Solomon A. Birnbaum: An Appreciation of a Lifetime of Scholarship on Yiddish¹

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When Solomon Birnbaum began his research on the Yiddish language in the first decade of the twentieth century, the study of the vernacular of Ashkenazi Jews was still in its infancy.² With the exception of some notable contributions – the fruit of still marginal research conducted by isolated scholars such as Alfred Landau³ and Lazare Sainéan⁴ – Yiddish was considered a secondary branch of Ashkenazi culture. Certainly, inventories of sources and bibliographies did exist,⁵ as well as brief studies about Jewish folklore that touched upon the popular language of Ashkenazi Jews.⁶ The history of Yiddish literature had, however, not yet received a proper scholarly treatment. Few critical editions of classic texts existed, and although still widely printed and circulated in Jewish society, Old Yiddish literature remained unknown to the broad public.⁷ The language itself was associated with a host of stereotypes, most often disparaging, such as its designation as ‘Jargon.’ As the refutation of such prejudices is a prerequisite to all scholarly inquiry, Birnbaum necessarily began his work by rejecting a plethora of erroneous definitions that contradicted the concrete data and facts of the language. The major ones he encountered concerned the relationship between language and race, and advanced the vague notion of *national spirit* that tended to demean the language by reducing it to the mode of expression of a biologically determined group and the manifestation of an elusive but negative Jewish *Volksgeist*.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, perceptions of Yiddish – both popular and academic – gradually began to evolve. The Jewish nationalist movement lent the vernacular a new political importance in the battle for the recognition of Jewish culture.⁸ A number of writers, often people estranged from Jewish tradition, also set about exploring the Jews’ rich heritage in general, and Yiddish culture in particular. They assembled anthologies and composed essays, literary histories, and literary works, thereby combining their return to the origins of Jewish tradition with the search for a new aesthetic.⁹ At the same time, the study

of Jewish folklore and tradition alongside the cultural creations of other peoples of Europe awakened scholarly interest across the continent, from St. Petersburg to Budapest, London, Vienna, and Paris. Jewish as well as non-Jewish intellectuals demonstrated awareness of the importance of studying the Jews' cultural heritage together with that of other European cultures from a comparativist perspective.¹⁰ In the area of philology, they composed a number of pioneering works, testifying to the importance of Jewish languages for understanding both the Ashkenazi world and broader society. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an entire cultural continent was slowly revealed, yielding a multitude of sources and questions that would stimulate thought about modern Jewish culture.¹¹

From this galaxy of pioneers and scholars, two great figures emerge – Solomon Birnbaum¹² and Max Weinreich.¹³ Both embarked in the first decades of the twentieth century upon a series of studies that would contribute to the shaping of Yiddish studies as a field in its own right. Thanks to their work, research about Yiddish, long marginalized or subsumed in related disciplines, found scholarly recognition and became a subject of study equipped with its own methodological frameworks, theoretical tools, and analytical models.

To be sure, there exist as many commonalities as differences between these two personalities. Both were raised in German-speaking circles and Yiddish was not their first language. Their passion for the language was born during adolescence: for Birnbaum, in the region of Bukovina (around Czernowitz) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and for Weinreich, in the northwestern provinces of the Russian Empire corresponding to today's Latvia and Lithuania, where Yiddish- and German-speaking Jewish communities co-existed. Both published their first research about Yiddish in the early decades of the twentieth century, helping to lay the foundation for its scientific study. Birnbaum published a grammar¹⁴ in 1918, and defended his doctoral thesis, *Das hebräische und aramäische Element in der jiddischen Sprache*, at the University of Würzburg. It was accepted *Magna cum Laude* in 1921.¹⁵ In 1923 Max Weinreich published his doctoral thesis, *Studien zur Geschichte und dialektischen Gliederung der jiddischen Sprache*, which he had defended at the University of Marburg.¹⁶ By thoroughly examining Yiddish's still largely unknown literary heritage, both young scholars sought to create the theoretical frameworks necessary for the scientific description of the Yiddish language. They showed how multiple fields of research – among them, literary history, linguistics, and folklore – could benefit from a systematic analysis of Yiddish. Moreover, these first studies created the template for their future work. Indeed, throughout their careers, they continued to explore the principal research questions that were already taking shape in the studies they authored in their youth. Both men advanced scholarship through successive insights based on conceptual frameworks they developed in the first decades of the twentieth

century. These studies would mobilize their intellectual forces for a lifetime and lead to the publication, only a few years apart, of the two major works of Yiddish linguistics of the twentieth century.

In 1979 Birnbaum published *Yiddish: a Survey and a Grammar*, the fruit of a lifetime of research.¹⁷ In it he applies a conceptual framework that he first advanced in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation published in 1922. According to this framework of linguistic fusion, Yiddish is composed of different elements (Semitic, Romance, Germanic, and Slavic) that combined over time to form a specific language – a linguistic system of its own.¹⁸ In his *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh/Gyśixty ffn der līdišer šprax*, which appeared in 1973,¹⁹ Weinreich employs a similar model of linguistic fusion (*lingvistishe shmeltung/lingvistišy śmélcjng*), one that he had also posited in earlier works.

Even if he did not use the term, Birnbaum, like historians of his generation, conceived of Yiddish as an expression of an *Ashkenazi civilization*, postulating its unity beyond cultural differences and geographic fragmentation (*YSG*, 20). For Birnbaum, Judaism was a ‘way of living for the totality of life’ (22). Yiddish must therefore be studied through a multidimensional approach that principally integrates an abundance of linguistic facts without neglecting extralinguistic data such as Jewish religious traditions, demographic data, statistics, and sociological information in order to understand how Jewish languages take shape and how their speakers create and use specific linguistic forms.

Birnbaum emphasized the relationship between the vernacular language and Jewish tradition. He spoke not only of the ‘religious basis of the Jewish languages’ (*YSG*, 12), but also of the uninterrupted influence on them of speech and writing, connected, among other sources, with the language of the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrashim, the Kabbalah, and the prayers. Sharing this perspective, Max Weinreich showed how deeply rooted Yiddish is in Jewish history, oral traditions, and scriptural sources – essentially the Bible, the Talmud, and the principal rabbinic texts, including the Kabbalah. He adopted the Rabbinic term *derekh ha-shas/déiryx haśas* (the Way of the Talmud) in order to indicate the consubstantial link that always existed between Jewish tradition, and social and religious life within Jewish communities, on the one hand, and the Yiddish language and its speakers, on the other.

