiography "from Graetz to Dubnow".² Fifty years between the last volume of Heinrich Graetz' "History of the Jews" (1876) and the first volume of Simon Dubnow's "World History of the Jewish People" (1925) had passed. Elbogen's observation was a general research on Jewish history by using unknown sources, mainly in regional places and in East Central Europe.

The contributions in the recently published anthology "Zwischen Graetz und Dubnow: Jüdische Historiographie in Ostmitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", edited by François Guesnet, cover the time range Elbogen was dealing with. The volume focuses on the development of Jewish historiography in East Central Europe, similarly framed as Elbogen's observations by the two great historians Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) and Simon Dubnow (1860–1941). The anthology is based on papers compiled in a workshop about Jewish historiography in East Central Europe at Potsdam University in 2005. It is divided into ten contributions and a eulogy to Heinrich Graetz by Moshe Szulstein when he stood at the tomb of the historian in Breslau/Wroclaw after the Shoah in 1949.

In his introduction François Guesnet shows Heinrich Graetz as the one who was writing a history of Jewish "suffering and scholars" (7–26). Similar to Isaak M. Jost (1793–1869), Guesnet understands Graetz as a paradigm of a religious Jewish historiography. At the same time he is introducing Simon Dubnow's works as a master narrative of Jewish history as a national collective, emphasizing the active social Jewish life. The editor describes East Central Europe "between Graetz and Dubnow" as an entangled Jewish space as well as a kaleidoscope for the impact of opponent historical narratives and for the formation of self-images and images of the other. Guesnet points out that until the end of the 19th century Jewish historiography in East Central Europe

¹ About Dubnow see the new biography of Viktor E. Kelner, *Simon Dubnow. Eine Biografie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

² Ismar Elbogen, "Von Graetz bis Dubnow: Fünfzig Jahre jüdischer Geschichtsschreibung", in Ismar Elbogen, Josef Meisl u.a. (Hg.), *Festschrift zu Simon Dubnows siebenzigsten Geburtstag* (2. Tischri 5691), (Berlin: Berlin Jüdischer Verl., 1930), 7–23.

was the research field of only a very few Jewish scholars. Moreover Jewish historians in East Central Europe understood themselves not only as mediators of historical knowledge. They rather used the study of history and historiography to replace the former significance of Judaism and Jewish religion. Besides, that specific historiography in East Central Europe strongly focussed on the social bonds and the structures of the Jewish community in Early Modern Europe. Thus, the Eastern European Jewish historiography was different to the Western European. It was based not on a Western European *contrat social* but upon a *contrat des sociétés*. The Warsaw Institute of Jewish Studies formed a symbol for these efforts and became a vital place to educate young Jews to become an integral part to the Jewish community. Majer Balaban (1877–1942), the director of the Warsaw Institute, became the *spiritus rector* for that approach to Jewish history and the teacher of many students.

The first contribution written by Louise Hecht, however, turns to the Bohemian historiography (33–61). After Jewish historians had begun to write about general Jewish history, they gradually turned to the history of their native Bohemia. As an example that these efforts were sometimes pushed hardly, Hecht exposes the case of the Ramshak-Chronicle, an supposedly ancient Chronicle from Prague. Only in 1929 it became clear that the chronicle was a fake. The Bohemian Jewish maskil Markus Meir Fischer (1788–1858) had faked it as a medieval source book in order to prove the long (co-)existence of Jews and Christians in Bohemia. Hecht concludes that such a falsification of history must be understood in the very context of nation-building in Bohemia when political ideals and loyalties were important.

Subsequently Carsten Schapkow tells about the picture of Iberian-Sephardic and Polish-Jewish life worlds in the works of Heinrich Graetz (63–86). Schapkow emphasizes that the horizon and benchmark for Graetz had always been the situation of the Jews in the German speaking countries. Moreover since the Haskalah existed the picture of integrated medieval Sephardim on the Iberian Peninsula whereas the Jews from Poland were classified to be uncivilized and reactionary. According to the positive image of the Sephardim, Graetz tried to show that the Jews had already been an integral part of European neighboring societies. The Polish Jewry served Graetz as a counter-image instead. However, Graetz' reservations toward the Polish Jews did not reach East Central Europe. The translator of Graetz' "History of the Jews" Shaul Pinhas Rabinowitch (1845–1910) left out the nasty parts on Polish Jews in the first Hebrew translation.

