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### The Study of Jewish Publishing

In 1948, the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction published a *Tentative List of Jewish Publishers of Judaica and Hebraica in Axis-Occupied Countries*. It was the fourth and last in the Commission's series of "Tentative Lists."

According to Prof. Salo Baron, the purpose of these publications was ". . . to give an account of the scope and richness of Jewish activities in Europe during the last pre-war years and help in documenting restitution claims on behalf of European Jewry" (Introduction, p. 5). Stressing that the list was "still tentative and subject to corrections," Prof. Baron made the following important observation: ". . . in contrast to Jewish printing, the history of Jewish publishing has never been subject to careful scholarly scrutiny" (1.c., p. 6).

The list is actually a directory, arranged by countries and cities. The information for each publisher includes dates, areas of specialization, and sources in which the information was found. It is an excellent starting point for the study of Jewish publishing, but by its very nature as a quick reference source, it can only underscore the importance of a study in depth such as that which was undertaken by Ms. Kühn-Ludewig.

This small book, entitled (in English translation) "*To enrich the book market with the best works*": *Tracing the Yiddish Publishing House TOMOR, Vilna, 1927–1939*, is one of the best documented and, at the same time, most emotionally moving studies on the little-known subject of Yiddish publishing in interwar Poland. The author, Maria Kühn-Ludewig, is a research librarian and contributor to the series "Kleine historische Reihe" [Small historical series], which appears as a supplement to the library journal *Laurentius*, edited by Raimund Dehmlow in Hannover, Germany.

Ms. Kühn-Ludewig became interested in the fate of Jewish libraries and books during the Holocaust after seeing the play *Ghetto*, by Israeli playwright Joshua Sobol (personal communication). [The play has been published in German (Sobol, 1984) and in English (Sobol, 1989).] One of the characters in the play is Herman Kruk, the Head of the Vilna Ghetto Library, who left a diary and other important writings before he perished in the last days of the Holocaust. (Kruk's diary was published in Yiddish in 1961, and an English translation is scheduled to be published soon.) His work, writings, and tragic death became the subject of Ludewig's studies, published in volumes 2 and 3 of the "Kleine historische Reihe."

While studying the pre-Holocaust activities of Herman Kruk, who was the head of the famous Grosser library in Warsaw and the author of numerous articles on the state of Yiddish readership and libraries, Ms. Kühn-Ludewig discovered the existence of a flourishing Yiddish cultural life in interwar Poland, with a rich press, hundreds of new books published annually, and numerous local circulating libraries. However, there was precious little information on those suppliers of newsprint: Yiddish publishing houses.

### The TOMOR Publishing House

A 15-page publisher's announcement entitled "Prospekt 1931," issued by the firm "TOMOR," with an address in Vilna (which Ms. Kühn-Ludewig discovered in the YIVO Library), became the starting point of her study. In the context of the devastation left by the Holocaust it became for her "a rare document comparable to a message delivered from a shipwreck by 'bottle mail' [Flaschenpost]—a small fragment revealing a larger whole—Yiddish publishing in interwar Poland . . ." (p. 1). With the expertise of a research librarian, Ms. Kühn-Ludewig traced the firm's book announcement, published at a considerably later date in a journal, as well as some reviews of the publish-

er's books. These data enabled her to establish a complete (or almost complete) list of the publisher's books. She could still find most of them in major libraries. They provided needed details regarding the external history of the publishing enterprise: the chronology of titles published, the number of titles per year, the extent of each issue (in terms of the number of pages per volume and number of volumes per title), the prices and changes in pricing policy, the printing shops used, the kind of binding selected (soft or hard covers) and, finally, the selection of book distributors.

In the absence of the publisher's archives, these details helped to trace the development of Tomor's publishing program, establish a picture of the magnitude of the enterprise, and provide insight into the firm's problems of management and finances. These details, presented in charts, are followed by another series of tables analyzing the content of the published books by the categories of fiction and nonfiction, as well as Yiddish originals and translations.

The results of this analysis are most interesting and significant. Nonfiction was favored, with preference given to 20th-century publications dealing with social and economic issues of the times. A surprising result was the discovery that translations formed 70% of the published material. They derived—in descending order—from Russian, French, and German literatures.

