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Familiarly Foreign

The Judeo-German Novellas of the Frankfurt (Oder) Press

Ossnat Sharon-Pinto

SCHOLARSHIP ON MASKILIC TRANSLATION HAS traditionally posited translation as a uniquely maskilic strategy for promoting cultural change and has given considerable thought to translated texts' domestication (which we may term Judaization in this context), intended to bring them closer to the Jewish target culture's needs and tastes. This position has recently been challenged by an argument based on an examination of premaskilic translation: by the time the Haskalah arrived on the scene, it has now been claimed, Jewish readers were well accustomed to translated literature from across the Jewish/Christian cultural divide. Old Yiddish prose, long recognized as largely translated (by a field of scholarship usually distinct and distant from Haskalah scholarship) is case in point; an examination of prose written or translated in the margins between the respective apexes of Old Yiddish and maskilic prose illuminates a little-noticed transitional period between the two.

In this essay I ask what eighteenth-century Central European Jews, on the cusp of "late modernity" and the Haskalah movement, thought about adventure narratives translated into Jewish languages. Were such narratives

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experienced as a seamlessly integrated part of their cultural sphere, or were they designed to give off a tempting whiff of foreignness, despite appearing in their own native language? The following is an examination of a body of eight novellas printed in the Jewish printing press of Frankfurt an der Oder in the years 1783–1814, in which I aim to fine-tune our understanding of this transition in several ways. First, I will argue that though Jewish audiences were accustomed to stories in translation, they were aware of narrative features that signified that what they were reading was a “translation,” and these features could be employed deliberately by translators to certain ends. Second, in dialogue with translation theorists such as Gideon Toury and Lawrence Venuti, I will demonstrate that translated texts’ *domestication* and *foreignization*, though generally thought of as opposing ends of a spectrum, may be intertwined: marking a tale with elements that signal its foreignness *is*, in some cases, a form of domestication. Third, I will suggest that we would do well to dispose of the disciplinary divide between the study of early Central European maskilic literature and the study of late Old Yiddish literature. Although the corpus before us is distinctly maskilic in some ways, approaching it with Old Yiddish sensibilities regarding its authorship and production yields significant insights into the inception of these unique works: The Frankfurt (Oder) novellas of 1783–1814 manifest a softer, more embedded cultural shift, more comfortable with its own low-key hybridity, than most maskilic efforts with which we have previously become familiar.



Bibliographies of Old Yiddish prose¹ and the Jewish book detail no fewer than eight prose booklets of a particular sort that were printed in Frankfurt (Oder) between the years 1783 and 1814.² These works stand out among

1. Old Yiddish, or *Mayrev* (Western) Yiddish, was the vernacular of the early modern central- and Eastern-European Jewish diaspora, displaced in Central Europe by German, and in Eastern Europe by Eastern (Mizrekhi) Yiddish, in the nineteenth century. Its heyday as a written literary language was in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. See Chone Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yiddish: Prakim le-toldoteha* (Tel Aviv, 1978); Chava Turniansky, *Polin: Prakim be-toldot yehude mizrah eiropa ve-tarbutam*, vol. 7 (Tel Aviv, 1994); Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, trans. J. Frakes (Oxford, 2005); Jerold Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 2017), esp. 1–33.

2. Sara Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-Yiddish mi-reshita ad shiv'he ha-besht (1504–1814): A Bibliography* (Jerusalem, 1985), 150–76; Yeshayah

contemporaneous Frankfurt (Oder) publications—most of which, whether Yiddish or Hebrew, bear “wholesome” Hebrew titles—for their foreign-sounding titles and promise of exciting, dramatic contents: *The Tale of the Beautiful Royal Princess Helene*, *The Wonderful Events Which Occurred to a Young Knight, Riter Gabein [Sir Gawain]*, *Tale of the Seafarer Robinson*, *Tale of the Chinese Emperor Kedar*, and more. Nearly all³ are written in a language I shall here term Jüdisch-Deutsch as opposed to Yiddish, here defined as a German language written in Hebrew characters devoid of the Hebrew and Aramaic components found in Yiddish, and of Yiddish grammar or idioms, and spelled as a transliteration of German, with double letters and German-reminiscent *H*'s.⁴ These works all feature non-Jewish characters; take place outside the Jewish sphere; and make no obvious reference to distinctly Jewish religion, traditions, or experiences. Upon comparison, they also share a family resemblance that sets them apart from previous Yiddish translations of German *Volksbücher*.⁵ They emphasize familial partings and reunions, and present an expansive “real-world” geography. It is tempting to assume them to be word-for-word transliterations of German stories, but, as most scholars who examined one or another of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas have concluded, this is not the case: they are short (a fraction of the length of their source texts, where known), indeed no direct sources (i.e. German-language abridgements, similarly phrased) have

Vinograd, *Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book*, (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1993), 576–79.

3. The exception is *The Tale of Avinadav*, to be discussed below.

4. Not much has been written about the writing of German in Hebrew letters, also known as Jüdisch-Deutsch, and the very distinction between Jüdisch-Deutsch and Yiddish is very much up for debate. See Marion Aptroot, “Writing ‘Jewish’ not ‘German’: Functional Writing Styles and the Symbolic Function of Yiddish in Early Modern Ashkenaz,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 55 (2010): 115–28; Ran HaCohen, “Germanit be-otiot ivriot,” in *Ha-sifriya shel tnu'at ha-haskalah*, ed. S. Feiner, Z. Shavit, N. Naimark-Goldberg, and T. Kogman (Tel Aviv, 2014), 459–74. On the fluid nature of German Jewish dialects and the complex lingual map of Jewish Central Europe, see Steven Lowenstein, “The Complicated Language Situation of German Jewry, 1760–1914,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 36 (2002–3): 3–31. The term Jüdisch-Deutsch will therefore be used here to designate the language used in the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas without necessarily subscribing to the idea that this language is strictly distinct from Yiddish.

5. See Arnold Paucker, “Yiddish Versions of Early German Prose Novels,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 10.3–4 (1959): 151–67.

surfaced for any of them, and some of their less obvious features point to a Jewish reworking, as will be discussed below.

The Frankfurt (Oder) novellas were not singular: they were part of a larger and little-explored trend in Jewish publication in their structure, language, and geography. Similar works were printed in other parts of the German-/Yiddish-speaking world at the time.⁶ But at least in terms of surviving novella booklets, Frankfurt (Oder) appears to have been a major locus for the production of this kind of literature. (The printing location of many of the other works is unknown, with a scant few originating in Karlsruhe or Fürth.) The eight booklets to be discussed here are not only of known geographical origin and production date; we also know the names of the producers of nearly all of them (and know of these producers' other works). Their publishers appear to have been quite purposeful about casting a variety of materials into a specific structural and thematic mold—more cohesively so than may be said for the wider corpus of Jüdisch-Deutsch novellas.⁷ At the same time, the involvement of multiple agents with slightly divergent styles in the production of novellas at the Frankfurt (Oder) printing house allow for a comparison that accentuates the possible variety—and more so, the shared defining features—of a wider literary phenomenon.

