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'I shall not look upon his like again'

The life of Salman Schocken - his complex and ambivalent character, farseeing vision and monumental projects - succeeds in rising above his biographer

By Zohar Shavit

"The Patron: A Life of Salman Schocken (1877-1959), by Anthony David, Metropolitan Books (Henry Holt and Company), New York, 2003, 464 pages, \$30; translated into Hebrew by Arie Hashavya as "Sefer Hama'asim," Schocken Publishing House, 460 pages

His nightmare was to end his life as a small, portly, balding and elderly bourgeois, stepping over to the window with a spool of thread and fabric in his hand, asking the client whether the color of the thread matches the color of the fabric. When he passed away, he was a man of the world, at home in luxury hotels and his large houses scattered over a number of continents; a wealthy man, who had established flourishing and modern department store chains and owned one of the world's most important collections of manuscripts and books. In this collection there were, among other items, the final pages of the second part of "Faust" in Goethe's handwriting.

When he died, his body was found in the luxurious hotel where he liked to stay during his visits to Switzerland, his hands tightly clasped around Goethe's "Faust" and a collection of stories by Rabbi Nachman. This is the same warm hand that was etched, as though branded with fire, in the childhood memory of his son Gershom (Gustav) Schocken, who has written one of the most beautiful essays about his father. In his memoirs, he described how he went out for a walk with his father one very cold day, and burst into tears when his hands froze from the cold. His father gathered him up and embraced him with his warm hands. Gershom Schocken saw this gap between the child's frozen hands and the father's warm hands as the embodiment of his father's complex personality:

"I have never forgotten my shock at my father's hand. My father directed his full attention upon himself and his own projects and he always assumed that everyone around him would always be able and prepared to work with him in whatever captured his own interests. A different father would have sensed that it was too cold for a young child to go out. Yet even though he was frequently, and in a very brusque manner, preoccupied with his own concerns, when necessary he also had a gift to meet others with friendly warmth. In this way the disastrous walk left me with a glad feeling."

This duality in Salman Schocken's character is a leitmotif in the biography "Sefer Hama'asim" ("The Patron"), and his personality emerges from it as many-faceted, almost enigmatic. He was a man who had not had an orderly and systematic education, but learned all

his life. A man who admired the German bourgeoisie's ideal of *Bildung*, but loathed the bourgeoisie. A man who fought all his life to accumulate for himself the intellectual and spiritual assets of the Jewish and bourgeois elites of Germany, but never succeeded in becoming a part of them. They, the elites that he later despised, preferred to see him as an *Ostjude*, alien to the German culture with which they identified entirely. They were envious of the many economic assets he accumulated, but refused to acknowledge him as a person who had intellectual and spiritual assets, and he remained an autodidact who did not rise to the level of scholar and intellectual.

Although he surrounded himself with intellectual friends and many artists, among them the greatest and most important figures in Jewish studies, like Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem, the image of someone who had not had the benefit of *Bildung* clung to him, and even in eulogizing him, S.Y. Agnon made a reckoning of Salman Schocken's lack of formal education. But Schocken was without a doubt far more of an intellectual than Agnon, and it is very doubtful that Agnon would have won fame had it not been for the devotion and concern of Salman Schocken, who saw to the welfare and fame of his protegee in a way that was bestowed on no other writer.

Intellectual capital

It is difficult to imagine the face of Hebrew literature without Schocken's activity, which was extraordinary - particularly in comparison to other wealthy Jews, some of whom, such as Hermann Tietz, had earned their wealth as he had from their department store chains. They, unlike Salman Schocken, never tried to turn the capital they had accumulated into intellectual and spiritual capital; neither were they men of economic and cultural vision.