There are of course also differences between these scholars’ approaches. These are apparent above all in Birnbaum’s approach to the central question of the relationship of Yiddish to German dialects,²⁰ in his wish to preserve the dialectal diversity of Yiddish beginning with the adoption of an original transcription system,²¹ in his scheme for the periodization of the language,²² and in his principles for describing the structure of the language.²³

Beyond their differences, these two unparalleled works laid the foundations of the fields of Jewish language studies and Yiddish studies. Transcending the negative conceptions of Yiddish that claimed it was of only minor scholarly interest, Birnbaum – in what represents one of the great comprehensive works on Yiddish – presents a model for the study of the language that integrates a thorough analysis of the most diverse aspects of the language. He endeavoured to determine the languages, linguistic affiliations, and language families to which Yiddish is related. He described its internal structure, its phonetic rules, its Hebrew-Aramaic component, and the relationship between the Slavic and Germanic dialects which contributed to its shaping. He also studied the linguistic geography of Yiddish and its transformations in different historical contexts. He was equally interested in the social dimension of Yiddish and its relationship to the languages and cultures with which Jews were in contact in order to comprehend the phenomena of interference, borrowing, and the sociolinguistics of the language.

Birnbaum examines the Yiddish language over the *longue durée*, along an historical continuum comprising an uninterrupted chain of linguistic traditions. The development of Yiddish, whose origins he locates in medieval Western Europe, is fundamentally linked to the history of the Jews. This is demonstrated in its ties to biblical, Mishnaic, and medieval Hebrew, and to the Aramaic of the Talmud and the Zohar. Yiddish is part of a vast ensemble of Jewish languages and is related to languages with which Jews have been in contact, whether they be Romance, Germanic, or Slavic languages and dialects. Birnbaum addresses, as well, the change in the language in the contemporary era, which is marked by secularization and the linguistic integration of Jews into their non-Jewish surroundings. Yiddish is thus analyzed as a total linguistic system, for which he proposes a through-going study of its fundamental elements.

The examination of Jewish languages was for a long time undertaken in only a few scattered studies flawed by mistaken assumptions. They also lacked the necessary scientific basis for the comprehension of the formation and structure of Jewish languages, and to analyze the linguistic creativity of their speakers. Birnbaum therefore described the linguistics of Jewish languages as ‘still virgin soil.’²⁴ Everywhere in the diaspora where they lived, he noted, Jews created their own linguistic tools. These languages were classified under various irregular names that tended to distort scholarly understanding, to impede their rigorous analysis, and to keep them in a state of isolation. The supposed contrast between ‘pure’ languages and ‘corrupt’ dialects served as the basis of almost all scholarly works composed in the nineteenth century.²⁵ This dichotomy referred to the division between, on the one hand, standardized languages equipped with grammars and dictionaries, and on the other, the ‘deviations’ from the norm, which

were classified under the generic term ‘mixed language’ or its derivatives: ‘creole languages,’ ‘jargons,’ or ‘dialects of majority languages.’ There arose a set of composite terms that testify to the difficulty of philologists in integrating Jewish languages (as hyphenated Judeo-languages) into the large language families and in understanding their genesis and structure. We note, among others, such names as *ivre-teutsche*, *ivri-taytsh*, *jüdisch-teutsch*, *Judeo-German*, *mame-loshn/mamy luushn*, *Prost-jüdisch*, *Jargon*, and *Jüdisch*.

Beginning in the twentieth century, attempts to define a Jewish language gave rise to scientific studies and discussions. Birnbaum²⁶ developed a typology of Jewish languages,²⁷ analysed the relations that existed between them, and identified their common features, thus paving the way for the field of Jewish interlinguistics, the comparative study of Jewish languages. He clarified this complex notion by establishing clear definitional parameters necessary for their analysis and classification, and by determining their differences from and similarities with contact languages. He also surveyed the historical, sociological, religious, and linguistic parameters that characterize them in order to propose a model that would foster their recognition in the field of general linguistics. Among specific traits, he first drew attention to the existence of archaisms. In *YSG* Birnbaum speaks of ‘conservatism in Jewish languages’ and of ‘phonological and morphological features, words and expressions which belonged to an earlier stage of non-Jewish languages and have disappeared’ from them (10–11). He explains, ‘It is therefore a matter of course that Yiddish, Dzido and other Jewish languages should contain some forms which have died out in German, Spanish and other non-Jewish languages’ (10). Another feature belonging to Jewish languages as a group, including Yiddish, is the existence of calque translations of the Bible (*Taytsh-khumesh/taac-xjmys*), and a rich Hebrew-Aramaic component reflecting Jews’ loyalty to the holy language as well as to the uninterrupted transmission – in both written and oral form – of canonical texts, prayers, and commentaries. Birnbaum’s doctoral thesis (see note 15) dedicated to the Hebrew-Aramaic component of Yiddish testifies to the importance that he attached to this structural feature of Jewish languages.²⁸ He devotes attention to the whole series of developments, phonological and otherwise, connected to the linguistic substrata of Jewish languages. He also considers the history of the Jewish people, as migrations had an impact on the linguistic elements that fused together in Yiddish and on the formation of autonomous spaces favourable to the birth of specific languages. The adoption of a distinct script in manuscripts and printed works testifies to the shaping of a distinct Jewish culture and the separation between the Jewish world and the surrounding culture.

In keeping with its overall approach, *YSG* addresses the study of the historical phases of Yiddish, its internal changes, and their causes. This led Birnbaum to

broaden his investigation to include extralinguistic factors. The first exploration concerns awareness of Yiddish as a distinct idiom, which he placed around the sixteenth century, when Yiddish began to be designated and perceived as a linguistic reality of its own in both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. But it is above all linguistic criteria, defined on the basis of the analysis of texts from the written and oral corpus, that play a role in the periodization of Yiddish²⁹ and in the determination of dialectal areas. Together, these criteria demonstrate the progressive autonomy of Yiddish from the Germanic substrate. Birnbaum's scheme, contrary to the periodization schemes and identifications of the area of Yiddish's origins proposed by other scholars,³⁰ situates the birth of Yiddish in the Rhine area around 900 CE and speaks of a long development up to 1300 in the Middle High German period (1050–1350).³¹ Phonetic, morphological, or syntactic developments distinguishing Yiddish from non-Jewish dialects of contemporary German could have occurred beginning in the ninth century, but Yiddish took shape toward the beginning of the thirteenth century, 'the time when phonological evidence shows the separation of Yiddish and German to have already been a fact' (YSG, 55–6).