6. See, for example, “Ein schöne Wunderliche Historie von ein Fischer sein sohn” (Fürth, 1788), in Erika Timm and Hermann Süß, *Yiddish Literature in a Franconian Genizah* (Jerusalem, 1988), 67–90; “Historie wunderliche beschreibung von der schöne Melusina ein Königs Tochter aus Frankreich” (place unknown), in Elisabeth Singer-Brehm, “Historie von der Schönen Melusina,” in *Genisa-Blätter II*, ed. R. Denz and G. Rudolf (Potsdam, 2017), 85–94; Singer-Brehm, “Neues zur Historie von der Schönen Melusina,” in *Genisa-Blätter III*, ed. R. Denz and G. Rudolf (Potsdam, 2020), 13–28; *Ein schöne Historie von Prinz Galanti* (Karlsruhe, n.d.), National Library of Israel, accessed October 4, 2023, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990010496760205171/NLI. Sara Zfatman comments on the prevalence of new translations and transcriptions in the Yiddish literature of this period; Zfatman, “Ha-siporet be-Yiddish mi-reshita ‘ad shivkhe ha-besht (1504–1814)” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1983), 43–46.

7. Gideon Toury remarks on the importation of “models for the establishment of acceptable texts” into a culture in which case multiple texts may be translated in a way that brings them closer to one another; Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam, 1995), 22.

Most of the research devoted to these booklets has been focused on those works that are obvious reworkings of well-known stories, often translated or often published within the Jewish sphere, most notably *Robinson Crusoe* and the Arthurian romance of Sir Gawain. These have been discussed in the contexts of those works' genealogies of translation and reworking, with researchers remarking, sometimes with a trace of bewilderment, on their singularity and lack of a direct source. No attempt has been made, however, to look into the broader local context of these publications, and thus they have never been compared either to each other or to the other contemporaneous novellas published in Frankfurt (Oder). These latter have themselves received next to no scholarly attention.

In what follows, I propose understanding these works as a “soft” maskilic endeavor, meaning they were meant to appeal to popular tastes, and also supply moral or linguistic education. Understood this way, the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas are instructive in significant ways: They afford a glimpse of nondeclarative aspects of eighteenth-century Haskalah and its nonconfrontational relationship with older Jewish (storybook) traditions, and they expose an implicit understanding of genre and translation within this storytelling community.

The Haskalah, a social movement poised to instill the values of the European Enlightenment in Jewish society, was active as a cultural and educational enterprise in Germany throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has often been framed in scholarly discussion using contrarian terms: a revolution, a crisis, a rupture. Maskilim and their literary products are commonly described as subversive vis-à-vis traditional Judaism, and much emphasis is put on the intentional and programmatic nature of their reform efforts, on the vehement opposition they faced in traditionalist Jewish society, and on the elaborate rhetorical and literary tactics—whether apologetic, defiant, or even deceptive—they employed to further their cause.⁸

8. See, for example, Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. B. D. Cooperman (1958; New York, 1993); Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 2004); Katz, “Megamot ḥatraniot besifriyat ha-haskalah be-shilhe ha-me’ah ha-shmone-‘esre,” in *Ha-sifriya shel tnu’at ha-haskalah* (ed. Feiner et al.), 23–38; Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Jews from Spinoza to Marx* (Seattle, Wash., 2021).

When we attempt to frame the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas in this narrative of rupture, however, we are confounded. How might they fit in with an all-out culture war? This essay therefore follows David Ruderman, who advises a rejection of the view that the Haskalah was “a radical break from the past, a kind of revolution shattering the old while ushering in the new.”⁹ Ruderman makes the case that the intellectual seeds of the Haskalah had been very much present in sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century Jewish society. In a similar vein Iris Idelson-Shein has shown that the pervasive cultural practice of maskilic translation is very much a continuation of, rather than a break with, Jewish literary practices and conventions of earlier periods.¹⁰ The Frankfurt (Oder) novellas fall between these positions of rupture and continuity: they are not a demonstration of early modern trends that blossomed into an elaborate intellectual movement at the turn of the nineteenth century; they were published during the heyday of political, programmatic German Haskalah and are, in a literary sense, very much of their time, even as they hark back to early modern literary conventions of translation and cultural transfer.

To the best of my knowledge, no attempts have hitherto been made at literary analysis of the body of works of one Jewish printing locus or agent as an indication of local literary producers’ literary inclinations.¹¹

9. David Ruderman, “Looking Backward and Forward: Rethinking Jewish Modernity in the Light of Early Modernity,” in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 7, ed. J. Karp and A. Sutcliffe (Cambridge, 2018), 1107. See also Ruderman, “Why Periodization Matters: On Early Modern Jewish Culture and Haskalah,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow Instituts* 6 (2007): 23–32.

10. Iris Idelson-Shein, *Between the Bridge and the Barricade: Jewish Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2024). On maskilic translation, see Gideon Toury, “Reshit ha-targum ha-moderni le-ivrit: ‘Od mabat ehad,” *Dapim le-mekhkar be-sifrut* 11 (1998): 105–27; Zohar Shavit, “Cultural Translation and the Recruitment of Translated Texts to Induce Social Change,” in *Children’s Literature in Translation: Texts and Contexts*, ed. J. Van Collie and J. McMartin (Leuven, 2020), 73–92.

11. Extensive descriptive historical and bibliographical research has focused on specific printers and printing houses, or on broad mappings of the world of Jewish printing, most notably by A. M. Habermann and Avraham Ya’ari. For bibliographies of their works, see “Abraham Meir Habermann,” *Lexicon of New Hebrew Literature*, accessed October 2, 2023, <https://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon//00120.php>; Naphtali ben Menahem, “Hibure Avraham Ya’ari,”

In a sense, this is unsurprising. Any localized take on the phenomenon of eighteenth-century European Jewish translation is hazardous in that the Jewish print industry was translocal by nature—books were often produced for an international market and circulated across the Hebrew-reading and Yiddish-speaking world.¹² Moreover, the case may be made that rather than reflect conscious connoisseurship, the choice to print a specific work at a specific time and place may be ascribable to nothing more than its availability to local print agents, the work itself having been first translated and prepared elsewhere. The Old Yiddish book trade of this period especially—international, often middlebrow, and largely anonymous as it was—presents a challenge to any scholar looking to attend to it “on its own terms.” While maskilic literature during this period (Hebrew and German) was characterized by a primarily individualist understanding of authorship, Yiddish literature was associated less with the figure of the author than with printing entrepreneurship—a vaguer, more collective form of textual production that is harder to pin down.

