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The present volume of studies is devoted to the study of the life and work of Moritz (Moshe) Steinschneider (1816–1907). Its aim is to modify the traditional view of Steinschneider as a “mere bibliographer” and to reveal further dimensions of his work and scientific personality. Most of the contributions included in this volume are expanded and revised versions of papers delivered at the conference: “Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907). Bibliography and the Study of Cultural Transfer. A Centennial Conference,” held on 20–22 November 2007 at the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin—the former Königliche Preußische Bibliothek—where Steinschneider worked for over twenty years (1869–1890). Although held a century after Steinschneider’s demise, it was nonetheless the first conference entirely devoted to this pioneering giant of medieval literary history. So, too, the present volume is the first ever to focus on Steinschneider and his scientific achievements.

Felicitously, the centenary of Steinschneider’s death was also marked by a conference held at the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem (16 January 2008). It will be followed by a special issue of the scholarly periodical Pe’amim dedicated to Steinschneider (no. 129–130 [2011–12]). The editor of Pe’amim, Avriel Bar-Levav, and the editors of the present volume have cooperated closely and the two publications complement one another (although, naturally, the two groups of authors overlap somewhat).

We are very grateful to all of the institutions that made our conference possible: the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, where the conference was held; the University Library, Frankfurt am Main and the University of Halle-Wittenberg, each of which handled a part of the administrative work. The Thyssen Foundation deserves our particular gratitude for its generous support of the conference.

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1 Very regretfully, owing to a series of unfortunate misunderstandings, the seminal paper by Gerhardt Endress presented at the conference did not find its way into the present volume. It has been published as: “Kulturtransfer und Lehrüberlieferung. Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907) und ‘Die Juden als Dolmetscher’,” Oriens 39 (2011): 59–74.
No less are we indebted to all the members of the Organizing Committee of the conference. In particular, we acknowledge our special and warm indebtedness to Dr Rachel Heuberger (University Library, Frankfurt am Main) who contributed in manifold ways to the preparation and carrying out of the conference. Last but not least, we extend sincere thanks to the contributors to this volume for their articles: we are confident that taken together, inasmuch as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, they will help to bring about a change in scholarly perception of Steinschneider.

Jerusalem-Paris-Geneva
Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal
ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY MORITZ STEINSCHNEIDER

AE  “Allgemeine Einleitung in die jüdische Literatur des Mittelalters,” *JQR* XV–XVII (1903–05).


Arab. Lit.  *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1902).


Cat. Munich  *Die Hebräischen Handschriften der Königlichen Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in München* (Munich: Palm, 1875; ²1895).

CB  *Catalogus Librorum Hebræorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin: Friedlaender, 1852–60).


HB  *Hebräische Bibliographie*, ed. M. Steinschneider (vols. 1–8 [1858–64] and 9–21 [1869–82]).


ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY MORITZ STEINSCHNEIDER


JL/H  Sifrut Yisrael, trans. by Henry Malter (Warsaw: Ahiasaf, 1897).


OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

JQR  Jewish Quarterly Review
JSQ  Jewish Studies Quarterly
JTSA  Jewish Theological Seminary of America
PAAJR  Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
RÉJ  Revue des études juives
ZDMG  Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
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Moritz (Moshe) Steinschneider (1816–1907) is probably the most oft-quoted scholar of nineteenth-century Wissenschaft des Judentums. In many branches of Jewish studies, serious research still cannot be done without constant reference to Steinschneider’s innumerable monographs, library catalogues, articles, and reviews. Notwithstanding the acknowledgment of his invaluable contribution to modern scholarship, Steinschneider is probably also the least studied of all the central figures that shaped Jewish studies during the nineteenth century. Whereas the other major scholars of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, notably Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) and Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), have received intensive scholarly attention, not a single comprehensive monograph or volume of essays has been dedicated to the man to whom Jewish studies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries owe more than to anyone else. Using Steinschneider for the study of Jewish history and literature is a must, but studying Steinschneider himself is a rarity.

Reasons for this formidable lack of scholarly interest in Steinschneider are not hard to find. Steinschneider’s work often seems to consist of endless listings of often highly valuable but unreadable biographical and bibliographical information. His dry and factual style, occasionally interspersed with ironic remarks on the objects of his study and sarcastic attacks on earlier scholarship, keeps readers away from a prolonged study of his writings. Although Steinschneider wrote a few shorter essays that are more accessible, not a single one of his larger scientific works was written in view of being read continuously from the first to the last page. The essay “Jüdische Literatur” (1850); the Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana (1852–1860); the catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts in the libraries of Leiden (1858), Munich (1875 and 1895), Hamburg (1878), and Berlin (1878 and 1897); and especially the monumental Die Hebraischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher (1893) are essential reference books, but not tightly knit monographs with a continuous narrative.
Steinschneider clearly shunned the literary genre of fluently written historical accounts and interpretations. His literary style went hand in hand with his preferences in historiographical matters: to large historical reconstructions he preferred well-established facts, raw materials painstakingly compiled and put at the disposal of the scholarly community for further research. Moreover, his books and articles are often obfuscated by a garbled manner of presentation, in part due to Steinschneider’s idiosyncratic working methods, and in part to the fact that the early Wissenschaft experimented with different scientific styles, methods, and literary genres. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, Steinschneider deliberately chose a style that concealed the motives behind his scientific work, his historiographical convictions, and the overarching aims that motivated and informed his scholarly work. These he never expounded systematically. Short remarks and allusions, rare and often scattered in unexpected places, are the only window into Steinschneider’s inner convictions and the ideological background of his gigantic scientific projects. Thus, when we think of Steinschneider, what often remains is the bare admiration in view of his breathtaking scientific productivity and knowledge and a respect for his scientific ethos. These feelings are, nonetheless, accompanied by a certain disappointment in light of his pedantry and his apparent wariness to draw general conclusions out of the mountains of facts he accumulated.

The lack of interest in Steinschneider the scholar is not the result merely of his scientific style and mode of presentation, however. It is likewise the outcome of commonly held convictions concerning Steinschneider’s relevance to us today; while there is unanimous agreement that his work remains the best possible quarry for scientific information and an indispensable research tool, most scholars believe that Steinschneider is uninteresting as a historical figure and, in addition, that in the beginning of the twenty-first century, his work poses no intellectual challenge nor can it be a source of inspiration. Scholars’ expressions of the highest esteem for Steinschneider’s work are thus often paired with a certain condescension, reflected, for example, in the image of Steinschneider as the “gravedigger” at Judaism’s “decent burial” (see Avriel Bar-Levav’s contribution to this volume). Even where the ideological insinuations behind this dictum (first pronounced by Gotthold Weil [1882–1960] and later propagated by Gershom Scholem [1897–1982]) are not shared, by and large Steinschneider’s work is perceived as dry historical scholarship, equally uninspired and
uninspiring. This is also the image of many of the other scientific works produced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the lack of interest in Steinschneider is part of the deep intellectual estrangement of contemporary research from the scientific culture of Steinschneider’s time. Paradoxically, modern scholarship seems to be rather more attracted to and sympathetic with the early *Wissenschaft*, with its strong ideological roots in the Enlightenment and in German Idealism (e.g., Leopold Zunz, Immanuel Wolf [1799–1847], Nachman Krochmal [1785–1840], the early Heinrich Graetz [1817–1891]), or to scholars who partook of the philosophical and ideological turn in the first half of the twentieth century (Hermann Cohen [1842–1918], Franz Rosenzweig [1886–1929], Gershom Scholem).

Thus, the initiative to publish the present volume of studies on Steinschneider (as also the decision to hold the conference that preceded it) was much more than a respectful homage to one of the founding fathers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. It reflects the conviction that Steinschneider’s gigantic scholarly work has more to offer than bare historical facts; that it is in fact rooted in a scientific agenda, one that may have become unfamiliar to contemporary scholarship but which nonetheless deserves to be carefully reconstructed and interpreted. The implication is that we must cease to regard Steinschneider merely as an inexhaustible treasure trove of historical and bibliographical information. Instead, the working hypothesis that underlies the present volume is that Steinschneider should be viewed as a first-rank scholar in nineteenth-century Europe who devoted his life to the promotion and realization of a specific concept of the scientific study of Judaism. We believe that the essays assembled in this volume confirm this hypothesis. They thus represent a first attempt to draw scholarly attention to the intellectual biography and scientific activities of Moritz Steinschneider and to signal the continued importance of Steinschneider’s work for contemporary Jewish studies.

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Part One of this volume contains ten papers that shed light on Steinschneider’s intellectual biography as a Jewish scholar of his times.3

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3 The most comprehensive biography of Steinschneider to date remains that of Alexander Marx: “Moritz Steinschneider,” in his *Essays in Jewish Biography* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948), pp. 113–84. See also Petra Figeac: *Moritz Steinschneider*
Born in 1816 in the Moravian town of Prossnitz, where a specific brand of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) flourished in the early nineteenth century, Steinschneider was exposed to a number of important intellectual currents. During the formative period of his life, his maternal uncle, Gideon Brecher (1797–1873), apparently exerted a considerable influence on Steinschneider’s early intellectual development. As Ismar Schorsch and Michael L. Miller show, Brecher’s ability to combine a high esteem for the Jewish tradition with a support of moderate reform in the spirit of the Haskalah and scientific ambitions inspired by the nascent Wissenschaft des Judentums, left lasting imprints of Steinschneider’s personality and thinking.

Steinschneider’s academic training began in Prague in 1833, and from there he went to Vienna in 1836 to study Semitic languages. Of more lasting impact, however, were his encounter with the Orientalist Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801–1888), with whom he studied at Leipzig in 1839, and his collaboration with Franz Julius Delitzsch (1813–1890). While Steinschneider’s passion for Arabic language and literature may have had its roots in earlier periods of his life, the scholarly exchanges with Fleischer were of particular importance, because they helped put Steinschneider in contact with leading Oriental-studies circles in Germany. Many of his articles and books on the history of Arabic philosophy and science, such as Zur Pseudepigraphischen Literatur des Mittelalters, insbesondere der geheimen Wissenschaften (1862) and Al-Farabi (Alpharabius), des arabischen Philosophen Leben und Schriften (1869) are the immediate fruits of Steinschneider’s active membership in the small but distinguished group of nineteenth-century German Orientalists.

But Steinschneider was not only, nor even primarily, an Orientalist. First and foremost, he was a scholar dedicated to the agenda of the Wissenschaft des Judentums. Alongside his uncle Gideon Brecher, it was the contacts with Leopold Dukes (1810–1891), Michael Sachs (1808–1864), and David Cassel (1818–1893) that brought him into close contact with that movement during his years in Prague and Vienna. The deepest and most lasting influence, however, was that of his paternal friend and colleague, Leopold Zunz. Steinschneider, who was twenty-two years Zunz’s junior, first met the latter in Prague in 1833, and the two men stayed in close contact until Zunz’s death in 1886. As Ismar

(1816–1907), Begründer der wissenschaftlichen hebräischen Bibliographie (Berlin: Hentrich und Hentrich, 2007).
Schorsch and Céline Trautmann-Waller demonstrate, the relationship between these two scholars was not only one of faithful discipleship, but above all one based on shared convictions and common scholarly interests. Both men deliberately chose as their main object of research the history of Jewish literature and both were reluctant to adopt in their works large theoretical constructs. Only on occasion did they borrow concepts or terms from Hegelian and other philosophies, and both eschewed indulgence in overarching theoretical speculations in favor of the sober and solid study of the literary sources. In addition, Zunz and Steinschneider were both convinced that the only appropriate institutional setting for Jewish studies was the secular university of the modern state and not Jewish religious institutions. In the intra-Jewish debates of the nineteenth century, both expressed strong reservations about religious reform. With time, they both also became increasingly skeptical about the prospects of political emancipation for the Jews and the fight against anti-Semitism. Steinschneider, it may be added parenthetically, was also the first to use the construction “anti-Semitic”: he did so in the context of his life-long critical engagement with Renan (a subject that unfortunately had to be left out of consideration in this volume), although he used it only as a common word, not as a concept.4

These similarities notwithstanding, in some respects the two scholars, who belonged to two different generations, also differed. In a certain sense, Zunz is still a representative of the age of Enlightenment and the transition to the age of Idealism, whereas Steinschneider belongs to the post-idealistic second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the former concentrated his efforts on the study of traditional Jewish literature and did not have direct access to Oriental languages and literatures, whereas the latter’s greatest scientific ambitions and

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4 Pointed out in Alex Bein, The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem, translated by Harry Zohn (Cranbury, N.J. etc.: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 594–95. In a review of an article by Heymann Steintal (1832–1907) in which the latter takes Renan to task, Steinschneider comments: “With his characteristic incisiveness the critic [Steintal] demonstrates the contradictions in Renan’s fundamental views and their unfruitfulness for scholarship and research. The more Renan’s brilliant dialectic and stylistic talent captivates the readers, the more necessary it is to expose the consequences—or, more accurately, inconsequences—of his anti-Semitic prejudices [seiner antisemitischen Vorurtheile]…” (quoted from ibid., p. 594; original in HB 3 (1860), p. 16 § 863). The term “anti-Semitic as a well-defined concept was first used by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1880; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism#Etymology_and_usage.
achievements lie precisely in the field of the study of cultural transfer, especially between the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian worlds. Also, from the outset Steinschneider was probably much less religiously attuned than Zunz was ever to become. Despite these differences, however, the scientific work of the two men can be seen as two complementary parts of one and the same project: the scientific study of the history of the entirety of Jewish literature—religious and non-religious. It is no mere coincidence that Steinschneider, who feverishly published studies on every subject that came his way, carefully avoided touching all the branches of Jewish literature that had been treated by Zunz in his classical studies on the Midrash and liturgical poetry (Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden [1832], Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters [1855], Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie [1865]).

Steinschneider published his first scholarly articles in the late 1830s and 1840s, most of them in Jewish journals such as Orient (Leipzig, 1840–1841), Literaturblatt des Orients (Leipzig, 1841–1843), Ost und West (Prague, 1841–1845), Bild und Leben (Prague, 1844), Sabbath-Blatt (Leipzig, 1844), and Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judentums (Berlin and Leipzig, 1844–1846), but also in non-Jewish publications such as Oesterreichische Blätter für Literatur und Kunst (Vienna, 1844–1845), Serapeum (Leipzig, 1845–1870), and the Magazin für die Literatur des Auslandes (Berlin, 1845–1846). From 1841 onward Steinschneider also published books, mostly editions of Hebrew texts such as the Etz Hayyim of Ahaaron ben Elijah of Nicomedia (with F. J. Delitzsch, 1841) or the Ma’amar ha-Yihud, which he attributed to Maimonides (1846 and 1847). He also contributed introductions and appendices to the works of others, for example, to Hirsch Fassels Horow be-Zion (a reply to Samson Raphael Hirsch's Briefe eines jüdischen Gelehrten [1839]) and to Gideon Brecher's Ueber die Beschneidung der Israeliten (1845). Although these publications already reveal Steinschneider’s enormous erudition, none of them shows the sovereign mastery of the history of Jewish literature that his later works bespeak.

An important turning point in Steinschneider’s biography as a scholar occurred in the mid-1840s and is connected with two ambitious projects, of which one failed and the other was a lasting success.

5 Cf. G.A. Kohut, “Bibliography of the Writings of Professor Dr. Moritz Steinschneider,” in Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstage Moritz Steinschneiders (Leipzig: Harassowitz, 1896), pp. V–XXXIX; the years in brackets indicate the period in which Steinschneider contributed to the respective journals.
In 1844, David Cassel initiated, along with Steinschneider, the publication of a comprehensive encyclopedia of Judaism. Cassel published the description of the project as *Plan der Real-Encyclopädie des Judenthums* under his name only, but Steinschneider greatly contributed to it. It represents a first plan for an undertaking whose goal was to systematically present all the different branches of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The *Wissenschaft* could date its birth to the establishment of the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* in November 1819, and the two young scholars obviously had the feeling that after more than twenty years of scientific efforts, it was high time for a conspectus. As Arndt Engelhardt shows in his contribution to this volume, this project for a *Real-Encyclopädie* was met with much skepticism among other Jewish scholars and failed in its initial phase. The idea, however, of presenting the scientific results of the *Wissenschaft* in an encyclopedic format was to occupy Steinschneider for many more years and lead up to another project, which was to become an enormous success: this is his essay on “Jüdische Literatur,” included in Ersch and Gruber’s prestigious *Allgemeine Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*.

