Yiddish Versions of Early German Prose Novels

It has often been recorded that a number of the early German prose novels were, from the sixteenth century onwards, adapted for Jewish readers; but the extent to which this secular fiction must have flourished in the Jewish communities has been little realised. Six of these adaptations into Western Yiddish (Kaiser Oktavian, Fortunatus, Die Sieben Weisen Meister, Die Schoene Magelona, Till Eulenspiegel and Schildbuerger), are still extant to-day, most of them in more than one version, and there is definite bibliographical evidence that other titles once existed. Some of these exceedingly rare books perished in the recent holocaust, others were already no longer available in the nineteenth century. Leo Landau asserted that nearly all the topics of the German Volksbuch exist also in “Hebrew German”.¹ This is a rather sweeping statement for which there is insufficient evidence, but there must have been other Volksbuch adaptations which have not survived.

German scholars have, in general, never investigated these books and consequently know very little about them. They usually rely on Jewish sources for their information, which is often in the nature of scant bibliographical references. Occasionally a degree of Judaization has been assumed² which our books certainly do not reveal. It is undoubtedly true that a considerable number of Volksbuch motifs can be found in the stories of eastern European Jewry, and in many cases this is due to the adaptation of definite German texts. In fact, it is a testimony to the peculiar rôle of the Jews as transmitters of culture that many oriental motifs which owe their presence in European literature to the activity of medieval Jewish translators³ here made their appearance in Hebrew letters for the second time, thenceforth to amalgamate with the then growing Jewish folklore of Eastern Europe. But there is no instance of a story being adapted to actual Jewish conditions when a book as such was made accessible to the Jewish reading public. That may have been the case with the Yiddish short story, but never with the prose novel.

Indeed, there is no reason why it should have been so. When German literature borrowed the early French prose novel, the plot

² L. Mackensen, Die deutschen Volksbuecher, Leipzig, 1927, p. 31.
³ M. Steinschneider, Die hebraischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher, Berlin, 1893.
was not transferred to German conditions, though the translations
did reveal the immense social changes of the times and it is this that
makes their study so very fascinating. Neither are the Yiddish versions
without significance in this respect, but in a Jewish setting most novels
would in any case lose all pretence to realism. Many depicted a world
of action alien to the Jew yet tempting to him; from much of it the
population of the ghettos was isolated, and precisely this was one of
the great attractions that this genre held for the simple reader. Thus
the effect of the occasional Judaization of the characters is inten-
tionally comic, and the Jewish adapters made no attempt to remould
the actual story beyond that. It is, moreover, improbable that many
of them would have been capable of such a task.

These books have, then, more commonly been regarded by Jewish
scholars as transcriptions of German editions; and however dubious
the appositeness of this terminology, such an attitude is understand-
able enough when we compare them with the earlier Yiddish litera-
ture as represented by a *Shmuel-bukh* or a *Bovo-bukh*, or with the
contemporary Yiddish short story. Only fleeting attention has been
paid to some of the texts, and where collation with German editions
has been undertaken it appears to have been casual, and generally
restricted to the beginning and end of the book. Other adaptations
have certainly never been examined at all. A more careful collation
of German and Yiddish texts can, however, be very rewarding.
Admittedly, no new genre of staggering wealth emerges from such an
investigation. Most of the books are more in the nature of close
translations, but they contain matter of considerable interest, and
they have never received the attention they merit.

Some attention has, of course, been paid to them by both German
and Jewish scholars. Wolf, v.d.Hagen, Gruenbaum, Lotze, Landau,
Perles, Karpeles, Ave-Lallemant, and others have recorded or de-
scribed some of them; in particular the descriptions by Steinschneider4
and Erik5 must be mentioned. It was, however, the German-Jewish
scholar Meir Schueler who in some articles, and particularly in a
survey of early secular literature,6 has dealt more extensively with