The (surviving) output of Jüdisch-Deutsch prose in the years 1783 to 1814 from Frankfurt (Oder) is therefore unique. It consists of several works that do not seem to appear elsewhere.¹³ Though these works are

Kiryat sefer 42 (1967): 252–57. An in-depth examination of the Romm printing house of Vilnius is the focus of an ongoing project led by Motti Zalkin and Yfaat Weiss; see Motti Zalkin, “Ha-ruah ha-ḥaya be-ofne ha-hadpasa,” in *Dereḥ sefer*, ed. A. Bar-Levav, O. Israeli, J. Meir, and A. Reiner (Jerusalem, 2021), 55–70. However, none of them have attempted to analyze specific printing locations from the perspective of preferred poetics.

12. On the early modern Yiddish book market and the nature of its distribution, see Chone Shmeruk, “Shirim historyim be-Yiddish shenidpesu be-Amsterdam ba-me’ah ha-17 ve-ha-18,” *Mehkarim al toldot yahadut Holand* 4 (1985): 147–48; Baumgarten, *Introduction*, esp. 38–71; Avriel Bar-Levav, “Amsterdam and the Inception of the Jewish Republic of Letters,” in *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History*, ed. Y. Kaplan (Leiden, 2008), 225–37; Shlomo Berger, *Producing Redemption in Amsterdam: Early Modern Yiddish Books in Paratextual Perspective* (Leiden, 2013).

13. The only known exceptions are *Riter Gabein* (1789), for which we have another edition with no place or date of publication, as discussed below, and *The Tale of Avinadav*, which was reprinted in Lemberg in 1794.

based on several distinct genres, their comprehensive reworking renders them significantly similar to one another and (where comparison is possible) different from their sources in significant ways.

This points to a local undertaking by a small group of actors essentially freelancing under one roof for an extended time. We are thus afforded a glance into this one printing house at the crossroads of maskilic and premaskilic publishing, and may observe different agents' divergent, and shared, sensibilities regarding translated prose. The ways that several of these works bend genre expectations to fit the local mold, as understood in this context, may provide significant insight as to how different aspects of the very foreignness of translated literature were digested, displaced, rejected, or subsumed into Jewish literature. Paradoxically, the works before us will be shown to deploy overt signifiers of foreignness to promote narratives with specifically Jewish, and local, inclinations.

This essay aims to illuminate a path to cultural change through the practice of storytelling and popular publication that, although demonstrably elaborate, is far more subtle and less consciously disruptive than discourse on the Haskalah would generally allow for. The Frankfurt (Oder) novellas are a realization of an embedded cultural shift that still embodies Old Yiddish sensibilities regarding their authorship and production, while conforming to the new sensibilities and needs of a cultural reform in a strikingly nonconfrontational manner. While somewhat sneaky in their own way, they also seem to be not much at odds with popular tastes and ideas of their time; and in fact, some of their "un-Jewish" aspects are, in a way, their most domestic.

THE HEBREW-LETTER PRINTING HOUSE OF FRANKFURT (ODER)

Situated east of Berlin near Poland's border, Frankfurt an der Oder was home to one of Brandenburg's largest Jewish communities. Its independent local ties to eighteenth-century Haskalah have never been specifically investigated, probably because it has been (reasonably) understood as an offshoot of neighboring Berlin in this respect. However, the attitude of one prominent local rabbinical figure, Yosef ben Meir Te'omim, might give us an idea about maskilic attitudes in the city. Te'omim, who served as the city's chief rabbi in the decade preceding his death in 1792, had ties to central maskilic personages in Berlin. In 1789 he cowrote an approbation (*haskama*) for maskil Isaac Satanov's pseudoepigraphic work

Mishle Asaf, a supposedly ancient collection of proverbs tailored to maskilic values.¹⁴

“It is unknown who authored [this work], as the aforementioned most esteemed R. Isaac says he found it as it is [before us],” Te’omim’s *haskama* reads, “And it seems that this [the claim regarding its authorship] is really a fable, and perhaps the aforementioned esteemed R. Isaac wrote it [himself] [. . .] But we have read it and found it sound for leveling crooked terrain and instructive in virtues, and so we decided to accept all that is good from whoever supplies it, and truth from any who speak it.”¹⁵ If Satanov’s (rather transparent) veiling of his own authorship hints at a contrarian dynamic between “old” and “new” sources of information and morality, Te’omim is pointedly unruffled by it. Satanov’s contribution is unproblematic, as far as he is concerned, and the ruse concerning its origins is referred to with humor. This casual attitude concerning the dissemination of maskilic ideas appears to be in keeping with the creation of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas, which were first printed in Te’omim’s time.

14. Samuel Werses, *Megamot ve-tsurot be-sifrut ha-haskalah* (Jerusalem, 1990), 162–86.

15. Asaf ben Berahiah [Isaac Satanov], *Mishle Asaf* (Berlin, 1789), ii. In the final part of this quote, “mekablin [. . .] ha-emet mi-kol omer,” Te’omim is paraphrasing Maimonides; see Moshe ben Maimon, *Shemonah perakim*, trans. M. Schwarz (Jerusalem 2011), 5. While generally open about their use of non-Jewish treatises and comfortable with publishing original works, there are multiple instances in which maskilim obfuscated the sources of the texts they put out, for different reasons. The 1787 contribution by Shimon Ben Zecharia (Baraz) to the maskilic periodical *Ha-me’asef* presents the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as though they originated with Maimonides, in an attempt to present maskilic ideas as immanently “Jewish”; see Zohar Shavit, “Rousseau bi-glimat Ramban,” *Zion* 79.2 (2014): 135–73. See also Tal Kogman, “Baruch Lindau’s Reshit Limudim (1788) and Its German Source: A Case Study of the Interaction between the Haskalah and the German Philanthropismus,” *Aleph* 9.2 (2009): 277–305. And Joseph Perl’s famous maskilic takedown of Hasidism, the 1819 novel *Sefer megale tmirin*, was satirically presented to the reader as a Hasidic work; see Jonatan Meir, *Imagined Hasidism: The Anti-Hasidic Writings of Joseph Perl* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2013), 13–27. Both cases of literary subterfuge (the first certainly being the more typical of the two) imply an inherently conflictual relationship between separate cultural discourses.