There can be no doubt that the composition of this comprehensive historical survey of Jewish literature was an enormous challenge, and one wonders what exactly qualified the young Steinschneider for this undertaking. And yet, after three years of intensive work (1845–1847), the essay Steinschneider presented was deemed more than satisfactory and the editors accepted the almost 120-page work without cuts. This was not only a personal achievement for the thirty-one-year-old scholar, but also a success for the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in its attempts to gain respect for Jewish topics among non-Jewish audiences. And from a scientific point of view the essay indeed constituted a veritable quantum leap in the study of the history of Jewish literature.

From a biographical perspective, “Jüdische Literatur” certainly laid the foundations for much of Steinschneider’s later work. There can be little doubt that some of the monumental books he published in the subsequent years, most notably his *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (1852–1860), the revised edition of the English translation of the essay, known as *Jewish Literature* (1857), and the catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts in the libraries of Leiden (1858), Munich (1875 and 1895), Hamburg (1878), and Berlin (1878 and 1897), would not have been possible without the solid preparatory work done for “Jüdische Literatur.” Indeed, the overarching scientific program underlying his great essay informs much of Steinschneider’s other works as
well, and it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that almost all of
Steinschneider’s later publications are only footnotes to and expand-
sions of “Jüdische Literatur.” This essay is indeed a perfect exemplar
of some of the most fundamental characteristics of Steinschneider’s
scientific personality: his relentless striving for comprehensiveness and
completeness, his strictly historical and a-religious outlook, his dry and
factual style, and his deliberate abstention from theoretical and philo-
sophical speculation.

“Jüdische Literatur” thus contained the seeds of Steinschneider’s life-
long preoccupation with bibliography. It was Ismar Elbogen (1874–1943)
who (in 1926) was apparently the first to describe Steinschneider
as the “father of Hebrew bibliography.”6 This characterization of
Steinschneider, although presumably well-intended, is inadequate; it
overlooks many facets of Steinschneider’s intense activities, including
his theoretical engagement with the fundamental issues of the history of
Hebrew literature. Presumably, Steinschneider himself would not have
been flattered by the label “bibliographer.” Nonetheless, the label cor-
rectly captures one, the most palpable, facet of Steinschneider’s activity:
Steinschneider indeed was the founding father of the scientific study
of Hebrew bibliography. His great Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bib-
liotheca Bodleiana (1852–1860), his catalogues of Hebrew manuscripts
in the public libraries of Leiden (1858), Munich (1875 and 1895),
Hamburg (1878), and Berlin (1878 and 1897), the surveys Polemische
und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache (1877), Die Mathematik bei
den Juden (1893–1899 and 1905), Die arabische Literatur der Juden (1902),
Die Geschichtsliteratur der Juden (1905), the monumental Die Hebraischen
Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher (1893), and innu-
merable articles and shorter notes, including especially those published
in Hebräische Bibliographie (Ha-Maskîr), which he founded and then
edited himself between 1858 and 1882, are all major, lasting contribu-
tions to Hebrew bibliography and can be viewed as having laid its
foundations.

During his work on “Jüdische Literatur” Steinschneider was con-
fronted with a problem that had already occupied scholars of the first
and second generations of the Wissenschaft des Judentums: the problem
of Judaism’s inner unity. In a sense, this problem had been created

6 “Moritz Steinschneider, der Vater der Hebräischen Bibliographie,” Soncino-Blätter
by the *Wissenschaft* itself. From its very outset, the *Wissenschaft* aspired to broaden the vision of what Judaism was. For most of its representatives, the object of the scientific study of Judaism could not be limited to traditional Jewish religion, exclusively identified with Eastern European talmudism. Other historical phenomena, forgotten or intentionally suppressed from the canon of normative Judaism, had to be rediscovered and integrated into Judaism as it was to be conceived and studied by the new science. According to this programmatic vision, nothing Jewish would be alien to the *Wissenschaft*: Philo and Hellenistic Judaism, the heritage of medieval Spain and of the other Muslim lands, Jewish philosophy from Saadia to Spinoza—all was to be included in its purview and in its concept of “Judaism.”

The agenda of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was thus characterized by the scientific ambition to achieve a comprehensive and objective historical description of Judaism, free of religious prejudices and limitations. On a sociological plane, this broadening of horizons to include traditionally excluded cultural phenomena allured to the *Wissenschaft* numerous individuals who had been painfully estranged from Judaism; these could identify with such a re-defined Judaism, in which real or imagined historical precedents of non-canonical Judaism were given due attention and in which the scientific understanding of an all-encompassing, unified, view of Judaism gave balanced representation to all Jewish phenomena with all their historical contradictions and tensions. All this fulfilled the contemporary need to give Jews an ideal, a vision to strive for, a way of overcoming the frictions and dichotomies within contemporary Judaism and restoring unity.

Ironically, however, this new broad concept of Judaism put its inner unity in jeopardy. If any and all expressions of Jewish culture—traditional religious as well as modern secular—are made the legitimate objects of the science of Judaism, then what is it that unifies Jewish culture? If ideational products originating in the most diverse cultures are all taken into consideration, then what circumscribes the unity of Judaism as a particular historical phenomenon? The answers to this pressing question were as many as the scholars who tackled it. Immanuel Wolf in his essay *Ueber den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (1822) located Judaism’s unity in a Hegelian vein in the idea of monism and its dialectical development in history from biblical times to Spinoza. Abraham Geiger highlighted Judaism’s religious ideas and values, and Heinrich Graetz, in his brilliant essay *Die Construction der jüdischen
Geschichte of 1846, identified the totality of Judaism in its national history.

Steinschneider, too, saw himself confronted with this daunting problem. His approach to it is probably closest to Zunz’s, who in his essay Etwas über die rabinische Literatur (1822) introduced the concept of a comprehensive history of Jewish literature; Jewish literature, taken to form a part of universal human culture, is construed as including everything that was written by Jews after the Hebrew Bible. As Irene Zwiep argues in her contribution to this volume, Steinschneider, too, repeatedly addressed the task of defining Jewish literature. In his early essay, “Jüdische Literatur,” his definition of his subject-matter was grounded in the idea of a “national” Jewish literature, an idea strongly indebted to the Hegelian concept of a dialectical historical development. In his later life, Zwiep further argues, Steinschneider gradually gave up this “Jewish Orientalism” and replaced it with a new approach more akin to what one might call a “comparative-literature approach.” In other words, the inner unity of Jewish culture founded upon the national paradigm became more and more suspect to Steinschneider and was gradually abandoned in favor of a more universalistic approach. Similarly, Reimund Leicht, in his contribution, analyzes Steinschneider’s concept of a history of Jewish literature, showing that it displays a growing impact of nineteenth-century positivism on Steinschneider’s thought.

All throughout, Steinschneider’s scientific work was characterized by a strictly historical perspective and a clearly post-idealistic (anti-speculative) outlook. In his hierarchy of values, the goals of “scientificity” (“Wissenschaftlichkeit”) and “objectivity” assume a central place. Nils Roemer points out that Steinschneider’s “noble dream of objectivity” comes close to Leopold von Ranke’s (1795–1886) ideal of historiography, which presumed to describe history “as it really happened” (“wie es eigentlich gewesen”), rather than Heinrich von Treitschke’s (1834–1896) far more politically engaged approach. Steinschneider admittedly shunned explicit theoretical discussions, but nonetheless on occasion formulated his position on historical methodology. In this respect, one can even go so far as to say that in the debates raging in the mid-nineteenth century, Steinschneider did not side primarily with German historicism—be it of the Rankean or the Treitschkean brand—but with English positivism. In his Allgemeine Einleitung in die jüdische Literatur des Mittelalters he explicitly rejects the Hegelian “philosophical schematism” and the “political pragmatism” identified with
Karl von Rotteck (1775–1840) to state that one should learn how to write cultural history (“Kulturgeschichte”) from Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–1862) and Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859). This statement is a rare piece of information demonstrating that Steinschneider’s methodology, far from being naïve, is rooted in a conscious and deliberate choice of an approach to historiography indebted to positivism. It is therefore not surprising that the criticism leveled against Steinschneider—he was taken to task notably for his firm belief in scientific progress, the emphasis on the collection of historical data, and the alleged lack of interpretative depth—parallels the criticism of positivistic historiography leveled by followers of the historicist school.

Steinschneider’s distance from the historicist school that dominated German historiography in the second half of the nineteenth century, and his inclination toward positivism, are highlighted through a comparison with his great antipode, Heinrich Graetz. Although there is no scholarly consensus about Graetz’s indebtedness to German historicism, there can be little doubt that his monumental Geschichte der Juden (11 volumes, 1853–1875) is basically narrative historiography, close in style to the mainstream of historicism and concentrating on outstanding individuals who are taken to embody the spirit of their age. This kind of narrative historiography was anathema to Steinschneider, who sharply criticized Graetz’s magnum opus for its lack of scientific soundness. Contrary to what one would expect on the basis of Steinschneider’s image as a pedantic collector of facts, Steinschneider not only criticizes Graetz’s history for factual mistakes and inaccuracies. It was of the very project of a “construction of Jewish history” that he disapproved. The critique Steinschneider leveled against Graetz shows that as a matter of principle he was more interested in the description of historical structures and facts (“Geschichte”) than in constructing overarching historical narratives (“Literatur”). Accordingly, some of Steinschneider’s methodological decisions in devising his own works may be interpreted as a conscious refusal to engage in historical narratives and the “history of great men.” A case in point

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8 Steinschneider’s blunt critique of the 5th and 6th volumes of Graetz’s work was published in *Hebraische Bibliographie* 3 (1860), no. 17, p. 104, and 4 (1861), no. 22, p. 84, and was also expressed in private letters. See Reuven Michael, *Hirsch (Heinrich) Graetz: The Historian of the Jewish People* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2003), pp. 91–92 (Heb.).
is his *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*; as Gad Freudenthal shows in his contribution to this volume, this monumental work deliberately follows a non-personalistic approach, a choice that may owe as much to Steinschneider’s deep-seated historical preferences as to practical considerations.

It thus becomes clear that to be adequately appreciated, Steinschneider’s approach to the study of the history of Jewish literature must be viewed in the context of his historiographical convictions. The latter, it turns out, are more complex and multifarious than may initially have been assumed and also to be more calculated and self-conscious. This applies also to Steinschneider’s approach to two additional historical literary phenomena: Kabbalah and magic. Steinschneider has often been criticized for his disrespectful and utterly unsympathetic treatment of the Kabbalah. However, as Giulio Busi shows here, his interpretation of Kabbalah as irrational, deceitful, and fundamentally un-Jewish, as biased as it may be by ideological (i.e., rationalist) prejudices, is not one-dimensional at all. It is not only thoughtful but of considerable interest even for post-Scholemian scholarship. Similarly, Giuseppe Veltri shows that although Steinschneider rejected magic as superstitious, he struggled to comprehend it scientifically and depicted it as a sort of pre- or proto-scientific way of thinking. (We reprint below Steinschneider’s text on this topic that has been nearly unknown and inaccessible.)

Such a reconsideration of Steinschneider’s goals and methods affords new insights into the domain for which he has been best known: that of Hebrew bibliography—the subject of Part Two of this volume. A fairly neglected aspect of Steinschneider’s engagement with bibliography is his interest in the material vessels of the texts making up this literature: manuscripts and books. As Judith Olszowy-Schlanger shows in her paper, Steinschneider was the first Jewish scholar to systematically apply the newly developed tools of paleography and codicology to the study of Jewish manuscripts. It is worth emphasizing that he goes beyond viewing manuscripts as neutral bearers of texts, considering them instead to be physical artifacts worthy of a scientific study of their own. This aspect of Steinschneider’s research again highlights his positivistic inclinations and his interest in the history of material culture. These characteristics are also apparent in the study of Steinschneider’s manuscript catalogues. Jan Just Witkam sheds light on the genesis of the Leiden catalogue, which was Steinschneider’s first
manuscript catalogue. Steven Harvey and Resianne Fontaine examine the goals Steinschneider set for himself in this catalogue and show that he broadened the traditional limits of the genre; he not only described the manuscripts, but read the texts they contain—mainly the philosophical and the scientific ones—and used them to advance the study of the history of Jewish thought. The Leiden catalogue thus became an important research tool for subsequent historians of medieval philosophy, like Adolf Neubauer (1831–1907), Ernest Renan (1823–1892), David Kaufmann (1852–1899), and many others. Steinschneider himself also collected manuscripts, although his collection was never large. Benjamin Richler describes the Hebrew manuscripts that Steinschneider had owned at some point and identifies their present locations. The two concluding papers of the section on the “father of Hebrew bibliography” shed light on Steinschneider’s influence on scholars of the next generation. Rachel Heuberger studies Steinschneider’s relationship to Aron Freimann, the most important Hebrew bibliographer of the twentieth century. Avriel Bar-Levav brings to light forgotten testimonies on how Steinschneider impacted upon (then) young scholars such as Reuven Brainin (1862–1939), Arthur Biram (1878–1967), Marcus Ehrenpreis (1869–1951), and, last but not least, Gershom Scholem, an impact that led to the foundation of the Hebrew Bibliography Project.

Steinschneider’s exceptionally broad scientific interests and his intensive study of manuscripts that had often not been read for centuries turned him into a pioneer in a number of fields of literary history. In many of his studies, Steinschneider went far beyond bibliography to formulate interpretations and hypotheses that were often adopted by later generations of scholars and are still accepted today. In the present volume, Steinschneider’s contributions to Karaite, Judeo-Arabic, and Yiddish studies are highlighted by Daniel Lasker, Paul Fenton, and Diana Matut, respectively. Similarly, Asher Salah describes Steinschneider’s contributions to the study of Italian Judaism, elaborated in the context of strong ties with Italian scholars and literati. Tony Lévy highlights Steinschneider’s singular contribution to the study of the history of mathematics. Norman Golb analyzes, more globally, Steinschneider’s role as a historian of culture. This third part of the present volume could easily have been enlarged and complemented by additional studies on subjects such as: “Steinschneider as historian of science,” “Steinschneider as historian of philosophy,” and many others.
This reflects not only his lasting contribution to various disciplines of Jewish studies today, but also invites a study of Steinschneider’s contribution to each of them in its proper historical context.

The lasting value of Steinschneider’s bibliographic work is reflected in Charles H. Manekin’s project (described here) to translate into English, update, and put online Steinschneider’s *Die Hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*. Another project, *Genizat Germania*, whose goal is the systematic investigation of fragments extracted from bindings of books or archival files in German libraries and archives, presented here by Andreas Lehnardt and Elisabeth Hollender, can in many respects be viewed as being conducted in Steinschneider’s spirit.

The present collection of studies, dedicated to Moritz Steinschneider—the man and his work—, aspires no more than to be a starting point for future systematic research leading up to a comprehensive intellectual biography of this outstanding nineteenth-century scholar of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Petra Figiac’s contribution demonstrates that the archives of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek have much material—literary and iconographic—to contribute to highlighting unfamiliar aspects of Steinschneider’s life and personality. Similarly, a number of contributors to this volume were aware that their subjects required the use of manuscript material. Any future in-depth study of Steinschneider will have to follow Steinschneider himself in drawing extensively on unpublished sources, notably those that are preserved at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (which holds Steinschneider’s literary *Nachlass*). Only an intensive and systematic exploration of these untapped materials will yield a comprehensive picture of Moritz Steinschneider—a picture that will finally do justice to Steinschneider’s importance for Jewish studies.

This takes us back to the question from which we set out: Is there a point in studying Steinschneider himself rather than studying Jewish literature and history *with* Steinschneider? Can such a study be more than a matter of repaying the debt most students of Jewish letters feel they owe Steinschneider? It seems to us that two reasons, at the very least, warrant a study of Steinschneider. The first is simple: through his immense influence on the course taken by Jewish studies in the twentieth century, Steinschneider has become a significant historical phenomenon in and of himself. He exerted this influence above all via his bibliographies and literary histories. Now, as argued above and confirmed by the papers grouped in this volume, Steinschneider’s
works resulted from an elaborate agenda and were informed by reflected historiographic convictions. Therefore, if we wish to understand the course taken by twentieth-century Jewish studies, we must seek to delve more deeply into Steinschneider’s background, formation, worldview, and mindset; these contributed to shaping us, scholars of the twenty-first century, into what we are. The light we will shed on Steinschneider will illuminate us, too.