In order to analyse the subcultures of the Yiddish language, Birnbaum stresses the importance of migrations and human geography, as, for example, the creation of specific places of dwelling, from urban ghettos and Jewish streets or quarters (*Judenviertel*, *Judengasse*) in the Middle Ages to small towns (*shtetlekh*/*stétilex*). Western, Central, and Eastern Yiddish are not only defined as the language of specific linguistic communities or groups of Jews living in the same geographical area, using the same vocabulary, expressions, and phonological features. These divisions also correspond to varying liturgical traditions, religious customs, and popular practices. The creation of a 'separate cultural entity' fostered the emergence of a specific Jewish language. Birnbaum also shows the importance of cultural stratification and social organization for the understanding of linguistic behaviour. Anticipating studies from the 1960s and 1970s of speech habits among different social strata, Birnbaum emphasizes the oral and written features of various segments of Jewish society. He points out different sociolects to illustrate the diversity of Yiddish as spoken by the rabbinic intelligentsia of the *yeshivas*, the working class in New York City, pioneers in the agricultural colonies of Russia, and by immigrants in the Jewish quarters of major European cities. An understanding of the cultural divisions, religious practices, and social stratification in Jewish communities helps one to understand the birth of the vernacular language, its disappearance in Western Europe, and its growth in Eastern Europe. Similarly, Birnbaum's approach integrates the Jews' mobility. He postulates a relationship between the crystallization of Jewish vernacular languages and the geographic history of the *Ashkenazim*. This history includes migrations of Jews since the

Hellenistic and Roman eras, the destruction of the Second Temple, and the Jews' deportation to Rome. It continues with their movement to Western Europe, their settling in the communities of the Rhine valley and southern Germany, and then their migrations toward the East, most notably Poland. The migrations put Jews in contact with several languages from which they adopted or transformed a number of features.

Among these criteria Birnbaum also includes relations of the Jews with broader society, which were often marked by periods of tension, crisis, and conflict – indeed, by violent rejections – and in other historical circumstances, by recognition, even encouragement, and the use of the non-Jewish vernacular. In non-Jewish society, the beginnings of interest in Yiddish date to the sixteenth century, when Christian Hebraists turned to the language of the Ashkenazim out of curiosity.³² Although disdainful and full of ambiguity in their relationship to the 'Jewish jargon,' the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the nineteenth century also evinced an early interest in the Jewish vernacular, intrigued as they were by an Indo-European language containing a Hebrew-Aramaic component.³³

But it was particularly in the twentieth century, with the creation of journals, institutes, academic posts, and university departments, that the Yiddish language achieved full recognition as a scholarly field and object of study.³⁴ The period of the *Haskalah*, the 'Jewish Enlightenment' (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), marked the beginnings, chiefly in Western Europe, of a gap emerging between Yiddish and Jewish tradition. First elites, then the masses, distanced themselves from the Jewish vernacular language, which was defined as a 'corrupt German' and perceived as the sign *par excellence* of the Jews' social particularism. This enabled them to come closer to the majority languages and thus break down the barriers separating the Jewish *inside* from the gentile *outside*. Urbanization, westernization, and modernization accelerated the progressive abandonment and decline of the vernacular, which gradually ceased to be spoken in Germany. In Western Europe the use of Yiddish persisted only in rural areas far from urban centres, such as in Jewish village communities in Alsace, Switzerland, and 'ultra-Orthodox' milieus. But history, in Birnbaum's words, 'followed a different path' (36) in Eastern Europe. There Yiddish continued to be the living language of a very large proportion of the Jewish population. Secularization took the direction of a specific form of Jewish nationalism in which language became a decisive political and cultural factor, as evidenced by the birth of the Yiddishist current. The battle between political movements was punctuated not only by a number of debates, public speeches, and literary creations, but also by intense pedagogic activity and cultural diffusion.

One might expect the sociological aspect of Birnbaum's study to be the part of his work in need of the most extensive updating. However, its relevance remains

undiminished since the divide between the two principal sectors of Jewish society – its secularist and traditionalist currents – still represents a structural fact of communal life today. For the former current, Yiddish is considered above all a marker of cultural identity without implying religious practice. For the latter, the language is foremost a rampart against the loss of spiritual identity and is the symbol *par excellence* of the uniqueness of Jewish cultural life based on traditional Jewish values. The originality of Birnbaum's intellectual approach resides in his having perceived and studied Yiddish as a fundamental component of the eternal heritage of Judaism at a time when the cultural and scholarly environment was dominated by secular Jewish currents. Birnbaum seems to have anticipated the present changes in Jewish society and sensed the sociological evolution of Yiddish, which is transmitted and spoken today mainly in 'ultra-Orthodox' circles.

Birnbaum focused his research chiefly on the rigorous scientific description of the Yiddish language in its broadest dimensions. Nonetheless, his conception of Yiddish remains influenced by his personal commitments, which are in keeping with the ideas defended by his father Nathan Birnbaum, most notably regarding the bonds between language and Jewish identity.³⁵ Steeped in German culture like many Jewish intellectuals of their time, Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum underwent a slow process of dissimilation. Beginning their journey in the circles of the Central European Jewish intellectual bourgeoisie, which was largely non-practicing and saturated with European culture and the German language, they arrived at a progressive questioning of the model promoting Jews' integration into general European society. Nathan (but not Solomon) identified at first with Zionism before they both finally committed to currents within Orthodoxy.³⁶

Birnbaum highlighted the central position of religion³⁷ in the formation of Jewish languages. True, he does not always take into consideration the complexity and the diversity of modern Jewish culture in Western Europe, which was torn between a multitude of antagonistic currents from assimilation to 'ultra-Orthodoxy,' and his existential engagement and scholarly argumentation mix, as when he reveals his penchant for Hassidic spirituality (*YSG*, 23). Yet, these factors do not diminish his place among scholars who have emphasized the importance of religion as a factor in the crystallization of Jewish languages.³⁸ His understanding of the role of religion in language genesis was largely inspired by his father, who affirmed, for example, that 'Orthodox Jews [were] the original and the true creators of Yiddish.' In secular Jewish currents, 'Yiddish was confronted with the danger of losing its true Jewish nature, its distinctive colours,' to become 'just a language, just a language.'³⁹ Birnbaum's analysis therefore concerns not only religious rituals, symbols and practices, but also those Jewish spiritual values that 'lift man out of the material onto the spiritual plane' and 'spiritualize the material sphere' (22). Birnbaum postulated within the Jewish legal system – which he defined as the