Frankfurt (Oder) had the oldest Hebrew printing press in the region, which printed more than 500 books over the course of more than 250 years. The press, owned by a series of non-Jewish proprietors, operated under the patronage of the local university. At the height of its achievements, capitalizing on its access to the Eastern European Jewish market, it had completed printing the first Talmud in Germany in 1699. By the later decades of the eighteenth century, it was an intermittently successful business owned by Prof. Johann David Grillo, followed by his widow and later by his daughter. In 1796 it was sold to Prof. Christian Friedrich Salomo Elsner, who, when changes to the law allowed this, sold it into Jewish hands, shortly before its activity ceased almost entirely in the mid-1810s.¹⁶

In this last stretch of the Frankfurt (Oder) press's activity, much of its output was the product of independent entrepreneurship. Local agents would privately order and finance many of the publications at Grillo's, and later Elsner's, printing house. Agents of this sort, who did not (strictly) author the printed material they put out (titled "publishers," "printers," "editors," and "proofreaders") had a critical, if fluidly defined, role in the dissemination of maskilic literature. This is equally true, if not more so, in the profit-driven world of earlier Yiddish printing, though these actors' anonymity was more common in that field.¹⁷ Such agents' involvement may have amounted to as little as reprinting extant materials or to as much as creating more-or-less original work.

Several identifiable families were involved with the Frankfurt (Oder) press over a few generations;¹⁸ and in the years under discussion, a father-son team, Itsak and Naḥman Zaks, as well as one Zvi Hirsh ben Meir Ba-

16. Brigitte Meier, "Frankfurt/Oder," in *Jüdisches Brandenburg: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. I. A. Dickman (Berlin, 2008), 113–53; Ralf-Rüdiger Targiel, "Gedruckt mit den Typen von Amsterdam: Hebräische Buchdruck in Frankfurt an der Oder," in *Jüdisches Brandenburg* (ed. Dickman), 450–81.

17. Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, "Yazamim be-sifriyat ha-haskalah," in *Ha-sifriya shel tnu'at ha-haskalah* (ed. Feiner et al.), 102–29; Baumgarten, *Introduction*, 58–60.

18. On the manning of the Frankfurt (Oder) Jewish press and its prominent printing families, see Bernhard Brillling, "Zur Geschichte der Hebraeischen Buchdruckerei in Frankfurt a. d. Oder: Urkundliche Beiträge," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 1.2 (1953): 84–94; 1.3 (1954): 145–56; 2.2 (1955): 79–96; 2.3 (1956): 102–6. Most references to Bashevits and the Zakses in the books they printed refer to them by

shevits, were responsible for commissioning a large portion of its publications. All three publishers commissioned a varied repertoire of printed goods, including halakhic literature, musar books, assorted prayer booklets, Passover Haggadahs, and belletristic works.¹⁹ Bashevits, flagged by scholars as an affiliate of the Haskalah movement,²⁰ also printed several philosophical works, as well as many editions of guidebooks for proper letter writing.²¹

It is notable that the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas were published by well-established printing agents committed to issuing traditional Jewish materials. Six of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas are attributed to the Zaks family; Bashevits is responsible for one bilingual work of a different but comparable nature titled *The Tale of Avinadav* and one notable novella, *Riter Gabein*, which was published anonymously. Because Bashevits and the Zaks family seem to have generally signed their works, and because *Riter Gabein* is unique in ways that will be discussed below, it stands to reason that it was the product of a different local agent. In spite of their being the products of several different agents in the same city, the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas share much in common.

To familiarize ourselves with this corpus, let us begin with an overview of the six novellas published by Itsak and Naḥman Zaks, before moving on to a detailed discussion of the two published by others—namely, *Riter Gabein* and *The Tale of Avinadav*. My discussion of these Frankfurt (Oder) outliers' unique features will serve to accentuate all eight works' common features, while also supplying critical context for one much-discussed work, and a preliminary analysis of another work that has hardly been discussed at all.

their first names and patronyms rather than by their surnames, hence, most often Zvi Hirsh (sometimes ben Meir), Itsak (יצחק) ben Aharon Zelig, Naḥman ben Itsak.

19. See Vinograd, *Thesaurus*, 576–79, for a bibliography of Frankfurt (Oder) books, many of which are available online at the National Library of Israel, www.nli.org.il.

20. See Tal Kogman, “Mishpakā be-hitkatvut,” *Zmanim* 124 (2013): 104–5.

21. Examples of philosophical works printed within our time frame include Joseph Albo, *Sefer 'ikarim* (1788); Zekharya Mendel ben Aryeh Leib, *Zekharya ha-mevin* (1791); Isaac ben Moses Arama, *Khazut Kasha* (1792). According to Vinograd's *Thesaurus*, 576–79, Bashevits's *Briefsteller* were printed at least five times between 1788 and 1804.

THE ZAKS NOVELLAS

The Zaks published *Tale of the Beautiful Royal Princess Helene*, the earliest of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas, in 1783,²² and *Bovo's Tale* in 1796.²³ In a later spurt, son Nahman Zaks published *Luck [Is] Better [Than] Wisdom, a Lovely Tale of the King Grossmann* in 1810,²⁴ *Tale of the Seafarer Robinson* in 1813,²⁵ and finally *Tale of the Former Princess Ritsat Who Later Became the Knight Ritsat* and *Tale of the Chinese Emperor Kedar*, both in 1814.²⁶ Importantly, the Zakses also produced no fewer than three translated editions of the far more extensive *Arabian Nights*, within this time frame (1794, 1796, 1803).²⁷

Some of these novellas have traceable origins: *Princess Helene* is obviously an abridged reworking of the epic *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, extant in German.²⁸ *Bovo's Tale* is a prose rendering of Elyeh Bokher's classic sixteenth-century Yiddish reworking of the Italian chivalric romance *Bovo d'Antona*, greatly reduced in length and nuance but generally faithful

22. Goethe Universitätsbibliothek, online: urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:2-647, accessed July 20, 2025, <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/jd/content/titleinfo/1697215>.

23. NLI 8=53A 11 41, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990021204110205171/NLI.

24. Goethe Universitätsbibliothek, online: urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:2-1083, accessed July 20, 2025, https://www.europeana.eu/et/item/09315/urn_nbn_de_hebis_30_2_1083.

25. NLI 8=35 V 44 02, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990021279710205171/NLI.

26. NLI 8=75 A 62 5, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990021306430205171/NLI; NLI 8=70 A 15 53, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990021306390205171/NLI.

