

## **Kalman Schulman's Josephus and the Counter-History of the Haskalah**

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The first time I heard of Kalman Schulman was at a meeting with Prof. Menahem Stern in the corridors of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem when I was a young student. He was told that I was interested in the Haskalah and said that he expects someone to thoroughly study Schulman who played a major role in his life. In a nostalgic tone he revealed that he had acquired his love of history in general and of ancient history in particular from Schulman's books, which occupied a place of honor in the library of his Lithuanian father in Bialystok. His first encounter with Josephus, he said, was when as a boy, he read his books again and again in Schulman's dramatic, moving translation.

Stern was not the only one; quite a few Jewish scholars and intellectuals from Eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century were inspired by Schulman's books in constructing their national and Zionist ideology, and learned about the history of the Second Temple through them. Ahad Ha'am and Simon Dubnov, for example, thanked Schulman enthusiastically for fostering their interest in studying the history of the Jewish nation. "The translation of *Wars of the Jews* that I bought and devoured when I was only twelve," wrote Joseph Klausner, the history and literary scholar, one of the founders of the Hebrew University, and this, "was the first work that encouraged me to love and become addicted to the Second Temple period."

Kalman Schulman's translations of Josephus from the 1860's were indeed an enormously important and meaningful event in the history of Jewish culture. Judging them from the perspective of the inspiration they provided for scholars and historians from Eastern Europe we may also consider them as mile stones in Jewish Studies. For generations, Josephus' works had been absent from the Jewish library and the collective memory drew mainly upon talmudic sources and the book of *Jossipon*, a Hebrew work from the tenth century, which was mistakenly attributed to Josephus. Interest in Josephus grew as historical research developed from the early nineteenth century, and founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* like Jost and Graetz already used it in their historiographic reconstruction of the ancient period in Jewish history. Hebrew readers, however, only became acquainted with *Wars of the Jews* and his other work at a relatively later time, and the first one to place it on the shelf in a translation from the German was in fact Kalman Schulman (1819-1899) of Vilna, an important Jewish agent of culture in his time, but later almost totally forgotten and neglected.

But just to balance the picture a bit, perhaps I should note that the leaders of Tel Aviv in the 1950s did see fit to commemorate his name in a small street, Kalman Schulman Street, which you can find today branching off Haskalah Boulevard, squeezed between two streets named after the most well-known moderate maskilim who were his contemporaries and friends: Abraham Baer Gottlober and Eliezer Zwiefel. They too were extraordinary agents of culture in

their times, and a great deal still needs to be done to acknowledge their contribution to the development of modern Jewish culture.

Kalman Schulman was born to a Hasidic father in White Russia, studied at the famous yeshiva in Volozhin and joined a group of maskilim in Vilna when that city was becoming a most dynamic center of Haskalah in Eastern Europe. He was no doubt one of the most successful, prolific, hard workers on the Haskalah project. From the eighteenth century, the maskilim undertook the task of establishing modern Jewish culture by building a new library that would complement and even present an alternative to the traditional library. This enormous cultural project, aiming to regenerate and reeducate the entire Jewish society, also provided new bookshelves that held books of science, philosophy, geography, history, poetry and from mid nineteenth century also Hebrew novels. From his modest apartment on Stefan Lane in Vilna, this autodidactic scholar, Kalman Schulman, initiated a remarkable, vast project: to make available the entire corpus of the Jewish historian Josephus to readers of Hebrew.

On 1861 Schulman published an open letter for the purpose of signing up advance subscribers, finding sources to finance the printing expenses and to provide some profit for the translator. It was probably written already in 1859, but now it was printed by his close friend Shmuel Yosef Fünf in his newly Hebrew periodical *Hakarmel*. Fünf not just opened his first volume for him, but also helped him financially and advised him how to proceed in this project, to raise the money and to organize a network of agents and distributors. We

may therefore consider the Josephus translation as a collective project initiated and supported by the Vilna messily. The open letters explained that it was inconceivable that the masterpiece of "the noblest of all the writers of antiquities in our generations and the finest of all authors of ancient history," which has already been translated "to all the languages on the earth," has never appeared in Hebrew. Schulman presented himself as totally committed to the great mission, almost as a martyr sacrificing himself on the altar of the reviving Hebrew culture: "after having dedicated my time and my pen to our holy language, and having risk my life to rebuild its destroyed altar, and having offered up the best years of my youth, I have zealously preserved the honor of our holy language and the honor of the books composed by this priest הכהן המשוח, and I have started this great, weighty task of translating these wonderful books into a clear and forceful Hebrew שפה עברית צחה ונמרצה."

