



Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy. *Yiddish Printing in Hungary: An Annotated Bibliography.* Budapest: Center for Jewish Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2011. 355 pp. ISBN 978-963-87162-4-8.

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

This exhaustive and technically meticulous bibliography, which grew out of the compiler's dissertation research at Oxford, implicitly poses the following questions: (1) What is Hungary? (2) What is Hungarian Jewry? (3) What is Yiddish? The historical map lining the endpapers at the front of the volume speaks to the first question: for this work's purposes Hungary comprises all of the territory under the sovereignty of the Hungarian Crown through the end of World War I. Areas within the map are shaded according to borders prevailing in subsequent periods: the greatly shrunken Trianon boundaries of 1921-37, the post-Munich annexations of 1938-44, and the frontiers of 1947 (essentially contiguous with Hungary's interwar boundaries). It would take the remainder of this review to outline the geopolitical situation represented by this map. Suffice it to say that over the period covered by this bibliography, 1814 to the late 1940s, Yiddish books and journals were issued in cities and towns that (at the time) were variously under the rule of the following states: Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Slovak protectorate, and Romania. This leads to the inclusion of such curiosities as the 1938 booklet *Dr. Edvard Benesh un di yiden* (Homonna/Humenné books no. 1), about the relationship of President Edvard Benes to Czechoslovakia's Jews. (During most of

1938, Humenné, where this book was printed, belonged to Czechoslovakia.)

As for Hungarian Jewry, the compiler provides this explanation for the inclusion of post-1920 works from "such lively Jewish centers as Transylvania, Carpatho-Rus, and Slovakia": "The Jewish population there maintained their cultural and linguistic affiliation as well as their personal and business ties with Hungary, and so their literary, cultural and political productivity remained not only relevant to but also a vital part of Hungarian Jewish life after 1920. These former Hungarian territories thus inevitably have to be considered as parts of a greater, historical and cultural Hungarian entity" (p. 11). Thus, to take perhaps the most exceptional case cited here, the Transylvanian-born Yiddish author Wolf Tambur--whose entire literary career unfolded under the Romanian flag (apart from early works published in Hungarian-annexed Sziget in 1940 and 1941)--is in effect treated as a Hungarian Yiddish author.

As to the linguistic question, perhaps as many as one third of the works cited here are essentially in Modern High German printed in Hebrew characters. The vast majority of these are liturgical or devotional works, many of them dating from well into the twentieth century. (This testifies to the persistence of German as a language in

common use by many traditional Jews.) The bibliography explicitly identifies the language of these publications as “Judeo-German”—a designation that risks conflation with Yiddish proper. Komoróczy characterizes this linguistic conundrum in the following terms: “I have tried to identify the exact [language] used in the books, when possible. Items marked as written in Judeo-German use a transitional language: they are essentially in German, but printed with Hebrew characters. In some cases this language still retains certain linguistic features of Yiddish, in other cases they even include special diacritics for German vocalization, using Umlaut above the Hebrew characters for the appropriate German sound” (p. 12). “Judeo-German” is distinct from Yiddish not only linguistically but often typographically as well—with works in the former often being set in what Komoróczy refers to as *Zur (tsur)* type. (Older Yiddish texts used the similar but not identical *vaybertaytsh*—or *mashey*t—typeface, and modern Yiddish employs square Hebrew characters.)[1]

The bibliographical universe of Yiddish publications is estimated at approximately fifty thousand book, journal, and newspaper titles. The vast majority of Yiddish imprints appeared either in the Yiddish-speaking heartland of Eastern Europe—Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union (after 1917), Poland (including Galicia), Lithuania, Latvia, Bukovina, and Bessarabia—or in its offshoots in Western Europe, the Americas, South Africa, Australia, and Israel. Historical Hungary’s position in Yiddishland was marginal, as this bibliography makes clear. Nevertheless, it would be all too easy to overlook the Yiddish presence in the history of printing—including Jewish printing—in that country.

Komoróczy states, “The aim of the present volume is to start filling this gap: to present a detailed, annotated bibliography of books and periodicals printed in Hungary, which are in Yiddish, or contain Yiddish—and thus reconstruct the corpus of Yiddish literacy in Hungary from the nine-

teenth century onwards” (p. 11). She acknowledges her debt to her predecessors among scholars of Hungarian Judaica and of Yiddish. The lacunae that this work fills are ones that earlier bibliographers neglected—Yiddish, at the hands of specialists in Hungarian Hebraica such as Róbert Dán, Alexander (Sándor) Scheiber, and Jekuthiel Judah Greenwald, and Hungary in the case of the Yiddish editor and bibliographer Zalmen Reyzen. “The material relevant to Yiddish printing in Hungary,” Komoróczy writes, “is scattered among a plethora of other data, be those in general Yiddish and Hebrew bibliographies, in multi-volume lexicons, or in studies of Hungarian Hebrew culture” (p. 24).

