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by Zohar Shavit (pp. 135–173)

This article examines the extent to which maskilic Jews were acquainted with the European Enlightenment, and in particular, the German Aufklärung and the French Lumières. It aims at reconstructing their knowledge and understanding of European Enlightenment literature as well as the strategies they employed for introducing this literature and its values into the Jewish world. It claims that the maskilic acquaintance with Enlightenment literature was much richer than is believed, and that it involved much more than superficial familiarity with famous titles and prominent figures of the Enlightenment. The intellectual ‘map’ of the maskilim was much larger, detailed and sophisticated than is usually assumed.

This study analyzes an article by Shimon Baraz, a virtually unknown writer, who belonged to the maskilic circles in Königsberg and died on the 4th October, 1787, shortly before his article – the fifth in a series – was published in Ha-me’assef. Baraz mentions Maimonides as the source of his text and refers to another work of the ‘Sages’, which a detailed comparison suggests was Émile by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Baraz translated and adapted several paragraphs of Émile, which deal with the concrete issues of child-raising, and provides detailed guidelines for diverse phases of everyday life: how to dress children, bath them, feed them, and even teach them how to swim. Baraz was probably motivated by Émile’s enormous success in Germany – from the time of its publication in 1762 Émile was translated into German dozens of times. Nevertheless, he introduced the text under the guise of Maimonides and constructed it as a puzzle whose phrases consist of, or allude to various canonical Jewish texts.

This article contextualizes the adaptation of several paragraphs from Émile within the wider translational activities of the maskilim, and discusses the strategies they employed to minimize opposition and hostility to the act of introducing ‘foreign’ texts. Among the principal strategies was the device commonly used by traditional Jewish literature of
composing a text on the basis of ready-made phrases taken from canonical Jewish literature, such as the Hebrew Bible, rabbinical writings and Maimonides. Baraz embedded the ready-made phrases into the paragraphs taken from Rousseau, interweaving them so that they created a coherent puzzle. In this way he made the translation seem familiar to the Jewish readers since it appeared as part of the traditional Jewish repertoire. Baraz followed Rousseau faithfully, even at the expense of contradicting Maimonides, although the insertion of phrases taken from the rich Jewish literature often lends the paragraphs a different character and meaning.

Baraz’s article was part of a larger trend within the early Haskala movement, whereby translated texts constituted part of the maskilic effort to change both the Jewish Weltanschauung and Jewish daily practices (e.g. the Jewish Habitus) and to harmonize the Jewish tradition with the universal values of the Enlightenment.

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN GUR AND ALEXANDER AND ITS IMPACT ON POLISH HASIDISM IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by Dafna Schreiber (pp. 175–199)

During the first half of the twentieth century, one of the bitterest disputes in the Hasidic world took place in Poland: the dispute between Gur and Alexander. This feud occupied the two Hasidic courts until the Holocaust, reflecting primarily a political power struggle as well as opposing perceptions about the Hasidic path. The Gur court viewed itself as the continuation of Kotsker Hasidism with its learning-oriented ideal and demanding approach; whereas the Alexander court saw itself as the successor of Warka Hasidism with its popular and easy-going approach. Both Kotsk and Warka derived from a common source, Przysucha Hasidism, and considered themselves its direct successor even though it was their differing interpretations of Przysucha that fueled the dispute. The initial tension between the two Hasidic courts probably stemmed from differences in ethos and the ‘competition’ over the spirit of Przysucha, but when the dispute erupted again this aspect had no bearing; the struggle largely revolved around hegemony, power, and control.

At the time of this dispute, Gur Hasidism was led by a single powerful Rebbe, Avraham Mordechai Alter (1866–1948), who succeeded in transforming Hasidism’s social strength into political power. Alexander Hasidism was led by three Rebbes during the same period. The dispute broke out shortly after Rabbi Avraham Mordechai became Rebbe (1905)