When these words were written, Schulman had already achieved the height of his success in the ever expanding Hebrew book market. He had completed the translation of the four parts of the turbulent adventure novel *Mysteries of Paris* by Eugène Sue, which immediately became a bestseller. Two thousand copies were sold and were passed on from hand to hand. It competed for success, to Abraham Mapu's dissatisfaction, with his *Ahavat Zion*, the first original Hebrew novel. But Schulman took to heart the criticism of his fellow maskilim "grumbling under their breath about my translation of *Mysteries of Paris*, saying see how this Hebrew person איש עברי has brought gentile children to our Hebrew sons ילדי נכר אל בני עבר." For his critics this popular novel of crime,

romance and adventures was undermining the true mission of the Haskalah. Schulman wanted to believe that the translation of Josephus' works would correct the impression that he was disseminating inferior foreign literature, and would increase his status in his critics' eyes, since he would be restoring the works of an ancient Jewish writer to the Jewish library גם הם יענו ויאמרו: ראו עתה כי העביר המעתיק ההוא את בגדי הנכר מילדי העברים וילבישם מחלצות חטובות אטון ירושלים. I should honestly say, Schulman declared proudly, that no one before me did such a great thing in the field of Hebrew literature.

It was a well-planned project. The first to come out was *Toledot Yosef (The Life of Josephus)*, followed by a biographical article in the periodical *Hakarmel* (1860), and then in 1861, Schulman published the above mentioned open letter announcing the translation project in an effort to find agents to distribute the book, and mainly to interest advance subscribers. This method had been widespread from the eighteenth century among maskilim in order to finance their works. The project did not lack problems and obstacles. The greatest surprise came when one of the major figures among the maskilim in the nineteenth century, the poet Judah Leib Gordon, told Schulman that a parallel project of translating Josephus was already underway. Particularly worrying was the information that another maskil, Zeev Kaplan (, had already begun translating *Toledot Yosef*. What am I to do, Schulman asked Gordon, "I greatly disturbed for I will stand as an obstacle in his way," But he went on, "I cannot put aside my translation for it is almost ready. If I had known these two weeks earlier, I would have been prepared to wait until he published and sold the

entire edition, but now it is too late." Schulman asked Gordon to apologize to Kaplan and to tell him he need not fear that there would be two translations in the Jewish book market at the same time. He believed that the readers were so eager for Josephus' books that they would buy both translations. But then he added something even more interesting. There is a great difference between the two translations, for while Kaplan has been selective in his translation, "I have translated it from beginning to end" and "while he is only translating, I will publish a scholarly book most of which is notes and annotations." But Kaplan's translation never came out and the Josephus project is identified entirely with Schulman.

Schulman's assumption that readers were eagerly awaiting the books proved to be true. The two parts of *Wars of the Jews*, together comprising close to 800 pages, were enthusiastically received when they came out in 1862. For decades, it was the only translation available in Hebrew. Schulman's translation was read like a dramatic historical novel and the last years of Jewish independence in their own land were depicted for the Hebrew reader in rich political events that culminated in the battles between the rebels and the Romans and the destruction of the Temple. Thus, for example, the readers followed with excitement the tragic moment in which, according to Josephus' story, the fate of the Temple was decided almost by chance, through the action of a Roman soldier, in opposition to Titus' wish. This is how Schulman describes it in his translation:

"ואז חילה איש רומי את פני רעהו להרים אותו במרום, ומבלי פקודת שר ונגיד גם מבלי דעת את חטא משפט מות אשר הוא עושה, השליך לפיד אש בחלון הזהב אשר ללשכת הדביר מקום אשר בגדי הכהנים מונחים שם, ותאחז האש בבגדים, ותבער בבית פנימה, ותלחך את כל סביבותיה. והיהודים אשר ראו את האש הגדולה ואת השלהבת המתלקחת במקדש ה', צעקו צעקה גדולה ומרה, כאשר יאתה להצרה האיומה והנוראה ההיא, ובחרדת מות וקול יללה ובכי ונהי תמרורים קפצו אל נחלי האש לכבותם בדמיהם, כי יקר להם המות מלראות את בית מקדש אלהיהם מאכל באש"

I didn't study Heinrich Paret's German translation used by Schulman and I therefore cannot tell if the Hebrew rhetoric here is following the German text, but it is important to imagine how the Hebrew readers in the nineteenth century could now be impressed by this crucial historical moment in the life of their people.

To Schulman, the translation of *Wars of the Jews* was more than a literary achievement. It was part of a national endeavor to redeem what remained from the glorious era of Jewish history that took place on the soil of the Land of Israel. Beyond his literary ambition to make forgotten literature available to the Jews, it was for him a project to strengthen the national Jewish identity by reconnecting it to Jewish ancient history. That history had to be glorious and dramatic, capable of evoking national pride. The national movement of the Jews was not yet created, but the concern about the declining collective Jewish identity in Europe was high on the agenda of the maskilim and it motivated

their projects. It was especially true for the moderate maskilim like Schulman, who strongly rejected assimilation.

From a social and cultural standpoint, Schulman's translation project was woven into the special texture of the culture and society of the Vilna community. Schulman was one of the major figures in the circle of maskilic writers and scholars. His close acquaintances included the poet Adam Hacoheh and his son Mikhal, and Shmuel Yoseph Fünf. Schulman earned his livelihood as a teacher, at a school that prepared students for the rabbinical academy that opened in Vilna in the 1840s as part of the Russian government's educational system. Schulman and Fünf represented the moderate Haskalah who were not eager to clash with the orthodox defenders of tradition. Schulman was also recognized in Vilna as the man "who stood out among the other maskilim in the city for his devotion to religion." People there used to say that he "was a true orthodox in his spirit and behavior...in his forelocks that grew below his ears, his long beard and his clothing, which was similar to that of a *melamed* of that generation." His books may also have gained popularity because although he was identified with the circles of maskilim, he was not regarded as a threat to religious values and his readership consisted not only of supporters of the Haskalah but also of yeshivah students. Like the other moderate maskilim in Vilna, he greatly admired the Gaon of Vilna, and the approbation he received for his *Wars of the Jews* from Rabbi Abraham Simha of the Mastislav community granted him legitimacy and approved the translation project. In that approbation, Schulman is depicted as a man who

fulfills the Gaon's wish to see books of science translated into Hebrew, a wish, which, according to the Lithuanian tradition, was passed on from the Gaon to R. Baruch of Shklov and to his pupil R. Haim of Volozhin and explicitly included a desire to see the writings of Josephus in Hebrew, as an aid to the study of the Talmud: "for through it, we will arrive at an understanding of the intention of our sages of blessed memory in the Talmud and the midrashim."

But behind the moderate Haskalah there was actually a hidden cultural trend which was transformative, even radical. Schulman's goal was to engender a revolution in the Jewish book world by expanding it into two spheres, which until then had been neglected: geography and history. The appearance of his history books in general (his nine volumes of *Weltgeschichte* were extremely important!) and Josephus' works in particular dramatically opened the world to the Hebrew reader in Eastern Europe, and it is no wonder that they were so enthusiastically received by curious and desiring young people. Although today we would consider Schulman an orthodox Jew, he actually contributed to the secularization of Jewish culture.