From this content analysis, in combination with the statement of the publisher's goals, epitomized by the motto at the head of Ms. Kühn-Ludewig's title, there emerges a picture of a publishing house with high aspirations, whose aim was to raise Yiddish publishing to a level that could satisfy the intellectual elite of the contemporaneous Jewish society. Tomor's owners and sponsors were idealistic people, true lovers of Yiddish, adherents of the ideology of Jewish cultural autonomy, with Yiddish as its foundation.

A very helpful feature for understanding the milieu of the publisher is the biographical dictionary of "authors, translators, reviewers" that Ms. Kühn-Ludewig provided. Translators, almost all of them from Vilna, dominate the list. It is this reviewer's strong opinion that two of them were especially active and influential in the undertaking: A. J. Goldschmidt and Falk Heilperin, noted scholars and writers in their own right. Both of them needed the money paid to translators, and both had more than two titles to their credit. It is very likely that one or both of them were the programmers and consultants for the publisher. Goldschmidt was the translator of the first and fifth items of the total of seven titles published in the first year of Tomor's activities, 1927. Falk Heilperin collaborated with the linguist Max Weinreich on a book of Yiddish grammar (Heilperin, 1928-29), and it may not be an accident that two of Weinreich's books were published in the initial two years of Tomor's existence (Weinreich, 1927, 1928).

History of literature was a special domain of Falk Heilperin, who translated for Tomor two monumental books in this field (Karpeles, 1927; Kogan, 1927), both issued in the first year of Tomor's publishing. In the third year, 1929, the first volume of Israel Zinberg's monumental *History of Jewish Literature* (Zinberg, 1929-37) appeared. The participation of the two scholars in Tomor's activities extended, most likely, to other aspects of publishing activity, such as the descriptive material which appeared in book catalogs and advertisements; these were on an exceptionally high level.

The works of Weinreich and Zinberg, written originally in Yiddish and first published by Tomor, were major contributions to the field of Jewish literature in general and Yiddish literature specifically. These publications were an instant success, highly praised by contemporaneous critics. The first three volumes of Zinberg's *History* were quickly sold out, and a second edition appeared already in the years 1933-36 (Zinberg, 1933-36). The work was not forgotten in the post-World War II period. Two Yiddish reprints were published, in New York (Zinberg, 1943) and Buenos Aires (Zinberg, 1964-70). There were also two translations, in Hebrew (Zinberg, 1955-60) and English (Zinberg, 1972-78).

In her biographical note on Zinberg, Ms. Kühn-Ludewig explains the dramatic circumstances under which he did his research and writing. Zinberg was a chemical engineer who worked, as did everyone else in the Soviet Union, for the government. His research on Jewish literature was

a private activity, conducted in the late, after-work hours. This research was not viewed favorably by the Soviet authorities, and sending the manuscripts to Poland was a difficult and risky undertaking. It was difficult on the receiving side as well, as the Polish authorities of Vilna, in which Tomor was located, reluctantly admitted materials sent from the Soviet Union. Considering these circumstances, the eight volumes that Tomor published constituted a miracle. But while the critics praised Zinberg's work highly, they failed to appreciate Tomor's effort and its accomplishment. The publisher was quite bitter about this, as Ms. Kühn-Ludewig discovered in the testimony of a contemporary (pp. 44-45).

The tragic end of Israel Zinberg was to be expected: He was arrested and deported, and his papers, including the completed ninth and final volume of the history of Jewish literature, were seized. It was only in the 1960s, after Stalin's death, when access to the archives of the Soviet Union was eased somewhat, that a group of American scholars succeeded in obtaining a microfilm of the ninth volume, which was subsequently published in New York (Zinberg, 1966). But even in this publication, which completed the monumental history, the accomplishment of Tomor was hardly noticed, as Ms. Kühn-Ludewig points out; the name Tomor is only once noted briefly in the introduction.

Another remarkable publishing achievement of Tomor should be mentioned here: the series of five novels entitled *Ameratsim* [Ignoramuses] by Zalman Shneour (1938-39). Shneour was a great Hebrew poet, but his prose was originally written in Yiddish and usually appeared in installments in the Yiddish press throughout the world, primarily in the New York daily *Forverts* [Forward]. That Tomor succeeded in collecting and editing this vast scattered material in one year, the last year of the Jewish prewar era in Poland, constitutes another miracle.