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4 M. Steinschneider, *Juedisch-Deutsche Literatur*, in *Serapeum*, vol. 25,
5 M. Erik, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur*, Warsaw, 1928, pp. 323-31;
6 M. Schueler, *Beitraege zur Kenntnis der alten juedisch-deutschen Profan-
literatur*, in *Festschrift zum 75 jahrfigen Bestehen der Realschule mit Lyceum der
YIDDISH VERSIONS OF EARLY GERMAN PROSE NOVELS

some of the Yiddish versions. Unfortunately, most of the books were not accessible to him, and he often had to be content with a late eighteenth-century edition, or even a fragment. Of the existence of other adaptations he was not aware; thus, of six Yiddish versions of Die Sieben Weisen Meister, four were known to him, only two of which he was able to procure. He examined certain passages only of the texts, and most of the deviations of interest escaped his notice; that he did not collate the books with the relevant contemporary German editions is quite obvious from some of his observations. He has also drawn certain conclusions as to bowdlerization, moral tendencies, and supposed Jewish tactfulness with regard to Christian details, on the basis of his knowledge of late eighteenth-century texts; these are not at all borne out by the earlier texts.

It may therefore be claimed that a detailed investigation to show precisely how these versions depart from the German originals has hitherto not been made. A confrontation with the contemporary German editions clearly establishes that the extent of deviation has been underestimated, and that significant alterations occur in books which have been regarded as mere transpositions of German editions. It goes without saying that editorial attention to passages containing a specifically Christian element is the predominant feature of these adaptations, but they reveal different techniques, gradual elimination and a variety of attitudes—conscientious alteration to an astonishing degree of laxity. Although the Judaization of the texts is always slight, some books reveal an impact of Jewish life going beyond the purely religious context. Moreover, our bibliographical information is incomplete and sometimes incorrect; some editions have not been recorded, and others are not, as had been assumed, mere reprints, but represent further stages of adaptation. There is not a single German Volksbuch in Yiddish which does not, in addition to omissions, show further deviation motivated by the Jewish faith of the writer. However, most of the books evince alterations going beyond the religious sphere; new motifs and details have been added in many texts. It is by no means an original literature, but the adaptations are never mere replicas of German texts, and the term "transcription" is tenable neither from a textual nor from a linguistic point of view.

We shall call these books "Yiddish versions"; in the light of modern Yiddish research such notions as "High-German in Hebrew

\[Ibid., \text{pp. 101-22.}\]
letters” cannot for one moment be entertained, even when, as is here the case, the individual text is very closely related to a German original. Yet while the earlier attitude was manifestly wrong these adaptations are, unlike original Yiddish creations, much less easy to place. We know that early Yiddish texts never represent a reliable picture of the stage of the Yiddish language as spoken. There was always a marked influence of German in the West, and naturally this will have been much stronger when a definite German text was transferred. At least one book (Fortunatus) appears to have been set up by a Jewish type-setter from a contemporary German edition. No doubt the Jewish readers interpreted it in accordance with their own pronunciation, but does this make it pure Yiddish? A few books do not contain a single term of exclusive Yiddish usage; in some, German expressions alternate with others then current amongst Jews only. Sometimes the German text proved stronger, sometimes the language of the Jewish adapter superimposed itself. Hebrew words which had long since become an integral part of everyday Jewish speech are rare in most texts, some are altogether without them. Only in the Schildbuerger does their (very inconsistent) use approximate to one per cent. From some books, printed in Amsterdam, the use of the Holy Language was deliberately excluded, and a compromise between Dutch Yiddish and the Yiddish current in other parts of Europe was consciously aimed at, so as to ensure a wide appeal. To apply to some of our books the term Kunstsprache is thus fully justified. A comparison of the adaptations of the texts with the Yiddish short story or with Jewish documents of any relevant stage, or even with their own accompanying prologues and epilogues, shows how far removed from spoken Yiddish these versions must have been. Whilst they all correspond in varying degrees to the Western Yiddish of their time, many of them would appear to be linguistic hybrids.

When these particular texts have to be reproduced in Latin characters they have to be transliterated. Only transliteration can be considered as an absolutely reliable yardstick when one is making accessible versions which vary considerably and originated over a period of three hundred years. This makes difficult reading, and for this article an alternative method has been adopted; quotations are trans-

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8 J. Fischer, Das Jiddische und sein Verhältnis zu den deutschen Mundarten, Leipzig, 1936, p. 64.