The historical circumstances in which Schulman lived, being part of the Russian system of Jewish education, and the ideology and agenda of the moderate Haskalah in the 1860s also determined his attitude towards Josephus. In his eyes, the author of *Wars of the Jews* was an exemplary model: a descendant of high priests and Hasmonean kings, a dedicated national leader, a great military commander, an excellent, prolific historian, a Jew who had earned the esteem of the leaders of the Roman Empire. He even identified him

with R. Yossi the Kohen, one of the tanaim, who is mentioned in the mishna Avot. Although Josephus was one of the soldiers, it was in his power to prevent the calamity of the Destruction. He foresaw what would happen, he took exception to the bloodthirsty Zealots, and "if the people of Judah had listened to him, Titus would not have devoured Jacob and left waste his habitation." לו שמע עם יהודה בקולו לא אכל טיטוס את יעקב ואת נהו לא השם After his failure, Josephus became, in Schulman's eyes, the representative and founder of diaspora Judaism at its best. For "the Jew who is faithful to his God, will not cease being a Jew, even after the temple of his God is destroyed, even after he wanders throughout the lands of the globe and distant isles. He will then carry the torches of the Temple in his heart, and from its ruins will build there a new temple, in the name of the Almighty, and that temple of his he will carry with him to all the places where the furious storms of the world will hurl him." Although the moderate maskilim developed a nationalist attitude they didn't consider leaving Europe. Jewish nationalism in the diaspora takes the form of keeping Jewish religion and culture, which is the substitute for political sovereignty and territory. Schulman hastened to defend Josephus' defamed reputation and to clear him of the accusations of treason and his desertion to the enemy camp. Perhaps the most intimate lines that Schulman wrote to show his great admiration for Josephus were in the dedication to his 1859 translation of *The Life of Josephus*:

To the soul of the author, Josephus: Hail! In your name and your memory though my heart and body fail! I compare you to Jeremiah son

of Hilkiyah, the prophet of truth and justice, for the story of your life and the story of his life are so much alike. Like him, you saw the poverty of your people as they wasted away in affliction, like him you rightly advised your brethren, the sons of your land, to heed the voice of their king whom the God of the world anointed as their sovereign, for God places kings on their throne and he bestows his glory and majesty upon them. Like him you loved the sons of your people boundlessly, and like him you were harassed by them for having sought their good and their happiness, and they regarded you as a traitor taken by their enemies and the destroyers of their land.

"אל נשמת המחבר. יוסף בן מתתיהו! הה, לשמך ולזכרך יכלה שארי ולבבי! אותך אשווה ואדמה לירמיהו בן חלקיהו נביא האמת והצדק, כי הליכות תולדות ימי חיך עם תולדות ימי חייו נשתוו. כמוהו ראית עני בת עמך בשבט עברתו, כמוהו יעצת צדק לאחריך בני ארצך לשמוע ולהקשיב בקול מלכם אשר המליך אל מלך עולם עליהם, כי אלהים מושיב מלכים לכסא, והוא נותן מהוד הדר מלכותו עליהם. כמוהו אהבת את בני עמך אהבה בלי מצרים, וכמוהו רדפוך המה בלי חשך על רודפך טובם ואשרם, ויתנוך לבוגד ונופל אל צורריהם ומחריבי ארצם".

Above all the other motivation, Schulman's translation project should be understood also as a counter-history. He found it important to suggest a counter-narrative and to offer an alternative to the hostility towards Josephus that he found in German-Jewish historiography. While, in his view the great historians Jost, Graetz and others used the method of "free criticism" ביקורת

הופשית in their research, he adhered to "the way of faith" דרך אמונה. Schulman wanted most of all to reject the defamation of Josephus and said it openly להציל את יוספוס מהדיבה הרעה אשר טפלו עליו בני עמנו חכמי אשכנז. I believe this is one of the most interesting insights in Schulman's project of translating Josephus. Two trends of the moderate Haskalah in Russia during the time in power of Czar Alexander II (1855-1881), then considered the most liberal ruler ever, joined together here. On the one hand, Schulman represented what could be called the second direction of Jewish studies in nineteenth century, which attempted to provide a more conservative alternative, one in the Hebrew language, to the research conducted by the main direction in German. In the 1870s, for example, Schulman began a project of translating Graetz in order to use it to present his own version of Jewish history. He understood the criticism of Josephus as an expression of the radical trend of Jewish historians in Germany, Graetz in particular. Paradoxically, he considered the criticism of Josephus to represent the assimilationist approach rather than the nationalistic one. The German historians are not proud enough of their national heroes. On the other hand, he understood his own approach, which defended Josephus against the accusation of treason and compared him to the prophet Jeremiah, as a nationalistic one that took pride in this remarkable first-century historian and did not defame his memory but rather identified with him and upheld him as a model. In this way, Schulman promoted the self-identity of the East European maskilim vis-à-vis the Jewish scholars in Germany.