The second reason for studying Steinschneider is perhaps more complicated. It touches upon the question of whether Steinschneider’s work and scholarly agenda still can pose a serious intellectual challenge for Jewish studies today. Interestingly, not all scholars in the past saw Steinschneider as a detached scholar on whose work one can draw as a treasury of historical information without being confronted with fundamental questions about the nature, methods, and aims of Jewish studies. It was Gershom Scholem who acutely identified and formulated the serious challenge that Steinschneider’s (and Zunz’s) concept of Jewish studies posed to his own scientific self-understanding. In his epochal essay *Mitokh hirurim ‘al hokhmat Yiśra‘el* (“Thoughts about the Science of Judaism”), first published in 1944, he admits that the images of Zunz and Steinschneider have always attracted him:

I do not think that their like exists in the Science of Judaism: neither in terms of the breadth of their knowledge, which is world-embracing—and perhaps it is this very breadth which prevented them from seeing in depth—and certainly not in terms of the power of their presentation, which is totally lacking. Jokesters used to say that Steinschneider never wrote a sentence with a noun, a verb, and an orderly sentence structure. [...] However, one finds something in these two scholars that is not to be found among any other scholars, neither in their contemporaries nor in those that followed them: namely, that they are truly demonic figures. These sober figures are unique in their generation in their total lack of sentimentality in the approach to the past. They do not serve up their novellas with a stew of empty or mediocre sentiments or empty enthusiasm; they speak to the point and only to the point, and this zealously matter-of-fact approach seems marvelous to us: at times annoying and cold, and at times refreshing and restraining. One finds in them the full measure of that spiritual asceticism which is demanded of the ideal scholar, and whose absence is so strongly felt in the generations of gushers which followed them. How much coolness is there in these temples of science.

But this is only one, the brighter, side of Zunz and Steinschneider, since Scholem goes on to say:
But they also have an intense Other Side. Suddenly, while reading their words, you feel as if you are gazing into the face of the Medusa, as if from among the half sentences and side comments something completely non-human gazes back at you and freezes your heart—a hatred which is not only of this world, a grandiose cynicism. And the stage changes, and you see before you giants who, for reasons best known to themselves, have turned themselves into gravediggers and embalmers, and even eulogizers.9

Gershom Scholem’s portrait of Zunz and Steinschneider is fraught with an unusual inner tension, and it is highly dialectical. Strong attraction and violent repugnance go hand in hand. It becomes clear that Scholem struggled with Zunz and Steinschneider, these taunting demons, and they were a serious challenge for his own scientific agenda. Only on a rather superficial level can one find a simple answer to the challenge posed by Zunz and Steinschneider: “We sought,” Scholem says about himself and his fellow younger Zionist scholars, “to return to science, with all its strictness and without compromise, as we had found it in the words of Zunz or Steinschneider—but we wished to direct it toward construction and affirmation.”10 In other words, Scholem sought to integrate the historical study of Judaism into the greater project of Jewish nation-building, while remaining faithful to the highest standards of scientific objectivity. Such an aim, however, is not easily achieved, and Scholem was aware of this. Jewish studies, he believed, are in constant danger of relinquishing their scientific standards in favor of national rhetoric11 and sentimentality.12 For this reason, Zunz’s and Steinschneider’s scientific ethos, their struggle for


11 Scholem, “Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies,” p. 70 (Devarim be-go, p. 402): “All of these ills have now assumed a national dress. From the frying pan into the fire: following the emptiness of assimilation there comes another type, that of the contentious nationalist phrase. Instead of religious homiletics and religious rhetoric, we have developed national homiletics and national rhetoric in science.”

12 Scholem, “Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies,” p. 70 (Devarim be-go, p. 402): “Have we destroyed sentimentality? It still walks among us, in new dress and in a new style, no less annoying than the original one.”
scientific objectivity, will never become obsolete; they remain a challenge, invincible demons reminding modern scholarship of its scientific ethos. They are a vital remedy for the shortcomings of ideologically motivated forms of science.

Translated into the vocabulary of contemporary discourse, Scholem touches here upon the sensitive issue of the uncertain role played by Jewish studies in constructing a coherent narrative of the history of the Jewish people and in criticizing such narratives. This question continues to be of outstanding relevance for Jewish studies to this day. In 1995, the noted intellectual historian Amos Funkenstein wrote that in the nineteenth century, “the historical-philological perspective constituted the backbone of the Wissenschaft des Judentums and sustained its branches.” In the late twentieth century, however, its status had been “eroded.” Funkenstein argued that this loss of authority of the historical-philological method and the consequent disappearance of a shared “master narrative” is reflected in a series of controversies among students of Jewish history that erupted in the 1990s. A polyphony of “voices,” each expressing a parochial outlook, replaced what once had been a unified vision. Funkenstein perceived this deconstruction of the shared vision of Jewish history as a destruction or elimination of the subject or the self, which he deplored: “There is no substitute for the self—neither in epistemology, nor in history, nor in life. [...] A coherent narrative is the mark of a subject’s identity. It even is the self, inasmuch as every self lives the narrative it shapes, not only in words but also in deeds: our narrative is our life.”

Funkenstein’s diagnosis implicitly suggests that a move toward the reconstitution of a consensual narrative and a unified self is called for in Jewish studies. Although Funkenstein does not say this explicitly, the implication of his diagnosis is that the erstwhile “backbone” of Jewish studies, the historical-philological method, should be restored some of its former authority. Scholem would probably not have disagreed with Funkenstein—not in the sense that all students of Jewish history should become philologists, but that the creation of overarching (ideological)
historiographic interpretive schemes has to be based upon and counterbalanced by a sober preoccupation with texts and facts.

Would Steinschneider have welcomed this proposal? Probably not fully. Steinschneider, as we saw, was not an “objective scholar” in the naïve sense of the term. In his reconstruction of the history of Jewish culture, he was guided both by historiographic concepts that informed his thought and by historical narrative. In thus balancing historiographic thought with positive, factual research, he parallels Scholem and Funkenstein. But in a dialogue with both Scholem and Funkenstein, Steinschneider would probably always have warned us that the study of history should never become the handmaiden of preconceived ideas. The study of history is a critical enterprise that should not serve religious, ideological, or political interests. This was Steinschneider’s “noble dream of objectivity,” which made him a strong skeptic with respect to the beneficial effects of the Wissenschaft des Judentums for the “Jewish cause.” Does this render Steinschneider’s approach to history obsolete for modern research? Certainly not. To be sure, historical research in the twenty-first century will not be able to emulate Steinschneider; it will do many things differently than they were done in the nineteenth century. But Steinschneider’s ideal of objectivity remains a critical force in scholarly discourse; the spirit of objective and critical science, this invincible demon, is still relevant to Jewish studies today.
“Mr. Brecher is among those doctors—previously so common among the Jews, but now so rare—who, alongside their practical profession, have proved their love for Judaism and their desire for scholarly inquiry in the field of Jewish literature.”

Gideon Brecher (1797–1873)—also known as Gedalyah ben Eleazar of Prossnitz—was the central figure in the Moravian Jewish enlightenment (haskalah), and when these words were penned in 1851, the 54-year-old physician had recently become the first Jew in Prossnitz, Moravia, to obtain a doctorate. Healer (rove) and enlightener (maskil), Brecher fit the mold of the modern Jewish doctor—“the physician who expressed Jewish concerns in the course of his medical practice”—that had appeared in Germany in the eighteenth century.

Rooted in the traditional rabbinic culture of Central Europe, and trained at the medical faculty at the University of Pest, Brecher was a polymath (hakham kolel), in the broadest sense of the term. A product of the yeshivah and the university, Brecher embraced the authority of revelation as well as the authority of empirical research. Throughout his career, he drew on these two sources of authority, and he spent much of his life trying to reconcile them.

Gideon Brecher is important in his own right, but in the context of this volume, he takes on added significance, since he was also Moritz Steinschneider’s uncle. Brecher was married to Josephine (Hayla) Zadek (1805–1885), whose older sister, Hani Zadek (1792–1859), was married to Jacob Steinschneider (1782–1856). Jacob and Hani were the parents of Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907), making Gideon

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1 Gideon Brecher would frequently close his letters to Moritz Steinschneider with the words, “Dein dich liebender Onkel” (your loving uncle).
4 See his obituary in Iveri Anokhi (Brody), May 23, 1873, p. 243.
Brecher the maternal uncle (by marriage) of the “father of Hebrew bibliography.” Moritz was eleven years old in 1827, when his twenty-two-year-old Aunt Josephine married thirty-year-old Gideon, with whom he “kept up close relations” for the next forty-six years.5

This paper examines the vibrant intellectual environment that shaped Gideon Brecher—and, by extension, Moritz Steinschneider—placing particular emphasis on Moravia’s moderate, “rabbinic Haskalah,” which sought to accommodate and integrate secular knowledge and scientific approaches while remaining committed to the Hebrew language and deeply rooted in traditional rabbinic texts. Indeed, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Moravian Haskalah was its intimate connection to the flourishing yeshivah life in places like Prossnitz, where students’ active engagement with literature, philosophy and European languages was often tacitly approved by their rabbis.

Born on January 12, 1797, in Prossnitz, known as the “Jerusalem of the Hana (plains)” due to its long line of illustrious rabbis, Gideon Brecher led a fairly peripatetic life before marrying. During his first eight or nine years he lived in Prossnitz, where his education consisted largely of translating the Bible from Hebrew into Yiddish at his maternal grandfather’s knee. Brecher moved on to the Talmud and its commentaries, but also learned to read and write German and French. As was the custom, he left home to attend yeshivah, first in neighboring Eibenschitz, and then in Nikolsburg, the largest Jewish community in Moravia and seat of the Moravian chief rabbinate. Here, Brecher developed his mastery of rabbinic literature, but he was also drawn to “profane knowledge,” which he acquired as an autodidact—with the help of the students attending Nikolsburg’s Piarist gymnasium.6 Afterwards, he worked as a private tutor in two other Moravian Jewish communities, first in Neu-Rausnitz, then in Lomnitz. Here, he offered instruction in Talmud and Bible, as well as the German and French language and penmanship, all the while devoting his free time to the study of theology and philosophy. According to Moritz Mordechai Duschak (1815–1890), his biographer and friend, Brecher came to view philosophy as “the temple one must enter to discover

the truth” and learned Latin as “the key to opening the gates of this sacred temple.”

Two of Brecher’s uncles played important roles in his intellectual and professional development. While in Prossnitz, he developed a close relationship with his maternal uncle, Ber Schiff, an “outstanding Hebrew stylist,” who, over the course of many years, instructed him in Hebrew poetry and style, and exposed him to many of the publications of the Berlin Haskalah. From 1814 until 1849, Gideon and Ber kept up a lively correspondence in rich and lucid Hebrew, full of biblical references and sophisticated rhymes. Occasionally, they resorted to Judeo-German, but they had such a command of Hebrew poetics and style that they could express even the most sublime thoughts in the Holy Tongue. Another uncle, a wealthy money-changer in Pest, had a rather different impact on his nephew’s career. In 1817, this uncle invited Brecher to work for him as a secretary. Brecher accepted the invitation, but a couple of months after his arrival in Hungary, his uncle and cousin surprised him by converting to Christianity. Duschak considered this “the most decisive moment” in Brecher’s career, since it was at this time that he abandoned the “banner of Mercury” for the scalpel of Hippocrates.

In 1818, Brecher matriculated at the University of Pest, where he studied surgery and obstetrics. At the medical faculty, he was in the company of many other Moravian Jews, including his younger brother Johann, who matriculated in 1821. Like the other Moravian, Bohemian and Galician Jews, Brecher studied at the German-language faculty (as opposed to the Hungarian-language one), but he presumably picked up some Hungarian while he was there. Gideon

7 Ibid., p. 10.
8 The correspondence can be found at the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTSA), Gideon Brecher Correspondence, ARC 22. On Ber Schiff, see M. Duschak, “Gideon Brecher,” p. 8.
9 M. Duschak, “Gideon Brecher,” p. 11.
11 Hungarian Jewish Archive (Budapest), I-Z1 Pestí Zsidó Összeirása 1820–től, f. 102. Gideon and Johann boarded in the same house, together with Salamon Rotfeld, a Jewish student from Eibenschitz, and Elisabeth Vagner, a Catholic maid from Kremitz, Hungary. Gideon [sic], Johann, Salamon and Elisabeth are listed as “Dienstschafft” (servants) at Joseph Granistädt’s house (Polinsbergisches Haus No. 197) in the Leopoldstadt district of Pest.
was a highly accomplished student, receiving the highest possible mark (I\textsuperscript{st} \textit{classis cum eminentia}) in ecology, surgery (theory), surgery (praxis), forensic medicine, therapeutic medicine, and obstetrics; in practical anatomy he received the second highest mark (I\textsuperscript{st} \textit{classis}).\textsuperscript{12} In April 1824, he passed his \textit{rigorosum} with distinction and obtained his masters in Surgery and Obstetrics.\textsuperscript{13} According to Duschak, Brecher was the best student at the university, a claim that seems to be borne out by his grades and the results of his \textit{rigorosum}. He caught the attention of Dr. András Pfisterer, the chief physician (\textit{protomedicus}) of Hungary, who offered him a position as county physician (\textit{Komitatsphysikat}). The offer, however, was conditioned on his conversion to Christianity, which Brecher “rejected so quickly and decisively, as if he had been offered a pinch of tobacco.” As Duschak put it, with a note of approval: “How different the nephew was from the uncle.”\textsuperscript{14}

After rejecting Dr. Pfisterer’s offer, Brecher returned to Prossnitz, finally settling down in his native town. In 1824, he set up a private medical practice and in 1831 was hired as a doctor (\textit{Spitalarzt}) at the hospital of the Prossnitz Jewish community, where he worked for the rest of his life. In 1827, thirty-year-old Gideon married Josephine Zadek, becoming a member of the extended Steinschneider family. (At first blush, thirty may seem rather old for a first marriage in this period, but—due to Jewish marriage restrictions in Moravia—the average age of Jewish grooms in Prossnitz was actually twenty-nine in 1827.)\textsuperscript{15} Together, Gideon and Josephine Brecher had three sons, Eliezar (Alois), Aharon (Adolf) and Moshe (Moritz). In Prossnitz, Gideon became a member of the Jewish communal board (\textit{qahal}) and burial society (\textit{hevra qadisha}) and served as the Jewish school’s superintendent (\textit{Schulinspektor}). As a key participant in the intellectual life of the Prossnitz Jewish community, he was an important figure in the Moravian Haskalah.