9 See Joseph Maarssen’s interesting preface to an adaptation of tales from the Decamerone, Amsterdam, 1710.
cribed in accordance with a standardised late Western Yiddish phonology. Naturally such transcription has to be tentative and will not always be correct, since our knowledge of western Yiddish is still very incomplete. The relevant German quotations which precede them stem from German sixteenth or seventeenth-century editions which most likely served the first Jewish adapter, or come closest of those accessible to the Yiddish text.

Unfortunately, a survey of the Yiddish adaptations has to be restricted by factors outside the student’s control. I have for three years been engaged in a most frustrating search for surviving Yiddish editions. It is evident that some very rare items are now lost, including Yiddish versions of Herzog Ernst (Fuerth, 1597 and later editions), Florio und Biancafora (Offenbach, 1714), Prinzessin Helene (Frankfurt a. Oder, 1782-3) and a third Yiddish version of the Eulenspiegel which was printed in Frankfurt a. Main in the early eighteenth century. Yet it would appear that the six extant titles are representative of the whole range of Jewish adaptation, and in what follows we can observe all the trends which emerge in the making of this literature available for Jewish readers.

The Oktavian is an example of conscientious and extensive religious alteration. It is also the oldest extant example of this genre, having been written down by the Bavarian Jewish scribe Yitzkhok Reutlingen and completed early in 1580. The (incomplete) manuscript is in the possession of the Bavarian State Library (Munich, Cod.Hebr. 100, ff. 1-66). In some ways the book seems a surprising choice for a Jewish adapter. Its theme of suffering innocence, the tale of the calumniated and exiled wife, undoubtedly had its appeal for him; but this story is set against the background of a religious struggle not likely to stir a Jewish reader to partiality. Christian France battles for her survival against the enemies of the faith, who swarm in from Babylonia to ravage the land. The nature of the narrative, and the effusive piety of the characters, induced Reutlingen to introduce changes on almost every page. Although in his adaptation one of the contending parties remains definitely Christian, religious observances tend to be somewhat vague. From the main hero, however, he removed all Christian traits, and occasionally he even imbued him with Jewish characteristics. Naturally the result is quite ambiguous, since he is an imperial prince fighting for Christian France. Thus, as an obvious

10 I gratefully acknowledge here the generous assistance of Dr S. A. Birnbaum, London.
witticism, his royal scion saddles his horse even before he had time to recite the traditional Jewish morning prayers:

1548 Strassburg
sattelt seinen gaul [27a] 1580
zootylt zain pfert, ee ér talys
un tìlyn bênsă [16b]

and the hero’s Mohammedan bride is willing to embrace the Jewish faith:

den Christlichen glauben an-
nemen, vnd wie ein gute Chri-
stin mich halten. [69a]
den Christlichen glauben oon nemyn,
un an frumy iëdin verdyn. [49b]

The adapter removed a reference to swine from a statement intended to elicit admiration for the hero’s great physical strength:

er ist stark, er würt feisste sew
vail ér is štark. [12a]
er ist stark, er wiirt feisste sew
vail ér is štark. [21b]

The many prayers which occur in the text were considerably altered. In one, where protection from a lioness is sought, we find an apt reference to Daniel introduced.

bey allen seinen heyligen die
bey jhm in dem hymmel seind,
das du weder kraftt noch mach-
te über mich nit habest. [18b]
du zolst kaan gyvalt ibër mix
hoobyn cu šeedigyn, alys di
leevyn dooniyyl in der gruu-
byn niks teetyn. [10a]

Christian pilgrims are consistently referred to as merchants:

In dem selben schiff was ein
frommer bilger. [13a]
In dem selben schiff was ein
unter dyn zelbigyn kaaf-lait
im šif voor aanër [6b]

Cathedrals are transformed into fortresses:

er hette sanct Dionysius Mün-
ster angehaben zu bawen.
hot erst an gyvaltigyn festyn
oon heebyn cu baayn. [19a]

While in some adaptations of German texts Christlich, Christ etc. very occasionally survive, they disappeared entirely in the Oktavian. Frequently, they were replaced:

Die Fürsten..der Christen
di firstyn..unteréd edym12
[30a] [19a]

Naturally we can here single out some only of the many peculiarities of this adaptation. Thus it is noteworthy that where, in the German text, the heathen enemy is referred to as the “cursed infidel” or “Turkish dog” the Jewish adapter has dispensed almost entirely with these terms. This is perhaps not surprising, in view of the much more favourable treatment accorded to the Jews in some Mohammedan

