

JEWISH STUDIES IN A NEW EUROPE

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**Literary Interference between German and Jewish-
Hebrew Children's Literature during the
Enlightenment: The case of Campe**

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The decisive role played by the German culture in the development of modern Jewish thought and culture is by now a commonplace. Various recent studies focus on the various phases of contact, interaction, and exchange between the Jewish-Hebrew culture and the German culture, especially from the 18th century on. However, the question of the actual agents and channels whereby these relations were made possible and materialized has remained largely untouched, with the exception of a few recent studies. This ostensible lack of interest in the concrete agents and channels involved in these cultural interrelations cannot be explained, as might be assumed, in terms of the marginal roles played by these factors in the process of cultural interference. Research in fact proves quite the opposite.

Lack of interest in these agents stems rather from their marginal position in the overall *cultural consciousness*. These agents, who functioned at a practical, down-to-earth level in the everyday life of German Jewry, were not of sufficiently high rank in the hierarchy of the cultural consciousness, and subsequently failed to occupy a significant niche therein. Just as their existence was not even acknowledged, so their historical roles have been inappropriately gauged.

In this paper I maintain that within the context of these cultural agents texts for Jewish children and young people played a leading, if not *the* most decisive role in the process of interference between the German culture and the Jewish-Hebrew culture towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Research on books for Jewish children in the German speaking countries is currently underway¹; however, it will be many years before it is complete.

1. A research project entitled: "German-Jewish Cultural history and Intercultural

In this paper I shall present several working hypotheses concerning the vast corpus of books for Jewish children. More specifically, I shall center on one of the more prominent writers who played a major role in the early stages of the interference between the German and the Jewish cultures. I refer here specifically to Joacim Heinrich Campe.

Campe's role in the development of Jewish-Hebrew literature should be examined from at least four different perspectives:

1. The connections between Haskalah views on education and those of Campe.
2. Translations of Campe's works into Hebrew.
3. Campe's status in the Haskalah movement in Russia.
4. Texts by Campe as a means of determining models for original Hebrew texts.

In the following discussion I shall focus on the first two points, dealing with two questions:

Why Campe?

– and why the German system for children?

To the first question:

The close relations between the Jewish Haskalah movement and the German Enlightenment made German children's literature during the Enlightenment an ideal, if not *the most desirable*, model for imitation. Ideologically speaking, the best guarantee of a supply of newly-required books for children was an ongoing process of interference with the German system, as a result of which hundreds of books in Hebrew, German and a bi-lingual format were written and published, all modeled on the German repertoire of books for children.

One must however bear in mind that adopting the German repertoire was neither a direct nor a straightforward process. The concrete way in which the German system served as a model for imitation was conditioned by the Haskalah's assessment of the evolution of German Enlightenment children's literature and its inventory.

Relationship: Jewish Books for Children in the German Speaking Countries from the Beginning to 1945" is now being carried out by Universität Frankfurt, Institut für Jugendbuchforschung and Tel Aviv University, School of Cultural Studies.

This process involved the translation of concepts and ideas which did not always concur with the state of affairs as perceived by the system of German children's literature. Furthermore, once Jewish-Hebrew children's literature had created a certain image of German children's literature, this image was sustained for a long time without really taking heed of the changes and developments taking place within German literature itself.

It was almost as though at a given point in time certain models, texts and processes of development in the evolution of German children's literature were enjoined to form a circle, which later became the sole frame of reference for Jewish-Hebrew children's literature for almost an entire century.

This frame of reference consisted mainly in the translation of German Enlightenment texts, or the production of a small number of original Hebrew texts based on German texts. In the system of Jewish-Hebrew children's literature, translated texts were in fact privileged to the extent that, to the best of our knowledge, all books for children published by the Haskalah in Germany were either official translations, pseudo-translations, or original texts based on existing German models.

The eligibility of texts for translation was ideologically motivated: the extent to which these texts reflected the ideological shifts of various Haskalah writers was a definitive factor for or against their translation into Hebrew. A text had to "prove" its unequivocal adherence to Haskalah ideology before it could be selected for translation; only texts seen through the *filter* of the Haskalah as affiliated to the German Enlightenment and/or the Jewish tradition were eligible for translation. Consequently, German texts were translated if and when they were recognizably "Jewish", if they had been written by German writers recognized by the Jews as German Enlightenment writers, or if they explicitly conveyed Enlightenment values.

The author to be most translated into Hebrew was Joachim Heinrich Campe.

WHY CAMPE?