\textsuperscript{12} Semmelweis Egyetem Levéltára (Budapest), Oszt. Könyv 1822/23, ff. 120–121.
\textsuperscript{13} For the results of his \textit{rigorosum}, see Semmelweis Egyetem Levéltára, 1.f.2. Az \textit{Orvostudományi Karon végzett hallgatók jegyzéke 1823/24. tanév}.
Prossnitz as a Center of the Moravian Haskalah

The Haskalah flourished in Moravia in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, a full generation after the Berlin Haskalah, but it never assumed the radical character of its German counterpart. Far from being a poor imitation of the Berlin movement, one could argue that the Moravian Haskalah embodied the true spirit of Moses Mendelssohn, since it managed to strike a balance between Jewish tradition and European rationalism, treating the cross-fertilization as mutually beneficial. Moravia’s *maskilim* had little direct contact with Berlin, so their encounters with the Haskalah were mediated by Prague and Vienna, which both played important roles in the dissemination (and moderation) of maskilic ideas in the Habsburg Empire.16

According to Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, the Prague Haskalah had a distinctly “national” character, conspicuously absent from its Berlin counterpart. Whereas *maskilim* in Berlin tried to downplay or eliminate Judaism’s national components, *maskilim* in Prague proudly portrayed the Jews as a “nation” (‘am, ummah, le’om) and even referred to the Land of Israel as their “homeland” (moledet). Kestenberg-Gladstein speculates that the multinational character of the Habsburg Monarchy made it easier for Jews to identify themselves as one nation among many.17 Hebrew held pride of place in the Prague Haskalah, but so, too, did Yiddish (or Judeo-German), which one Prague *maskil* praised as “my language.”18

Prague’s *maskilim* published a short-lived Judeo-German journal in 1802, but the real center of maskilic publishing in the Habsburg Monarchy—from 1820 onwards—was Vienna. The imperial capital did not have a home-grown Haskalah movement, but its printing houses published important maskilic periodicals, such as *Bikkure ha-‘Ittim* (“First Fruits of the Times,” 1820–1831) and its successor, *Kerem Hemed* (“Vineyard of Delight,” 1833–1856), both of which were founded by Galician Jews. Despite being published in Vienna, *Kerem Hemed* was

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16 On the Moravian Haskalah, see Michael L. Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution*, pp. 60–98.
commonly viewed as “the Hebrew annual of the Galician [sic!] Haskalah,” because it counted so many Galician Jews among its contributors.\(^{19}\) In a similar vein, *Kokheve Yitzhak* (“Stars of Isaac,” 1845–1848, 1850–1873) could be considered the Hebrew annual of the Moravian Haskalah. Although its editor, Max Emanuel Stern (1811–1873), came from Pressburg, then in Hungary, and its contributors hailed from all corners of the Habsburg Empire, nearly half of the articles published between 1845 and 1848 were written by Moravian Jews.\(^{20}\) The latter, who contributed original Hebrew poems, Hebrew translations of German poems, as well as a wide range of philological, philosophical, historical and exegetical studies, had generally come of age in the 1820s and 1830s, having acquired secular knowledge in Moravia’s German-Jewish schools and (most of them) a traditional Jewish education in the yeshivot of Moravia (Nikolsburg, Prossnitz, Trebitsch, Triesch, Boskowitz, Eibenschitz) or Hungary (Pressburg, Eisenstadt). Nearly all of them tried their hand at Hebrew poetry, with varying degrees of success. One poem, entitled “Prayer for the Hebrew Language,” was certainly no masterpiece, but as a paean to the “mother of all tongues,” it expressed a sentiment that ran through the pages of *Kokheve Yitzhak* (as well as *Bikkure ha-Ittim* and *Kerem Hemed*).\(^{21}\)

The Moravian Haskalah had several centers, including Prossnitz, Neu-Rausnitz, Trebitsch, and Triesch. Of these Prossnitz was the most important, but Neu-Rausnitz was home to Josef Flesch (1781–1839), “the father of the Moravian [Jewish] enlightenment” and a frequent contributor to *Bikkure ha-Ittim* (Brecher spent time here as a private tutor in the 1810s); Trebitsch was home to Chaim Josef Pollak (1798–1879), head of the local yeshivah and the most prolific contributor to *Kokheve Yitzhak*; and Triesch had so many *maskilim* that it was known colloquially as “little Berlin.”

Gershom Scholem took particular interest in Prossnitz, because, more than any other Jewish community in Europe, it seemed to support his argument for a nexus between Sabbateanism and Haskalah.

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\(^{20}\) In the twelve issues published between 1845 and 1848, 49% of the pages contain articles and other contributions by thirty-four Moravian Jews.

\(^{21}\) H. Wassertrilling, “*Tefillah la-safah ha-‘iriyah,*” *KI* 6 (1846): 66–68. Hirsch (Hermann) Wassertrilling was from Boskowitz, Moravia.
“It is certainly no accident,” he wrote, “that a city like Prossnitz, which served as a center for Haskalah in Moravia... was also a bastion of Sabbatianism in that country.”

According to Scholem, Sabbateanism, which had made inroads into Prossnitz in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had “completely destroyed” the world of rabbinic Judaism from within, making former Sabbatean bastions—like Prossnitz—all the more susceptible to the allure of Haskalah. Leopold Löw (1811–1875), who taught in Prossnitz in the 1830s, expressed a similar theory, but the kinds of “subterranean” links proposed by Scholem (and Löw) are almost impossible to substantiate. None of the maskilim in Prossnitz had a known Sabbatean (or Frankist) lineage, and many of the identifiable Sabbatean families had left Judaism altogether. Furthermore, Scholem’s theory does not explain why Holleschau and Kojetein—which were also bastions of Sabbateanism in the eighteenth century—played no significant role in the Moravian Haskalah. For this reason, the specificity of Prossnitz must be sought in other realms.

Prossnitz, Moravia’s second largest Jewish community and a venerable center of rabbinical learning, was also Moravia’s wealthiest Jewish community and the hub of Moravia’s thriving textile industry in the first half of the nineteenth century. The financial pillar of the community was the Bohemian-born Veit (Feish) Ehrenstamm (1757–1827), an army purveyor who supplied salt, tobacco, wine, grain, carts, horses, and especially uniforms, to the Habsburg troops during the Napoleonic Wars. (In 1812, he supplied the army’s entire uniform quota!) With his prodigious wealth, Ehrenstamm gave generously to the


24 In 1773–74, six Prossnitz families (35 individuals) converted to Catholicism. According to local tradition, these families were followers of Jacob Frank, who had recently arrived in Moravia. See Moritz Duschak, “Geschichte der israelitischen Gemeinde zu Prossnitz,” Ben Chananja 6 (1863): 522, and Gerson Wolf, Judentaufen in Oesterreich (Vienna, 1863), pp. 78–79.

educational and religious institutions in Prossnitz; he also built himself a private library with well over two hundred Hebrew and Aramaic books, comprising more than five hundred separate volumes. His library was largely made up of traditional rabbinic literature, but in it were also fifteen books on Hebrew grammar, thirteen books on ethics, philosophy, geography and astronomy, and three volumes of *Bikkure ha-Ittim*. In short, it was a model library of the “rabbinic haskalah.”

Alongside Prossnitz’s pillar of wealth stood its pillar of rabbinic learning: Rabbi Moses Katz Wanefried, a student of Rabbi Moses Sofer, who headed Prossnitz’s celebrated yeshivah from the late 1810s until his death from cholera in 1850. Wanefried was wealthy in his own right, but it was his “glistening brilliance” as a talmudist that attracted students from all over Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary and Poland. The students who flocked to Wanefried’s yeshivah found an environment that was particularly open to secular studies. According to one of them, Wanefried’s yeshivah “differed favorably from all other yeshivot” in that “students were allowed to occupy themselves with other disciplines in addition to Talmud.”

In addition to Ehrenstamm’s library, Prossnitz provided other opportunities for yeshivah students to expose themselves to extratalmudic knowledge. In the 1820s and early 1830s, the home of Jacob Steinschneider, in particular, served as a meeting point for enlightened Jews who whole-heartedly embraced Hebrew language and literature. Steinschneider was a native of Prossnitz who had made an effort to

26 A hand-written list of the books in Ehrenstamm’s library can be found at the Archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague, MS 86. The manuscript has been dated to 1818, but it contains many works from the 1820s, such as *Bikkure ha-Ittim*. The following works are of note: Joseph Albo’s *Book of Principles* (Frankfurt); Bahya ibn Pakuda’s *Duties of the Heart* (Amsterdam); Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed* (Berlin); Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*; Naftali Benet’s *Emunat Yisrael* (Vienna, 1824).


acquire a secular education during his yeshivah studies in Prague around 1800.30 Back in Prossnitz, Steinschneider’s home attracted like-minded Jews, such as his brother-in-law, Gideon Brecher. By the mid-1830s, Brecher’s home (which happened to be near Wanefried’s yeshivah) took the place of Steinschneider’s, offering yeshivah students and members of the Jewish community a place to cultivate Hebrew literature, read the newly-established German-Jewish newspapers (such as the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums) and study classical and modern languages.31

With Ehrenstamm’s prodigious wealth, Wanefried’s celebrated yeshivah and Steinschneider and Brecher’s devoted circle of Hebraists, Prossnitz served as a veritable incubator for Hebrew literature and Jewish scholarship in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s. A remarkable number of Jews who passed through Prossnitz in these decades went on to become leading figures in the religious, scholarly and educational firmament of central European Jewry (especially in Hungary). Löw Schwab (1794–1857) taught Veit Ehrenstamm’s children in the early 1820s and served as rabbi of Prossnitz (1831–1836), before being elected rabbi of Pest, Hungary. His son-in-law, Leopold Löw, taught in Prossnitz’s Talmud Torah school (1830–1835), before becoming rabbi in various Hungarian Jewish communities (Nagykanizsa, Pápa and Szeged), and publishing the important scholarly journal, Ben Chananja (Szeged, 1858–1867).32 Hirsch B. Fassel (1802–1883) served as rabbi of Prossnitz from 1836 to 1851, before being elected rabbi of Nagykanizsa, Hungary (where Löw had served before him). While still in Prossnitz, Fassel ordained Moritz Steinschneider, and began writing works on Jewish philosophy and law.33 Ephraim Israel Blücher (1813–1882) wrote an Aramaic grammar book while living in Prossnitz during the late 1830s, before teaching Hebrew in Lemberg, setting up a gymnasium in Vienna and finally settling in Budapest. Adolf Jellinek (1821–1893), who attended Wanefried’s yeshivah in the 1830s, became

32 Moritz Feitel, Reminiscenzen aus meinem Umgange mit Leopold Löw vom J. 1829. bis zu seinem Lebensende (1875): Ein Beitrag zur Culturgeschichte (Pápa: Schossberger, 1885).
33 For Steinschneider’s rabbinical diploma (Nov. 6, 1843) and hattarat hora’ah (April 12, 1844), both of which were granted by Fassel, see A. Marx, “Steinschneideriana II,” in Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut (New York: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1935), pp. 501–502.
a celebrated preacher in Leipzig and Vienna and a trailblazing scholar of Jewish mysticism. Moritz Eisler (1823–1902), who attended Wanefried’s yeshivah with Jellinek, became director of the German-Jewish school in Nikolsburg and published a multi-volume work on medieval Jewish philosophy. Josef Weisse (1812–1897) studied with Moritz Steinschneider in Prossnitz and Prague, and then taught at Prossnitz’s German-Jewish school (1838–1842), before serving as rabbi in Waagen-Neustadt (Vágújhely), Hungary.34

Prossnitz was an important node in the ramified network of Jewish scholars that stretched across Central Europe; and native sons like Moritz Steinschneider—who studied in Prague, Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin—played an important role in keeping the “Jerusalem of the Hana” in the loop. In 1841, for example, Steinschneider announced the imminent arrival of Abraham Geiger, who was passing through Prossnitz on his way from Vienna to Breslau. Fassel, Brecher, Weisse and others welcomed the German rabbi “with great anticipation,” and Geiger returned the favor by delivering a few well-received sermons.35 In 1843, Steinschneider also drew upon Prossnitz talent in his ambitious effort to publish a comprehensive Jewish encyclopedia, the so-called Real-Encyclopädie des Judenthums, which he and David Cassel hoped to bring to fruition in the mid-1840s.36 Steinschneider solicited articles from, among others, his friends Josef Weisse and Adolf Jellinek, his rabbi Hirsch Fassel, and his uncle Gideon Brecher. The encyclopedia was never completed, but by the end of 1843, Brecher had already submitted an entry on abortion and started writing his entry on bloodletting (phlebotomy) in the Talmud.37 Bringing together Brecher’s talmudic erudition and his medical knowledge, his encyclopedia entries

34 Adolf Bacher, great-granduncle of the Hungarian Jewish scholar Wilhelm (Vilmós) Bacher (1850–1913), lived in Prossnitz in the 1820s, where he taught Moritz Steinschneider Italian. See A. Marx, Essays in Jewish Biography, p. 114.


drew on two sources of authority—revealed and empirical—which Brecher spent much of his life trying to reconcile.

**Jewish Educational Reform in Prossnitz**

The Haskalah, as a whole, put a strong emphasis on school reform, and in Moravia, Gideon Brecher—and his circle of Hebraists—stood at the vanguard of this movement. Already in 1838, Brecher wrote a series of letters to the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, putting forth his vision for Jewish educational reform. In his view, traditional religious instruction—which he characterized as “mythical explication of Holy Scripture, obfuscation of the text through aggadic obscurities, and mystification of micrological observances”—was driving the youth away from Jewish observance. But excessive “rationalism” was not the solution either, since it ignored the fact that religion was, above all, a “matter of the soul” (*Sache des Gemuethes*). Thus, he insisted, any educational reforms had to strike a happy balance between rationalism and emotionalism.

Brecher was a driving force behind school reform in the Prossnitz Jewish community in the late 1830s. Prossnitz’s *Talmud Torah* school, which provided religious instruction primarily for poor and orphaned children, had been run along the lines of a traditional heder until the Jewish communal board took steps to transform it into a modern Hebrew school (*hebräische Lehranstalt*) in 1838. At the beginning of the year, the board, which counted Brecher as a member, hired Joseph Weisse to be the principal of the revamped school and to design its curriculum. A twenty-six-year-old native of Plumenau (near Prossnitz), Weisse had spent the previous six years in Prague, where he had established life-long friendships with Brecher’s nephew, Moritz Steinschneider, and with Leopold Löw, who had taught in Prossnitz some years earlier. In Prague, he had also been mentored by Leopold Zunz, one of the founding fathers of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In his school curriculum, Weisse devoted special attention to the fundamentals of Hebrew grammar, which he viewed as a discrete discipline to

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be studied systematically and methodologically. His curriculum was designed so that students could first learn the basics and then progress incrementally to more difficult or less quotidian subjects. All students were to take courses in Hebrew grammar, the Hebrew Bible, and the prayer book, and those who intended to become rabbis would go on to study Talmud (with Hirsch Fassel), Aramaic grammar, Aramaic Bible translations (Targumim), Jewish history and biblical geography. When Prossnitz’s revamped school opened its doors in 1838, Weisse marked the occasion by composing an original Hebrew poem.\(^{39}\) (In 1844, after Weisse had left Prossnitz, the Jewish community invited Moritz Steinschneider to become director of the school. On Fassel’s advice, Steinschneider did not return to his native Prossnitz, moving instead to Berlin.\(^{40}\)

The above-mentioned Ephraim Israel Blücher, a friend of Brecher’s, presumably hoped that his just published Aramaic grammar book (1838) would be used at the new Hebrew school in Prossnitz. Entitled *Marpe lashon arami* (The Wholesome Aramaic language), this work was composed for students who had mastered Hebrew grammar and now wanted to move on to Aramaic grammar.\(^{41}\) Blücher, who sometimes conducted his correspondence in Aramaic, hoped his book would help young students understand not only the Talmud and Midrash, but also the *Book of the Zohar*.\(^{42}\) The work was printed with approbations from Löw Schwab and Nehemias Trebitsch, former rabbis in Prossnitz, after having been proofread by Moritz Steinschneider, who was studying in Vienna at the time.\(^{43}\) Blücher’s textbook also featured a Hebrew poem by “the sage, the biblical and rabbinic philosopher, [and] doctor” Gideon Brecher.\(^{44}\) Written in rhymed verse, this was

\(^{39}\) The poem was subsequently published in *Kokheve Yitzhak* II (1845): 75–76.

\(^{40}\) On the invitation, see A. Marx, “Steinschneideriana II,” pp. 508–510. For Fassel’s letter to Steinschneider, then in Prague, see: Moritz Steinschneider Collection, Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, ARC 108, Box 13, Letter from Fassel to Steinschneider, Dec. 27, 1844.


\(^{42}\) Ibid. In 1835, Blücher wrote a letter in Aramaic to Löw Schwab, who was then in Prossnitz. See Löw Schwab Archive, JNUL, Jerusalem, Arc. 4° 1619/12. Blücher also asked Samuel David Luzzatto for an approbation, but the Italian Jewish scholar refused, in part because Blücher’s book did not distinguish between the different phases of the Aramaic language. See *Iggerot ShaDaL*, vol. 1 (Przemysl: Zupnik & Knoller, 1882), pp. 427–428.