11 Hebrew Tallith = praying-shawl; tefillin = phylacteries; Yiddish bensyn = bless.
12 The name Edom-Esau was identified with Byzantium-Rome; hence = Christendom.
lands at the time. On the other hand we observe a much sterner attitude towards the muddled notion of Mohammedan "idolatry" as portrayed in the original. Here the Jewish scribe, in a curious manner, avoids introducing the name of God:

\[\text{mein Gott Machomet [29a] main bok maxmet [18a]}
\]
\[\text{O Gott Juppiter vnnd Venus oo bok iupyter un veenis [52b] [36b]}\]

Reutlingen also added a rhymed epilogue, which, with its strange blend of alien fiction (so much frowned upon by the rabbis), general moralisation, and Jewish piety, is a particularly good example of the method by which the scribes sought to justify their occupation and to render their works more respectable. By his painstaking avoidance of reference to Christian observances and his many other alterations this adapter has produced a version which differs noticeably, and often in a curious manner, from the German original. Only a few decades after the publication of the German Oktavian (1535), there was to circulate amongst the Jewish communities a text which constitutes the only real variant of the German Volksbuch ever to originate in Germany.

The Fortunatus, on the other hand, shows a greater preparedness to compromise and a more limited deviation from its German parent. The only surviving edition (Frankfurt a. M., 1699) does not appear to have been based on a Yiddish manuscript. It was probably set up from a contemporary German edition by a Jewish type-setter employed by a Christian printer (the municipal laws of Frankfurt forbade the setting up of a printing press by the Jews). Linguistically, it is the closest of all the adaptations to a High-German text.

This story of a burgher-Croesus seems to have enjoyed a fairly brief popularity in the Ghetto; it is the only one of the Yiddish versions of which no eighteenth century edition is known to have existed. Our adaptation differs but slightly from the German text, and primarily in its omission of reference to certain Christian rites such as baptism:

\[\text{1680 (?) der ward getauft, und geheissen Fortunatus. [4]}\]
\[\text{1699 der vard gyhaasyyn fortunatus [2b]}\]

The equation of the concepts "human" and "Christian" was not retained in the Jewish version:

\[12a\] We have here the oldest literary example of this substitution. For further evidence of this usage, see J. J. Schudt, Juedische Merckwurdigkeiten, Franckfurt und Leiptzig, 1714, part 2, p. 249. Schudt quotes der Goym ihr Bock.
so . . . verlaugnet er den Christlichen Glauben . . . und haette er hundert Christen er-mordet, so waer er sicher gewesen. [26]

In some cases, most inappropriately in the context, the word "German" appears:

dass die Heyden keinem Christen weder treu noch hold seyn [89]
doos di haadyn kaanyn tai-

Once only, when the hero endows a church foundation, do we find a whole sentence replaced:

stift da eine Probstey, und zwelff Pfaffen, die solten all-
zeit singen und lesen. [71]

Although this is certainly not a specifically Jewish idea, it is yet not without significance that it perhaps occurred to a Jewish type-setter at Frankfurt on the spur of the moment. Quite a number of Christian details were, however, not omitted and on the whole this version is religiously not sufficiently neutral even to be ambiguous. Yet it does at least contain some singular alterations.

Finally, as in the other adaptations of a German Volksbuch, there appear here in a greatly modified form in Hebrew print motifs (for instance, from the Gesta Romanorum)¹³ which had been transmitted centuries earlier from the Orient by the unflagging activity of Jewish translators.

Of no other Volksbuch are there so many Yiddish versions as of Die Sieben Weisen Meister. Throughout two centuries this story again and again caught the imagination of a Jewish adapter. Quite apart from two early manuscripts seven printed versions are recorded, and of the five surviving editions only one is a simple reprint. This story, of Indian origin, was probably transmitted to European literature through the agency of a medieval Jewish translator.¹⁴ A Hebrew version was printed at least three times.¹⁵ In Hebrew it was of no use to the mass of Jewish readers, but it is noteworthy that all the Yiddish versions go back to German and later Dutch texts. In most cases this

¹⁵ Constantinople, 1516; Venice, 1544 and 1608.
must have been as much a matter of the adapter’s competence as of his taste.

