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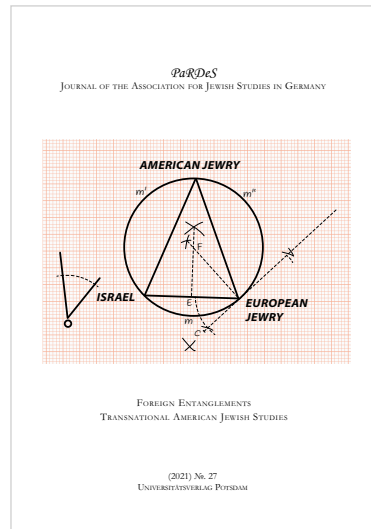
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Exporting Jewish Ideas from Germany (via Palestine) to America: Salman Schocken and the Transnational Transfer of Texts, 1931–1950

by Markus Krah

Abstract

When he founded Schocken Books in 1945, department store magnate, philanthropist, and publisher Salman Schocken (1877–1959) called his new American publishing business an imitation of its German predecessor, which had functioned from 1931 until 1938. He intended it to replicate the success of the Berlin Schocken *Verlag* by spiritually fortifying a Jewish community uncertain in its identity. The new company reflected the transnational transfer of people, ideas, and texts between Germany, Palestine/Israel, and the United States. Its success and near-failure raise questions about transnationalism and American Jewish culture: Can a culture be imposed on a population which has its own organs and agencies of cultural production? Had American Jewish culture developed organically to the specific place where several million Jews found themselves and according to uniquely American cultural patterns? The answers suggest that the concepts of transnationalism and cultural transfer complement each other as tools to analyze American Jewry in its American and Jewish contexts.¹

1. Introduction

When Salman Schocken announced his plans for a new publishing house in New York to a Jerusalem audience in 1945, he suggested a line of continuity with his Berlin-based Schocken *Verlag*: “I am currently working to create a Schocken publishing house in America. That is an imitation of the German

¹ Much of the research for this project was made possible by a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and by a fellowship at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

publishing house.” He actually presented the relationship between the two endeavors as a transnational project *avant la lettre*: “Distances no longer exist, and the mutual influences between here and there are obvious.”²

The two statements in the speech, however, contain the kernel of a contradiction that shaped Schocken Books’ stated mission: a mere imitation of the German model is hardly a transnational endeavor. It points instead to an attempt at influencing another community by exporting cultural goods, as opposed to a transfer or exchange that gives the “receiving culture” agency in choosing what to accept, appropriate, and make its own. The tension between the claim of transnational exchange and the reality of a one-directional cultural exportation haunted the company in its early years, when Schocken offered American readers handsome and affordable books with English translations of texts he had successfully published in prewar Germany. Intellectuals and German-speaking immigrants welcomed this infusion of high-brow central European Jewish culture, affording Schocken Books cultural influence through journals such as *Commentary* and *Aufbau*. Still, the company sold nowhere near enough books to become profitable. An internal analysis in 1957 concluded that the company had faced commercial failure around 1950 because it had not taken into account the distinctly American needs of its target audience.

The simultaneous cultural success and commercial near failure of Schocken Books illustrate crucial questions that a transnational approach asks of American Jewish culture: How do national and transnational cultural forces interact in the shaping of a culture? What factors determine the acceptance and absorption of elements from a different culture? Does transnationalism offer ways to analytically disentangle the various forces shaping a transnational culture? More specific to the Schocken case, the fate of the enterprise poses the question of whether the Jewish element could have ever been enough to overcome the nationally specific cultural outlook of American Jews who had minimal connection to the German Jewish world which Schocken represented?

² Salman Schocken, Untitled Speech (German), Jerusalem, December 16, 1945, Schocken Archive (hereafter SchA), Jerusalem, section 83.