‘foundation,’ the ‘framework,’ (23) and the *axis mundi* of the Jewish existence – a constant evolution. He also saw in it evidence of the existence of great creativity and inventiveness, especially through the medium of Jewish languages. Even though they belonged to two different intellectual milieus, Birnbaum’s argument parallels Max Weinreich’s consideration of specific features of the Yiddish language. For Weinreich, Yiddish is the direct expression of the *derekh ha-shas/déiryx haśas* (the ‘way of the Talmud’⁴⁰). For Birnbaum too, there exists a strong ‘connection between Judaism and Yiddish,’ (35) and the vernacular is important as a ‘safeguard against loss of spiritual identity and as a symbol of specifically Jewish life upon the basis of Judaism’ (38).

The study of the Yiddish language is the direct continuation of his activity for the preservation and transmission of the traditional values of Judaism. He considers religious tradition one of the surest protections against assimilation. Further, without a strong Hebrew-Aramaic substrate, minority Jewish languages, weakened under the pressure of social environments pervaded by secularization, are in danger of both being penetrated by deleterious influences and being slowly absorbed into the majority culture to the point of disappearance. It is thus telling that Birnbaum devotes a paragraph to *East Ashkenazi dress* (23), stressing its cultural importance. This passage seems to echo the famous Midrash: ‘Israel was saved because they did not change their names, their language’ (*Vayiqra Rabba* 32, 5) ‘and their dress’ (Midraš Lekah on *Parašat Va’yera*). He asserts, ‘They [The Jews] have their own religion, their own language, their own literature, their own customs and costumes.’ (19). Dress is not considered a folkloristic sign, but instead plays ‘a significant role’ (23) in the life of East Ashkenazi Jews, especially as the observance of an important religious precept.

This consideration led him to introduce a sharp cultural dichotomy, even if it could be relativized by historical and sociological facts, between the West and East Ashkenazi worlds.⁴¹ Birnbaum attributes to the former negative qualities, such as assimilation, secularization, separation from tradition, and the destruction of the ‘Jewish national body’ (24), as leading to Jews’ slow absorption into the surrounding society. Estranged as they are from religion, these Jews have adopted the values of the gentile majority. The Western world is portrayed as the negative, ‘dark side’ of Europe, a society in which Jews have lost their ‘national unity’ and their specific identity, and have even ‘jettisoned’ (36) their own language. For westernized Jews, the Yiddish language became the symbol of Jewish separateness that must be abandoned for the sake of integration, and replaced with a majority language such as Polish, Hungarian, German, or Russian. In contrast, the eastern Ashkenazi world was, in his view, more oriented toward religion, mysticism, traditional ways of life, and the preservation of social norms: ‘In the East of Europe, Judaism still existed in an undiluted form,’ he noted (19), and was

the repository of living customs and beliefs, of strong ethical values, and of an innovative tradition. In Eastern Europe, Jews perceived the traditional forms of religious life as part of 'God's world plan.' (25)⁴² Hence, Birnbaum was deeply attracted to Hasidism as a 'strong barrier against secularization' (36) and as the symbol of the strength of traditional Jewish values. So strong were these values that even among secularists they did not wholly disappear in Eastern Europe. Rather, Jewish national consciousness there replaced the old notion of an *am segula*, rendered in the classic English Bible as 'a peculiar people,' and became a positive concept in which language, either Hebrew or Yiddish, played an essential role.

In assigning a central place to religion in the formation, transmission, preservation, and historical evolution of Jewish languages, Birnbaum anticipated contemporary research about Jewish languages as sociolects or religiolects.⁴³ He summarizes the role of religion in language formation when he explains that 'language is an expression of group life' (13). The study of Jewish languages is not limited for him to the collection and analysis of linguistic data alone; rather, they should be studied from a number of sociocultural perspectives. This approach lays the basis for the sociolinguistics of Jewish languages,⁴⁴ which examines the relationships between different prevailing factors. These include the internal stratification of Jewish society, strategies of collective identity, attitudes toward religious practice, and how Jews present themselves to the outside world. Birnbaum integrates into this general framework of study such phenomena as internal and external diglossia, languages in contact, and linguistic interference between Jews, other minorities, and broader society. He thus expands his investigation of the phenomena of borders, linguistic hybridity, and cultural porosity.

Birnbaum does not offer a simple anthology of sources in *YSG*. Yiddish literature is, first and foremost, viewed in its unity and continuity and the various ways it responds to the specific religious and cultural demands of Jewish society. The anthology of texts⁴⁵ (146-189) offers a survey of the diverse modes of literary expression originating in the two main streams of Ashkenazi Judaism, Central and Eastern European. It combines linguistic description with the presentation of a representative sample of vernacular texts into a coherent whole in order to provide the basis for a scientific study of Yiddish and its culture, literature, and history. While there were already some anthologies compiled in the nineteenth century, their purpose was to provide simple text fragments for comparison with European popular literature. This approach detached Yiddish literature from its social context, relegating it to study primarily as a minor branch of Hebrew and European literatures.⁴⁶

The texts Birnbaum presents aim at a combination of scholarly objectives. They demonstrate, first of all, the longevity of Yiddish literature spanning nearly