Some of Schocken's activity remains unknown to this day. His support of writers like Agnon and scholars like Buber and Scholem, and the fact that he was the owner of the Schocken Publishing House and the *Haaretz* newspaper are known to all. Less known, though not less important, were his project of land purchase along Haifa Bay; his rescue of countless manuscripts and first editions of Hebrew books and his contribution to the Hebrew University, of which he served as chairman of the board of directors between 1935 and 1945. At the beginning of the 1940s, largely thanks to him, the university was transformed from a small institution into a research institution with more than 100 faculty members, 1,000 students, new faculties of education, medicine and agriculture and a university hospital. Nevertheless, despite all this, Schocken suffered all his life from a suspicious attitude toward him on the part of the academic elites, and in return he nurtured toward them a series of prejudices, along with prejudices about "bankers, long underwear, diapers with safety pins, and the bourgeoisie" (in that order).

Schocken was a very total and focused individual, energetic and goal-oriented, and he moved out of his way anything that was unsuited to the realization of his aims. According to Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, he was characterized by the ability to "leap over graves," an ability that often stood him in good stead in the fulfillment of a seemingly impossible vision, but at the cost of a biography in conflict with itself and with its environment. He did not hesitate to dismiss his brother

Simon, who had established the chain of stores, because Simon no longer suited his management plans. Simon apparently did not bear a grudge; he consoled himself by driving a sports car - in which he met his death - and with a 400-acre estate bought from a Junker who had gone bankrupt. Later, the estate served as a center for training Youth Aliyah children prior to their immigration to Eretz Yisrael/Palestine and in this way helped in the rescue of many youngsters.

When the Cultural Committee that Schocken established under the leadership of Martin Buber did not succeed in realizing to his satisfaction the vision of a Jewish renaissance, he did not hesitate to withdraw his patronage from it. Instead, in 1928 he initiated the preparation of an anthology, edited by Ludwig Strauss, which would present the close connections between German and Jewish culture. After Hitler's rise to power he tried to conciliate the new regime, and in some of his stores swastika flags were displayed. He dismissed Siegfried Moses, the devoted manager of his chain, and appointed in his stead Dr. Wilhelm Fonk, who suited the position because of his Aryan origin. Moses later said of his relationship with Schocken that "his personality quirks 'made association with him challenging.'"

Almost postmodern

Schocken's totality is evident in his faith in the pure reason of history, which for him was stronger than history itself. He did not let the events of the 20th century change his mind, despite the fact that he experienced directly the evils of that history - though, it must be said, in a relatively mild way that ultimately boiled down to the loss of a considerable part of his property.

Schocken's totality was also evident in the way he acted according to the same plan in all the areas in which he engaged, be it the purchase of underwear, the acquisition of incunabula, or support for writers and intellectuals. He operated in accordance with a worldview that on the one hand was very modern, almost postmodern, and on the other assumed a strict hierarchy of social order. His view was characterized by an impossible blend of conservative ideals and ideas and new and progressive ideas, especially the idea of the self-construction of the individual, which he borrowed from Goethe. To the intellectuals around him, the result looked like an anachronism, and therefore Kurt Blumenfeld described him as a "figure out of the 18th or 21st centuries."

In this hierarchy he gave himself pride of place at the top of the pyramid, and subordinated to himself anyone over whom he had authority. In addition to the employees of his department store chain, Schocken tried to subordinate to his authority everyone with whom he came in contact: public figures like Kurt Blumenfeld, or intellectuals and artists like Robert Weltsch, Hugo Bergmann, Arnold Zweig, Leo Hermann and Max Brod.

His totality is also evident in the way he "adopted" artists. He saw not only to their income, but also to their everyday needs, and to their education as well. The story of his relationship with Agnon is known, but it is worth repeating some of the details. Schocken made sure that the writer had toothbrushes, socks, foodstuffs and shirts, and also saw to furthering his education. Therefore he sent him as reading material

Goethe, "Don Quixote" and The Iliad, but forbade him to read Strindberg because "he just felt that Agnon had some growing up to do before tackling such a complex and dangerous master."

It was only in 1951, when Agnon was staying in a room in Stockholm that Schocken had booked for him at the Grand Hotel, that Schocken sent him "The Father" and "The Ghost Sonata" to read. He did not hesitate to scold Agnon when he introduced a political note into his stories, and he ordered him sharply, after the 1929 disturbances, to keep his political views to himself.