Yiddish printing came relatively late to Hungary, with the first publication (apart from earlier works by Christian Hebraists) dating only from 1814. Interestingly, the University Press at Buda played a major role in the publication of both Hebrew and Yiddish books up to 1875. Hebrew and Yiddish printers in Hungary belonged to a pan-European network of Hebrew printing and publishing. For a time, the prominent Viennese Hebrew printers Anton Schmid and Joseph Schlesinger set up shop in Budapest.

Of the “several thousand books, periodicals and prints published in Hebrew characters” in Hungary, over seven hundred entries for Yiddish works are included in the bibliography in two separate sections, each alphabetically arranged by (Hungarian) place name: (1) books printed in forty-seven places and (2) periodicals printed in twenty-eight localities. A cumulative total of fifty-seven cities and towns are represented in the bibliography, just twenty of them within the boundaries of present-day Hungary.[2] A fair number of the works listed are bilingual (especially Hebrew-plus-Yiddish/Judeo-German). In other words, of the roughly “hundred cities and towns within Hungary, or on former Hungarian territories [that] had Hebrew printing in them,” slightly

more than half were sites of Yiddish printing as well (p. 15).

The cities where the largest number of Hungarian Yiddish and Judeo-German books were printed are Budapest (265 entries), Pozsony (Pressburg/Bratislava, 97), Paks (52), Sziget (Máramarossziget/Sighet/Sighetul Marmartiei, 40), Munkács (Mukacheve/Mukachevo/Mukacevo, 33), and Szatmár (Satu Mare/Szatmárnémeti, 27). (The compiler helpfully supplies alternative spellings of place names—including Hebrew-alphabet variants.) By contrast, more periodicals were published in Sziget (25 titles) than in Budapest (just 14).

Genres represented here include religious texts (prayer books, *haggadot*, practical *halakhah*, Tanakh translations and commentaries, Hasidut, ethics/*musar*), statutes (*takanot*) of burial and mutual aid societies, calendars, textbooks, folk tales, and—relatively infrequently—modern literary works (these were primarily published in Transylvania). As in any comprehensive bibliographical survey, curiosities inevitably jump out of the page. Among the books, for example, are “the first Hebrew atlas,” dating from 1817 (Budapest books no. 1); an 1838 travel guide (Pozsony books no. 13); introductions to the metric system (Budapest books no. 150, Sziget books no. 2); a 1925 Purim play (Munkács books no. 20); and a sprinkling of Holocaust-era publications from Slovakia and Carpatho-Rus prior to the 1944 deportations. Press publications include early newspapers such as the Pester *yidische tsaytung*, 1869-87 (Budapest press no. 4; “in highly Germanized Yiddish/German with Hebrew characters”); humorous and satirical journals (Kassa press no. 5, Munkács press no. 2); a trade publication for ritual slaughterers (Nagybánya press no. 1); and even a pro-communist newspaper from 1932 (Sziget press no. 19). In all of these instances the compiler’s annotations are unfailingly informative and instructive, and her listing of libraries holding specific items is most useful. Another attractive

feature of the volume is the abundance of title-page facsimiles scattered among the entries.

The presentation of the bibliographical entries within the book’s two main sections (books and press) is straightforward: alphabetical according to place name, chronological listings under place names, and then alphabetical by Hebrew-alphabet titles where more than one work appears in a given year. (Initial articles are not ignored in the latter instances.) The two indexes are for Hebrew book titles (Yiddish initial articles *der*, *di*, and *dos* are ignored in the filing sequence, which is not the case with Hebrew initial article *ha-*) and personal names (Latin alphabet). While leafing through the volume I encountered only a handful of typographical errors, e.g., *Illustrirte veltgeshikhte der letstn 001* [i.e., 100] *yahre* (Yiddish-alphabet title, Budapest books no. 168), *Agudes zoykvhim* [i.e., *zoyvkhim*] (Nagybánya press no. 1). The compiler occasionally makes use of somewhat obscure bibliographical abbreviations (e.g., [s.a.] and [s.d]), which are not glossed in the volume.

To sum up, *Yiddish Printing in Hungary* is a most welcome addition to the bibliographical literature of Hebraica. By taking such a comprehensive and inclusive approach, Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy has set the standard for future bibliographical surveys of Hebraica imprints published in specific countries and regions.

Notes

[1]. To avoid the confusion engendered by the term “Judeo-German,” Daniel Lovins, a librarian now at New York University and formerly at Yale, once suggested introducing “Hebraeo-German” as the descriptor for the language of publications that utilize High German vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in the Hebrew alphabet.

[2]. The other seats of Hungarian Yiddish printing are currently situated in Austria, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine.

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