seven centuries of existence. The oldest extant written text, a blessing inserted into the manuscript *Mahzor of Worms*, dates back to 1272. Birnbaum also transcribed excerpts from the Cambridge Codex, which dates from 1382 and was found in the Cairo Geniza.⁴⁷ The most recent text is a 1955 article by Isaac Nachman Steinberg. The sources may be seen from multiple angles, as a testimony to a cultural tradition at the crossroads of rabbinic sources and contemporary creations, as well as documents in the service of history, anthropology, and sociology. They thus link cultural factors and linguistic data. The choice of fragments according to the three broad dialect areas of Yiddish helps to make the collection a language laboratory for the study of variants of Yiddish. Although the collection can only be based on written sources, the rigorous transcription of texts from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century allows for lexical, phonemic, and syntactic analysis, as well as for the study of the script and the diachronic evolution of language. The selection of excerpts, as well as their accompanying philological notations, complements the other parts of the work, thus encouraging correlations, comparisons, and thematic connections. The first part links the birth of the Yiddish literary tradition to Western Yiddish,⁴⁸ indicating the multitude of types of texts and their scripts. It also points nonetheless to the importance of works created in Eastern Europe, such as the homiletic commentary of Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi of Janow, the *Tsenerene/Cénerény* (written late sixteenth century, first printed edition Hanau, 1622), which was reprinted in Poland from the late sixteenth century on, and the commentary on the prophetic books *Sefer ha-Maggid* (*Seyfer ha-Magid/Saifer ha-Magyd*) (Lublin, 1623–7). The collection begins with the transcription of the oldest texts, which are fragments of biblical epics or glosses of biblical manuscripts. This is a tradition that continued with the printing of excerpts of literal adaptations of the Bible⁴⁹ (*Taytsh-khumesht/Taać-xjmyś*) until the full version was published in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century. Added to these are prayers, an excerpt from a book for moral instruction, a *responsum*, official documents⁵⁰ including court testimony and community edicts, religious poems, a courtly song, and a satirical poem by the great Jewish humanist Elijah Bahur Levita.⁵¹ The Central Yiddish dialect is mainly represented by a sample of letters preserved in Prague.

The anthology shows the migration beginning in the eighteenth century of Yiddish literature from Western Europe to Eastern Europe⁵² and later to the United States, especially through the works of the three classic Yiddish writers Mendeley Moykher-Sforim,⁵³ Sholem Aleichem, and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. Meanwhile, Western Yiddish is represented in the twentieth century only by the oral memoirs of Jews in Switzerland and the regions of Baden and Alsace. Each author represents a commitment and a unique contribution within this general picture of modern Jewish literature; some authors, including Mendeley Moykher-Sforim

who wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish, are located at the intersection of two cultural streams, making for a remarkable synthesis. In thus sketching a history of Old and Modern Yiddish literature, Birnbaum shows the main areas of creation and the specific cultural space in which Yiddish literature unfolded in contact with European literature and works in Hebrew. In his conceptual framework, he connects vernacular literature to canonical and Rabbinic texts. Yiddish literature is not defined as merely a 'popular' and 'minor literature' or as a simple putative branch of Hebrew literature. Instead, it is presented as a direct expression of Jewish tradition (*Masorah*). In this way, the sacred and the profane are combined into a single creative unity.

Birnbaum views Modern Yiddish literature as a direct result of secularization, which, in his words, 'succeeded in breaking up the Jewish community ... destroying the Jewish national body' (24). He illustrates in the literary domain the dichotomy between Jewish literature by western Jews, who were more affected by the influences of the surrounding society, and the literature of 'traditional East Ashkenazi Jewry' (24), which kept strong links to religion, faith, and traditional Judaism. Recent studies have significantly relativized this cultural opposition, showing the cultural porosity between the Jewish world and Eastern European culture in general and the forces of secularization at work in Eastern European society since the late nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Birnbaum, taking up an idea that ran through many scholarly and literary works of the early twentieth century, describes Judaism in Eastern Europe⁵⁵ as less susceptible to external influences and mixing, given its more traditional content. He saw it as a bulwark against the forces of atomization, dilution, and absorption, as well as an important domain for the expression of the world of tradition. In contrast with the Jews of the western world, where writers and artists were more influenced by the dominant literary models of European culture, the Jews of Eastern Europe chose a path leading to the creation of a literature rooted in traditional texts, and an involvement in Jewish political and national awareness movements.

Birnbaum therefore gave a prominent place to religious songs and to the creation, adaptation, and translation of scriptural sources. Above all, he assigned a major role to Hasidism and its founder the Besht (the Ba'al Shem Tov), whose teachings he reproduced. He thus included a Kabbalistic allegory excerpted from *Keter Šem Tov*⁵⁶ and the Holy Epistle (*Iggeret ha-qodeš*), which recounts the ascension of the Besht's soul and his dialogue with the Messiah.⁵⁷ To these fragments he added a tale by R. Nahman of Bratslav, often considered the first author of modern Jewish literature. Traditional texts remain an important branch of Yiddish's cultural heritage. This is symbolized by the inner strength of *Hasidut*, which he viewed both as a mighty defense that combines mysticism and piety, and as an answer to contemporary materialism.

A new Jewish literature emerged during the period of the *Haskalah*. In Yiddish it was more oriented to political and social issues and the formation of a secular diaspora culture. In Hebrew it tended toward nationalism and Zionism. The main opposition in it was between *traditionalism*, which used Yiddish as an integral part of the Orthodox way of life, and *Yiddishism*, for which secular national trends were essential. Two significant events symbolize this process of returning to the sources of Ashkenazi tradition and calling into question its cultural heritage and its future: on the one hand, the Czernowitz Conference in 1908⁵⁸ where heated debates took place to define the national language of the Jewish people, and, on the other, the creation in 1925 of YIVO, the Jewish Scientific Institute which contributed greatly to achieving academic recognition for Yiddish.⁵⁹ Birnbaum actively contributed to contemporary debates about nationalism, secularization, Jewish identity, and the future of the Jewish people, thereby offering rich material for reflection on the role of Jewish languages and on changes in a Jewish society.

Birnbaum, as seen in his correspondences, his contacts with many leading scholars, and his scholarly achievements, was at the heart of Yiddish studies in his generation. He participated in many debates and academic discussions, as well as achieved recognition for this field in Jewish Studies, dialectology, and sociolinguistics. Because of his scholarly choices – above all the use of his own system of Romanization – he occupies a unique place in the field. His academic research is particularly remarkable because he investigated a great variety of domains in order to give a comprehensive picture of the language, its history, its culture, its structure, and its social functions. In his work, Yiddish is not seen as a closed system, but is integrated into a network of Jewish languages and is permeated with the linguistic influences of its surroundings. Birnbaum's work reminds us that the scientific study of Yiddish must consider the multi-faceted expression of religious practices and beliefs, literary traditions, a common cultural heritage, social structures, and shared ways of living that, in conjunction with linguistic features, provide the basis for the unity and diversity of Jewish languages. Birnbaum based his original thinking on such data, imparting to this magnum opus a broad analytical perspective that has lost nothing of its scholarly relevance.

Translated from the French by Kalman Weiser.