To Buber he gave advice on matters of real estate, and sent him clothing and from time to time writing paper and a nice piece of bacon. When Buber asked him for a loan, Schocken allotted him a monthly salary. When the German publisher Lambert Schneider (a former member of the revolutionary movement Spartacus) found it difficult to bear the costs of publishing Buber and Franz Rosenzweig's translation of the Bible into German, Schocken subsidized the initiative, but when the newspaper *Der Jude* ran into financial difficulties Schocken did not come to its aid. When Buber's son Raphael was conducting an affair with a local actress, Schocken, who was himself known for his extramarital affairs, did not hesitate to have him followed by Buber's son-in-law, the poet Ludwig Strauss, and demanded that Raphael stop seeing his lover. When he refused, Schocken fired him.

He had a tremendous talent for spotting genius, in all areas: Agnon, Buber, Erich Mendelsohn. He believed in expertise and therefore made use of experts, who built him his beautiful and very revolutionary Schocken department stores and the wonderful Schocken Library, helped him acquire his rare collection of books and advised him when he purchased works of art, among them pictures by Rembrandt and Cezanne, Kandinsky and Gauguin, Oskar Kokoschka and Albrecht Dürer.

In his family life he knew how to give all the good things in life to his wife Lilly and his five children, and saw to providing them with the best possible Bildung. The list of the private tutors for Gustav, Theodore, Eva, Gideon and the child of his old age, Micha, even included S.Y. Agnon and Nahum Glatzer, but Schocken treated them with distance and restraint, and succeeded in controlling them from afar as well.

According to Anthony David, his son Gustav (Gershom) lived in his shadow even many years after his death, and blamed his father for the fact that he had not married his great love, Lea Halpern. Salman Schocken forbade his son to immigrate to the Eretz Yisrael/Palestine when she did in 1933, because he had not yet completed his university studies, and in Palestine she found a new love and married another. According to the biographer, Gershom never recovered from this heartbreak.

The educator

By 1933, Salman Schocken had become a very wealthy man and a famous figure throughout Germany, thanks to the chain of department stores he established. The chain spread throughout Germany and

reflected a new concept of management culture: centralist management by means of a central administration, the establishment of laboratories for quality control of the products and the systematic construction of a network of buyers and suppliers to ensure the provision of products of the highest quality at the lowest possible price. The view that guided him in his department stores was similar to the view that guided him in his extensive cultural initiatives: He targeted large segments of the populace with the desire to educate them and bring them the word of the modern revolution.

The man who himself had not been afforded *Bildung* devoted his entire life to making *Bildung* available to the lower classes. He wanted to educate the general public to better taste and to overturn the values of the bourgeoisie, some of which he scorned, some of which he tried to change and some of which he wished to instill in the broader classes of the public and in that way deprive the bourgeoisie of its assets. His respect for the lower classes, workers and simple people stayed with him all his life. Even after World War II Schocken did not change his attitude toward the working class, which he saw as honest and diligent, and wanted to alleviate the desperate misery of the simple, respectable German, whom he saw as the victim of the evil bourgeoisie - in contrast to his son Gershom. In 1955, when Gershom was serving as a member of Knesset, he submitted a proposal for a law that would prohibit Israelis from doing business with Germany. His father, however, did not hesitate after the war to establish a flourishing chain of department stores in Germany, while he did not even try to establish a similar chain in Israel.

Apparently, over the years Salman Schocken became more and more capricious and more of a hermit. At the end of his days he was almost alienated from his acquaintances and relatives. His faithful employee and librarian Jacob Katzenstein became the person closest to him toward the end of his life. He divided his time between Scarsdale, Switzerland, Germany and Israel, and in 1950 he received American citizenship. This expressed his anger at what he saw as the flawed realization of the Zionist project more than it expressed his identification with the United States. He lived almost cut off from his children, who did not forgive him for having left their mother, and found it hard to create a relationship with his grandchildren - not one of them spoke German, whereas he himself refused to speak Hebrew. On his last visit to Israel, when he came in 1958 with his wife's coffin, he was very critical of Israeli politics and also to a large extent bitter that he had not received the recognition that he felt was due him.