2. The Berlin *Verlag*: A Template to Elevate American Jewish Culture

During the first five years of its existence, from 1945 to 1950, Schocken Books, echoing its founder's announcement, adopted almost in totality the model of the German *Verlag*, from which authors, editors, books, and business practices were exported, via Palestine, to New York. Salman Schocken saw this triangular exchange between Germany, Palestine/Israel, and the US, three key loci of Jewish modernization, as the key to a transnational Jewish culture in which a positive Jewish identity could be grounded. That worldview, a product of German Jewish history in the modern era, assumed that the classic works of Jewish culture contained within them values that could sustain Jewish life and instill pride. Salman Schocken identified with German and Jewish "high" culture with the zeal of the autodidact. Many other Jewish immigrants, and later refugees, from Germany brought this bourgeois understanding of Jewish culture and *Bildung* as formation and cultivation of the self to the US and Palestine.

This notion also drove the Jewish cultural renaissance in interwar Germany, when Jews faced both new educational, economic, and cultural opportunities, but also struggled with the forces first of assimilation and then exclusion by state-driven anti-Semitism. Searching for alternatives to traditionalism and assimilation, they crafted new cultural expressions for traditional contents of Judaism and created a modern German Jewish culture.³ The Schocken *Verlag*, founded in 1931, was a key agent in these processes, trying to tap the richness of the Jewish tradition in order to spiritually fortify its readers.⁴ During its seven-year existence it published more than 200 books: fiction and non-fiction, translations, anthologies, almanacs, and editions of texts that had previously been inaccessible to broader audiences. A partial list of authors reads like a roster of the most eminent and respected European

³ Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴ For the most comprehensive history of the Schocken *Verlag*, see Volker Dahm, "Das jüdische Buch im Dritten Reich; II: Salman Schocken und sein Verlag," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* XXII (1982): col. 302–915. A revised version was published as *Das jüdische Buch im Dritten Reich* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993). See also Saskia Schreuder and Claude Weber, eds., *Der Schocken Verlag/Berlin: Jüdische Selbstbehauptung in Berlin, 1931–1938 [Essayband zur Ausstellung "Dem suchenden Leser unserer Tage" der Nationalbibliothek Luxemburg]* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1994); Ernst Simon, *Aufbau im Untergang: Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung im*

Jewish thinkers and writers, including Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Heinrich Heine, Mendele Mokher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Yitzhak Leib Peretz, Franz Kafka, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Leo Baeck, Gershom Scholem, and many others.

Many of these authors were published in the *Schocken Bücherei*, a series of attractively designed, yet affordable books, which presented treasures of the Jewish tradition and learned modern takes on religion and history. The series suggested the idea of a new Jewish canon. According to a Schocken memo, the series would “present from the vast and often inaccessible corpus of Jewish texts of all times and places [...] those which will immediately speak to the searching reader of our time.”⁵ The books repackaged these venerable texts in modern forms, designed to appeal to the aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual tastes and needs of post-traditional Jews. The house published a total of 92 books, just missing the stated goal of 100 volumes. For some German Jews, the *Bücherei* volumes served functions beyond the texts they contained. As in the United States one generation later, displaying the colorful volumes on one’s bookshelf allowed individuals to highlight not only cultural refinement, but also to engage in a symbolic act of performing and displaying Jewishness. With this program, the Schocken *Verlag* had been if not commercially successful, then culturally influential, as it gave the most important writers a public voice in Germany, even through the first years of Nazi rule, up until it was liquidated in 1938.

In the early 1940s, Salman Schocken began exploring the idea of repeating this enterprise in the US, a place with many Jews with enough money to buy books.⁶ He had already left Germany in 1933 and immigrated to Palestine.⁷ He

nationalsozialistischen Deutschland als geistiger Widerstand (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959); Stephen Poppel, “Salman Schocken and the Schocken Verlag,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 17* (1972): 93–113; Antje Borrmann, Doreen Mölders, and Sabine Wolfram, eds., *Konsum & Gestalt: Leben und Werk von Salman Schocken und Erich Mendelsohn vor 1933 und im Exil* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2016).

⁵ Bücherei (Dtld.) memo, n.d., Vanderbilt University Glatzer Collection (hereafter VU GC), Glatzer Papers, Box 23, Folder 839.

