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*TREASURES OF
JEWISH BOOKLORE*

MARKING THE 200TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH
OF LEESER ROSENTHAL,
1794 - 1994

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MATZATI MATZATI—I found it! I cried when I finally managed to find the original copy of the first edition of David Friedländer's *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder* on my 1989 visit to the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana. To the best of my knowledge, the Rosenthaliana is the only library which has a copy of this book on its shelves.

David Friedländer's *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder* can be regarded as the first modern book for Jewish children. It was published in Berlin in 1779 for the use of the pupils of the Jüdische Freischule in Berlin. Its publication is something of a turning point in the history of books for Jewish children, primarily because it was the first to call itself a *Lesebuch* in the modern sense of the word and secondly, because it gave expression to a process that dramatically changed the nature of Jewish education in Germany.

Edited by David Friedländer with the help of Moses Mendelssohn, it was the first to be written in the framework of the Haskalah movement (Jewish Enlightenment). Since its appearance hundreds of non-religious books have been published in a German-Hebrew bilingual format in German-speaking countries, specifically addressing Jewish children, in an attempt to influence their Jewish identity and their world-view.

Written in German and with no more than 34 pages, the *Lesebuch* includes almost all the components of both old and contemporary German readers. It contains various German texts and translated Hebrew texts, quite a few of which were written and translated by Mendelssohn himself.

The *Lesebuch* presents a unique attempt to 'translate' the ideology of the Haskalah movement into practical terms, particularly into terms of educational programs. It also reflects a unique effort to create a new kind of symbiosis between the German and Jewish cultures. This was achieved by emphasizing the similarities between the two cultures: points of appropriation were searched for, and part of the Jewish-German tradition was used to fulfil functions originally filled by German texts. In the process, Friedländer presented his belief in new and different rela-

tions between German and Jewish-German culture. This meant that part of the repertoire of Jewish culture was to be translated into a new Germanized version of Jewish-German culture, mixed with German elements to constitute a new Jewish-German repertoire. To give an idea of Friedländer's mode of operation, I would like briefly to analyze the nature of the fables included in the *Lesebuch*.

The inclusion of fables in the *Lesebuch* was an outcome of progressive educational theories of the time, which saw fables as the most appropriate reading material for children. However, Friedländer chose fables written by Berakhiah Ha-nakdan in the thirteenth century and translated by Mendelssohn. Obviously, these were not meant for children. The difference between these and the German fables for children is categorical: German fables for children, and their morals in particular, were characteristically unequivocal and were based on the assumption that texts for children should be simple and easy to comprehend. The moral in Berakhiah Ha-nakdan's fables is unquestionably enigmatic, even without comparing it to German fables. There can be no doubt that German educationalists of the time would have found Berakhiah Ha-nakdan's fables inappropriate for children.

Despite this, Friedländer chose to incorporate the fables, because his main concern was to supply Jewish equivalents for the German elements. The Hebrew fables allowed him to introduce Jewish texts which appeared, on the face of it, to conform to the most progressive German educational theories, thus implying that the Jewish heritage can be unreservedly integrated into the current German culture. The fact that these texts resembled the German ones only ostensibly, was of lesser importance.

Such considerations were typical of Friedländer in compiling the reader. For him, it was much more important to prove through the reader the affinity between the Jewish and German cultures, than to provide texts which could genuinely function as texts for children.

More than anything else, Friedländer's *Lesebuch* typifies the cultural puzzle of the Jewish world of the Haskalah with its German and Jewish components. In its complete form, this puzzle reveals the attempt to adjust Jewish culture to German, in part by forcing the Jewish heritage through the strainer of German culture.

The heterogeneity of the *Lesebuch*, as well as the vacillation between alternative cultural models, make this text one of the most interesting pieces of evidence relating to the Berlin Enlightenment's endeavour to create a Jewish-German culture.



Römische Zahlen.

I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, bis
XX, XXX, XL, L, LX, bis C, D, M, XM, CM.

S. 8.

Gebräuchliches jüdisches Alphabet im Schreiben.
Siehe die Kupfertafel.

Übungen.

Der Mit-lei-di-ge, der dem E-len-den nicht
zu na-he kom-men will, weil er E-tel fürch-tet,
ver-räth Weich-sich-keit, und Här-te zu-gleich.

Was du thust, thu-e recht; sprichst du mit
je-man-den, so den-ke auf das, was du hö-rest,
lie-sest du, so prü-se was du lie-sest.

Ge-he nie-mals mü-ßig, so hast du nie-mals
lan-ge-wei-le, und lan-ge-wei-le macht Ver-druf.

Sprich und thu-e nichts, wo-von du nicht
willst, daß es die gan-ze Welt se-hen und hö-ren
kön-ne.

Grund.

zur pagina 8

Handwritten text in Hebrew script, likely a continuation of the exercises or a separate passage. The text is written in a cursive style and includes various words and phrases.