Two late sixteenth-century manuscripts of the novel have survived; both are incomplete. One is in the possession of the Bavarian State Library (Munich, Cod. Hebr. 100, ff. 90-132), the other is owned by Dr J. Maitlis of London. The first printed edition appeared in Basle in 1602. These are three independent adaptations, based on contemporary German editions which differ little from each other. All the later Yiddish versions now extant (Amsterdam, 1677; Berlin, 1707, reprinted Offenbach, 1714; Amsterdam 1776) are, directly or indirectly, based on Dutch versions which are very similar to the German texts, the Christian elements being practically identical. This affords us an opportunity to study their treatment by the several Jewish adapters; and in their range from relative strictness and casual elimination to laxity and disparagement, our books display the differing approach of scribes and publishers, in one case even within the same manuscript. The Munich MS. was started by one scribe and completed by another. The first omitted the Christian element more carefully and shows himself more squeamish than most of his fraternity; the other, apart from one notable alteration, took the Christian expressions quite unconcernedly, even allowing a reference to the Virgin Mary to stand.

Most of the adapters did not omit casual references to church-going, but sometimes we find witticisms or deliberate alteration:

1554, Frankfurt a. M.
darnach gieng die Fraw eins mals in die Kirchen, da begegenet jr jr Mutter. [27b]
dérnoox gink di fraa ains mool in di šuul[16] doo bygeege- nyt ir ir mutër (1602) [42b]
azou gyfiil ys auf an caat, doos ir mutër ir bygeegeynyt, um auf an lusthouf cu geen (1677). [17b]

Occasionally nearly all Yiddish editions take objection to a passage. Thus, a tale-telling magpie which is taught Hebrew in the relevant German editions (Hebrew and Latin in the Dutch texts), is debarrèd from achieving this accomplishment by all adapters but one. The others will doubtless have regarded it as a profanation of the Holy Language.

One of the anecdotes related in this book contains a particularly

[16] i.e. Synagogue.
strong Christian element. It tells of a king who besieges Rome in order to carry away the remains of the apostles. The relevant leaves are missing in the Munich MS., and one may conjecture that the fact of their not having survived is not accidental. In the second manuscript the tale is deliberately curtailed, the king’s erotic escapades alone remaining. Only one printed version is relatively faithful to the original. All the other adapters censored and altered.

Some adapters were not very tactful in their choice of a substitute, and references to Christian “idolatry” can be found in other passages. But derogatory references to Christianity will be mentioned in another context.

Amongst the many alterations which we find in our texts, by no means all are of a religious character. It has been maintained that Yiddish adaptations eschew the obscene and bowdlerize their originals; and that the very choice of subject matter reveals how the true spirit of Jewish literature has not remained without effect in the field of secular writing.18 Such conclusions were reached on the basis of a knowledge of late eighteenth-century versions, for not one of the earlier ones reveals any restraint. Indeed, the continual adaptation of Die Sieben Weisen Meister over two centuries attests the extent to which the erotic and the lascivious were appreciated. For at least one of the early adapters (1602) the book still did not reach what he thought to be the required standard of titillation for his public. He consequently embroidered certain passages in the story of Ludwig und Alexander, a tale of selfless friendship which concludes the book. The effect of these alterations is that one only of the two friends, Ludwig of Israel, remains true and faithful, while his companion, Alexander of Egypt, proves susceptible to temptation; some psychological factors were no doubt at work here. Whereas Ludwig never touches Alexander’s bride when, in his stead, he marries her, Alexander enjoys the favours of Ludwig’s future wife. This gives an incongruous

17 Hebrew shedh = demon.
18 M. Schueler, Beiträge, p. 87.
twist to the story, and at certain points the language is definitely pornographic.

With their many alterations, and with their variety of rhymed prefaces and epilogues, these adaptations of *Die Sieben Weisen Meister* form a particularly illuminating chapter in the utilization of secular literature for the benefit of the Jewish masses.