It may be of interest to quote what Zalman Shneour himself remarked about this in his short foreword to his novel *Der Mamzer* [The Illegitimate Child] (Shneour, 1957). Ms. Kühn-Ludewig includes the novel in the list of titles that Tomor announced but never published owing to the outbreak of World War II, but she had no opportunity to see the later edition. The words of Shneour are quoted below at considerable length, because they constitute a remarkable document of the times, as well as of what happened to the work of a Jewish author who himself happened to survive:

"... In its time the novel *Noah Pandre* (in five volumes) was a rousing success in Yiddish literature. It was published in nine Yiddish newspapers all over the world; it was translated into several European languages; was performed in the Yiddish theaters in Warsaw, New York, Buenos Aires, and in Hebrew in Israel. The author believes that the novel *Mamzer* is also a great work. ... But every work, like every individual, has its fate. The fate of *Mamzer* was as tragic as the fate of *Noah Pandre* was happy. ... After it was finished in installments, the novel was fully revised, and in its new, carefully rethought form, sent to the publisher [Leyb] Shur (publishing house "Tomor" in Vilna-Warsaw). But the Nazi invasion destroyed the manuscript, together with many millions of Jewish lives and cultural treasures, such as the Strashun Library in Vilna, and the novel did not appear in book form until now. It was quite a number of years before the lost series (cycle) *Moshke Mamzer* was restored from the partially rescued material and from fragments of newspapers ..."

(Translated from Yiddish by D.A.)

### Biography of the Publisher

The biography of the last owner of Tomor, whose relationship to the first, Joseph Kamermacher, could not be established, is the concluding part of Ms. Kühn-Ludewig's book. In contradistinction to the objective tone of the preceding part, the last part is clearly lyrical and personal in nature. After stressing the point that the change of ownership did not affect the initial orientation and direction of Tomor, the author paints a picture of a man, a loner whose world was Yiddish printing and the Yiddish book. The Warsaw environment of the mid- and late thirties was very different from that of Vilna in the late twenties. The assimilation of the young took its toll; Yiddish publishing and book consumption shrank considerably. But the astonishing fact was that Leyb Shur was not giving in: Tomor published almost as many titles in 1939 as it did in 1927.

Ms. Kühn-Ludewig's feeling for the tragedy in Leyb Shur's life is expressed in the following strong words: "It was not the crisis of the Yiddish book market that would remove Leyb Shur from the project of his life. It had to be Hitler's attack on Poland which changed all." The narrative of the last years of his life continues. In the Warsaw Ghetto, Leyb Shur found for himself another mission—that of rescuing discarded Yiddish books. But when even this activity became impossible, he did not wait for Hitler to end his life. He put an end to it himself.

From the perspective of time, the act of Leyb Shur acquires the dimensions of a symbol: It was the final end of a whole world of ideas, beliefs, and hopes that the man represented. All that remained after Shur, Ms. Kühn-Ludewig concludes, was a scattering of books, most of them already forgotten. Yet, Ms. Kühn-Ludewig's contribution should leave us with the hope that memories of worthy causes and worthy people should survive somehow, somewhere.

### Bibliographic Data

Mrs. Kühn-Ludewig's book is richly illustrated by facsimile reproductions of Tomor's title-pages. The original Yiddish titles are Romanized in the text and various listings. The system of Romanization is not very consistent, however. It appears to be a combination of German and American schemes, unless there is a German standard with which the present reviewer is not familiar. For example, in the title "Di geshichte fun der literatur bay yidn," the word *geshikhte*, which appears quite often in Tomor's titles, is spelled in a mixture of American and German orthography: the letter "shin" is transcribed à la ALA/LC [American Library Association/Library of Congress Romanization] by "sh," while the letter "khof" is consistently represented by "ch," although the standard American Romanization for this letter in Yiddish would be "kh." This is also the case for the word "tochter," which in American standard Romanization would be rendered "tokhter." The adjective "yidisher" in a Yiddish context should be spelled with a single "d." The spelling of personal names consistently follows the Romanization provided in the books by copyright or printing shop notices. This reviewer noticed only one misreading of a title: the title of David Reubeni's chronicle is *Seyfer Hazikhroynes* (in translation, "The Book of Memoirs"), and not "Sefer Haskores (Memorial Services)," as it is given on p. 21.

Ms. Kühn-Ludewig is to be congratulated for her pioneering work in a neglected area of Jewish Studies.

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