⁶ *The Memoirs of Nahum N. Glatzer*, eds. Michael Fishbane and Judith Glatzer Wechsler (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 98. Glatzer mentions a first formal meeting to explore the founding of a publishing house in 1943: “Herrn Salman Schocken zum achtzigsten Geburtstag,” n.d. [1957], SchA 30.

⁷ For biographical information on Salman Schocken, see the comprehensive, yet flawed biography by Anthony David, *The Patron: A Life of Salman Schocken, 1877–1959* (New York: Metro-

settled in Jerusalem and founded a new publishing house in Tel Aviv.⁸ Among his many other activities was the chairmanship of the board of the Hebrew University, and it was in this capacity that he arrived in New York in 1940. It is unclear whether this was meant to be a fundraising trip of a few months, which turned into a five-year stay, or an unannounced decision to move to the US. Schocken used his time in the US to explore the intellectual and spiritual state of American Jewry. Hobnobbing with an intellectual elite of New York Jewry, with interlocutors as diverse as Salo Baron, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Philip Rahv, and Harold Rosenberg, he came to an assessment, widespread at the time among American Jewish elites, that the community needed guidance in creating and sustaining Jewish culture, not just to elevate it culturally to its new middle-class socioeconomic status, but to ground American Jewishness in its heritage as an antidote to the threat of assimilation perceived by many rabbis and Jewish intellectuals. “The American is proud to preserve the tradition, the Jew convulsively rejects it,” he claimed in a speech in Haifa in 1946. “In America, one is an enthusiastic galuth Jew, i.e. one is an American.”⁹

Schocken held 1940s American Jewish reading culture to his imagined standard of the cultural renaissance of 1930s Germany and found it wanting. He was blind to or dismissive of the existing Jewish culture, including a lively scene of book publishing, which included publishers like Behrman House, Bloch, the Hebrew American Publishing Company, Ktav, and the flagship Jewish Publication Society (JPS).¹⁰ Instead he saw American Jewry as a *tabula rasa* and predicted, “With Schocken Books in New York, the Jews of America will get for the first time representative samples of their Judaism at a level hitherto unknown in America, and scarcely available in any other country except Germany.”¹¹

politan Books, 2003); and Stefanie Mahrer, *Salman Schocken: Topographien eines Lebens* (Berlin: Neofelis, 2021).

⁸ The company was run by Salman’s son Gustav/Gershon Schocken (1912–90). The New York and Tel Aviv publishing houses did not interact closely, more like distant cousins in business relations than close siblings.

⁹ Salman Schocken, “Amerika 1945,” January 8, 1946, SchA 83.

¹⁰ Charles A. Madison, *Jewish Publishing in America: The Impact of Jewish Writing on American Culture* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1976); Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888–1988: A Centennial History of the Jewish Publication Society* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989).

¹¹ Quoted in Altie Karper, “A History of Schocken Books in America, 1945–2013,” in *Konsum und Gestalt: Leben und Werk von Salman Schocken und Erich Mendelsohn vor 1933 und im Exil*, ed.

German Jewish culture provided the main ingredient in the mixture of commitments and ideals that together formed the mission driving Schocken's publishing businesses. Another was his cultural Zionism, a belief that a Jewish cultural center in Palestine would be more important to the revitalization of the Jewish people, including in the diaspora, than a Jewish state. In the Haifa speech he argued that the source of American Jewry's spiritual nurturing would have to be the Jewish community in Palestine, noting, "It is the responsibility of this land, including its cultural producers, to adapt to the six to seven million people outside of it who will perish without a permanent supply."¹² Yet, Schocken deemed the diaspora Jewishly legitimate. He went even further, arguing that American Jewry would be essential to the future of world Jewry. In the 1945 Jerusalem speech he said, "we also have to cultivate America from the point of view of the future of Jewry, because the majority of our people are there and our future depends on it." While looking down on American Jewry, Schocken nevertheless saw cultural potential and the beginnings of its development: "We cannot hope for a Franz Rosenzweig to emerge in America, but some kind of reaction is going on there. We can practically grasp it with our hands."¹³ Schocken hoped to be part of this cultural development and thereby help American Jewry find its new role *as Jews* in American society. He tried to do so by founding another publishing house. Central to its mission was Schocken's commitment to a transnational understanding of modern Jewish culture in which a Jewish identity could be anchored.