NOTES

- 1 In this text, the page numbers in parentheses refer to the pages in the main text of *Yiddish: a Survey and a Grammar* (YSG). Salomo/Solomon Asher Birnbaum is abridged to Birnbaum.

- 2 I am very grateful to Prof. Eleazar Birnbaum and to David Birnbaum, Director of the Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum Archives in Toronto, for providing me with valuable information about the life and work of Solomon A. Birnbaum.
- 3 Alfred Landau, 'Die Sprache der Memoiren Glückels von Hameln,' *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volkskunde* 34 (1885): 20–68.
- 4 Lazare Sainéan, 'Essai sur le judéo-allemand et spécialement sur le dialecte parlé en Valachie' in *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique*, 1903, 90–138 and 187–96.
- 5 These include, among others, the contributions of Moritz Steinschneider, 'Jüdische-deutsche Literatur,' *Serapeum*, 1848, 1849, 1864, 1866 and 1896, pag. div. Note also the pioneering work of Ber Borochov/Béir Buurexov, especially 'Di oyfgabn fun der yidisher filologye/Di ofgabn fñ der lîdißer filolgy,' in *Der Pinkes/Der Pinkys*, Shmuel Niger/Šmjil Niger, ed. (Vilna: B. Kletskin, 1913) 1, 1913, 1–18.
- 6 See, for example, the works of Moritz Grünwald and folklorists in *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volkskunde* (Vienna, 1898–1929).
- 7 The first history of Yiddish literature is Leo Wiener, *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Nimmo, 1899); on Old Yiddish literature, see Max Erik/Maks Erik, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur fun di eltste tsaytn biz der haskole-tkufe/Di gyšixty fñ der lîdißer literatúúr fñ di éltsty caatn biz der haskuuly-tkjify* (Warsaw: Kultur-lige/Kúltúúr-ligy, 1928).
- 8 Emanuel S. Goldsmith. *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century, a Study in Jewish Cultural History* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976) (Reprinted with an additional chapter: *Modern Yiddish Culture, the Story of the Yiddish Language Movement*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).
- 9 Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised, a Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the 19th Century* (New York: Schocken, 1973).
- 10 Itzik Gottesman, *Defining the Yiddish Nation, the Jewish Folklorists of Poland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).
- 11 Delphine Bechtel, *La Renaissance culturelle juive en Europe centrale et orientale, 1897–1930: langue, littérature et construction nationale* (Paris: Belin, 2002).
- 12 Erika Timm, Eleazar Birnbaum and David Birnbaum, eds. *Salomo/Solomon A. Birnbaum, Ein Leben für die Wissenschaft/A Lifetime of Achievement*, vol. 1: Linguistics, vol. 2: Palaeography (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).
- 13 Paul Glasser 'Max Weinreich,' in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press; New York: YIVO, 2008), vol. 2, 2014–2016.

- 14 Salomo Birnbaum, *Praktische Grammatik der jiddischen Sprache für den Selbstunterricht* (Vienna, Leipzig: Hartleben, 1918; new, enlarged editions: Hamburg: Buske, 1966, 1979, 1984, and 1988).
- 15 The work was published in 1922 in Kirchhain by the printers Zahn and Baendel: *Inauguraldissertation verfasst in der philosophischen Fakultät der bayer. Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg zur Erlangung der philosoph Doktorwürde vorgelegt am 10. Juni 1921*. The thesis was republished with an introduction by Walter Röhl (Hamburg: Buske, 1986).
- 16 His book *Shtaplen: Fir etyuden tsu der yidisher shprakhvisnshaft un literaturgeshikhte/Štaplyn: Fiir étiudn cj der lîdišer šprax-visnšaft jn literatûir gyšixty* (Berlin: Wostok, 1928) contains elements from his thesis. The thesis was republished as Max Weinreich, *Geschichte der jiddischen Sprachforschung*, ed. Jerold Frakes (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).
- 17 Solomon A. Birnbaum, *Yiddish: a Survey and a Grammar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979). Some of these developments can be found in previous books and articles, especially in *Die Jiddische Sprache: ein kurzer Überblick und Texte aus acht Jahrhunderten* (Hamburg: Buske, 1974; second enlarged edition, 1986; third edition, 1997, with an introduction by Walter Röhl). These revisions and additions inform us about the evolution of Birnbaum's method of work, which deepened and broadened his linguistic, sociological, and literary investigations over the years. Thus, for example, the analyses contained in the article, 'The Age of Yiddish' (*Transactions of the Philological Society*, London, 1939, 31–43) appeared again in *YSG* (44–57), but with differences, notably in the transcriptions of Old Yiddish texts.
- 18 See note 15. We read (4): 'Das Jiddische besteht der Hauptsache nach aus drei zu einer Einheit verschmolzenen Elementen: einem germanischen, einem semitischen und einem slavischen.' ('Yiddish consists mainly of three elements fused into a unity: Germanic, Semitic, and Slavic').
- 19 Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh/Gyšixty ffn der lîdišer šprax* (New York: YIVO, 1973). (Two volumes of text, two volumes of footnotes.) See the partial English translation, *History of the Yiddish Language*. Trans. Shlomo Noble with the assistance of Joshua A. Fishman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). A complete translation was published (2 vols., New Haven: Yale University Press; New York, YIVO, 2008).
- 20 S.A. Birnbaum, 'The Origins of the German Elements in Yiddish' in *The Field of Yiddish*, ed. Uriel Weinreich, vol. 1 (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1954), 63–9 (Repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit. vol. 1, 121–9).

