

Ismar Schorsch: Leopold Zunz. Creativity in Adversity. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2016. 329S., 54.00 €

Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) was a major figure in the evolution of scholarship on Judaism as an academic field, as well as a crusader for Jewish equality in Germany of the 1810s–1850s. His life and work merit attention and Ismar Schorsch, former chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a veteran historian of German Jewish scholarship, has taken upon himself to write an intellectual biography of this early pioneer of Jewish studies.

Lipmann (later Leopold) Zunz was born in 1794 in Detmold. Orphaned in a young age, he was sent to the Samson Free School in Wolfenbuettel, where the director, Samuel Ehrenberg, took him under his wings. Zunz proved to be a prodigy, mastering mathematics, classical and modern languages, and Jewish texts. Completing his *Abitur*, he proceeded to the University of Berlin shortly after it opened its doors in 1811. While providing unprecedented opportunities to young aspiring Jews to study and expend, Berlin's political and cultural atmosphere also presented serious challenges. Contextualizing Zunz progress, Schorsch points out that Jews were increasingly moving from the periphery to the center of German economy and culture, acculturating and hoping for full integration into the German polity. However, they did not enjoy full civil rights, and the Prussian government revoked, during the reaction that came about in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat and the Congress of Vienna, even the partial emancipation that the edict of 1812 had offered Jews.

Jewish intellectuals, like Zunz, found it impossible to gain a foothold in academia, which, being part of the state apparatus, was closed to Jews. A number of Zunz' friends opted for conversion to Christianity, a move that helped secure positions in academia, the professions, or state bureaucracy. Zunz rejected that option and chose instead to remain in the Jewish fold and devote his energy and talents to advance the position of Jews and Judaism in German society and culture. Schorsch's thesis highlights, very convincingly, the connections between Zunz's struggles in the political, cultural and professional fronts and his scholarly and literary endeavors. While active in public struggles for civil reform, Zunz's contribution was mostly in the realm of scholarship, which, he believed, could combat prejudice, and transform the image of Judaism among Christian readers. A critical and even-handed research, which utilizes the latest academic tools, Zunz and his comrades hoped,

would present the richness and creativity of post-biblical Judaism and convince Christian thinkers that Judaism was a legitimate community of faith, whose members were worthy of trust and respect.

Together with a handful of other young Jewish university graduates, Zunz founded, in 1819, the 'Society for the Critical Study of the Jews' (Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden). Although it disbanded merely a few years later, the pioneering group provided a beginning for the larger and more enduring movement of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that set the stage for the creation of Jewish Studies as a field of academic inquiry. Zunz himself published prolifically on important aspects of Jewish literature, such as *Piyyut*, and was involved with numerous educational and literary projects.

Schorsch writes about Zunz's endeavors with abundant admiration, and his book is a labor of love. Schorsch identifies with Zunz and sees in him a forerunner of Solomon Schechter, who arrived in New York from England in the early twentieth century to re-create the Jewish Theological Seminary as a renowned center of Jewish scholarship. He makes the connection between Zunz and Schechter explicit in the epilog, where the author asserts that: "Emblematic of the explosion of new knowledge ignited by Zunz is the iconic stage photograph of Solomon Schechter pouring over the hoard of manuscripts in Cambridge..." (p. 240). A scion of the Historical School, Schorsch also applauds Zunz's decision not to follow in the path of increasing reforms in German Judaism, and to remain close to tradition. The book is infused with sentences conveying the admiration of the biographer to the object of his inquiry. In discussing Zunz's publication *On History and Literature*, Schorsch writes that "The originality and richness of Zunz's book demands and deserves multiple readings" (p. 137). In discussing Zunz's appeal for Jewish educational efforts in Berlin, the author claims that "not only was this appeal infused with common sense, but also filled with intensive conviction" (p. 35).

Some readers might find Schorsch's evaluation of Zunz's achievements to be a trifle too laudatory. However, the biography serves a purpose, reminding students of Jewish history, as well as the larger public, of the contributions of the early masters of Jewish research in Germany to both the civil and academic realms. His work points out that Zunz and his comrades militated, via high quality academic publications, for respect and appreciation on the part of Germans towards the Jewish tradition and its literary creativity. Lack of gratitude towards the early pioneers of Jewish scholarship has been endemic. Schorsch

relates, at times in a cursory manner, to some of the defamations. While many Christian scholars either ignored, or thought little of, the emerging movement of Jewish academic inquiry, demeaning attitudes also came from Jewish quarters. Orthodox and Zionists have often regarded this brave and gifted group of scholars with contempt, and presenting them, and the culture they had represented, as turning their backs on their heritage. In recent decades, a number of scholars have re-evaluated the writings and contributions of the early masters of Jewish scholarship. One such seminal work has been Susannah Heschel's groundbreaking study of Abraham Geiger and in which Heschel demonstrated both Geiger's outstanding intellectual accomplishments and his proud Jewish stand. Ismar Schorsch's biography of Leopold Zunz follows in that vein, making an impressive contributing to the new wave of revisionist history. Scholars and students of Jewish culture and history should welcome the new study as an important addition to a more even history of Judaism in the modern world, as they will learn a great deal from it.

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