3. Transnational Continuities? Translations and a Cultural Canon

With its earliest publications, in 1946, Schocken Books manifested – in texts, authors, and editors – continuities with its German predecessor, notwithstanding the historical ruptures and differences that separated 1930s German Jews from those of 1940s America. Among the editors, Nahum Norbert Glatzer (1903–90) represented both transnational continuities and transmutations. He

Antje Borrmann, Doreen Mölders, and Sabine Wolfram (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 1994), 272.

¹² Schocken, "Amerika 1945."

¹³ Salman Schocken, Untitled Speech, December 16, 1945.

had been a disciple of Buber's and Rosenzweig's in Germany, had worked as an editor and author for the German Schocken *Verlag*, lived in Palestine for several years, and in 1945 became one of two chief editors of Schocken Books, New York.¹⁴ The other chief editor, Hannah Arendt (1906–75), brought her own commitments to German Jewish thought and culture, but lasted only two years in the role.¹⁵ Schocken Books also benefitted from the leadership of Theodore Schocken (1914–75), Salman's Harvard-trained son, but the founder remained the most influential actor until his death in 1959.

Salman Schocken, Theodore, Glatzer, and Arendt exchanged hundreds, if not thousands of letters, memos, telegrams, and cables in the early years of the American company alone, discussing which books to publish, which translator to pick, the design and marketing strategies, choice of paper, and all the other details of publishing. Likewise, they corresponded with authors living on different continents and countries. When Schocken claimed that by running a transnational Jewish publishing network he helped create a transnational modern Jewish culture, he pointed to this roster of editors and authors, their texts and ideas, which he turned into books. Without much self-reflection or conceptual thought about the processes involved, he implied that these books constituted the building blocks of a transnational cultural edifice. Schocken believed that what had worked in Germany ten years before should work in the US.

Not surprisingly then, Schocken in these early years turned to his German backlist and selected books to be translated into English. The very first publication released by Schocken Books in 1946 was *In Time and Eternity: A Jewish Reader*, an anthology of classical texts from the postbiblical tradition, edited by Glatzer. It was an English reworking of the German anthology

¹⁴ Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Knowledge as Service: An Appreciation of Nahum N. Glatzer," *Jewish Studies Forum of the World Union of Jewish Studies* 31 (1991): 25–46; Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Scholarship as a Craft: Reflections on the Legacy of Nahum Glatzer," *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 269–276; Eugene R. Sheppard, "'I am a memory come alive': Nahum Glatzer and the Legacy of German Jewish Thought in America," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (winter 2004): 123–148.

¹⁵ Barbara Hahn, "'Wesentlich ein Übersetzungsverlag': Hannah Arendt als Lektorin bei Schocken Books in New York," in *Konsum und Gestalt: Leben und Werk von Salman Schocken und Erich Mendelsohn vor 1933 und im Exil*, ed. Antje Borrmann, Doreen Mölders, and Sabine Wolfram (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2016), 259–271. See also Arendt's memos at VU GC Schocken Files, esp. Boxes II, V, and VI, and Glatzer's correspondence (Glatzer Papers, Boxes 10 and 12, and Glatzer, *Memoirs*, 103).

