



Progress Report: July 2019

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During the past academic year, I initially continued work on my project “From *Mayse* to *Musar*: Stories in Yiddish Ethical Literature, 1535–1815.” I completed my examination of the Cracow edition of *Pirkei Avot* (1590) and compared it with other Yiddish translations of the text which exist in manuscript form. My comparison of these texts has broken new ground: indeed, until now scholars have largely neglected the Yiddish translations of *Pirkei Avot*. I am currently in the final stages of polishing my article on this topic (provisionally entitled: “When the Days Are Long and People Are Idle: Sixteenth-Century Yiddish Translations of *Pirkei Avot*”), which I intend to submit to a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the summer (I will initially submit to the *Journal of Jewish Languages*). Below is the abstract for the article:

Pirkei Avot (Chapters of the Fathers), a collection of ethical and moral sayings pronounced by the sages, is one of the most popular and commonly read works in the Jewish library. Furthermore, the custom of reading it on Sabbath afternoons led to its inclusion in the prayer book. Over the centuries, *Pirkei Avot* was translated into various vernaculars spoken by the Jews in the diaspora, among them Ladino and Yiddish. However, little has been written about Yiddish translations of *Pirkei Avot* from the Early Modern period, a number of which have survived in both print and manuscript form. A Yiddish translation of the text was first printed in Cracow in 1590. A close reading of this edition, and a comparison with other Yiddish translations, especially that in the Italian manuscript penned by the scribe Anshel Levi (completed in 1578/9), suggests the existence of an earlier Yiddish tradition which circulated in manuscript form and was adapted by writers/printers in different locations to suit the needs of their intended readers. Likewise, it also reveals that the printer of the Cracow edition framed his text as a work of *musar*, or ethical literature, which would appeal to a wide audience.

Since the end of February 2019, I have been working a new project: “Disseminating Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Lemberg: Abraham Menachem Mendel Mohr and His Peers.” After surveying the existing scholarly discussions of Mohr, I began my study of his writings with his *Tsaytung*, a Yiddish newspaper that he published in Lemberg almost singlehandedly during the Spring of Nations (1848-9). Mohr’s *Tsaytung* provides a



fascinating window onto the tumultuous events of the time, during which Europe was engulfed by revolutions, from the perspective of a Jew living in Galicia. It not only reports the major events of the revolutions, and the military campaigns in Italy and Hungary, but also provides Mohr with a platform through which to disseminate general education and maskilic ideas. Indeed, Mohr frequently calls upon his readers to seize the opportunity offered by the revolutions and the constitutional changes that they brought about, describing how the democratically-elected Reichstag debated the question of Jewish emancipation and the cancellation of the meat and candle taxes, which placed a major economic burden upon the Jews. He reports with great excitement the eventual abolition of these taxes and the constitution granted by the Austrian Kaiser in March 1849 that gave Jews full rights (although this constitution was never fully implemented and was revoked at the end of 1851), urging his readers to prove their loyalty to the authorities and their non-Jewish neighbors, to improve themselves, and to provide their children an education that will prepare them for life as useful citizens. Having read all the available issues of the paper (unfortunately, a few are lacking), in the past month I began writing an article about the paper, which is provisionally entitled: “It Isn’t Every Day that a Miracle Occurs: A Lemberg Maskil’s Commentary on the Spring of Nations (1848-49)”. In this article I survey Mohr’s commentary on the political developments, his views on relations between Jews and non-Jews, reports of anti-Jewish sentiment during the revolutions, his loyalty to the Habsburg Empire, the general didactic content of the paper, and his maskilic platform, all on the background of the dramatic events of the time and the Galician *haskalah*. I plan to submit this article to a peer-reviewed journal (*AJS Review* or a similar journal) by the end of the summer (August 31).