\(^{44}\) Brecher’s poem, “*Shir meshubbah*,” comes after the title page. In his review of Blücher’s book, David Cassel pointed out a “few grammatical inaccuracies” (einge
Brecher’s first published poem. In it, he apostrophized the Aramaic language, lamenting that the passage of time had “obscured the splendor (zohar) of your countenance with fog and darkness.” He praised Blücher for shining light on this long-neglected language in which “the sages of Israel had hidden pearls of mystery.” (Blücher returned the favor, composing a Hebrew poem for Brecher’s Kuzari commentary, the first volume of which was also published in 1838.)

Commentary on Judah Halevi’s Book of the Kuzari, 1838–1840

Gideon Brecher’s Hebrew commentary on Judah Halevi’s Book of the Kuzari (Prague 1838–1840) was the apotheosis of the Moravian Haskalah and the work with which Brecher was most closely identified. This commentary brought together the extraordinary constellation of Jewish scholars in Prossnitz, most of whom contributed, in one way or another, to Brecher’s Hebrew masterpiece.45 The Kuzari, a twelfth-century philosophical treatise and apologia for Judaism, was a favorite work of the early maskilim, in part because it explored “questions of the relationship between Judaism and philosophical reasoning.”46 Like his maskilic predecessors, Brecher was drawn to the Kuzari because it attempted to harmonize western philosophy and rabbinic Judaism, two traditions that were often considered at odds with one another. The Kuzari also hearkened back to the somewhat idealized Golden Age of Spanish Jewry, when Jews actively participated in the cultural life of their surroundings without sacrificing their religious faith and observance.47

Like the Moravian Haskalah in general, Brecher’s work was firmly rooted in Jewish tradition. First of all, he chose the well-established genre of commentary to express his own ideas. By writing glosses to Judah Halevi’s text, Brecher placed himself in a Jewish exegetical tradition extending deep into the Middle Ages. Second, he chose to write

his commentary in Hebrew, even though German had a richer and more precise philosophical vocabulary. Thus, like many of the early maskilim, he attempted to renew Hebrew as a medium for philosophical and scientific inquiry. He even coined numerous neologisms for philosophical concepts that did not yet exist in Hebrew. Furthermore, his choice of Hebrew was especially appropriate for this particular commentary. Indeed, although Halevi originally wrote the Kuzari in Arabic, his medieval apologia for Judaism was an effusive paean to the Hebrew language (esp. Part 2, Chapter 68).

The Kuzari offers a “strongly ethnocentric version of Judaism,” so it should come as no surprise that Brecher’s commentary on the above-mentioned chapter has an unmistakably “national” character. In the original text, Halevi stresses the sacred nature of Hebrew as the language of revelation, and Brecher takes the opportunity to reflect on the present condition of the Jews, whom he refers to here as “the Israelite nation” (ummah ha-yisra’el). According to Brecher, the moral and intellectual condition of a given nation (ha-ummah) is reflected in the state of its language (leshon kol ‘am); as the “achievements and successes” (gedolot ve-hatzla’ot) of that nation increase, so, too, does the state of its language. As Brecher explains, the versatility of the Hebrew language diminished over time, because “our thoughts” were unworthy of such a sublime language; “our thoughts demean the purity of the language,” he writes, and consequently foreign words had to be imported in order to “sweeten our thoughts and reveal our secrets.” He explains that the language lacks “words for sciences and arts,” a point that is indirectly strengthened by his decision to translate this very expression into German (Kunstausdrücke) and Latin (termini technici). By coining this expression—and many others—Brecher was doing his part to revive Hebrew as a language of the “sciences and arts,” and thereby restore the Israelite nation to its proper glory. One contemporary was very pleased with the result, noting that Brecher’s commentary was written in an “easily comprehensible, fluent Hebrew.”

48 Adam Shear, “Judah Halevi’s Kuzari,” 72.
50 Among other terms that Brecher coins/employs are: yeshut kefulah = eine zweifalle Realität (32a); yesod ha-musar = Moralprinzip (53b); en migre muhleteet nimtzet = es gibt keinen reinen Zufall (63b); hibbur kokheve shanayim = Sternbilder (72a).
The “national” character of Brecher’s work was determined, in part, by its subject matter. Many maskilim were drawn to philosophy because of its universal truths, but the appeal of Judah Halevi’s Kuzari was often rooted in its distinctly “national” philosophy of religion. An early reviewer of Brecher’s Kuzari commentary observed that “the philosophical systems of all peoples” (die philosophischen Systeme aller Völker) are “the product of national characters” (das Produkt der Nationalcharaktere), and he lavished praise on the Kuzari as the quintessential expression of the Jews’ national character. “Of all . . . Jewish philosophical works,” he wrote, “none is as truly national (ächt national); none is more suited to the spirit of Judaism (dem Geiste des Judenthums) in all of its nuances—political, national, autonomous; none is as fruitful for the scientific development of the Jewish faith” as the Kuzari, referring to Brecher’s new edition. \(^{52}\) Similar sentiments were expressed by Rabbi Hayyim Josef Pollak of Trebitsch, whose rabbinic approbation extolled the new publication for its ability to show “the youth of our nation” (tse’ire bne ameynu) that “Israel is not an orphan” in the field of philosophy. \(^{53}\)

The Kuzari commentary was the fruit of Brecher’s pen, but it also illustrates the extent to which the Moravian Haskalah was a collaborative and highly intertwined project. In Prossnitz, Brecher could avail himself of Veit Ehrenstamm’s copy of the Kuzari, and he could also discuss his own work-in-progress with Rabbi Hirsch Fassel (who contributed an approbation to Vol. 2 of the Kuzari commentary), Josef Weisse (who contributed a critical essay to Vol. 4), as well as Baruch Schönfeld (1787–1862) and Ephraim Israel Blücher, two maskilim who contributed Hebrew poems to Vol. 1. Brecher’s nephew, Moritz Steinschneider, was also an important resource. A student at Leipzig University in 1839, Moritz could visit the local libraries on his uncle’s behalf and also promote Brecher’s commentary in the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums and Der Orient, two German-Jewish weeklies that had recently been founded in Leipzig. \(^{54}\) Brecher corresponded with Rabbi

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 54–55. The publication of Brecher’s commentary was greatly anticipated in the pages of the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums. See “Prossnitz [in Mähren],” Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (March 15, 1838): 125.


\(^{54}\) Letter from Gideon Brecher to Samuel David Luzzatto, 3 Av 5601 [July 21, 1841]. Gideon Brecher Correspondence, JTSA, ARC 22, letter 16. Brecher mentions the assistance he received from Steinschneider. The latter was also trying to find a publisher for Brecher’s work in Leipzig.
Löw Schwab, who had left Prossnitz for Pest in 1836, and he also had an epistolary discussion about the *Kuzari* with Samuel David Luzzatto (ShaDaL), an important Italian *maskil* in Padua.\(^{55}\) One of Luzzatto’s letters was published in Vol. 2 of Brecher’s commentary, and part of their correspondence was published in *Kokheve Yitzhak* in 1846.\(^{56}\) Not surprisingly, even the publication of these letters had a strong Moravian connection. Max Emanuel Stern, *Kokheve Yitzhak*’s editor, who had briefly been a teacher in Triesch (Moravia’s “little Berlin”), thanked “our good friend” Moritz Steinschneider for providing the Luzzatto-Brecher correspondence.\(^{57}\)

Brecher initiated his Hebrew correspondence with Luzzatto in 1839, perhaps at the encouragement of Ephraim Israel Blücher, who had exchanged a few letters with the Italian *maskil* the previous year, or perhaps at the suggestion of Steinschneider, who was also in regular contact with him.\(^{58}\) The *Kuzari* commentary appeared in installments, so Brecher was able to include Luzzatto’s first letter (March 7, 1839) in the publication, but not his second one (June 18, 1840), which was written after the work had been completed.\(^{59}\) In any case, the first letter must have been more to Brecher’s liking, since it showered praise on his commentary, in contrast to the second letter, which sharply criticized it. In the first letter, Luzzatto suggested a few minor corrections and alternative interpretations, but his overall evaluation of Brecher’s work was quite positive. “Your commentary was sweet to my soul,” he wrote, “and had you perused *Qol Yehudah*, your labors would have been all the more complete.” Here, Luzzatto was referring to Judah Moscato’s classic commentary on the *Kuzari* (Venice 1594), which had apparently not been at Brecher’s disposal in Prossnitz.\(^{60}\) (David Cassel,

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\(^{55}\) Letter from Gideon Brecher to Löw Schwab, Aug. 5, 1840. Löw Schwab Collection, JNUL 4° 1619/12.

\(^{56}\) “Schreiben von Prof. S.L. Luzzatto in Padua, mitgeteilt von Dr. Gideon Brecher in Prossnitz,” *KI* 5 (1846): 28–34; “Antwort des Dr. Gideon Brecher in Prossnitz,” *KI* 5 (1846): 35–36; *KI* 6 (1846): 95–100; and *KI* 7 (1846): 77–78. Some letters can also be found in the Gideon Brecher Correspondence, JTSA, ARC 22.


\(^{60}\) On this commentary, see Adam Shear, “Judah Moscato’s Scholarly Self-Image and the Question of Jewish Humanism,” in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in*
who published his own *Kuzari* commentary in 1853, similarly criticized Brecher for ignoring Moscati.)

In the second letter, Luzzatto excoriated Brecher for his naive and ahistorical approach to Jewish mysticism. Since the 1820s, Luzzatto had raised his pen in battle against the Kabbalah, challenging the traditional view that the *Book of the Zohar*, Kabbalah’s foundational text, was of ancient origin. Like Azariah de Rossi and others before him, Luzzatto exposed the *Zohar* as a thirteenth-century forgery and set out to demonstrate that core kabbalistic concepts—such as the ten *sefirot*, or divine emanations, that comprised the mystical godhead—had no antecedents in the rabbinic tradition. Defenders of Kabbalah’s antiquity—and authenticity—often pointed to *The Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*), a pseudopigraphical work attributed to Abraham (and sometimes to Rabbi Akiva), which is the earliest Jewish work to mention the ten *sefirot*. Luzzatto did not question this book’s antiquity, but argued that the *sefirot* mentioned therein were merely numbers (from the Hebrew root *sfr*) having absolutely nothing to do with the kabbalistic *sefirot* (from the Greek *sphaera*).

Luzzatto berated Brecher for equating the *sefirot* in the *Book of Creation* with the *sefirot* in the *Book of the Zohar*, and even more so for claiming that Judah Halevi—whose *Kuzari* (Part 4, Chapter 25) provides an extensive commentary on the *Book of Creation*—was, himself, a kabbalist. “These things pain me,” wrote Luzzatto in his second letter to Brecher,

and not only for the honor of Rabbi Judah Halevi, who is dear to my heart. More than this, it pains me when I see that in your efforts to fight the kabbalists (*ba’ale ha-sod*), you give them strength by giving their ideas an ancient pedigree, by attributing these ideas to the authors of

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63 On the *Kuzari’s* commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* and its use by Italian kabbalists, in particular, see Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 125–126.
the *Kuzari* and the *Book of Creation*. How will we ever succeed in distancing these superstitious beliefs from the children of our people when you, yourself, ascribe them to the great ones of our faith, Rabbi Judah Halevi and Rabbi Akiva?64

Following this rebuke, Luzzatto provided a detailed summary of his case against the Kabbalah, granting Brecher explicit permission to publish it, as he saw fit.

Brecher and Luzzatto did not see eye to eye on this matter, and their epistolary friendship—and scholarly cooperation—suffered a setback after Brecher’s decision not to publish Luzzatto’s second letter. Brecher had prepared a German translation of the *Book of Creation*, and in 1842, he asked Luzzatto to copy a certain Hebrew commentary on this work and send it to Prossnitz. Luzzatto informed Brecher that it was not worth his while, since he opposed Brecher’s apparent intention “to elucidate the words of the kabbalists.” In contrast, Luzzatto intended “to strengthen his argument against those [like Brecher] who ascribe kabbalistic ideas to our ancestors, the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, and to Rabbi Judah Halevi.” Luzzatto also opposed Brecher’s project on linguistic grounds, since the latter planned to publish the commentary on the *Book of Creation* in German translation, not in the Hebrew original.65

Brecher’s plan to publish the *Book of Creation* in German is noteworthy, since his previous work had aimed, at least in part, at renewing Hebrew as the language of Jewish scholarship.66 The “easily comprehensible, fluent Hebrew” of the *Kuzari* commentary attests to Brecher’s facility with the Hebrew language, as do a number of Hebrew epistles, poems and essays that he published (or prepared for publication) in the late 1830s and early 1840s. As already mentioned, Brecher’s correspondence with Luzzatto appeared in *Kokheve Yitzhak*, but he also prepared original Hebrew compositions for other maskilic journals,

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such as *Yerushalayim* (1844–1845), a self-styled continuation of *Bikkure ha-Ittim*, which was published in Zolkiew, Lemberg and Prague, and featured “all things dear, written in our holy language.”

Brecher’s Hebrew writings in this period are significant, because they adumbrate themes developed in his later German-language works. In 1844, for example, he published three Hebrew poems in *Yerushalayim*, which are more noteworthy for their subject matter than for their poetic style. Entitled “The Existence of God,” “Immortality of the Soul,” and “Reward and Punishment,” each of these poems deals with a tenet of natural religion, tenets that could purportedly be demonstrated on the basis of reason and empirical observation.

In the 1850s, he returned again to the theme of immortality, writing an entire treatise—this time in German—on *The Doctrine of Immortality according to the Israelite People*. (In a subsequent volume of *Yerushalayim*, Brecher published a historical-exegetical essay, assigning authorship of Psalm 141 to “a God-fearing priest in the days of Matitiyahu ben Yonatan,” rather than to King David.)

In the early 1840s, Brecher also wrote a Hebrew essay on the *terafim*, the idols or household gods that make an appearance in the books of Genesis, Judges, Hosea, Samuel, Ezechieil, Zecharaiah and Kings. Here, Brecher undertook an etymological and historical excursus, concluding that the teraphim were phallus-shaped pillars at the center of an ancient fertility cult, which had spread from India to the ancient Near East. (The word teraphim, he contended, is etymologically similar to Arabic and Aramaic words for genitalia.) He argued that the idols worshiped by the Midianites, Moabites and Assyrians (*Pē’or, Ba’al, Ba’al-Pē’or, Ashtarte*) were all variations of the ancient Hindu Lingam, as were the teraphim mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Brecher took a particular interest in this topic, because the teraphim shed light on

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68 “Metziut ha-el,” “Hasharat ha-nefesh,” and “Gemul ve-onesh.” These poems appeared in the first volume of *Yerushalayim*, called *Yerushalayim ha-benuyah* 1, no. 8 (Zolkiew, 1844): 86–87.

69 G. Brecher, “Bi’ur mizmor 141 bi-tehillim,” *Yerushalayim*. 3 (Prague, 1845): 22–25. This psalm, traditionally attributed to King David, was usually understood to refer to events in the time of Moses and Aaron. Brecher, however, dated it to the time of the Maccabees, taking it for granted that this psalm, like many others, was composed centuries after King David’s death. He assigned authorship to “a God-fearing priest in the days of Matitiyahu ben Yonatan,” who had been “roused to scream out in bitterness and pour out his entreaties before the Lord from the depths of his heart.”
the historical context in which Jewish doctrines, such as the immortality of the soul, crystallized. More importantly, the teraphim—and the ancient fertility cults, in general—illustrated how ancient peoples understood the transcendental and magical powers of the divine. In the 1850s, Brecher delved deeper into this question, examining how such ancient beliefs had influenced the rabbis of the Talmud. In fact, his excursus on the teraphim—written in Hebrew in 1842—was first published (in German translation) in *The Transcendental: Magic and Magical Healing Art in the Talmud*, which he completed in 1850.70 (The original Hebrew text was only published in 1861.)

*Homeopathy and the “Vital Force”*

Brecher’s interest in transcendental and magical powers extended to the medical field, as evidenced by his increasing fascination with homeopathy. First formulated in 1796 by the German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), homeopathy is based on the principle of *similia similibus curantur* (“like cures like”) and, as such, offers an alternative to conventional medicine (“allopathy”). Homeopathy treats diseases with highly diluted substances that, in a healthy person, would cause the symptoms of these very same diseases. It understands disease as a disturbance to a person’s “vital force,” which can be remedied by the energy released during the preparation of these diluted substances.