27. On these translations and the relationship between them, see Iris Idelson-Shein, "Arabische ertselung/toysend und ayn nakht," Online Database of Jewish Translations and Cultural Transfer in Early Modern Europe (JEW TACT), accessed October 3, 2023, <https://aranne5.bgu.ac.il/jtact/index.php>. While certainly relevant to our corpus, the Frankfurt (Oder) *Arabian Nights* demand a discussion of greater breadth than is possible here.

28. Iris Idelson-Shein, "Historye fon der shene keniglikhe Prinzessin Helene," JEW TACT.

to its source's plot. *Sailor Robinson* is an abridged reworking of Joachim Campe's popular German adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*.²⁹ Sources for the remaining books listed, which read much like the others do, have not hitherto been identified.

Most of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas have attracted little or no scholarly attention, presumably because superficially they read so much like word-for-word German transliterations and therefore represent a phenomenon that appears to defy "researchability" in either German or Yiddish studies.³⁰ But when considered together, the outline of a specific cultural undertaking becomes clearer. Though these novellas were sourced from an array of origins in terms of language and genre, they were evidently remolded to fit a standard Frankfurt (Oder) frame in terms of length and style, with specific common themes selected and highlighted.

How do these books read? They are all twelve or sixteen pages in length and written in Jüdisch-Deutsch, devoid of Hebraisms and Yiddish idioms. All are plot-driven adventure stories, and nearly all feature protagonists of noble birth or who rise to nobility.³¹ Most feature international travel and the price of distance between family members as major themes and plot points. The eponymous Bovo, Princess Helene, and Emperor Kedar traverse great distances and are spatially separated from their families, to (temporarily) tragic results, as is of course Robinson, who, although a

29. Rebecca Wolpe, "Judaizing Robinson Crusoe: Maskilic Translations of Robinson Crusoe," *Jewish Culture and History* 13.1 (2012): 47–48.

30. *Sailor Robinson* has been examined by several scholars interested in maskilic translations of Robinson Crusoe, of which this is one early example. It must be noted that this book is an abridgment, and slight Judaization, not of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe but rather of Joachim Heinrich Campe's Popular German retelling, *Robinson der Jüngere*. See Zohar Shavit, "Literary Interference between German and Jewish-Hebrew Children's Literature during the Enlightenment: The Case of Campe," *Poetics Today* 13.1 (1992): 41–61; Wolpe, "Judaizing Robinson Crusoe"; Iris Idelson-Shein, "No Place Like Home: The Uses of Travel in Early Maskilic Translations," in *Jews and Journeys*, ed. J. Levinson and O. Bashkin (Philadelphia, 2021), 129–44. On other Frankfurt (Oder) novellas, see Meier Schüler, "Die Historie von der Prinzessin Helene," *Zeitschrift für hebraeische Bibliographie* 23 (1920): 29–36; Claudia Rosenzweig, *Bovo d'Antona by Elye Bokher: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (Leiden, 2015), 505, 516–18.

31. *Sailor Robinson* is the exception in this case.

different sort of protagonist in many ways, cries hot tears for his mother and father while stranded on the island. In the end, as bluntly emphasized in the book's introductory paratext, he is not only delivered from his miserable circumstances but, more importantly, reunited with his parents in Hamburg.³² Shipwrecks appear, whether prominently or incidentally, in several of these narratives, as do desert islands. Another feature of these works' imagined geography is their situatedness, in some cases, in "real" exotic spaces. Kedar, an adventurer whose travel map includes Japan, America (*sic*), and multiple unnamed islands, becomes emperor by marrying a Chinese princess who had previously been kidnapped by pirates. Ritsat, an exiled princess of Astrakhan, disguises herself as a male knight and becomes involved in a conflict between Ethiopia and the neighboring(!) Bengal. Space in these stories is therefore elaborately expansive, nominally international, and sometimes adorned by crude colonialist brushstrokes.

"Novella," as generally defined by folklorists, is differentiated from the fairy tale in its slightly longer plot, indicative of written rather than oral origins; possible, if improbable, circumstances (as opposed to magical ones); and a proclivity for young protagonists making their way in the world with the aid of their luck or wits—while, as opposed to the legend—retaining some distance from its audiences' lived reality.³³ There is an abundance of examples for this genre in Jewish lore dating back at least to the Middle Ages. Although it is hard to say what contemporaneous readers of medieval or early modern Hebrew and Yiddish novellas might have made of such stories, scholars have consistently pointed out their "international" (i.e., non-Jewish) origins. In story collections that include novellas, they stand out for their extraordinary length, and for neither originating in known Jewish sources nor touching upon specifically Jewish topics or values, with Judaization appearing in the form of nominal adjustments, secondary to the main thrust of the narrative: changes to the story's fram-

32. *Sailor Robinson* (Frankfurt [Oder], 1813), 1a.

33. Eli Yassif, *Ke-margalit be-mishbetset* (Tel Aviv, 2004), 143–44; Andrew Teverson and John Drakakis, *Fairy Tale* (New York, 2013), 28–29. Note that this definition of the term "novella" is quite different from that of modern literary scholarship in reference to works such as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a genre quite distant from the works discussed here. See Florian Fuchs, "Novella," in *New Literary History* (Baltimore, 2019), 399–403.

ing or dialogues, or insertion of episodes that better align with Jewish sensibilities.³⁴ Novellas were, to conclude, not at all foreign to the eighteenth-century Jewish reader, but they may well not have been read as of a piece with the Jewish sphere of existence.

Although novellas are consistently defined as taking place in clearly defined time and space, the Jewish novella's "possible realism" extending to its nominal geography is, as far as I have been able to find, a relatively late phenomenon³⁵ and seems to have become especially fashionable in the wake of the immense popularity of the *Arabian Nights*. The *Arabian Nights*, first published in French in the early decades of the eighteenth century and almost immediately translated into Yiddish³⁶ (and reissued intensively in Frankfurt [Oder] in the years under discussion, by the Zakses themselves), paints an expansive "Orient" and name-drops an abundance of far-off lands and cities throughout. This is a likely source of influence for the imagined geography of the Jüdisch-Deutsch novellas.

For the purposes of understanding this project's aims, the paratexts of all these works are unhelpfully thin: most include a brief summary of the story, and some offer some promise of an edifying moral, of the kind one typically finds in more traditional Yiddish prose publications.³⁷ *Sailor Robinson* is presented as an example of divine providence and of the evils of disobeying one's parents; *Luck Is Better Than Wisdom* promises to show that, well, luck is more important than wisdom—a rather questionable lesson; and *Emperor Kedar* promotes good behavior toward others. The novellas' commitment to the edification of youthful readers, however, appears to

34. Sara Zfatman, "Mayse bukh: Kavim li-dmuto shel genre be-sifrut Yiddish ha-yeshana," *Ha-sifrut* 28 (1979): 134–36; Yassif, *Ke-margalit be-mishbetset*, 157–62; Eli Yassif, *Sipur ha-'am ha-'ivri* (Jerusalem, 1994), 77, 371; Rella Kushlevski, *Tales in Context: Sefer Ha-Ma'asim in Medieval Northern France* (Detroit, 2017), 65–82.