Sendung und Schicksal (Mission and Destiny), co-edited by Glatzer and announced as the first publication of the German *Verlag* in 1931. Other translations and reworkings of German publications included Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* (1947–1948), Leo Baeck's *The Pharisees and Other Essays*, Yitzhak F. Baer's essay *Galut*, Salomon Maimon's *Autobiography* (all 1947), as well as Ferdinand Gregorovius's *The Ghetto and the Jews of Rome* (1948). Schocken Books was originally, in Arendt's assessment, "essentially a publisher of translations."¹⁶

In the spirit of imitation, Schocken decided to replicate the *Schocken Bücherei* by creating the *Schocken Library* series. Like the German predecessor, it consisted of attractively designed, short books, typically 128 pages long, priced at \$1.50, and targeted at a broad readership. The multicolored set, like the *Bücherei*, was supposed to consist of 100 volumes. All 20 volumes published until 1949 were translations of texts originally written in other languages, and most had been previously published in German by Schocken. The continuity of the larger Schocken mission is most explicit in a programmatic foreword which Buber wrote in 1946 (in German) for the *Schocken Library*. He described it as a repository of a modernized version of the religious tradition, necessary to anchor post-traditional Jews in their heritage:

"The vital substance of the [Jewish] people can only be saved and preserved if [...] a great inner gathering takes place, a gathering of the dispersed Jewish spirit, the dispersed Jewish soul. [...] For millennia, we lived off of the power of an incredibly vital tradition, a tradition that immediately affected life, the whole life, proving to give strength, edify, and regenerate in any historical situation. We have lost the vitality of this tradition; the best of us should dedicate their efforts to regaining it for man today in a form that fits his nature and interests. [...] The call for gathering as the call of the hour is the foundation of Schocken Books and of this book series in particular."¹⁷

Echoing the trauma of living through an era of disruption and destruction, Buber presented books as a new way to transmit what he, and Schocken, defined as an authentic Jewish heritage to a community of tradition-rejecting "galuth Jews" in need of it. This idea in turn appealed to many American

¹⁶ Hahn, "Wesentlich ein Übersetzungsverlag."

¹⁷ Martin Buber, "Verlagsvorwort Schocken Library," November 29, 1946, SchA, 378/o.

Jewish intellectuals, as it promised to provide an infusion of profound Jewish culture to the US, something that they believed had long been lacking. “We have reached a stage of maturity where a low level of culture no longer becomes us,” *Commentary* editor Elliot Cohen stated in 1947, claiming this was a point “upon which the articulate in the Jewish community seem to agree.”¹⁸ In Schocken they welcomed a fresh voice into an ongoing conversation about the question what an American Jewish culture should look like. The 1947 *Commentary* symposium titled “Jewish Culture in This Time and Place,” in which Hannah Arendt and rabbi-philosopher Jacob Agus were prominent participants, illustrated the breadth of the discourse on the effort “to make Jewish experience in this country meaningful.”¹⁹ Salman Schocken tapped into this discursive network, and brought his own group of thinkers of different stripes – religious and secular, Socialists and conservatives, Hebraists and Yiddishists – to the conversation, who in different roles – as translators, members of an informal board, occasional authors of blurbs and advertising copy – supported the publishing house. Baron, Elliot Cohen, Moshe Davis, Clement Greenberg, Will Herberg, Heschel, Irving Howe, Joshua Loth Liebman, Rahv, Joshua Starr, Milton Steinberg, Max Weinreich, and even the young Norman Podhoretz populate the lists of correspondents and meeting partners in New York. Recent immigrants from central Europe constituted another support group. Their journal *Aufbau* enthusiastically hailed what seemed like a continuation of the German endeavor, again embodied in the *Library*: “Those who knew and loved the *Schocken Bücherei* in Germany can rejoice. The affordable little Schocken volumes are back, printed and bound as tastefully as before.”²⁰ An announcement of the series in the *Schocken Reader*, a catalogue brochure with excerpts of forthcoming publications (and as such another imitation of a German publication) in 1947 made explicitly transhistorical and transnational claims for the series:

“The Schocken Library series is devoted to Jewish writings of the past and present which are expressive of the great classical traditions of Judaism. The books selected

¹⁸ Elliot Cohen, “Jewish Culture in America: Some Speculations by an Editor,” *Commentary* 3, no. 5 (May 1947): 412–420, here 412.