- 21 The YIVO system adopted in 1937 is based on the traditional Yiddish spelling system, which is pan-dialectal. Uriel Weinreich maintained that the correspondence between the Northeastern dialect and the written form is greater than that between the southern dialects and the written form. Birnbaum disagreed with this assertion. His transcription system is based on central and southeastern Yiddish. For him, the YIVO system, by standardizing the transcription of the language, has the defect of not adequately taking into consideration the dialectal richness of Yiddish. See Birnbaum, 'Standard Yiddish' in *The Field of Yiddish*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1954), 69–72 (Repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit. vol. 1, 277–9). On the subject of Yiddish spelling, see Weiser's essay in this volume.
- 22 On periodization, see note 30.
- 23 Max Weinreich used the term 'component.' See Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh/Gyśixty fn der lîdişer śprax*, vol. 1, 32–41. Birnbaum employed the term 'elements.' In his *YSG* (58), we read, 'The immediate predecessor of Y[iddish] was Zarphatic [Birnbaum's term for the Jewish language based on Old French], which the Jews had brought from Northern France. From this, the new language which was born in Germany inherited an element of Semitic origin. Zar[phatic], of course, did not disappear without a trace. Thus it may be said that Y[iddish] at its birth consisted of three elements: Semitic, Romance and Germanic.' Solomon Birnbaum and Max Weinreich both use terms and metaphors borrowed from chemistry. At the beginning of his 'Synthesis' (*YSG*, 82), Birnbaum writes, 'The words "element" and "reaction," taken from chemistry, seem to provide a suitable metaphor for the linguistic processes in question. Thus "element" is preferable to the term "component" which was introduced some time ago as a substitute. However, "components" suggests things placed side by side without "interaction."'
- 24 *YSG* 14.
- 25 Leo Wiener, in his *The History of Yiddish Literature*, uses some stereotypes associated with Yiddish, calling it 'an arbitrary and vicious corruption of the language of their country' (13), and is considered by German scholars 'a careless corruption of the German,' (17) and 'less known to the world than that [the language] of the Gypsy, the Malay or the North American Indian' (33).
- 26 S. Birnbaum, 'Jewish Languages,' in *Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J.H. Hertz*, eds. Isidore Epstein, Ephraim Levine, and Cecil Roth (London: Goldston, 1944), 51–67; see also his 'Jewish Languages' (a different article) in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, 1971 edition only, cols. 66–9; repr.

in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 1, 1–5. A large part of the articles in volume I is devoted to typology and to linguistic corpus studies of Jewish language. This is especially true of his ‘The Jewish Languages of the Jewries at the Edge of Eastern Europe’, 305–30. There are articles about Judezmo/Jidyo/Jidic (especially letters in the language of the Sephardim of Sarajevo [Bosnia] and of Ragusa [Dubrovnik]; about Maaravic and Maghrebinian of Fez [Morocco]; and about the language of the Jews of Bukhara, Central Asia [‘Bukharic Language of Samarkand’]). For Bukharic, there is notably the facsimile, the original text, accompanied by the Yiddish transcription and the English translation of a poem from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, *Xudaidad*. These articles are of the greatest importance not only as linguistic studies of the spoken and written languages of the Jews of Oriental communities, but also as valuable testimonies to Jewish languages that are almost or actually no longer extant.

- 27 S. A. Birnbaum, ‘Tables of Jewish Languages and Scripts,’ in *ibid.*, vol. 1, 7–18.
- 28 See also the summary, ‘Hebräisch und Jiddisch’ in *Actes du XVIIIe Congrès International des Orientalistes* (Leiden, 1932), 169.
- 29 Solomon Birnbaum, ‘The Age of the Yiddish Language,’ in *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1939), 31–43 (Repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 1, 97–108).
- 30 On the periodization of Yiddish, see Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh/Gyśixty fñ der İdişer şprax*, vol. 2, 383–97; Nathan Süsskind (Nosn Ziskind/Nuuns Ziiskind), ‘Batrakhtungen vegn der geshikhte fun yidish/Batraxtjngyn végn der gyśixty fñ İdiş,’ *Yidishe shprakh/İdişy şprax* 13 (1953): 97–108; Dov-Ber Kerler, *The Origins of Modern Literary Yiddish* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 255–6; on the geographic origins of Yiddish, there exist two main opposing theories: that of Rhineland origins (S. A. Birnbaum [see YSG 106] and Max Weinreich) and that of Bavarian origins (Robert King). See Robert King, ‘Proto-Yiddish Morphology,’ in *Origins of the Yiddish Language*, ed. Dovid Katz (Oxford: Pergamon, 1987), 73–81. On the relationship between Yiddish and Bavarian dialects, see Birnbaum, ‘Bayrisch und Jiddisch,’ in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 1, 108–19.
- 31 In YSG (106) Birnbaum writes, ‘The ninth century must be regarded as the birth date of the new language ... [by] 1382 the Jewish vernacular had undergone about five centuries of development.’ 1382 is the date of the Cambridge manuscript of *Avrom Ovinu/Avruum Uviinij* (TS 10 K22), one of the oldest sources of Old Yiddish literature.
- 32 Jerold Frakes, *The Cultural Study of Yiddish in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

- 33 Diana Matut, 'Steinschneider and Yiddish,' in *Studies on Steinschneider: Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 283–409.
- 34 Cecile Kuznitz, 'Yiddish Studies,' *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 541–71.
- 35 On Nathan Birnbaum's work, life, and thought, see Jess Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013); Solomon A. Birnbaum, 'Nathan Birnbaum,' in *Men of Spirit*, ed. Leo Jung (New York: Kymson, 1964), 517–49; Joshua Fishman, *Ideology, Society and Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1987); 'Nathan Birnbaum' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1972, 2003; *The Bridge: Selected Essays*, ed. Solomon A. Birnbaum, trans. Irene R. Birnbaum (London: Jewish Post Publications, 1956); Joshua Shanes, 'Nathan Birnbaum,' in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, 286.
- 36 See Kalman Weiser's essay in this volume.
- 37 In his article 'Jewish languages' (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, 1971 (only), col. 68; repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, *A Lifetime of Achievement*, vol. 1, 3), Birnbaum states, 'The Jewish languages are creations of the group-forming factor of religion.'
- 38 See, for example, Matthias Mieses, *Die Entstehungsursache der jüdischen Dialekte*, mit einer Einleitung von Peter Freimark (Hamburg: Buske, 1979) (facsimile of the 1915 edition published in Vienna by Löwit).
- 39 See Nathan Birnbaum, 'A mol un atsind/A muul jn acind,' in YIVO, *Di ershte yidishe shprakh-konferents/Di éirśty lîdiśy śprax-konferénc*, (Vilna: YIVO, 1931), ix; on the ties between Yiddish, religion, and Jewish tradition, see Shloyme Birnboym/Śloimy Biirnboim, 'Geule fun loshn/Gjly fjn luuśn,' in *Never Say Die*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 181–95.
- 40 This expression is used by Max Weinreich (Weinreich/Vaanraax, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh/Gyśixty fjn der lîdiśer śprax*, 2, 2008, 174–246) to denote the cultural-historical way of life of the Ashkenazi world and Yiddish as a linguistic repository of the main components of the Jewish tradition. The term, as used in traditional Jewish sources, means the way the Talmud develops an argument, e.g., Shabbat 1436, Tosafot.
- 41 This cultural opposition is also found in the works of many Jewish intellectuals of his time, such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, and in the thought of his father, Nathan Birnbaum (see, for example, 'Die Emanzipation des Ostjudentums von Westjudentums' in his *Ausgewählte Schriften zur jüdischen Frage* (Czernowitz: Birnbaum, Kohut, 1910, 13–33).
- 42 This idea is also expressed in Nathan Birnbaum's *Gottes Volk* (Vienna: Löwit, 1918).