The Yiddish version of *Die Schoene Magelona* is a unique example of a whole German prose novel having been adapted into rhyme by an anonymous Jewish poetaster. For a century and a half edition after edition was printed in the ghettos of Germany and beyond. Four of them (Fuerth, 1698; Prague, 1705-11; Offenbach, 1714; Fuerth, 1791) still survive. The title of the Yiddish adaptation is *Sigmund un Magelene*. Since in the German version it is stressed that the hero takes his name from St Peter, the Jewish adapter changes it altogether.

*Sigmund un Magelene* is an epigonal work, and the poet tended to apply the techniques of the Jewish minstrels of the past. The first stanzas in particular are reminiscent of works like the *Shmuel-bukh*. Yet he seems to have found it difficult to maintain this style, and soon the conventional poetic diction is superseded by rhythms and expressions of colloquial speech. The Yiddish version follows the German original closely and often complete sentences were taken straight over with very slight alterations and the introduction of rhymed words. The story, however, has been much de-Christianized.

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**1661, Nürnberg**

Es gedauchte mich, dass Christus unser Erlöser zu mir kaeme, und fuchret einen schoenen jungen Ritter bey seiner Hand. [63a]

gieng die Amme in die Kirchen, den Ritter zu suchen, und fand ihn allein betend. [15b]

die Pilgerin sprach: Gnaedige liebe Frau, so ... solt ihr darumb die Leut Jesu Christi nicht spotten, denn solcher schoener Rock, den ihr antraget, zieret euch den Leib, aber mein Rock, hoffe ich, werde mir meine Seel zieren. [44a]

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**1698 Fürth**

ix hob drai naxt noox anander gyzehyn, zolt ir mir glaabyn, vi an engyl in dêr hant fiirt an fainyn knabyn. [15a]

gink di am un volt fun ritër veryn gyvoor, doo bygeezynt zi in glaix bai dyn tour. [3b]

di betlerin śproox: main gyneedigy frau, ir zolt di armyn nit aus śpotyn azou. den ir hot klaader, ciiryn aiërn laib zeer, ober mainy mus ix hoobyn cu geeyn betylyn hiin un heer. [9b]

The Yiddish version is also distinguished by other traits. The adap-
ter endeavoured to amend certain inconsistencies in the original, and such attempts at a more logical working out of the story are very successful. There is also considerably more stress on the amassing of large fortunes' and a greater accent on monetary values, which is quite natural in view of the enforced position of the Jews in the economy of the time. On the other hand there is a much greater emphasis on parental love.

This version also served another Jewish poet for a further adaptation, a much shorter poem (Magelene-lid), which was printed at Amsterdam in the early eighteenth century. Neither of them can lay claim to any great literary merit, yet they are two curious monuments to the transplantation of a German prose novel to the Ghetto.

At least three versions of the Eulenspiegel were made accessible to Jewish readers. We know of a condensed version, first published in the eighteenth century and repeatedly reprinted, of which apparently no copy survives. But we still have two complete Yiddish versions—a manuscript written by the scribe Benjamin Merks in the year 1600 (Bavarian State Library, Munich, Cod. Hebr. 100, ff. 134-91), and an edition printed in the year 1736 at Homburg. The two are not related, being based on contemporary German editions of the late sixteenth century and of the early eighteenth century respectively. The MS. has always been regarded as a mere transcription; neither of them has ever been examined. It is true that the Yiddish versions follow the German original quite faithfully, not even the most blatant vulgarities being toned down for the benefit of Jewish ears; a single one of Eulenspiegel's pranks concerning Jews, a nauseating story, is indeed missing in the printed version, but in the MS. we find it with all its details. Eulenspiegel is also the only Yiddish Volksbuch hero ever to be baptised. The first episode, relating his accidental triple-baptism, was retained by both adapters.

Yet precisely in these versions we find some very remarkable alterations. It has been asserted that the Jewish adapters usually exercised great restraint with regard to matters of Christian concern, even to the point of toning down remarks offensive to the clergy. This is allegedly a marked trait of our adaptations. In fact, the evidence points rather the other way; and we have already met with some alterations which are anything but tactful. There are a fair number

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19 See Steinschneider, Schueler and Erik.
20 M. Schueler, Beitraege, p. 88.
of instances where various books or manuscripts go even further in slight or mockery. It is well known that amongst the victims of constant persecution there had developed from early times a considerable vocabulary, not only of Hebrew substitutes of Christian terms which a pious Jew would never utter, but also of derogatory slang. Intentional corruptions, cant phrases and abuse of Christianity, also crept into many Yiddish adaptations, adding even more to the incongruous effect of the changed religious setting. In some cases it can, admittedly, be argued that the intentional transposition of letters signifies no more than pious avoidance, but other spoonerisms, word-plays and substitutions insinuate idolatry on the part of Christians or are otherwise intended in a derogatory manner, as plainly emerges from the new meaning.