35. An earlier example is *Mayse Vestindie* ("Ayn sheyn mayse tsu hant"), Prague ca. 1665; see Sara Zfatman, "Makor u-mekoriyut ba-mayse-bikhl Mayse Vestindie," in *Ke-minhag ashkenaz u-Polin*, ed. I. Bartal, C. Turniansky and E. Mendelsohn (Jerusalem, 1995), 95–192; Zfatman notes a few additional such texts but emphasizes that they were rare (99).

36. Two separate translations of Antoine Galland's 1707–14 work were issued in 1718 and ca. 1720. See Iris Idelson-Shein, "Mar'ot ha-tso'vot," *JEW TACT*.

37. Shlomo Berger, *Producing Redemption* (Leiden, 2013), 34–36, 55–57.

be somewhat secondary to entertainment. In fact, several novellas, including *The Knight Ritsat*, *Bovo's Tale*, and *Princess Helene*, hint at no edification whatsoever. The publication of these novellas may have been above all a commercial enterprise, one that did not make very strong claims to added moral benefits. It is very possible that these books served as an instrument of teaching “proper” German to youths, in accordance with maskilic sensibilities, but they are not overtly presented as didactic. To put it differently, the Zaks'es' novellas do not seem to have taken themselves very seriously.

Having laid out what the typical Frankfurt (Oder) novellas were like, let us take a closer look at two specific novellas created by different agents and note their particular ways of fitting works from vastly different genres into the same mold. This may give us a better idea of their more implicit ethics and aims, and the cultural trends in which they took part. I begin with the one anonymously published novella, *Riter Gabein*, using an important, overlooked edition to better comprehend this literary project. I then move on to the novella published by Bashevits, *The Tale of Avinadav*, read in the context of another of his projects—a comparison that will benefit our understanding of the lingual aspects of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas and the maskilic lingual shift circa 1800 more generally.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF GABEIN, ARTHURIAN KNIGHT

Chivalric romance, a medieval form of (typically rhymed) epic narrative concerning knights and knighthood that celebrates themes of honor, loyalty, and courtly love, was highly popular among early modern Jewish readers. Many chivalric romances were translated into Old Yiddish, and we have several versions of manuscripts and printed editions, and sometimes multiple translations, of such works. There is testimony regarding the existence of still more titles that have not reached us, often in the form of written remonstrances of their unprincipled readers in the introductions to more “wholesome” reading materials.³⁸ A further testament to the pop-

38. On Yiddish chivalric romance, its popularity, and contemporaneous detractors, see Israel Zinberg, *Toldot sifrut Israel*, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv, 1971), 30; Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yiddish*, 28–32; Max Erik, *Vegn alt-yiddishn roman un novelle* (Warsaw, 1926); Baumgarten, *Introduction*, 128–206; Full English prose translations of several key works can be found in Jerold Frakes, *Early Yiddish Epic* (New York, 2014). Perhaps the most popular and best known of these works is *Bovo*

ularity of this and adjacent genres is the wealth of original Jewish rhymed epics, either retelling biblical narratives or, in at least one instance, imagining a wholly original tragic romance set in Second Temple Jerusalem.³⁹

One of the most popular Yiddish chivalric romances is *Viduvilt*, a reworking of the thirteenth-century German (Mittelhochdeutsch) Arthurian romance *Wigalois*.⁴⁰ *Viduvilt* relates the story of the son of Sir Gawain of Arthur's Round Table. The first section of the work, generally faithful to the original *Wigalois*, goes as follows: A strange knight shows up at King Arthur's court and offers the queen the gift of a magical belt. King Arthur heeds the counsel of Sir Gawain to refuse this gift, and the stranger challenges Gawain to a duel, bests him, and rides off with Gawain as his prisoner. After a lengthy journey, the strange knight introduces himself as the king of a fabulously great kingdom, confesses himself deeply impressed

d'Antona, translated and reworked by fifteenth- to sixteenth-century author and scholar Elia Levita (Elyeh Bokher); see Rosenzweig, *Bovo d'Antona*. See also *Der altjiddische "Widuwilt,"* synoptic edition, transliteration and commentary, ed. A. Lembke, I. Spetzke, and T. Meisler (forthcoming).

39. See Erika Timm, "Beria und Simra: Eine Jiddische Erzählung des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 14 (1973): 1–94; Rachel Wamsley, "Exegetical Poetics: Tanakh and Textuality in Early Modern Yiddish Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2015), 1–66; Oren Cohen Roman, *Joshua and Judges in Yiddish Verse: Four Early Modern Epics*, annotated ed. (Berlin, 2022).

40. For a recent Middle High German edition with modern German translation, see Wirnt von Grafenberg, *Wigalois*, trans. and ed. S. Seelbach and U. Seelbach (Berlin, 2014). For a prose English translation, see *Wigalois: The Knight of Fortune's Wheel*, trans. and ed. J. W. Thomas (Lincoln, Neb., 1977). The earliest recension of *Viduvilt* is found in three closely related sixteenth-century manuscripts (with the text itself assumed to be a century older). *Viduvilt* first appeared in print (in two separate translations, in Prague and Amsterdam) in the early 1670s. Both were reprinted before the end of the seventeenth century—the Amsterdam edition bilingually by Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil. On the history of *Wigalois/Viduvilt* adaptations and editions, see Achim Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter: Studien zum jüdisch-deutschen "Widuwilt" (Artushof) und zum "Wigalois" der Wirnt von Gravenberc* (Tübingen, 2000); Annegret Oehme, *The Knight without Boundaries: Yiddish and German Arthurian "Wigalois" Adaptations* (Leiden, 2021). Astrid Lembke is completing a new edition of the Yiddish versions.

by Sir Gawain, and offers him his only daughter's hand in marriage. Gawain marries the princess, she becomes pregnant, and soon afterward Gawain is overcome with yearning for King Arthur's court and leaves for a visit. However, he discovers that without the magic belt, the journey is extremely long, and return is impossible. Meanwhile, his wife bears him a son named Viduvilt (Wigalois in the German), who eventually journeys off to King Arthur's court to find his father, and the two reunite.