In the following Heidemarie Petersen illuminates the reception of Heinrich Graetz' "History of the Jews" in Hungary (87–98). Between 1906 and 1908 a shortened and revised version of Graetz' "History" was published in Hungarian. Petersen exposes that the whole

“intellectual elite” of the Hungarian Jewry was concerned with the translation of Graetz’ work and also added own parts on the Hungarian Jewish history. Thus, Petersen concludes, the translation into Hungarian was a creative adoption of Graetz’ “History” and an emblematic mnemonic symbol (98).

Kerstin Armbrorst-Weihs informs about the Polish-Jewish historiography in Russia, especially about the contribution of Galician historians to the “Eврејskaja Starina” (Engl. “Jewish Antiquity”), published by the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society in Saint Petersburg since 1909 (99–118). The connections between the Eastern European and the Russian Jewish historiography ended only in 1914. Armbrorst-Weihs especially focuses on the contributions of Majer Balaban, Moses Schorr (1874–1941) and Ignacy Schipper (1884–1943) who were appointed by Simon Dubnow to write for the encyclopedia. She analyzes the main topics of the contributions of Balaban, Schorr and Schipper as well as the internal controversies of Polish Jewish historiography, embodied in the “Eврејskaja Starina”.

Also the editor François Guesnet deals with a Jewish historian from Poland, the today almost unknown Ezriel N. Frenk (1863–1924) from Warsaw (119–145). Guesnet provides a first sketch of Frenk’s life and his work. Frenk exclusively wrote and published in Yiddish and Hebrew. In his historical works he aimed for a synthesis of different Eastern European historical patterns and kept his childhood connections to Hasidism.

Natalia Aleksium portrays Majer Balaban’s “training a new generation of Jewish historians” at the Warsaw Institute of Jewish Studies (147–176). Majer Balaban was the key figure of Polish-Jewish historiography for over a decade since the foundation of the Institute in 1927. He kept a critical distance to the German speaking *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its historians and encouraged his students to consider archival sources. The power of historical knowledge and history itself as kind of “sense of mission” and the sense of community were basic in the understanding and teaching of Balaban. Aleksium illuminates the social background of Balaban’s students and their career. Only a very few historians Balaban had educated, survived the Shoah.

In the following contribution Cornelia Aust focuses on the historical narratives of economic history of Jews in Eastern Europe (177–201). Unlike in Western European Jewish historiography, economic history was an important research field in the interwar period Eastern Europe. At the same time the historical research on economic history was deeply routed in Marxist theories as well as in debates over the works of Werner Sombart. Moreover the works reflected on discourses about utility and deleteriousness of Jewish economic acting in history. As a concluding remark, Aust suggests a new approach for the writing of economic history of the Jews and argues for a systematic analysis of the

mercantile networks in East Central Europe.

Subsequently Stefan Litt focuses on the cultural contexts, the research interests and intentions of the editors of Jewish sources around 1900 (203–222). Among others Litt highlights that a strong emphasis in Eastern European Jewish historiography laid on the documentation of Jewish history through Jewish sources.

Guy Miron reflects on revisiting Jewish history in the Hungarian Jewish press between 1938 and 1944 (223–247). In contemplation of death political loyalties, ideologies, the history of emancipation and assimilation to Hungarian society were debated by four Jewish camps, the neolog, orthodox, liberal, and a national Jewish camp.

In the last contribution Krzysztof A. Makowski addresses the historiography on the Jews in Poznan during the separation of the land 1772 until 1918 (249–283). By then Jews were living among two majority groups, Poles and Germans. As Makowski describes, the historiography that existed only since the 1880ies was dependent of the present situation of the authors and thus differing Polish, Jewish and German estimations shaped the view on the past of Jews in Poland.

Ismar Elbogen stated in 1930 that Jewish historiography, also in East Central Europe, was increasingly attached to professional historians. By then they had begun to exploit the archives Graetz could not use at his time. Moreover Elbogen noticed that Jewish historians had gradually turned to legal, social, economic and cultural history.³ The anthology proves these observations of Ismar Elbogen and represents moreover the current state of research. Each contribution focuses not only on outstanding scholars but also substantially illuminates the specific contexts, milieus, ideologies and omissions in which Jewish history in East Central Europe was written until WW II. Besides the topics mentioned above, further contextualization of Jewish historiography in East Central Europe could also deal with the material culture, i.e. the medias, practices and ways of (historical) knowledge, including a study of the recipients, children's education, especially for girls and for women, or the presentation of Jewish historical knowledge in (Jewish) libraries and museums. On the whole, the book gives an interesting summary of various aspects of Jewish historiography of that time and place.

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³ Elbogen, "Von Graetz bis Dubnow", 23.