In some Yiddish adaptations the "sacrament" is alluded to in general terms. The Eulenspiegel provides us with one example of considerable abuse and one of the senseless mutilation of a sentence.

1532

| vnd vor der beicht die Sacrament zu sehen nicht wirdig. [29b] | un für dër paixt seekér toomy 21 cu zeehyn nit virdik (1600) |
| un for dër baixt cu zeehyn nit veertik (1736). [15b] |

The Hebrew phrase Sheger tame used by the earlier scribe (he also applied it in Die Sieben Weisen Meister) is suggested by the word Sacrament itself, and we must regard it as a very ingenious pun.

"Saint" as a prefixed title has been dealt with in various ways by the different adapters. We find this transposition repeatedly in one of the Eulenspiegel versions.

| ein arm man der nicht zu essen hat, fastet wol mit Sanct Nicolasen, vnd wann er etwas hat, so isset er wol mit S. Martins abent. [5a] | an armér man, der nit cu esyn hot, fast voul mit staan klaasyn, un ven ér epys hot, zo est ér voul mit staan martins obynt (1736). [2b] |

Obviously the spoonerism is intentional, the analogy between "stone" and "image" being apparent. The following is an observation on the "Easter-play":


21 Hebrew sheger = falsehood; tamè = impure.
21a It is probable that the later German edition at the disposal of this Jewish adapter read Sant Nicolausen etc.
Wherever the Holy Ghost is mentioned, both adapters employed the same derogatory prefix.

\[
\text{in den spital ... (der hies zum heiligen geist) ... der heilig Geist solt in mich komen. [77b]}
\]

\[
\text{in den špitoool ... der hiis 'cum šmaaligyn gaast' ... der šmaalik gaast zol in mix kumyn (1600). [188b]}
\]

śm is a well known derogatory prefix in modern Yiddish. In the manuscript we now have the earliest written example; it must have been the accepted substitute already in the sixteenth century.

The two Eulenspiegel versions contain a relatively high share of such deliberate corruptions of the German text. The reason is not far to seek. The original abounds in mockery of the clergy and of certain Christian observances. Into a book of this nature Jewish derogatory references were bound to penetrate.

Finally, we have the Schildbuerger, a great favourite with the Jewish reading public in the eighteenth century. The earliest extant print is an undated Amsterdam edition and we have three later editions (Amsterdam, 1727; Offenbach, 1777; Fuerth, 1798). The Yiddish versions are based on an adaptation of the German original by Pomponius Filtz-hut. A Schildbuerger edition has been described twice, first by Jeep\(^2\) and then by Schueler.\(^3\) The later editions seen by them are, however, not simply reprints as they assumed. Collation of all the extant versions would dispose of the assertion of the former that a Yiddish Schildbuerger-edition was necessarily the corrupt product of a speculative Jewish bookseller, and of the latter that it necessarily shows a commendable restraint in matters of Church and sex allegedly typical of Yiddish literature. In fact, these editions represent various stages of adaptation.

The earliest edition available (170?) is a faithful translation into Yiddish, with the usual editorial attention to whatever might prove offensive to Jewish readers.

\[
\begin{align*}
1698 (?) & \quad 170?, \text{ Amsterdam} \\
\text{ist ihnen eben so unbekannt,} & \quad \text{is zi eebyn zou umbykent,} \\
\text{als einem Jueden, welcher} & \quad \text{alys an haat, velxër nit vaas,} \\
\text{eigentlich nicht weiss, von} & \quad \text{vuu ēr entsproct is. [3b]} \\
\text{welchem Stamme der Kinder} & \quad \text{Israel er eigentlich entsprossen}
\end{align*}
\]


\(^3\) M. Schueler, Beitraege, pp. 116-22.
Such changes may include anything from the elimination of "bacon" to the transfer of mundane activities from Saturday to Sunday.