Homeopathy was quite often viewed by conventional physicians as quackery or pseudo-science, but it gradually made inroads in Moravia (and elsewhere) during the first decades of the nineteenth century. In Prossnitz, the first homeopathic practice was set up in 1839 by Dr. Adolf Haas, who introduced “many doctors of this town” to this new form of alternative medicine.72 In nearby Boskowitz, Elias Altschul (1797–1865), a Prague-born Jew, became acquainted with homeopathy.

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70 “Exkurs. Ueber die biblische Theraphim,” in Gideon Brecher, *Das Transcendental: Magie und magische Heilarten im Talmud* (Vienna, 1850), pp. 137–147. In a footnote on p. 137, Brecher states that this excursus was first composed in Hebrew in 1842.


in the mid-1830s; he returned to Prague in 1837, became a docent at Prague’s medical school in 1849 and founded one of Austria’s first homeopathic journals in 1853. Like Brecher, Altschul had studied medicine at the University of Pest.

Brecher may have been introduced to homeopathy by Haas or Altschul, or he may have even familiarized himself with it during his sojourn in Pest (even though homeopathy was officially forbidden in Hungary until 1837). In any case, by 1844, he could write his Uncle Ber about “the day when I [first] laid my eyes and heart on the healing technique which is called homoeopathic method.” Ber also experimented with homeopathy and, in a letter to Brecher from 1847, described “the small box full of little homeopathic flasks” (das Kästchen voll homöopathischer Fläschchen), which he rendered into Hebrew as “a small box full of small tubes, prepared [as] preparation against preparation” (argaz qatan male tzintzanot qetanot, ‘arukhot ma’arakhah mul ma’arakhah). By the 1850s, Brecher’s name regularly appeared on lists of homeopaths in Moravia.

Brecher’s professional interest in homeopathy, like his scholarly interest in magic and mysticism, may have been rooted in his life-long exploration of the relationship between the spiritual and the material sides of human existence. Significantly, homeopathy was sometimes called “Christian” or “spiritualistic” medicine, because it placed greater importance on “curing the soul” than on “curing the body.” As one contemporary homeopath observed, the Jews’ perennial concern with “temporal goods” (zeitliche Güter) resulted in an inordinate preoccupation with medicinal (as opposed to spiritual) cures, to such an extent that “for a long time, it was believed that, in order to be a good doctor, one had to profess the Jewish religion.” Interestingly,
some homeopaths likened the rejection of homeopathy to the rejection of Jesus, accusing “allopathic rabbis” of failing to recognize the truth, for fear of being “cast out of the allopathic synagogue.” To extend the metaphor, members of the “clerical profession” had denounced “our Savior as an imposter, his doctrines as fallacies,” and now professors of allopathy opposed homeopathy out of the “same rabbinical motives.”

There is no evidence that Brecher’s interest in homeopathy had anything to do with the Christian-Jewish polemic, but it certainly touched upon theological questions that occupied him for much of his life, indeed, questions for which conventional medicine had no satisfactory answers. The “vital force” is sometimes identified with the human soul, and, as a central “doctrine” of homeopathy, it may have provided Brecher with some insights into the immortality of the soul. It may have also informed his views on magic and mysticism in the Jewish tradition, two topics that continued to occupy his scholarly interest (much to Luzzatto’s chagrin).

The Circumcision of the Israelites (Vienna, 1845)

In 1845, Brecher published The Circumcision of the Israelites, a scholarly work that drew not only on his talmudic and empirical expertise, but also on his ramified network of Prossnitz Jews. Unlike his commentary on the Kuzari or his poems in Yerushalayim, this work was composed in German and represented an effort to engage in one of the most hotly-debated topics of the day: ritual circumcision among the Jews. Circumcision came under a two-pronged attack in the 1840s, as Jews and non-Jews alike subjected this Jewish custom to

81 In Brecher’s Prossnitzer Wochenblatt obituary, a full paragraph is devoted to his experimentation with homeopathy. The obituary was reprinted in Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (June 17, 1873): 406–408.
ever-increasing scrutiny. In 1842, the Austrian authorities made an official inquiry into the practice of circumcision, asking Jewish communities in the Habsburg Empire to elaborate on the methods and health risks of the procedure and to describe the training and supervision of the circumciser (mohel).84 In the following year, a group of Jewish reformers in Frankfurt am Main resolved to abolish circumcision and replace it with a purely symbolic initiation ceremony. The members of this group, known as the “Friends of Reform,” regarded circumcision as barbaric and physically dangerous, but above all, they rejected its intrinsically particularizing character.

Rabbis and medical doctors played a central role in the larger debate, lending their authority to a range of arguments in favor of maintaining, reforming, or abolishing circumcision. Brecher, himself, had already performed almost 300 circumcisions (including those of his own sons), so he could add practical experience to medical knowledge in his staunch defense of this age-old ritual.85 He also appealed to the authority of history, not only to defend circumcision against its Jewish detractors, but also to argue for the elimination of metzitzah (sucking the blood of the circumcision wound), the most controversial part of the whole procedure.

Brecher viewed circumcision as inherently salubrious, but there were aspects that he—as a medical doctor—found utterly repugnant. Like other defenders of the ritual, he argued that circumcision provided immunity against a number of life-threatening illnesses (e.g., phimosis and paraphimosis), but he also expressed concern that metzitzah might facilitate the transmission of disease, since the mohel customarily sucked the wound with his mouth in order to draw out the blood. Brecher was particularly worried about the spread of venereal disease from the mohel’s mouth to the baby’s sensitive organ. (As Brecher noted, Johann Nepomunk Rust had speculated that a syphilitic mohel had caused an outbreak of syphilis among newborn boys in Krakow’s Jewish quarter at the beginning of the nineteenth century.)86

Brecher was committed to eliminating metzitzah, but he wished to do so within the bounds of the halakhic tradition.87 More radical reformers

85 Ibid., “Vorwort,” p. 3.
86 Ibid., 48–49. Brecher refers to J.N. Rust, Helkologie (Vienna, 1811).
could arbitrarily reject metzitzah or simply argue that it was not of biblical origin, but Brecher felt obliged to explain away the custom by understanding its historical development. Metzitzah, he argued, had never been an integral part of circumcision, but was added by the talmudic rabbis as a safety precaution to prevent excessive bleeding. Since its original function was medical—and not religious—Brecher could justify the elimination of metzitzah by showing that the medical assumptions of the Talmud were no longer valid; i.e., when the rabbis introduced metzitzah, syphilis had not yet been brought over from the New World. Thus, what had been introduced as a safety precaution now endangered lives. Moreover, he noted, modern medicine had developed “less repugnant methods” for stopping bleeding.

Hirsch Fassel wrote a lengthy approbation of the book, in which he echoed Brecher’s argument about the invalidity of talmudic medical practices in modern times. Fassel even went so far as to invert the talmudic injunction that a mohel who fails to perform metzitzah should be dismissed. To the contrary, argued Fassel, the mohel who performs this repugnant custom should be the one dismissed. “I openly declare myself in favor of eliminating metzitzah,” he wrote towards the end of his approbation, “and I have not performed it for a long time.”

Fassel and Brecher’s attack on metzitzah was matched by an equally fervent defense of ritual circumcision as a whole. Fassel drew primarily on biblical and talmudic sources (as well as the Mishne Torah and Shulhan Arukh) to build a halakhic argument in defense of circumcision, while Brecher supplemented the biblical and talmudic sources with Philo, Josephus, Tacitus, as well as contemporary works of German scholarship, to shape a historical argument with strong national overtones. Brecher emphasized the historical continuity of circumcision from ancient times to the present, noting that this “custom, so closely linked to nationality” (mit der Nationalität so engverknüpfter Gebrauch), was suspended only during the forty years of wandering in the desert. He argued that it took on special significance during Greek and Roman times, when circumcision was occasionally forbidden and Jews sometimes opted to undergo painful epispasm procedures (restoration of the foreskin). In this period, circumcision “regained its original holiness,”

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leaving a deep impact on the Jews’ sense of “peoplehood” (Volksfähigkeit) by simultaneously separating them from other nations and serving as a symbol of the covenant that God had made with the Israelites. At this time circumcision became an “expression of the religious confession” (Manifestation des Glaubensbekennnisses), a “national badge of Israelite-hood” (nationale Abzeichen des Israelitenthumes), the “absolutely essential and sacred cement binding the individual to the nation and to God.”

Brecher’s argument was bolstered by an “epistle” by his nephew, appended to The Circumcision of the Israelites and entitled The Circumcision of the Arabs and Mohammedans. Here Steinschneider examined biblical and rabbinic sources pertaining to circumcision among the ancient Ishmaelites, Gibeonites, Edomites, Midianites, and Nabateans, as well as Koranic sources pertaining to circumcision among Muslims. He noted that the Koran does not contain any positive commandment with regard to circumcision, arguing that Islam originally viewed circumcision as a means for “corporeal perfection” (körperliche Vollkommenheit). By denying the religious or spiritual significance of Arab and Muslim circumcision, Steinschneider, in effect, confirmed this ritual’s singular role as a “covenant of blood” between God and Israel. Together with Fassel’s approbation, his “epistle” not only strengthened Brecher’s core argument, but also joined the three Prossnitz Jews in a common scholarly pursuit.

Brecher’s book was such a strong defense of circumcision that it even included a “practical-operative” chapter for self-instruction, followed by the Hebrew liturgy for a brit milah (circumcision) ceremony. Indeed, The Circumcision of the Israelites was not conceived solely as a scholarly (or polemical) treatise, but rather as a medically-, historically- and halakhically-informed handbook to promote the “national badge of Israelite-hood.” Brecher’s Uncle Ber lavished effusive praise on the book, extolling his nephew for marching “like a warrior, girded with the armor of medical science and surgery, with the helmet of


90 M. Steinschneider, Die Beschneidung der Araber und Muhammedaner, mit Rücksicht auf die neueste Beschneidungsliteratur. Sendeschreiben an Herrn Gideon Brecher (Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1845). This work was republished in an expanded version in Abraham Glassberg, Die Beschneidung in ihrer gesichtlichen, ethnographischen, religiösen und medizinischen Bedeutung (Berlin: Boas, 1896). It also appeared as a separate volume (likewise published by Glassberg) in 1892.
the Talmud and Midrash on your head.” In his Hebrew letter, Ber underscored the two sources of his nephew’s authority—scientific and halakhic—and also commended him for fighting “a holy war on the battlefield, out of love for the truth [and] compassion for the children of Yeshurun, so that their souls will not be diminished, because the blood is the soul.” In quoting Deuteronomy 12:23 (“the blood is the soul”), Ber may have been alluding to Brecher’s strident opposition to metzitzah, implying that the blood of the circumcision, like all blood, contains the essence of life, and the mohel should therefore not suck it from the wound. In any case, Ber’s allusion touched upon the nature of the human soul, a topic that may have been peripheral to Brecher’s treatise on circumcision, but always remained at the forefront of his intellectual and literary pursuits.

The Transcendental: Magic and Magical Healing Art in the Talmud (Vienna, 1850)

In 1850, Brecher published The Transcendental: Magic and Magical Healing Art in the Talmud, a 233-page compendium, a collection of talmudic passages dealing with the subjects mentioned in the title, systematically divided into chapters on theology and angelology; demonology; the human soul; prophecy; dreams; magic; cosmic and magical influences on man and his condition; and magical healing. He envisioned the volume, first and foremost, as a reference work, which would make the “Sea of the Talmud” more easily navigable for the scholar who would otherwise have to “swim the infinite ocean” in order to find the scattered passages related to such non-legalistic matters. The fact that such a compendium had never before been published was indicative of the unease that many Jews felt towards the “nonsense” and “superstition” in some of the rabbinic teachings. Brecher was fully aware that the Ugly and Erroneous would appear alongside the True, Good and Beautiful, and he marshaled this as proof that he was writing a work of rigorous scholarship, not “an apologia for the Talmud.”

91 Letter from Ber Schiff to Gideon Brecher, 2 Adar 5606 [Feb. 28, 1846]. Gideon Brecher Correspondence, JTSA, ARC 22, letter 154.
92 G. Brecher, Das Transcendentale: Magie und magische Heilarten im Talmud (Vienna, 1850).
93 Ibid., pp. v–vi.
94 Ibid., p. viii.
Steinschneider echoed this claim, calling his uncle’s book “neither apologetic nor critical, but merely a reference work, with the addition of a few interesting parallels from recent writings on magnetism, somnambulism, etc.”  

Brecher’s and Steinschneider’s claims notwithstanding, *The Transcendental* has an unmistakably apologetic tone. In his work, Brecher cites many superstitious and seemingly nonsensical passages from the Talmud, readily dismissing them as mere expressions of “Judaism at that time” (*das damalige Judenthum*). By historicizing these problematic passages, he relegates them to the realm of antiquarian curiosity. Perhaps they can provide the archaeologist and philosopher with “a true reflection of those centuries” (*ein getreuer Zeitspiegel jener Jahrhunderte*), or even give a glimpse into what the rabbis of the Talmud believed to be “good and true”; but, as Brecher duly observes, some of what the rabbis believed to be “good and true” in talmudic times appeared “frivolous” and “bizarre” by modern standards. (In his commentary on the *Kuzari*, Brecher used a similar line of reasoning when dismissing some of Halevi’s out-of-date philosophical views. Likewise, in *The Circumcision of the Israelites*, he argued similarly for eliminating *metzitzah*.)

The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* lavished praise on Brecher’s book, because it portrayed the talmudic rabbis “as they were,” without attempting to artificially reconcile their primitive worldview with the latest philosophical trends. “It demonstrates what we have known for a long time,” declared the German-Jewish newspaper: “that the rabbis of the Talmud were not philosophers . . .” They may have been “giants” in expositing the Law, but remained “children” and “full of idiocy” (*voll Blödigkeit*) in the realm of moral teaching. According to the book review, the Jewish people were the carriers of this moral teaching, and the rabbis had been tasked with constructing a carapace (*Schale*) to safeguard it against “the hammers of the Middle Ages.” This carapace

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96 G. Brecher, *Das Transcendental*, p. vi. Meir Letteris’ review in *Wiener Blätter* (Feb. 23, 1851): 106–7, also notes that Brecher’s work has an apologetic tone: “the Herr Doctor was not able to fully free himself from a certain subjective Weltanschauung.”
99 Ibid., 200–201.
provided protection in times of persecution, but now that the Middle Ages had passed and the moral teaching had been safeguarded, the Talmudists had little left to contribute.

Nevertheless, the newspaper appears to have overstated Brecher’s position on the Talmud. Although the latter was not a systematic philosophical treatise, Brecher still viewed it as the foundational text of “rabbinic Judaism,” since the Talmud—and not the Bible—served as the source of Judaism’s ethics, dogma, ritual practices and general worldview.100 However imperfect, the Talmud still remained indispensable for understanding the origins and development of Jewish traditions and beliefs.

From Master of Surgery & Obstetrics to Doctor of Medicine: University of Erlangen, 1851

*The Transcendental* catalogued various folk remedies and “magical healing arts” in the Talmud, such as a cure for eye problems using the spittle of a first-born son (BT *Baba Batra* 169b),101 and a treatment for flatulence by consuming radish, watercress or warm water, while reciting a magical incantation (BT *Pesahim* 116a).102 Such remedies did not represent the cutting edge of nineteenth-century medicine, but Brecher’s study of these remedies and “healing arts” was sufficient to earn him a doctorate in medicine at the University of Erlangen in Bavaria. Brecher had received his Masters in Surgery and Obstetrics from the University of Pest in 1824, and in 1850 he began corresponding with the medical faculty at the University of Erlangen in the hopes of obtaining a doctorate on the merits of his recent scholarship. The university did not require any coursework, so Brecher hoped he could take his exams by mail and receive a “Promotio in abstentio,” without having to embark on the lengthy and costly journey from Prossnitz to Erlangen.103 On April 26, 1850, he sent a manuscript copy of *The Transcendental* to the medical faculty in Erlangen, along with exempla

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101 G. Brecher, *Das Transcendentale*, p. 211.
102 Ibid., 232.
of his commentary on the *Kuzari* and his work on circumcision. On May 10, 1850, he sent a separate letter to the dean of the medical faculty, Dr. Johann Ferdinand Heyfelder (1798–1869), describing his 26 years “in the service of humanity,” his well-earned “trust and recognition by the public,” and his indefatigable efforts on behalf of the “needy and destitute people” of Prossnitz. He provided certificates attesting to these accomplishments, and hoped his books (and manuscript) would demonstrate his “love for science in the struggle for practical life.” Heyfelder was apparently sufficiently impressed, and he invited Brecher to sit for his exams at the University of Erlangen. After obtaining Bavarian travel papers, Brecher set off from Prossnitz on May 27, 1851, and arrived in Erlangen a week later. On June 4, 1851, after answering written questions about dyscrasia, laxation of the upper arm and the medicinal uses of argan oil, he was awarded the title *Doctoris medicinae et chirurgiae* from the University of Erlangen.