When this subplot is complete, Viduvilt embarks on a lengthy set of adventures to prove himself as a knight, finally marrying a princess. This part of the narrative, which makes up most of the substance of *Viduvilt/Wigalois*, will not be further detailed here, however, because it is entirely absent in Frankfurt (Oder)'s recension of *Viduvilt*, titled *Riter Gabein*.⁴¹

The Frankfurt (Oder) *The Wonderful Events Which Occurred to a Young Knight, Riter Gabein*, published in 1789, is a prose booklet, a fraction of the traditional *Viduvilt* in length. The fact that it is written in Jüdisch-Deutsch has led some scholars to allow for the possibility that it is a wholesale transliteration of a German source text (which, as others have correctly argued, is probably not the case).⁴² The story is as follows: After a brief exposition describing the court of King Arthur comes the admittedly compelling

41. The protagonist's name is spelled גאבײן, which can theoretically be pronounced (and transliterated) "Gawein" ("Gavayn" in Yiddish) or "Gabein." The Arthurian Sir Gawain of the Round Table is called "Gawein" in Wigalois and "Gabein" in a 1699 German translation of the Yiddish *Viduvilt*; see Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Belehrung des Jüdisch-Teutschen Red-und Schreibart* (Königsberg, 1699). I've chosen to transliterate the work's title (and protagonist's name) *Riter Gabein*, in keeping with existing scholarship.

42. Leo Landau makes a comprehensive case for the Yiddish *Artus Hof*, a 1671 version of *Viduvilt*, as *Riter Gabein*'s source; see L. Landau, "A nit-bakanter nusekh fun Artus-Legende," *Landau-Bukh* (Vilnius, 1926), 130–40. Jaeger thinks a Jewish source is likely (but doesn't rule out a German one); see Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, 347. Meier Schüler points out uniquely Jewish features, as discussed below; Schüler, "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der alten jüdisch-Deutschen Profanliteratur," *Festschrift zum 75 jährigen Bestehen der Realschule mit Lyzeum der Isr. Religionsgesellschaft Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt am Main, 1928), 79–132; Oehme points out that German-language adaptations of the Jewish *Viduvilt* (rather than *Wigalois*) were available in the eighteenth century, thereby complicating the question; see Oehme, *The Knight without Boundaries*, 138–39.

story of the strange knight's rejected gift and Gawain/Gabein's departure as a prisoner of the stranger—except that here the stranger is revealed to be the emperor of China. This is followed by Gabein's marriage to the princess, after which he attempts to return to Arthur's court, not because of a knightly yearning for the Round Table but because he had left his elderly parents behind and wishes to care for them in their later years. A fine point is put on this by a lengthy prayer inserted into the story just before the royal wedding, expressing Sir Gabein's passionate conflicted emotions regarding the distance between his parents and him:

“And you, kindest Lord, you have allowed your sun to shine over me after this rain. The fate I had believed to have destroyed me is now that which is to make me and my parents eternally joyful. But regrettably my parents cannot have the pleasure of living nearby on this joyous day. Lord of all happiness, allow this feeling of joy to flow into their souls, allow them today to see this union, even [lit. “already”] in a dream, announce it to them by an angel. Your might is boundless. Grant me the mercy that I might after this year visit them in person and tell them of my well-being, let it be an act of love that I, with your help, after this year, may visit them and take them to my home, [so that they may] spend their later years in peace here by me and my wife—and—” Sir Gabein was called to the wedding ceremony and was compelled to cut his fervent prayer short.⁴³

A strong reliance on God's grace and assistance is a central theme of the original German *Wigalois*, which is largely edited out of the Yiddish *Viduvilt*. The *reappearance* of this religious trend in *Riter Gabein* is therefore striking.⁴⁴ Equally striking is the nature of Gabein's prayer: Meier Schüler asserts that its opening phrases, addressing an almighty and endless God and referencing aid to the poor and downtrodden, are quite particularly Jewish. The seemingly universalistic religiosity of this scene, preceding a marriage that takes place “according to the Chinese rite,” may be aligned

43. *Riter Gabein*, Schocken ed., Schocken Library III-7-16-31, 5a–5b. See an additional, shorter prayer later in the story, 5b–6a.

44. Compare Mendel Lefin's theological engagement with the idea of divine providence in his maskilic translation of J. H. Campe; Ken Frieden, *Travels in Translation: Sea Tales at the Source of Jewish Fiction* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2016), 223–25.

with Jewish devotional practice.⁴⁵ It is certainly well aligned with Jewish storytelling. Sara Zfatman has noted that the insertion of prayers is a common feature of Judaization in Yiddish translations of European texts, as is preoccupation with the fate of the protagonists' parents, also prominent in this narrative. (This theme is bluntly emphasized in the Zaks'es *Sailor Robinson* and *Luck Is Better Than Wisdom* as well).⁴⁶

Rather than Gabein's attempts to return to his homeland being thwarted by the lack of a magic belt—this story contains no magic, and is, in fact, described in its opening passage as a story “that really happened”—he is robbed by highwaymen. He then wanders through the forest and happens to rescue the king and queen of Sardinia from a drowning ship near the Galbanian (Albanian?) border. Soon two ships pass by: an English ship, which the Sardinian royals board to go home, and an “Arthurian” ship, which Gabein happily boards. Unfortunately, “because of much bad luck,” the Arthurian ship is then “flung toward Greenland for eighteen years.”⁴⁷

Following this report of Gabein's fate, young Viduvilt's quest for his father is dispensed with rather quickly: the young knight travels to Sardinia nearly without incident, receives the (oddly irrelevant) news of that his father had met the Sardinian royals many years ago, and stays to marry the local princess. What happens next is dependent on which extant edition of *Riter Gabein* one reads.

RITER GABEIN'S SCHOCKEN EDITION

In 1912, Leo Landau published an edition of the Frankfurt (Oder) *Riter Gabein*, transliterated into gothic characters, as an appendix to his book *Arthurian Legends*.⁴⁸ He later published an additional paper on this work, in which he reproduced its first and last pages in Hebrew letters.⁴⁹ The original edition, belonging to Moses Gaster, was then purportedly lost, and re-

45. Schüler, “Beiträge zur Kenntnis der alten jüdisch-Deutschen Profanliteratur,” 96–97.

46. Sara Zfatman, “Ha-siporet be-Yiddish,” 179–83.

47. *Riter Gabein*, 6b.

48. Leo Landau, *Arthurian Legends, or the Hebrew-German Rhymed Version of the Legend of King Arthur* (Leipzig, 1912), 134–47, facsimile iv.

49. Landau, “A nit-bakanter nusekh.”

searchers were left to work with this curious transliteration.⁵⁰ But the full, Hebrew-letter text is in fact extant, in not one but two editions, which are very similar but for one crucial difference.