As far as Jewish-Hebrew culture was concerned, Campe was the representative of German children's literature. His books were translated into Yiddish as well as into Hebrew. The first book by Campe

to be translated into Yiddish was *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* (1781-82), which was translated by Haikel Hurwitz as early as 1817. Entitled *Zafant paaneax* (Berdichev), it was followed by a second translation, *Di Entdeckung fun Amerika* (Vilna, 1823-4). The first translation, enjoyed an overwhelming success, especially among women readers. The book eventually replaced books of religious teaching (Erbauungsliteratur) such as *Tsene-rene* and *Bove mayse*. In fact, the most recently published Hebrew translation by Günzburg was based on Hurwitz's translation. Moreover, Günzburg himself produced his own translation into Yiddish in order to compensate for the financial loss incurred by the translation into Hebrew.

Campe maintained his position as the most privileged German writer in the Jewish-Hebrew system for a long time, up until the second half of the 19th century. Even when harshly criticized by German writers, and even when he was no longer a living literary figure in Europe in general or in Germany in particular, Campe's books still provided a model for the production of original texts in Hebrew. *Robinson der Jüngere* was re-translated into Yiddish yet again as recently as 1910.

One might even propose as a working hypothesis that the initial stages of Jewish children's literature were in one way or another based on the translation of Campe's works. Because he was regarded as the dominant writer of German children's literature, translations of Campe's works in fact provided a blueprint for the scope of children's literature in Hebrew. Moreover, historically, these works marked the establishment of a system of children's literature in the Jewish-Hebrew culture, and were regarded as reliable and accessible sources for the reproduction of both texts and models.

Robinson der Jüngere was by far Campe's most popular book and was of course translated also into Hebrew, as well as *Theophron, oder der erfahrene Rathgeber für die unerfahrene Jugend*, *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, *Merkwürdige Reisebeschreibungen*, and *Sittenbücher für Kinder aus gesitteten Ständen*, all of which underwent more than one translation. It seems safe enough to assume that these five titles were chosen for translation due to their popularity in the German or other European literary systems. However, their inherent generic orientation was undoubtedly another an important factor.

Let's have a look at the case of *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*. This book, comprising, among other things, the requirements of a history and geography textbook, was the first of Campe's books to be

translated into Hebrew, by Moshe Mendelssohn-Frankfurt, in 1807. The book was chosen for translation probably due to the potential of its generic affiliation. Indeed, after translation the book became strictly a geography and history book.

The need for generic adaptation was rooted in the existing repertoire of the Jewish-Hebrew system. The emerging Hebrew system was not yet in a position to endorse fictional narratives for children or adults. A translated text was therefore expected to conform to the standards of acceptable genres, which *did not* include fictional prose. Even in the case of a writer of Campe's caliber, whose translated works were legitimized by his rank and status among Haskalah circles, only a limited number of books were eligible for translation, i.e. only those which contributed to the acquisition of human knowledge and wisdom, as understood by the Haskalah. This systemic demand in respect of acceptable genres determined pre-translational decisions concerning the selection of texts, as well as choices concerning the actual process of translation itself.

Translating Campe, in our particular case, amounted to replacing the original narrative of *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* with an historical-geographical narrative. The original text was restructured as a frame-story, a narrative technique favored by the Philanthropists who regarded the dialogue constructed by the frame-story as the most suitable form for instructing children. In the frame-story of the source text the father promises his children to tell them a fascinating tale during the coming week. In this way the dialogue with the children plays an important role in structuring the narrative sequence of the text. Recourse to dialogue enables the narrator to focus on the children, making them rather than Columbus the main protagonists. Focusing on the children also allows the narrator to teach the children several things by way of a series of questions and answers. The dialogue also makes it quite clear that in the course of narration the text is meant to impart specific values to the children, among which knowledge is highly significant, but not exclusive.

This narrative structure which *above all else manifests Philanthropist ideas* is not represented in the Hebrew translation, in which the frame-story has been left out as its fictional nature was not in keeping with the translation norms of the Jewish-Hebrew system. It is replaced instead by a narrator who relates an historical narrative. In this way Hebrew translators, despite their desire to impart

Campe's ideas and Philanthropist values into the Jewish-Hebrew system, finally produced a text which is removed from the Philanthropist model.

This attitude towards the original text resulted from the status of translational activity which enjoyed a status similar to that of original writing, as it was esteemed a creative act in its own right. This is indicated in the copy of Mendelssohn-Frankfurt's translation: Campe's name appears neither on the cover, nor on the front page of the book. Instead the front page reads: "composed, gathered and compiled in the Hebrew language from people's books, in clear and simple language, in order to teach the young people of Israel the beauty of this language, and inform them of God's work and the wonders he performs everywhere." The absence of the writer's name did not indicate a lack of respect for the original writer; as clearly noted in the introduction, Mendelssohn-Frankfurt had great respect for Campe, whom he describes as "the clever, enlightened and sincere Campe". This absence was a direct result of the governing norms of translation at the time, whereby the text was clearly not expected to resemble the original in the same way we would expect it to today.