There was a great deal of justice in Salman Schocken's feelings of bitterness and frustration, but a large part of this stemmed from his personality - a mixture of inflexibility and the inability to take part in any project in which he was not the only player.

autobiography. It was with reason that he summoned his five children to this library after the end of the days of mourning for their mother, for a meeting for which he sent formal written invitations and at which all the participants wore suits (or a uniform - at that time Gideon was a major general in the Israel Defense Forces, a career that he developed to his father's dismay).

Schocken used the meeting, which was officially intended to mark the 30th anniversary of his brother Simon's death, in order to review his own life history for his children and to settle accounts with the German bourgeoisie and the Jewish "snobs" of the upper class. Nor did he mince words about the Israeli elites, which had not forgotten that he had fled the country during the War of Independence, and noted angrily that the Israeli government "hasn't a clue that there's something to see in the Schocken Library."

Perhaps he was right, and the members of the government really did not have any interest in the library, but the Hebrew University faculty, led by Gershom Scholem, deeply desired the library and its treasures. They hoped to persuade him to donate the library to the university. Salman Schocken, who in 1950 had already received an honorary doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, wanted to receive an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University on his 75th birthday. The university heads hesitated, both because Schocken's flight from the country during the war was held against him and because until then the honorary degree had been awarded to only three people, whose equal, in their opinion, Schocken was not: Chaim Weizmann, Judah Magnes and Albert Einstein.

The university heads tried to make the doctorate contingent on the receipt of a written, legally binding commitment to donate the library. Schocken refused to look as though he had purchased the honorary doctorate, and therefore he did not agree to commit himself in advance to the donation, especially as he believed that he deserved the degree for the many good services he had done for the university when he served as chairman of the board, and also because in the past he had already donated his collection of incunabula and Einstein's article on the theory of relativity to the university.

The stubbornness of both sides led to a dead end and later led to the tragic and unforgivable loss of the library. Even today, from the distance of decades, the heart aches at reading the circumstances of the dismantling of the library and the sale of part of its treasure to the highest bidder.

Schocken built up the collection of books throughout his life. He corresponded with hundreds of publishers, booksellers and private collectors, and sent buyers long distances to purchase books for him. By the 1920s the collection was already famed, and Thomas Mann saw Schocken as "chief among Goethe connoisseurs." Among the pearls of the collection were the notebooks of Karl Kraus' draft manuscript of "The Last Day of Humanity," a large collection from the Cairo Genizah and a large collection of incunabula, including the full first edition of the complete Babylonian Talmud and the first edition of The Book of the Zohar (1558). Late in life he succeeded in acquiring the Nuremberg Machsor from the Nuremberg municipality

as a kind of recompense for the distress and losses that had been caused him during the Third Reich. And this was after he had already bought a number of pages from the Nuremberg Machsor that had been stolen by Napoleon's soldiers.

After Schocken's death, his children decided to dismantle the library and sell a large part of its holdings. The unique Heine collection was sold to the government of France, which after lengthy negotiations agreed to pay the asking price. Other rare books were sold at auctions, where the prices soared. Among the items sold were Goethe's notes for the final pages of "Faust." The building itself, and an important part of the Judaica collection, were given to the Jewish Theological Seminary, which unlike the Hebrew University had had the sense to award Schocken an honorary doctorate, and today it fulfills some of the functions of the cultural center that Schocken had dreamed of establishing.

The dismantling of the library, which Schocken saw as the embodiment of his autobiography, is something of a metaphor for the dismemberment of Schocken's body; perhaps in this way his children wanted to settle accounts with their father, who according to his biographer, made them "emotionally crippled."