Shortly after Brecher received his doctorate, a Viennese Jewish newspaper reported that he was preparing a book on dietetics and pathology in the Talmud. This planned work was presumably based on the extensive research he had already conducted for his entries in the *Real-Encyclopädie des Judenthums*, which Moritz Steinschneider and David Cassel had hoped to publish a few years earlier. Unfortunately, Brecher’s research met the same fate as the encyclopedia project, and his manuscript notes remain unpublished to this day. (They were acquired by the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, together with Moritz Steinschneider’s library and correspondence.) In his notes, Brecher organized talmudic passages under various rubrics, including *Materia medica*, doctors, anatomy, surgery, physiology, gynecology, pathology, therapy, dietetics and the transcendental. *Materia medica* included talmudic passages dealing

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104 Ibid., ff. 4a–5b; a partial manuscript of *Das Transcendentale* can be found on ff. 9a-31b.
105 Ibid., ff. 6a–7b (“im Dienste der Menschheit”; “das Zutrauen und die Anerkennung des Publikums”).
106 Ibid., f. 6b (“die Liebe zu den Wissenschaften im Kampfe des praktischen Lebens”).
107 His handwritten answers can be found on ff. 32a–46b; his diploma on f. 49.
109 JTSA MS 2757. The 348-leaf manuscript is entitled “*Talmudische Medicin*” in German and “*Hokhmah ha-refu’ah ba-Talmud*” in Hebrew.
with sore throats, colic, cataracts, diarrhea, constipation, toothaches, anthrax, rabies, etc. Of course, his seven pages of notes on “the transcendental” had served as the basis for *The Transcendental compendium*, so we can only imagine what might have come out of the material he had assembled on gynecology, pathology, dietetics, etc.\(^\text{110}\)

We can speculate that Moritz Steinschneider’s interest in the history of Jews and medicine stemmed, in part, from his uncle’s passion for the subject. In his groundbreaking essay, *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century* (1850; 1857), Steinschneider devoted an entire section to “Medicine and Natural History,” which he introduced with the following words: “The labors of the Jews in the department of Medicine belong to that part of the history of literature and civilization which is generally supposed to be known, but is seldom specially investigated.”\(^\text{111}\) Steinschneider, himself, published numerous articles on Jewish physicians in the Arab lands, which appeared in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, *Hebräische Bibliographie* and other scholarly journals from the 1850s to 1890s.\(^\text{112}\) His most important work in this field was a lengthy article on Shabbatai Donnolo (a tenth-century Italian Jew), author of “the oldest medical work in the Hebrew language,” which appeared in the *Archiv für pathologische Anatomie* in 1868.\(^\text{113}\) As a fitting tribute, Steinschneider dedicated this work to Gideon Brecher on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (albeit one year late).\(^\text{114}\) The book contains a glossary of medical terms in Hebrew, which can also be found in manuscript form in his uncle’s papers.\(^\text{115}\) Indeed, it is possible that Brecher compiled this glossary during his work on the *Real-Encyclopädie*.

\(^{110}\) In his obituary for Gideon Brecher, Moritz Steinschneider described the contents of this manuscript and marveled that a mere seven pages of notes had produced an entire book. See *HB* 13 (1873): 139.


\(^{113}\) It also appeared as a separate offprint: M. Steinschneider, *Donnolo: Pharmakologische Fragmente aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Julius Bezian, 1868).

\(^{114}\) The dedication can be found at the beginning of the offprint.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., pp. 72–91. The glossary appears on ff. 1a–13b of JTSA MS 2757.
By the mid-1850s, Brecher’s interest in medicine was limited largely to his medical practice in Prossnitz. His writings dealt with more metaphysical matters, which had also occupied him in previous decades. In 1857, Brecher published a thin treatise on the immortality of the soul, entitled *The Doctrine of Immortality according to the Israelite People*. He had already explored this doctrine in his *Kuzari* commentary as well as in *The Transcendental* and, in 1844, had even published a Hebrew poem entitled “Immortality of the Soul.” His 1857 treatise, however, was an in-depth study, devoted entirely to this subject. The soul’s immortality was a favorite topic for Jewish enlighteners, most notably Moses Mendelssohn, whose *Phaedon, or: On the Immortality of the Soul* (1764) earned him the moniker “German Socrates.” In *Phaedon*, Mendelssohn reworked Plato’s original dialogues, drawing on the writings of Christian Wolff and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to provide a philosophical proof for the immortality of the soul.\(^\text{116}\) Mendelssohn’s treatise paid no heed to biblical texts, for *Phaedon* operated in the realm of natural theology (as opposed to revealed theology) and, as such, aimed to demonstrate the immortality of the soul on the basis of reason and empirical observation. Indeed, immortality of the soul was one of the few tenets of natural religion, since it provided a necessary condition for reward and punishment in the afterlife, thereby laying a rational basis for human morality. As Immanuel Kant later put it in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), “the highest good is practically possible only on the supposition of the immortality of the soul, and the latter, as inseparably bound to the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason.”\(^\text{117}\)

Brecher’s interest in immortality was shaped more by the Christian-Jewish polemic than by the moral philosophy of Mendelssohn, Wolff, Leibniz, or Kant. For centuries, Christian polemicists sought to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, by claiming that Judaism rejected the belief in the immortality of the soul. During the


French Enlightenment, this view even found expression in the writings of Voltaire, who declared in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) that “[t]heir legislator himself [i.e., Moses] does not anywhere speak expressly of the immortality of the soul, nor of the rewards of another life.” Of course, Voltaire’s claim had a long pedigree, as the French-Jewish Orientalist Salomon Munk (1803–1867) pointed out several decades later. “This reproach,” observed Munk in 1833, “repeated with so much pretense [*avec tant d’affectation*] in the last century, and even still in our days, does not have the merit of novelty.”

Nevertheless, Voltaire’s reproach reflected the widely-held position that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was nowhere to be found in the Five Books of Moses. Even Moses Mendelssohn’s posthumously published Hebrew treatise, *Sefer ha-Nefesh* (The Book on the Soul, 1787), did little to dispel this perception. Here, as in *Phaedon*, Mendelssohn appealed to reason, not revelation, to demonstrate the immortality of the soul, and—as Alexander Altmann has shown—he used biblical and rabbinic quotations “not…as theological proof-texts but as stylistic devices that help to give the essay a decidedly Jewish flavor…” Even religious reformers, who considered immortality of the soul a core principle of faith, had difficulty demonstrating its scriptural basis. Rabbi Salomon Formstecher (1808–1889), for example, admitted that any such attempt would “founder against the rocks of sober, impartial criticism.” To his mind, the very fact that the Talmud denies a portion in the world to come to anyone who maintains that resurrection is not a biblical doctrine (BT *Sanhedrin* 90a) means that “it is, in fact, possible not to find the doctrine of immortality in the Holy Scriptures.” Salomon Munk put it even more bluntly: “It is highly probable that Moses was familiar with this principle, but it is entirely certain that in the work attributed to him, it is nowhere in sight.”

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Munk and Formstecher were among the more than seventy-five authors, both Jewish and Christian, who—in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries—wrote inquiries into the scriptural origins of the immortality of the soul.\textsuperscript{123} In the 1850s, a flurry of books on this topic appeared, including Gideon Brecher’s treatise and Hermann Engelbert’s *The Negative Merit of the Old Testament with regard to the Doctrine of Immortality*, which were both published in 1857.\textsuperscript{124} Engelbert, a rabbinical student in Berlin, set out to debunk Christianity’s “exclusive claim to the doctrine of immortality,” but rejected—in light of the sparse scriptural evidence—the standard apologetic approach of selecting arbitrary verses to demonstrate that “every page of the Old Testament preaches immortality and resurrection.”\textsuperscript{125} Brecher, too, refrained from this approach, acknowledging in the introduction to his work that “Moses did not legislate any positive commandments pertaining to the highest rational ideas (*Vernunftsideen*), namely the existence of God and the immortality of the soul…”\textsuperscript{126}

In the absence of unequivocal scriptural proof-texts, Brecher and Engelbert both appealed to the authority of history in order to “prove” that the ancient Israelites did, indeed, believe in the immortality of the soul. This also demanded a compelling explanation for why this doctrine left no explicit trace in the Five Books of Moses. In grappling with this question, Brecher and Engelbert both placed the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context, drawing attention to the particular challenges of the polytheistic environment. According to Engelbert, the Hebrew Bible aimed to draw attention away from the doctrine of immortality, because the Egyptians, Persians and other ancient peoples adhered to primitive, shamanistic beliefs in immortality that might be confused with the ancient Israelites’ rational, monotheistic belief. As such, “the negation of the pagan belief in immortality” was one of


\textsuperscript{124} G. Brecher, *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre des israelitischen Volkes* (Leipzig, 1857); Hermann Engelbert, *Das negative Verdienst des Alten Testament um die Unsterblichkeitslehre* (Berlin, 1857). In the same year, the following works were also published: Felix Himpel, *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen, 1857), and M. Nicholas, “De l’origine des doctrines de l’immortalité de l’ame et de la résurrection des corps chez les Juifs,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie chrétienne* 14 (1857): 356–374.

\textsuperscript{125} H. Engelbert, *Das negative Verdienst*, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{126} G. Brecher, *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre*, pp. 1–2.
the Hebrew Bible’s greatest accomplishments, and thereby justified its silence on this matter. Like Engelbert, Brecher contended that the ancient Israelites adhered to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but during their “centuries-long sojourn among a polytheistic people,” their beliefs had been enveloped in paganism. Consequently, Moses’s principal task was to “lead the Israelite people back to monotheism,” not to preach doctrines of immortality.

Just as Brecher’s earlier book on *The Transcendental* tried to explain the presence of certain troublesome passages in talmudic literature, his later treatise on *The Doctrine of Immortality* tried to explain the absence of certain desired passages in biblical literature. In both works, Brecher conceived of Judaism in historical terms, viewing it as something that interacts with its environment, changing organically over time, but all the while retaining its essence. Already in *The Transcendental*, he identified the doctrine of immortality as part of this essence, denoting it as a “special characteristic of the People of Israel” (*ein Eigenthum des israelitischen Volkes*). Likewise, in *The Doctrine of Immortality*, he insisted that this doctrine had always been in the bosom of the ancient Israelites, developing subsequently by means of encounters with other ideas and cultures. In a paragraph that reads like a manifesto for “positive-historical Judaism,” Brecher detailed his understanding of Judaism’s ideational development:

> An exotic teaching can find general acceptance only when its germ is already present inside the people, and the idea can easily be linked to this and then brought to fruition. What distinguishes the People of Israel, however, is that the Israelites have never repudiated original and specific elements of their religion, even as they incorporated unfamiliar elements into their religious system, which has occurred in every age. In fact, they assimilated this material into [their religious system], and, as it were, created, by means of a chemical process, a new, entirely homogenous product.

Brecher, who was quite fond of scientific metaphors, set out to trace the “genetic” evolution of the doctrine of immortality of the soul in Judaism from a “purely objective standpoint.” In his “historical

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127 H. Engelbert, *Das negative Verdienst*, p. 16.
129 G. Brecher, *Das Transcendentale*, p. 64.
131 Ibid., p. 7.
investigation of the truth,” he showed how Judaism had assimilated Zoroastrian conceptions of resurrection and Platonic conceptions of immortality, allowing a traditional Jewish belief to crystallize—in talmudic times—into an “essential dogma.” The talmudic period was only one stage in the “chemical process,” and Brecher went on to show how this core belief continued to evolve, as the “philosophical school” (Maimonides, Judah Halevi, Abraham ibn Ezra and Joseph Albo) accommodated it to Aristotelian thought and the “mystical school” (Nahmanides, Isaac Luria, and Bahya ben Asher) accommodated it to Gnosticm and Kabbalah. For Brecher, both of these schools were legitimate expressions of the Jewish people, incontrovertible proof that Judaism’s continuous engagement with its environment actually reinforced its “essential dogmas.”

Brecher’s argument was considered novel and persuasive enough for Albert Cohn, the French Jewish scholar and philanthropist, to have it immediately translated into French. The translation was undertaken by Isidore Cahen, whose father, Samuel Cahen, had published the French translation of the Hebrew Bible (Paris, 1831–1851) that had included Salomon Munk’s above-mentioned reflections on the immortality of the soul. By rendering Brecher’s work into “the most universal and widespread language of the civilized peoples,” Cohn hoped to uproot the erroneous views about Judaism that were still commonly held. Isidore Cahen assumed that readers of Brecher’s treatise would be surprised to find out that “this race of exiles and bankers . . . had produced such scholars and philosophers.” He hoped that its readers would finally comprehend that the sublime belief in the immortality of the soul was the true source of “the heroic obstinacy” with which the Jewish people had “braved all of the humiliations and persecutions since the Christian era.”

It is not clear whether Brecher managed to convince any of Judaism’s detractors that the ancient Israelites did, in fact, believe in the immortality of the soul, but his small treatise did contribute to the religious edification of German-speaking Jewish children. Two years

132 Ibid., p. 47.
133 Ibid., p. 73.
135 Ibid., p. 6.
136 Ibid., p. 18.
137 Ibid., p. 13.
after the publication of The Doctrine of Immortality, a German-Jewish catechism quoted from this work in a section on “eternal life and resurrection”; the Jewish pupils were presumably required to memorize Brecher’s words.\(^{138}\)

**Distinguished Citizen in the Age of Emancipation**

Brecher’s books on circumcision, magic and immortality were part and parcel of the debate over Jewish emancipation in the middle of the nineteenth century. In their own ways, these books challenged deeply-rooted assumptions about the barbarism of circumcision, the absurdity of the Talmud and the primitiveness of Judaism, assumptions that all stood in the way of the full acceptance of Jews by the surrounding society. As Ismar Schorsch has shown, “modern scholarship on Judaism betrayed all the urgent concerns raised by the long-contested venture of emancipation,” and in this sense, Brecher’s works were no exception.\(^{139}\) In many respects, however, Brecher’s greatest contribution to the “venture of emancipation” was his sheer humanity, a quality that distinguished him in the eyes of nearly everyone who came into contact with him. Already in 1850, when corresponding with the medical faculty at the University of Erlangen, he made special mention of his “service to humanity.”\(^{140}\) This sentiment was echoed by the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, which observed in 1865 that Brecher conducted himself as a “human being and Jew” (als Mensch und Israelit) in all of his affairs.\(^{141}\) Moritz Steinschneider saw Brecher’s scholarship in a similar light. As he wrote to his uncle in the preface to his study of Shabbatai Donnolo, “I emblazon my small work with your name, because humanity is the ultimate goal of scholarship.”\(^{142}\)

On January 14, 1865, Gideon Brecher turned sixty-eight, and the Prossnitz Jewish community took the opportunity to honor its most


\(^{140}\) Universitätsarchiv Erlangen-Nürnberg (UAE): C3/3 Nr. 1849/50–13, f. 6a–7b.

\(^{141}\) “Prossnitz,” Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (Feb. 21, 1865): 119.