¹⁹ “Jewish Culture in This Time and Place: A Symposium,” *Commentary* 4, no. 5 (November 1947): 423–431, here 423. The contributors responded to Cohen’s “Speculations by an Editor.”

²⁰ “Die Schocken-Bücher sind wieder da,” *Aufbau*, October 24, 1947. The article was signed “-ck,” likely editor Richard Dyck, who wrote several other stories on Schocken Books.

for publication will be central and pivotal works in the great body of Jewish literary production. [Works] that were in the past, and are today, of concentrated relevance for the thoughtful and the perplexed.”²¹

4. **Lost in Cultural Translation: American Interests of American Jewish Readers**

The main challenge for the Schocken vision was making texts accessible and relevant to American Jewish readers. This involved three related processes of translation. First, the previously published German books had to undergo a linguistic translation into English. Additionally, the Jewish religious traditions and themes had to be rendered into understandable cultural terms. Finally, the press had to translate the details and style of the original context of central Europe to the new American context. Each of these processes posed its own challenges. Schocken Books sometimes struggled to find the right translator for a German, Hebrew, or Yiddish book of literary complexity, like the work of Agnon or Kafka. It had to find new spiritual aesthetics, as in prayer collections, and had to transmit into new forms traditional religious knowledge such as in Buber’s Hasidica. This process of cultural translation proved to be the greatest problem. Glatzer, for all his experience and qualifications, confessed to being overwhelmed as a cultural mediator, beginning with *In Time and Eternity*. “I tried to adapt the material to what I believed to be the American Jewish mentality and receptivity for classical Judaic sources. I confess that I did not know enough for the job.”²²

If Salman Schocken had been a more modest man, he could have made a similar confession for the entire publishing program of his US company by 1950. At that time, the signs of an existential crisis, measured in sales figures, could no longer be ignored. Again, the *Schocken Library* was an indicator of larger developments. Schocken printed 5,000 copies of most of the works in the series but sold only between 1,000 and 2,000 copies of most of them.²³ Schocken had to end the series after 20 volumes, falling far short of the 92 volumes it had published in the German series. Schocken Books curtailed its

²¹ *Schocken Reader 1947*, 43.

²² Glatzer, *Memoirs*, 99. The latter remark attests to Glatzer’s modesty. *In Time and Eternity* sold much better than most other Schocken books published in the 1940s.

²³ Stock and Sales Analysis, 1946–1949, VU GC, Schocken Files, Box 6, Folder H.1.a.

operations to a minimum and entered a decade of near paralysis. Having published some 60 titles between 1946 and 1950, it brought out only 15 new books during the entire decade until 1960. It was only after the death of Salman Schocken, in 1959, that the company changed course and picked up its business in a serious way. Looking back at this period, then-executive vice president Peter Bedrick called 1960 “the year of Schocken’s re-birth as an active publishing house.”²⁴

Its ideology and publishing program were not the only causes of Schocken Books’ crisis. Economic factors sent the entire US book business into a deep crisis in the late 1940s. Inflation drove production costs up so high that publishers faced the choice between raising sales prices to prohibitive levels or losing money on making books.²⁵ But it seems equally clear that Schocken Books had seriously misread the interests of its target audience, resulting in a failed attempt at cultural translation.²⁶ The *Aufbau*-reading community of German-born Jews in the US, or at least those who wanted to read Schocken books in English, was apparently too small to sustain the press.²⁷ Sensing this, Salman Schocken from the beginning aimed at a native-reading audience. Here, he fundamentally erred by presuming that the product for sale needed to be translated in the first place, as opposed to something produced in the language of American Jews and engaging with their cultural needs in the American present. None of the 20 volumes of the *Schocken Library* was by an American author or dealt with a specifically American Jewish topic. Among the roughly 60 books Schocken published in the US before 1950, a generous assessment yields two titles fitting that bill: H. E. Jacobs’s *The World of Emma Lazarus* (1949) and arguably the 1950 anthology *A Treasury of Jewish Folk-songs*, whose editor, Ruth Rubin, who lived and worked in the United States,

²⁴ Peter Bedrick, “Living the Good Life,” memo, September 14, 1970, VU GC, Schocken Files, Box 24, Folder B.1.1.