- 43 On the concept of *religiolect*, see Ora Schwartzwald, 'Morphological Aspects in the Development of Judeo-Spanish,' *Folia Linguistica* 27/1-2 (1993): 29; Shlomo Morag speaks likewise of *socioglossia*, thus highlighting the coexistence in Jewish languages of fragments of the corpus of classic Jewish texts and of a Hebrew-Aramaic component integrated into the structure of the language, especially at the lexical level. See S. Morag, 'The Study of the Language Traditions of the Jewish Communities of the Diaspora, *Vena Hebraica in Judaeorum Linguis*, ed. S. Morag, M. Bar-Asher, M. Mayer-Modena (Milan: Universita degli Studi; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1999), 3-13.
- 44 See on this subject the work of sociolinguist Joshua Fishman catalogued by Gella Schweid Fishman, 'Joshua A. Fishman's Bibliographical Inventory,' in Ofelia García, Rakhmiel Peltz and Harold Schiffman: *Language, Loyalty, Continuity and Change: Joshua Fishman's Contributions to International Sociolinguistics* (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd.), 125-77.
- 45 A first version appeared in *The Field of Yiddish II*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 1-23.
- 46 Max Grünbaum, *Jüdischdeutsche Chrestomathie* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1882); Willy Staerk and Albert Leitzmann, *Die jüdisch-deutschen Bibelübersetzungen* (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1924).
- 47 It is the epic poem *Avrom Ovinu/Avruum Uuviinjj* inspired by the Bible and the Midrashim. Birnbaum participated in the publication of the manuscript of the Old Yiddish version of the epic *Dukus Horant*. See his palaeographic analysis, S. Birnbaum, 'Excurs,' *Dukus Horant*, ed. F. Ganz, F. Norman, and W. Schwarz (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964), 7-14; repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 2, 387-93.
- 48 The phonological analysis of the manuscript of *Dukus Horant* placed its origins in the Rhine region in the thirteenth century. See Ganz, Norman, and Schwarz, *Dukus Horant*, 130-1.
- 49 Note two transcriptions of Psalm 6, a manuscript version (no. 8 in the collection of texts, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Or.Qu. 310) and a printed version (no. 21 in the collection, by Joseph bar Yakar, published in Ichenhausen in 1544). Birnbaum included these versions in two articles that trace the history and study the language of Psalms in Yiddish in the work *Die Psalmenverdeutschung von den ersten Anfängen bis Luther*, ed. Hans Vollmer (Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1932-1933), 4-5, 8-9, 19 (reprinted in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 1, 177-96); and Shloyme Birnboym/Śloimy Biirnboim, 'Zeks hundert yor tilim af yidish/ Zéks hjndert iur tilym af Iidiś' in *For Max Weinreich on his*

Seventieth Birthday: Studies in Jewish Languages, Literature and Society (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), 526–600.

- 50 They were collected for the first time in Raphael Strauss, ed. *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der Juden in Regensburg 1453–1738* (München: Beck, 1960), 455–62; repr. in Timm, Birnbaum, and Birnbaum, op. cit., vol. 1, 197–205.
- 51 Twenty-four texts out of twenty-nine, thus showing the importance of socio-religious factors in the shaping of Yiddish literature.
- 52 This development was studied by Dov-Ber Kerler, *The Origins of Modern Literary Yiddish* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).
- 53 Birnbaum translated three novels by Mendeley Moykher-Sforim/Mendaly Moixer Sfuuryim (published in Berlin by Jüdischer Verlag 1924): *Die Mähre* (from 1873), *Schloimale* (1901) and *Der Wüschring* (1865). They were collected, together with other novels translated by Alexander Eliasberg and Efraim Frisch, in Mendeley Moicher Sfurim, *Werke* (Olten/Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter), 2 vols., 1961–2. The work includes a glossary and afterword by, among others, Klaus Wagenbach, one of the great biographers of Franz Kafka. Wagenbach draws a parallel between Mendeley Moykher-Sforim/Mendaly Moixer Sfuuryim and Wilhelm Raabe.
- 54 Nathan Cohen shows the diversity of Jewish literary and cultural currents, especially secular ones in Warsaw prior to the Second World War. See Natan Kohen (Nathan Cohen), *Sefer, sofer ve-iton, merkaz ha-tarbut ha-yehudit be-varša, 1918–1942* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003). See also Hana Šmeruq (Chone Shmeruk), ‘Ivrit, yidiš, polanit, tarbut yehudit tlat lešonit,’ in *Ben šte milhamot ha-olam, peraqim me-ḥayyei ha-tarbut šel yehude polin li-lšonotehem* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997), 9–33.
- 55 For example, to mention only the best known, Franz Kafka, Martin Buber, Sh. Agnon, and Joseph Roth. On the history of this cultural rupture, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: the East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
- 56 *Keter Šem Tov* (*Crown of a Good Name*, Zolkiew, 1794) is an anthology of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s teachings by Rabbi Aharon ha-Kohen of Zhelikhov, gleaned from the works of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye.
- 57 In his introduction to the life and work of the Besht, (*Leben und Worte des Balschemm nach chassidischen Schriften*, Auswahl und Übertragung von Salomo Birnbaum (Berlin: Welt-Verlag; Leipzig: von Spamer, 1920; English translation by Irene Birnbaum, New York, 1933), Birnbaum contrasts *Westjuden* with *Ostjuden*, describing the latter as the ‘Hauptkerngruppe

des jüdischen Volkes.’ The work contains a glossary of Hasidic terms in Birnbaum’s transcription system based on the dialect of southern regions of Eastern Europe (*südlichen Dialektes des Jiddischen*), the Yiddish spoken by the Besht.

- 58 Kalman Weiser and Joshua A. Fogel, eds., *Czernowitz at 100: The First Yiddish Language Conference in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).
- 59 Cecile E. Kuznitz, ‘Yivo,’ *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, vol. 2, 2090–6.