ADDITIONAL TRANSLATIONS OF *DIE ENTDECKUNG VON AMERIKA*

Die Entdeckung von Amerika became a most popular text among Haskalah writers. Even outside Germany, Jewish 'maskilic' writers often chose to begin their careers as writers by translating this very book, regardless of other existing editions.

The second translation of the book, entitled *Giluy Ameriqa*, was done by Hirsch Baer Hurwitz, also known as Hermann Bernard. Hurwitz, who belonged to the first generation of maskilim in Russia, translated Campe's book into Hebrew as early as 1810. It is not quite clear why it was deemed necessary to produce a new translation only three years after Mendelssohn-Frankfurt's book had been published. There may indeed have been several reasons for this, including the fact that Mendelssohn-Frankfurt's translation may not have been known or available in Russia. However, we must bear in mind that one of the first accomplishments to be performed by the Jewish maskil in Russia was to translate one of Campe's books into Hebrew.

This was also true in the case of the third translation of *Die Ent-*

deckung von Amerika, accomplished by Mordechai Aharon Günzburg. *Sefer Galot Ha-aretz Ha-xadasha* (Vilna, 1823 – in three parts). Günzburg's translation is of special interest as it was the first full translation, and also because it points to the significance of Campe in the eyes of Jewish Russian Haskalah. By translating Campe into Hebrew, Günzburg, who saw the knowledge of German culture as vital to the development of Jewish-Hebrew culture in Russia, wished to introduce into Jewish Russian Haskalah a bridge to the German culture.

Günzburg, who often journeyed to Lithuania and Courland, crossing the cultural barrier between the Jews of Eastern Europe and the German culture, thus became a main conduit in the cultural flux through which German culture and the Haskalah filtered into Jewish East-European society. He regarded German as a primary tool for the acquisition of knowledge and economic advancement, as well as a factor of political significance. In his quest for an exemplary representative of German culture, Campe was the most likely figure to be nominated. His *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* served Günzburg's goals perfectly due to its potential as a text for teaching geography and history.

Furthermore, an unoffensive text such as this would be less likely to provoke the Russian censor, thus allowing Günzburg to introduce 'maskilic' values into the Jewish culture without incurring the wrath of the Russian authorities, who in any event held the Jewish Russian maskilim in suspicion. According to Günzburg, the book was an overwhelming success. In 1846 Günzburg's edition was sold out, and not a single copy remained. The book was reprinted in Warsaw as late as 1884, and was even then considered popular reading material.

Once accepted as a history book, further translations of Campe's *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, and similar texts such as *Merkwürdige Reisebeschreibungen*, tended to ignore completely the underlying model of the original text, referring to it as "purely" a history book. This was the case with Mendel Lefin's *Mas'ot ha-yam* (Lemberg 1818), and Abraham Mohr's *Columbus, Hu sefer metziat erez Amirqa* (Lemberg 1846). Translating Campe was not perceived in terms of writing fictional narratives, nor in terms of mere "adventure stories" about the discovery of America or any such "wonderful journeys", but in terms of creating a repertoire of historical awareness.

Due to lack of time, I cannot elaborate on other cases of Campe's translation.

I would just like to conclude with the following brief remarks:

Campe maintained his prestigious position throughout the 19th century, even after interference between the Jewish-Hebrew culture and the German had become less controlled. Campe belonged to the group of German writers who bore the stamp of the Haskalah in Germany, using it to furnish the repertoire of the emerging Jewish-Hebrew system. The definitive preference for translating Campe at the time shows how translations paved the way for Haskalah goals, helping to achieve at least two:

1) Translations made it possible to borrow components of a system considered to be ideal for imitation, thus laying the groundwork for gradual consent to and acceptance of a new system.

2) They also made possible the use of texts which had already acquired legitimization, were unquestionably representative of Enlightenment ideology, and could hence be readily legitimized by the Jewish-Hebrew system.

Jewish-Hebrew children's literature followed the German model of development in two ways: by following its stages of development, and by borrowing its textual models. This occurred due to similar processes of legitimization attributed to both systems during their respective formative stages, and also as a result of the ideological dependence which made German Enlightenment children's literature a natural frame of reference. Reliance on the German system implied that each process and procedure in the development of the Jewish-Hebrew system was conditioned by the German system. It was the German system, or more precisely the interpretation thereof by the Jewish maskilim, which determined the nature and limitations of the Jewish-Hebrew system, its repertoire, and its structure.

In order to follow the development of Jewish-Hebrew children's literature, interference with the German system is not only methodologically important, but it is an indispensable parameter in its own right, without which the bulk of the evolutionary process cannot really be understood.

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