²⁵ Sarna, *JPS*, 216.

²⁶ There is no indication that Schocken Books ever conducted systematic surveys or analyses of readers and their interests, something very few American publishers did during this period. For a rare exception, see Harold U. Ribalow, “Do Jews Read?,” *Congress Weekly*, October 8, 1951, 10–12.

²⁷ The number of German-speaking immigrants and refugees in the US in the 1940s is difficult to ascertain. It is estimated that between 1933 and 1945, some 100,000 German-speaking refugees arrived in the US, joining an extant community of earlier immigrants. In the early 1940s, *Aufbau* had a circulation of about 15,000.

made reference in her introductions to American culture.²⁸ JPS had as early as the 1930s made books on American Jewish history part of its program. It continued this focus during the war years, sensing a need for affirmation as well as for the continuing Americanization of Jewish culture.²⁹

In a retrospective analysis of the company's early years, Glatzer ruefully pointed to an overall lack of attention to the distinctly American interests and needs of its audience: "[There] were people who considered Schocken Books a predominantly European publishing endeavor, which did not see the need of adjusting to the American way of life."³⁰ *Congress Weekly*, the journal of the American Jewish Congress, charitably suggested that Schocken Books and American Jewry were both to blame for the company's failing, neither side *getting* the other:

"No doubt American merchandising of books and American reading tastes and habits were factors which were not always mastered by the men who ran Schocken in this country. On the other hand, the failure of the Schocken enterprise to become a permanent cultural feature of American Jewish life, just as it used to be in pre-war Germany, is also, and perhaps largely, the fault of the American Jewish community."³¹

The failed efforts to bring American Jewish voices into the Schocken program illustrate the complexities of assembling a program fitting the original mission, the hard-to-gauge needs of an audience in flux, and the practical realities of finding authors and texts to turn lofty ideas into actual books. Schocken Books did try to recruit American authors for books on American topics. Some of them declined. In other cases, Salman Schocken vetoed their proposals.³² It appears that he had failed to see the need to "Americanize" his company by publishing texts that spoke to the cultural needs of his intended audience. Large segments of the early post-World War II American Jewish community had very limited interest in books that spoke to the idea(l)s of a

²⁸ Despite its subject, the Lazarus biography is a translation, too, from the German original by the Berlin-born author Heinrich Eduard Jacobs (1889–1967).

²⁹ Sarna, *JPS*, 165, 189–204.

³⁰ Glatzer, "Herrn Salman Schocken zum achtzigsten Geburtstag," *SchA* 30.

³¹ "A Cultural Loss," *Congress Weekly*, January 28, 1952, 5.

³² Schocken Books tried to commission books from Elliot Cohen, Isaac Rosenfeld, and other American authors. According Antony David, Salman Schocken rejected Arendt's plan to bring in T. S. Eliot: *The Patron*, 360.

highbrow German Jewish *Bildung* and culture. Even though the up-and-coming voices of a distinctly American Jewish literature and theology in the 1950s were themselves elite phenomena, they nevertheless reflected the emergence of an American Jewish cultural sphere not shaped by models or predecessors from central Europe. The big issues facing post-1945 American Jewry – Jewishness in the suburbs, acceptance as a religious, as opposed to ethnic group, whiteness and the Black civil rights movement, remembrance of the Holocaust, urban crises, and Cold War liberalism – found very little reflection in Schocken publications.

Thus, after operating for five years in the US, Salman Schocken could look at a mixed balance sheet. No doubt, an intellectual elite of American Jewry welcomed the importation of books that made the European Jewish tradition and history more accessible than before. The praise by *Commentary* and *Aufbau* may have encouraged Schocken in his ambitious vision: by virtue of its transnational history and setup, Schocken Books would be both an agent of mutual influences among three Jewish cultures – Germany, Palestine/Israel, and the US – out of which a transnational Jewish culture would develop, taking material form in Schocken books that would form a new canon of Jewish cultural knowledge.