\(^{142}\) M. Steinschneider, *Donnolo, Pharmakologische Fragmente aus dem zehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Julius Benzian, 1868), second unnumbered page.
distinguished member and to celebrate his forty years of service in Prossnitz’s Jewish hospital. Abraham Schmiedl, rabbi of the community, lauded the medical profession as a “sacred calling,” adding that it is “all the more beautiful, sacred and praiseworthy when the doctor is, at the same time, a human being [wenn der Arzt zugleich Mensch ist] in the most noble and sensitive meaning of the word; when his heart, which enthusiastically embraces the good of humanity, is so full of the most fervent concern and deepest compassion, that he sees every suffering human being, first and foremost, as his suffering brother…” Brecher’s jubilee took place in 1865, a full two years before the emancipation of Habsburg Jewry, and the laudatory speeches reflected this climate of hope and expectation, touting him as a “shining example for the youth” and highlighting his moral qualities and his strivings on behalf of humanity. The celebration included a torch-lit procession and a serenade by the local choral society, but the real highlight was the dedication of a “charitable, humanitarian institute” in the jubilant’s honor: a sick house (Siechenhaus) in the Prossnitz Jewish community.

To mark the occasion, Prossnitzers in Vienna contributed to the establishment of the sick house and also set up a foundation (Brecher-Stiftung) to support impoverished students from Prossnitz. Along with many others who could not attend the festivities in person, Moritz Steinschneider and his wife Auguste sent their congratulations by mail.

On the symbolic level, Brecher endowed his celebration with special significance, since it brought Jews and Christians together as “fellow brethren” (Mitbrüder). Like many Moravian towns, Prossnitz was divided into a Christian town and a Jewish town, each of which had its own elected mayor and aldermen. The Christian and Jewish populations quite often came into conflict with one another, and Brecher found it worth mentioning—in a letter to Moritz and Auguste Steinschneider—that the representatives of the Christian town had sent him a “letter of praise and thanks.” In Brecher’s view, this was “an event that should not be underestimated”; it was surely a “sign of the times.”
since such behavior towards a Jew “was unprecedented, from the Middle Ages until our days.” In 1871, Brecher also received recognition from Emperor Franz Joseph, who awarded him the Golden Cross of Merit.

Brecher joined in the struggle for Jewish emancipation, first and foremost, by setting a personal example through his commitment to scholarship, medicine and the well-being of his “fellow brethren” (in the widest sense of the term). Highly prolific from the late 1830s until the late 1850s, he devoted the last decades of his life primarily to his medical practice. Nevertheless, he published a few pieces in the 1860s, including an article on teraphim (which had been composed in 1842), some observations on biblical Hebrew style, and a serialized Torah commentary in Hebrew. All of these appeared in Galician Hebrew periodicals, the first two in Otzar Ḥokhma, a Lemberg-based journal, which also published contributions by a number of Moravian rabbis. Brecher’s Torah commentary appeared in Ṭori Anokhi (I am a Hebrew), “an obscure journal” (in his terms), published in Brody.

“My time is devoted primarily to my career,” Brecher wrote to Steinschneider in 1868, explaining why his literary output had diminished over the years. In any case, by this point in his life, he could take pride in the fact that his son, Adolf (Aharon) Brecher (1831–1894), had followed in his scholarly footsteps, and that his nephew, Moritz Steinschneider, had long ago surpassed him. Adolf, who had studied medicine in Prague, settled down in Olmütz (near Prossnitz) in 1859, where he worked as a physician for the railways and served as vice-president of the newly-established Jewish community (and director of the local German Association). Perhaps inspired by his father, who, in

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147 Ibid.
148 Brecher was awarded the Goldenes Verdienstkreuz on the first day of Passover in April 1871. See Ungarisch-Jüdische Wochenschrift (April 27, 1871): 141.
151 Gideon Brecher (Prossnitz) to Moritz and Auguste Steinschneider (Berlin), Jan. 24, 1868. Moritz Steinschneider Papers, JTSA, ARC 108. Correspondence, B.
1845, had published a Judeo-German translation of Psalm 141, Adolf published a German translation of the Book of Psalms in 1864, which he dedicated to his father (and to a childhood friend, Adolf Beer) “with love and devotion.”152 (Adolf also translated Hungarian and Czech poems into German and composed many humorous German poems of his own.)153 After Gideon’s death, Adolf completed and published an unfinished Hebrew manuscript that his father had left behind: a concordance of all the proper names in the Hebrew Bible, entitled Eleh ha-ketuvim ba-shemot (Frankfurt, 1877).154

Moritz Steinschneider was Gideon Brecher’s true scholarly heir. Just as Ber Schiff had nurtured his nephew’s interest in Hebrew language and literature, Gideon Brecher constantly encouraged (and promoted) his own nephew’s prodigious scholarly talents. Already in 1828, when Moritz was a mere eleven-year-old, Brecher boasted to his own Uncle Ber about his nephew’s original interpretation of a biblical verse.155 In 1840, when Steinschneider was in his mid-20s, Brecher could see that his nephew was destined for greatness. As he wrote in 1842, “everyone is amazed at the level of his knowledge . . . He gave a sermon (derash) in the synagogue, and the entire town was impressed by the beauty of his language (melitsot).”156 Brecher supported his nephew’s projects, such as the planned Real-Encyclopädie des Judenthums, and he occasionally put his own private manuscripts at Moritz’s disposal.157 Brecher

152 Adolf Brecher, Die Psalmen, metrisch übersetzt (Vienna, 1864). The copy in the Jewish National and University Library (Jerusalem) is inscribed by Moritz Steinschneider to Sal. Kaufmann (April 1900).

153 For Adolf Brecher’s obituary (and brief biography), see “Olmütz,” Dr. Bloch’s Oesterreichische Wochenschrift 4, no. 16 (1894): 322.

154 G. Brecher, Eleh ha-ketuvim ba-shemot; mar‘ eh maqom (qongordantzya ’al kol shem—’etsem perati ha-nizkar ba-Tanakh, ve-nishlenah melakhto u. z. beno Aharon (Frankfurt a.M. 1876). For a review of this work, see Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur 3 (1877): 192–193. This journal, published in Frankfurt am Main, was edited by Nehemias Brüll (1843–1891), grandson of Rabbi Nehemias Trebitsch; Moritz Steinschneider studied with Trebitsch during his years at the Nikolsburg yeshiva.

155 G. Brecher to Ber Schiff, Jan. 28, 1828. Gideon Brecher Correspondence, JTSA, ARC 22, letter 7.

156 G. Brecher, undated letter, Gideon Brecher Correspondence, JTSA, ARC 22, letter 16. An article in Der Orient (Jan. 24, 1843): 30–31, refers to a sermon given in Prossnitz by Moritz Steinschneider, so I assume this letter can be dated to the end of 1842.

also gave him career advice, expressing relief in 1843 that his nephew did not take a rabbinical post in Tarnopol, Galicia. “That you will not be going to Tarnopol does not bother me at all,” he wrote his nephew. “My antipathy towards the Poles in general makes it impossible for me to consider it pleasant or worthy for you to take a [rabbinical] post among Polish Jews, who, with all of their relative education, are saturated with the smell of onions, superstition and Hassidism.” His anti-Polish diatribe was somewhat gratuitous, since the main point of his letter was that Steinschneider should pursue a career in scholarship, not the rabbinate. “Were Tarnopol to be seen merely as the first step on your ladder of destiny (die erste Stufe deiner Schicksalsleiter),” he added, then it would be a nice point of entry (prozdor). “But there is one thing that I cannot contain myself from saying,” he continued, “namely that I believe you have already gathered nearly enough scholarship (Wissenschaft) to work as a scholar, and it is high time that you take strides towards applying [your knowledge].”

Indeed, by the time Brecher penned these words, his nephew had published a German translation of the sayings of Rabbi Abraham Belais (1838), co-published (with Franz Delitzsch) the Hebrew text of a Karaite theological work (1841), and been invited to contribute entries on Arabic literature and religion to the Universal-Lexikon der Gegenwart und Vergangenheit. A quarter century later, when Steinschneider had already established his reputation as the “father of Hebrew bibliography,” Brecher offered him additional career advice. Following the emancipation of Habsburg Jewry in 1867, the Ministry of Religion and Education in Vienna considered establishing a rabbinical seminary in the western lands of the Habsburg Empire (Cisleithania), and the Moravian governor (Statthalter) asked Brecher to prepare a report on this proposed institution. Soon thereafter, Brecher proclaimed to his nephew: “I immediately thought of you.” Nevertheless, Steinschneider remained in Berlin (where he had been editing Hebräische Bibliographie since 1858 and teaching at the Veitel-Heine-Ephraim’sche

159 A. Marx, Essays in Jewish Bibliography, pp. 115–117.
160 G. Brecher (Prossnitz) to Moritz and Auguste Steinschneider (Berlin), Jan. 24, 1868. Moritz Steinschneider Papers, JTSA, ARC 108. Correspondence, B.
Lehranstalt since 1859); he then went on to teach at the girls’ school of the Jewish community and work as an assistant at the Royal Library in Berlin. (In subsequent decades, Steinschneider rejected offers to teach at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin as well as the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, since he firmly believed that the university, not the theological seminary, was the proper place for critical Jewish studies.)

Unlike his nephew, Gideon Brecher had the luxury of engaging in critical Jewish studies “alongside [his] practical profession.” Medicine was his profession and the Jewish hospital his place of work, and even though he made important scholarly contributions, he never aspired to an academic career. Steinschneider, in contrast, viewed the university as his rightful place, and he nurtured the hope that the German universities would one day follow the English example by creating a place for critical and objective Jewish learning in their hallowed halls. He rejected the rabbinate and the rabbinical seminary as unsuitable for truly objective scholarly inquiry, and settled instead for positions that were clearly below his level of accomplishment. Although he lamented that Jewish scholarship “has no basis in reality, no institution, no encouragement,” when these institutions finally came into being, Steinschneider deemed them unsatisfactory. His uncle, on the other hand, supported the creation of a rabbinical seminary, since Brecher was always interested in Judaism more as a system of beliefs and practices than as an object of study.

Gideon Brecher passed away on May 12, 1873, at the age of 76, and his funeral took place two days later. Moritz Steinschneider wrote a brief obituary in *Hebräische Bibliographie*, describing his recently deceased uncle as “one of the few, great individuals who has no enemies. Simple, warm, idealistic, human to the extreme, his personality infused everyone with a genial adoration.” “His writings,” he continued, “reflected his personality: a rare combination of astute historical perception with an ideal, almost spiritualistic belief that relieved him of stiff forms and harmoniously rounded out the life of the author,

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163 Ibid., p. 131.
which was as active as it was calm.” The adjectives he chose to characterize his uncle—“warm,” “idealistic,” “spiritualistic”—would certainly never have been used to describe the tormented, irascible and ironic “father of Hebrew bibliography” himself. Indeed, Stein- schneider shared much of his Uncle Gideon’s erudition and diligence, but little of his calm temperament and congenial disposition.

A conciliatory person by nature, Brecher sought to reconcile conflicting positions in his scholarship, as well. In his 1838 article on Jewish schooling, Brecher insisted that any educational reforms had to strike a happy balance between rationalism and emotionalism. He was drawn to Judah Halevi’s Kuzari, in part, because it attempted to harmonize western philosophy and rabbinic Judaism, two traditions that were often considered at odds with one another. Unlike Luzzatto, he even viewed Kabbalah as a legitimate and ancient Jewish tradition, part of a “mystical school” that evolved together with Judaism’s more rational “philosophical school.” Indeed, much of Brecher’s scholarly (and medical) career was devoted to understanding the irrational, the transcendental, the magical and the liminal elements of human existence. In this respect, his medical curiosity about homeopathy’s “vital force” easily dovetailed with his poetic, exegetical and theological inquiries into the nature of human soul.

Prima facie, Brecher’s treatise on the immortality of the soul tackled an enduring ontological question, but on a deeper level, it proposed a bold redefinition of Judaism as a dynamic religious system, capable of incorporating unfamiliar elements, if their “germ is already present inside the people.” Indeed, for Brecher, Judaism is rooted in the historical experiences of the People of Israel, whose ongoing engagement with the surrounding environment allows the religious system to evolve in accordance with its inner essence. In other words, the (re)conciliatory approach that typified his writings was more than just a reflection of his personality. It was a reflection of Judaism, as he conceived it. As he wrote in The Transcendental, the People of Israel had been assimilating foreign ideas into Judaism throughout history, and ended up creating a “new, entirely homogenous product” by means of a “chemical process,” one that helped Judaism reconcile opposing currents, enabling it to retain its vitality and relevance in modern times.

164 M. Steinschneider, HB 13 (1873): 139.
On May 18, 1873, the Prossnitzer Wochenblatt, a liberal German weekly, published a lengthy obituary, which was subsequently reprinted by many Jewish newspapers, such as the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums.\(^{165}\) The obituary drew heavily on a biographical sketch that Moritz Duschak had written on the occasion of Brecher’s sixty-eighth birthday.\(^{166}\) In describing the funeral, the obituary singled out the highly diverse group of individuals and organizations that paid their last respects to Prossnitz’s “best and most noble citizen.” These included the mayor of the Jewish town, the mayor of the Christian town, the town priest, the prior of the Brothers of Mercy, doctors and medics, as well as music societies, gymnastics clubs, the local fire brigade and various Jewish associations. The large, diverse turnout was a testament to Brecher’s life, which—in the words of the Prossnitzer Wochenblatt—had been “devoted to the well-being of our fellow citizens, irrespective of standing and confession.”

The Prossnitzer Wochenblatt also suggested a fitting epitaph—in German—for Brecher’s tombstone: “He lived and worked for this world and the next. He made himself immortal.” Of course, the epitaph played on the title of Brecher’s last major work, but, by treating immortality on the symbolic—rather than spiritual—level, it paid short shrift to the “essential dogma” that occupied Brecher’s thoughts for much of his life. Furthermore, a German epitaph was hardly suitable for a scholar who, in the spirit of the Moravian Haskalah, had devoted himself to Hebrew language and literature, and even wrote his Kuzari commentary in an “easily comprehensible, fluent Hebrew.”

Fortunately, Brecher had had the foresight to compose his own epitaph, prior to his death. Written as a rhymed Hebrew acrostic, it evokes the Hebrew poetry of Solomon ibn Gabirol, the medieval Spanish poet, grammarian and Neoplatonist philosopher.\(^{167}\) Here, Brecher hearkened back to the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry, an idealized, yet eminently ‘usable’ past for anyone seeking a model for harmonious coexistence and cultural cross-fertilization between Jews and their neighbors. Ibn Gabirol is best known for reconciling

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165 “Prossnitz,” Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (June 17, 1873): 406–408. Ignatz Rottberger, publisher of the Prossnitzer Wochenblatt, was married to one of Gideon Brecher’s nieces.

166 M. Duschak, “Gideon Brecher” (1865): 3–19. [see Note 6 above]

167 I would like to thank my colleague, Hano Yami, for pointing out the similarities between Brecher’s epitaph and the poems of Ibn Gabirol.
Neoplatonism with rabbinic tradition, and Brecher’s epitaph drew on the Neoplatonist conception of the soul as being temporarily trapped in the human body; his Hebrew terminology could have been taken directly from Ibn Gabirol’s poetry:

I was a stranger here in a strange land  
Distinguished in creations, and trapped in a body  
From the beginning, my soul has yearned for eternal light  
On the day that God called, [my soul] left its earthly grave  
And joy returned to life  
With the strength of youth  
In the father’s house.168

The strange land does not refer to Moravia, but rather to the human body that provides a temporary domicile (or earthly grave) for the immortal human soul. Nevertheless, Gideon Brecher was an unmistakable product of his Moravian environment, where traditional rabbinic culture was rooted and secure enough to absorb new ideas and new approaches, giving the Moravian Haskalah its distinctly moderate character. Moravian Jews took great pride in Brecher, and in other native sons—such as Leopold Löw, Adolf Jellinek, and Moritz Steinschneider—who had risen to prominence in the Jewish firmament of Central Europe. As a Prossnitz correspondent to the Galician Hebrew periodical *Ivri Anokhi* observed in 1873, Brecher’s death had “removed the crown from our head, the glory of this town and all of its environs.”169

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168 Brecher’s tombstone no longer exists, but his epitaph was transcribed at the beginning of the twentieth century when the old Jewish cemetery was destroyed. For the transcription, see Jewish Museum in Prague, Nr. 51036, “Grabsteine Abschriften des alten jüdischen Friedhof in Prossnitz,” No. 1/1 r.