In any case, Salman Schocken's insistence on not playing according to the accepted rules in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine characterized his whole circuitous path to Zionism. In the vision of a Hebrew Jewish culture, Schocken did not join the large movement of cultural entrepreneurs at the turn of the century, even if he did share some of their positions and sometimes even some of their activities. He enabled Chaim Nachman Bialik to carry out his collection project and put into effect a large part of Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky's translation plans. But Schocken was never part of the group of cultural entrepreneurs to which writers, intellectuals and political leaders from the entire political spectrum in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine belonged. He was too opinionated and too much of an individualist to become part of this group, and therefore, in the end he did not enter the national pantheon and a large part of his contribution to Jewish culture and the Zionist project remains unknown to this day.

The outsider

Schocken was and remained an outsider in every place he was active and productive. In Germany he was known for his chain of department stores, but not for his cultural and Zionist activity. His interlocutors and partners in German Zionism were radical Zionists, who were not accepted by German Jewry or even by the mainstream of German Zionism. All of them came from established families and had an academic education; they had turned to Zionism as part of the modernist trend that called for a return to roots. They needed Schocken financially, but they did not particularly admire his social and cultural vision.

In this way, Schocken found himself in increasingly strangling circles of alienation: alien to German Jewry, alien to the German Zionists and even to the radical group of German Zionists. This duality - the acquisition of great influence alongside rejection and marginalization - characterized Salman Schocken's entire life, and reached its peak

toward the end of his days, when he found himself also alien to the political, academic and social elites in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine and the State of Israel.

Kurt Blumenfeld, who became close to Schocken again toward the end of his life after the break between them in the 1930s, tried to convince him to write his autobiography. He asserted that it would be of great interest because "the life of Salman Schocken contains the entire history of German Jews between 1880 and 1933." But Blumenfeld was wrong. The story of Schocken's life does not contain the history of German Jewry, or even that of the Ostjuden. The biography of Salman Schocken does not embody a collective biography. It is not a typical biography, but rather the unique biography of an exceptional personality. A personality who was foreign in the eyes of German Jewry, but who in the eyes of Jews in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine paradoxically symbolized the embodiment of the yekke, the German Jew, and in the eyes of Jews who immigrated to the United States, a "Jewish Bismarck" (according to Hannah Arendt, who worked with him in the United States). No wonder Gershom Schocken chose as the title of the essay he wrote in memory of his father a quotation from "Hamlet": "I Shall Not Look Upon His Like Again."

What remains of Schocken's heritage? A little and a lot, depending how one looks at things. Two of his projects, which he considered marginal, have remained from his heritage; they continued and are continuing to play an important role in the Zionist project: the Haaretz newspaper, in which these lines appear, and the Schocken Publishing House in Israel. Of his other projects, the chain of department stores and above all the wonderful library, only a trace remains.

Blumenfeld believed that Schocken needed a "gifted Eckermann" to write down his memoirs. But, sadly, Schocken has not been accorded an Eckermann. Anthony David's biography is written in a very American style, and this is not meant as a compliment. It sets forth Schocken's life like a novel, sometimes a cheap novel, and often very much flattens the historical context. I doubt whether it would have met the strict standards that Salman Schocken himself would have set for his own biography. He would no doubt have demanded more precision, more information about the sources and the quotations and a deeper treatment of the historical material. Apparently he would have preferred that his biography be written in the German tradition, and not the American tradition. But he would have agreed, or so I assume, with the descriptions that are not flattering to him and the description of his complex and ambivalent character, with its farseeing vision and often astonishingly narrow horizons - a man of monumental projects, most of which were destroyed in his lifetime.

Perhaps more justice was done to the figure of Schocken by Agnon, in his description of Schocken as Mr. Lublin in his story "Mr.

civilization that had passed from the earth. This tragic and very powerful figure emerges, despite everything, from between the lines of Anthony David's biography; it appears that Salman Schocken's life succeeds in rising above his biographer. This is a fascinating life story - highly recommended reading material for anyone interested in the history of German Jewry, the revival of Jewish and Hebrew culture and the Zionist project.

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