Realities looked different, at least in hindsight. Instead of a transnational canon emerging out of interactions among various Jewish cultures, we see an effort to export the cultural products of a supposedly superior, more productive culture to a less productive target culture. In this model, often called “cultural diffusion,” the target culture “receives” these goods, with very little agency in defining its own needs or identifying which cultural goods will best serve it, let alone actively integrating and appropriating them. Schocken Books repackaged the books on its backlist by translating them, but beyond that and some marketing efforts did little to address the actual needs and interests of the readers of its target audience, many of whom therefore ignored or even rejected what seemed like “foreign objects” in an emerging *American* Jewish culture.

5. Cultural Transfer and Transnationalism: Shaping American Jewish Culture

How does the understanding of American Jewry as the product of transnational cultural forces fit into this picture? The experience of Schocken Books seems to highlight the importance of distinct national Jewish cultures and the difficulties in transferring or meshing them with one another to form something new – a transnational culture. The Schocken story can serve as a case study to link a transnational approach with the model of cultural transfer, as a way to better understand some crucial aspects of American Jewish history.

“Cultural transfer” is defined against earlier approaches to cultural interaction, which were variously called “diffusionist,” “reception-focused” or “influence-focused.”³³ As described above, the early period of Schocken’s US operations provides a good example of such types of interaction. While these approaches focused on the *exportation* of cultural goods, “cultural transfer” focuses on the motives and circumstances around their *importation*. It assumes much greater agency among actors in the “receiving” culture who reflect on cultural needs and identify potential ideas, cultural objects, or patterns that will address those needs. Successful cultural translation by cultural mediators is necessary for such products to be integrated and appropriated into their new context.

To tap the potential of transnational approaches to American Jewish history, its combination with the conceptual tool of cultural transfers can be particularly helpful, especially as the concepts point in different, even opposite directions. Transnationalism may not negate the differences between various cultural contexts, but relativizes them by focusing on their entanglements rather than their differences. Cultural transfer, by focusing on the presence of elements of a “foreign” culture, also destabilizes the idea of fixed cultural, or even national, identities. But it takes as a starting point the existence of distinct and coherent cultural contexts between which transfers take place.

³³ Matthias Middell, “European History and Cultural Transfer,” *Diogenes* 48, no. 1 (2000): 23–30; Wolfgang Schmale and Martina Steer, eds., *Kulturtransfer in der jüdischen Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006); Christophe Charle, Jürgen Schriewer, and Peter Wagner, eds., *Transnational Intellectual Networks: Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2004); Micha J. Perry and Rebekka Voß, “Approaching Shared Heroes: Cultural Transfer and Transnational Jewish History,” *Jewish History* 30 (2016): 1–13.

By holding transnationalism and cultural transfer in balance with one another – coherent and distinct cultures on the one hand, and their dynamic and fluid nature on the other – these concepts can be fruitfully connected and made relevant for American Jewish studies. Taken together, they can save each other from their respective pitfalls: the dissolution of national cultures that can be the extreme outcome of transnational exchanges, and the reification of cultures as static entities between which transfers take place.

Schocken Books learned the hard way that what they took to be transnational was actually a national Jewish canon, and that it did not speak to postwar American Jews' cultural needs. This experience suggests that cultural transfers resulting from the transnational nature of American Jewry involve processes of selection and adaptation that are deeply enmeshed in the distinctly *American* Jewish cultural context. If we can tease out, by using cultural transfer as a tool, which transnational cultural imports were integrated and which were not, we will know more about how American Jewry has been both transnational in its makeup and distinctly American at specific points in time. Without falling for static and essentialist understandings of what is transnationally "Jewish" and what is "American," or what is too specifically "German Jewish" to fit American Jewish culture at particular moments in time, such an analysis raises the question how one can speak meaningfully about what is American and what is Jewish in the American Jewish experience. This should be a crucial issue on the research agenda of transnational American Jewish studies.