His extremely sympathetic attitude towards Josephus reflects also the ideology of the moderate Haskalah that advocated Russian patriotism, complete loyalty to the government and identification with the Russian empire and its Jewish policy. Schulman unreservedly accepted the pacifying position of his hero and rejected the claims that denounced him as a traitor. His negative view of the revolt against the Romans was clear, and he repeated it in his writings again and again. In his eyes, the Zealots were responsible for the destruction of the Temple. The political revolt was totally devoid of any legitimacy. "He who rebels against his king also rebels against God who has enthroned him," Schulman firmly declared. "And he who rises up against the king shall be regarded as one who lifts a hand against the throne of God." המורד במלכו מורד גם באל ממליכו, וכל אשר ירים יד בכס המלך יחשב כשולח יד בכס יהוה. The tragedy of the revolt against the Romans in the first century, as well as the Bar Kochba revolt, Schulman believed, obliged the Jews to realize that they ought to remain loyal to the ruling government.

Like his fellow maskilim in Russia, in the 1860s Schulman had high expectations from Alexander II. In those very same years in which his translation of *War of the Jews* was published, Gordon printed in *Hakarmel* the most important, well-known manifesto-poem of the Haskalah: *Hakitzza Ami* (Awake, my People), which contained a call for Jewish Russian loyalty and solidarity in an era of growing hope of emancipation. "The land of Eden is now open to you," Gordon wrote about Russia. "Its sons now call you brothers./How long will you dwell among them as a guest/Why do you reject

their hand?" And in the most famous words in the poem, he also suggested how to become a Russian citizen: "To the treasury of the state bring your wealth/Bear your share of its riches and bounty/Be a man in the streets and a Jew at home/A brother to your countryman and a servant to your king." Schulman, we need to remember, began translating *Wars of the Jews*, when he was under the influence of the royal visit of the Czar in Vilna, on October 1, 1860, when the Jewish community went out of its way to express its unqualified loyalty. He himself published nine years later a book describing the wonders of St. Petersburg. It seems this patriotism was projected on to the useful past that Schulman provided to his readers, and it explains his resolute objection to the revolt against the Romans and his determination to clear Josephus' name and present his position as one worthy of a Jewish leader. When he was asked whether his attitude towards the Zealots was so negative only because he was being cautious since Hebrew books were then under the supervision of the Russian censor, he replied that his negative opinion of the Revolt had always been an inner conviction and not merely a tactics. His counter-history was patriotic but more than every thing else he wanted to express the autonomy of the maskilim in Russia and how different they are from the Jewish German historians.

In summary, Schulman's Josephus project can be understood within the historical context of the moderate Haskalah in Russia. It was a transformative, part of the effort of the Haskalah to enrich the Jewish library in Hebrew. It was a project of transformation as part of the Haskalah's great aspiration to change

Jewish society by opening avenues to the world at large and by disseminating knowledge. It was also a project that was part of reconstructing Jewish historical consciousness, as I wrote about in length in my *Haskalah and History*. Kalman Schulman played a central role in the emergence of modern Jewish culture. His translation of Josephus was also a project of "counter history." He offered an East European Jewish alternative to German Jewish historiography. In addition, he drew a picture of the past which also fostered Jewish national identity by revealing the ancient world of the Jews. At the same time he took a clear political stand, urging the Jews to remain loyal to the state and the government. To clear Josephus of the accusation of treachery was, then, one of Schulman's major goals. Like most of his fellow maskilim, he hoped that the Russian Empire under Alexander II would also improve the situation of the Jews and support the maskilim's effort to promote modernization. On the way to the realization of these political and cultural aims, something no less important occurred. Josephus' books were made accessible to Hebrew readers at the very same time that Hebrew was reviving. And Josephus himself as a fascinating, attractive and controversial figure made its way not only into scholarly discussions, but also into the discourse of the Jewish collective memory.