In 1727 another edition appeared. An itinerant Jewish bookseller had it printed in Amsterdam, and in his very amusing epilogue claimed to have translated the German original word for word into Yiddish. Yet his translation is neither literal nor new. It is clearly based on the older Yiddish version. This adapter altered the preceding version considerably. He omitted, condensed and corrupted. On the other hand he provided some very apt variants, and, with a keen eye for the Jewish love of verse he added rhymes and transformed many of the prose passages. Some of the products of this rhymester's activity are quite spirited, others are outrageous. But his is a very much altered version and, as an example of Reimwut, probably unique.

Later Jewish publishers used this version and in these late editions we actually do find an unusual degree of reticence in matters regarding Christianity and the clergy. All slighting references to priests are now omitted. The earlier adapters had corrupted the prefixed title of sanctity. Now, certain protestations were not even tolerated in their altered form.

In this final Yiddish version the German text is whittled down by at least one quarter. The extent of bowdlerization is striking, even in an age of sensibility.

Throughout the eighteenth century we can trace the history of this Volksbuch in the Jewish communities; from a faithful translation, to a version which departs considerably from the German original, and finally to a mere rump. Stories of the Schildbuerger continued to be cherished amongst the Jews, and they have directly inspired the tales of the Khelemer Naruunim, \(^\text{24}\) their Jewish counterparts. Many of the

\(^{24}\) M. ERIK, geshikhte, p. 324.
antics attributed to this Eastern confraternity are clearly borrowings adapted to prevalent Jewish conditions. Thus many of the anecdotes came to find a permanent place in the rich folklore of the Jews of Eastern Europe.

Most of our adaptations are accompanied by rhymed prologues and epilogues, many of them modelled on those used in the earlier period of Jewish minstrelsy. Some of these contributions may, amid pious protestations, summarize or relate the whole plot in advance. In others the itinerant bookseller expatiates on the trouble he has taken to satisfy his discriminating customers. The author of the 1677 adaptation of Die Sieben Weisen Meister, after reiterating the heinous crimes of the evil royal stepmother, advises all Jewish householders to be extremely circumspect in the choice of second wife; and all this in endless couplets, replete with allusions to Jewish religious doctrine. Or a pointed Jewish expression may stand, in amusing contrast to the enumeration which preceded it of the powerful kingdoms which the Gentile princely pair is to inherit. Furthermore, valuable information can be gleaned here about both the author and reading public. For instance, the verses of the adapters offer convincing evidence that these prose novels were by no means primarily addressed to women, as has so often been maintained.

In such a brief survey as this we can give some indication only of the many points which emerge from a full investigation of our texts. That most of the Jewish adaptations of German books are casual or corrupt—a view coloured by the attitude to Yiddish, entertained by many Jews and Germans, which sees in it but Jargon and Mauschel-deutsch—certainly cannot be maintained. Usually, our versions are not markedly inferior to the cheap contemporary German editions on which they are based. The question of the wide dissemination of this literature is also very interesting. It would appear that many early

ADDrrITIONAL NOTE:—
The first Yiddish edition of Die Sieben Weisen Meister (Basle, 1602) is in the Bibliothek der Universität Basel; the second version of the Schildbuerger (Amsterdam, 1727) in the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt. All the other Yiddish editions mentioned here are either in the British Museum or in the Bodleian Library, with the exception of the last reprint of Sigmund un Magelene (Fürth, 1791) which is in the possession of the Universiteits-Bibliotheek, Amsterdam.

The German editions quoted are in the British Museum, but the Yiddish versions have also been collated with almost all the accessible German prints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
manuscripts were in circulation at the turn of the sixteenth century, and that from then onwards a wholly literate Jewish public must have been more familiar with many German prose novels than were their Gentile neighbours.

The *Volksbuch* has justly been assigned a very minor place in Yiddish literature. Compared with older works, these translations mark the decline of the Jewish adaptation of German texts. The new authors were generally copyists and publishers, not poets. Most of the Yiddish versions originated in Germany, and are significant of the still greater isolation of the German Jews in later times. They take their place on the lowest level, that of popular mass entertainment. But of a constant and active preoccupation with this popular literature of Germany our books are both evidence and symbol. They fully deserve our interest.

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