The Frankfurt (Oder) *Riter Gabein* is currently available online at the National Library of Israel (NLI).⁵¹ Additionally, it seems to have gone unnoticed that Sara Zfatman noted another edition, housed at the Schocken collection, in her 1985 bibliography of Old Yiddish prose.⁵² That we can now examine the text's spelling throughout is important enough; but upon examination, it appears that Zfatman's comparison of the two editions' openings and endings for the sake of her bibliography led her to declare them nearly identical—missing an omission of about a thousand words in the extant Frankfurt (Oder) edition.

In the extant copy of the Frankfurt (Oder) edition, as also transliterated by Landau and hence known to scholars, Viduvilt, having arrived in Sardinia and become betrothed to the Sardinian princess, is soon joined there by King Arthur (who is to marry another local princess), accompanied by a newly returned Gabein, alongside Gabein's elderly parents, as well as the emperor of China and his long-grieving daughter, who have been invited to the festivities. All reunite happily and the story ends.

Even without considering the deviation from the classic *Viduvilt*, this ending comes about somewhat confusingly in and of itself: at the turn of page 9a, a monologue by Viduvilt to the king of Sardinia seems to morph into direct speech by said king to the newly arrived Gabein, narrating some seemingly offstage occurrences rather too hurriedly. Gabein apparently appears in Sardinia quite suddenly to reunite with his son, and King Arthur, whose wife figures in the first part of the story, now strangely marries a Sardinian princess himself, alongside Viduvilt, and the story quickly comes to an end. This incongruity suggests physically missing pages rather than an abridgment.⁵³ This is true of (the basis for) Landau's

50. See Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, 337–38; Oehme, *The Knight without Boundaries*, 134–37.

51. NLI 8 = 89 A57 1, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990010774320205171/NLI.

52. Zfatman, *Bibliography*, 153–54 (no. 156); Schocken Library III-7-16-31.

53. Jaeger comments on Gabein's "sudden" reappearance; Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, 345.

transliteration and the NLI copy, and it stands to reason that they are one and the same.⁵⁴

The Schocken edition supplies the complete story, including several missing pages that would fit between Landau's page 8b and 9a: We witness King Arthur, interrupted while telling his servant how much he misses Gabein, receiving news of his sudden and joyous arrival and reunion with his elderly parents. Arthur, who has been corresponding with the king of Sardinia, then tells Gabein some of what has transpired in his absence, including the death of Arthur's first wife (thereby warranting his upcoming remarriage). Arthur persuades Gabein to join him on the voyage to Sardinia, bringing his parents along, and then continue back to China. Meanwhile, the Chinese emperor convinces his daughter to join him on his own journey to Sardinia for the planned festivities. A considerable stretch of the story is therefore devoted to a series of reunions and retellings as the different characters fill each other in on their circumstances and express their profound emotions over all that has transpired.

The poetic tenor of this missing part of the story is rather more similar to that of Gabein's prayer than it is to the story's *Wigalois*-esque opening sequence:

King Arthur was already busy with his trip to Sardinia, after the loss of his first wife, to marry the king of Sardinia's daughter. "Most loyal knight, yes, I miss Sir Gabein on this journey," he said to his servant. "He knew the road to Sardinia well, he is smart beyond measure, against any adversity I could depend on him. He has been lost at sea for seventeen years now."

"Your majesty, I hear cannons going off!" said the servant.

54. The NLI copy has an adhesive patch between page 8b and 9a (but between no other two pages), which may suggest a fixed tear. It is also worth mentioning that the Schocken edition is divided into five parts (titled part 1, part 2, etc., and the NLI/Gaster edition is cut in such a way that it has "part one" and "part two" subtitles, and a truncation mark at the end of each, but subtitles 3, 4, and 5 are missing. The last leaf would belong to part 5, but absent the subtitles, it reads as if it is meant as an ending to the second and last part of the story. Importantly, this means that the Sardinian king's monologue begins mid-sentence *right after a truncation mark*. The printer seems therefore not to have participated in setting the text as it is before us, because he would be unlikely to insert a truncation mark mid-speech; this too suggests a tear.

“Yes, it’s true, you’re right, send the runner to quickly find out what it might mean.”

The runner returned breathlessly. “Your majesty!”

“What is it then?”

“Sir Gabein has arrived with the lost ship! His father and mother stood right on the shore as the ship arrived, they greeted him with open arms and wiped the tears from their cheeks, many people are standing around them and participating in this joyous occasion. I myself was so delighted that I had to weep for joy with them. He is already on his way to visit your majesty, and his parents are coming with him.”

The king[:] “Thank God! Runner, you shall receive a good reward for this message.”⁵⁵

Rather than courtly interactions, chivalry, and tightly packed action, we have an abundance of sentiment and down-to-earth direct conversation, as well as plot resolution that favors emotional drama but is otherwise narratively weak. In essence, the lengthy recovered section of the story adds very little to the plot, a point that is important in and of itself. The complete *Riter Gabein* is, more obviously than before, something altogether different than chivalric romance, and something different than an abridgment of *Viduvilt* as well, though it seems to style itself as such.

Regarding the genre of the story in its form in his edition, Landau notes that *Riter Gabein* is a didactic tale rather than a chivalric romance.⁵⁶ Christoph Cormeau suggests that *Riter Gabein* exemplifies a principle by which when stories transform, fairytale-like impulses emerge or are pushed to the forefront. As examples he cites the story’s emphasis on twists of fate, as well as the introduction of faraway lands.⁵⁷ But this second feature in its specific form before us, the naming of *real* places, is not typical of the classical fairy tale.

A different approach to space in the story is offered by Annegret Oehme, who recently devoted a chapter of her book on the German Yiddish traditions of *Wigalois/Viduvilt* to *Riter Gabein*. She highlights its international

55. *Riter Gabein*, 8b.

56. Landau, “A nit-bakanter nusekh,” 135.

57. Christoph Cormeau, “Die jiddische Tradition von Wirnts *Wigalois*: Bemerkungen zum Fortleben einer Fabel unter veränderten Bedingungen,” *LiLi: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 8.22 (1978): 41–42.

aspects, tying its representation of China to contemporary Orientalist fascination⁵⁸ and positing a cosmopolitan(-Jewish) fantasy as a driving force in this adaptation's decentering of the Arthurian Camelot in favor of a broader, realistic international map, where a vaguely aligned but decidedly pious monotheistic protagonist may transcend political and cultural borders with ease.⁵⁹

To Oehme's useful analysis, I would however make an important qualification: the most striking quality of *Riter Gabein's* China is, to my mind, its lack of real content. Other than a thin description of the Great Wall, a mention of the wedding taking place according to Chinese tradition, and one or two other paltry details, China is a blank slate in this work, as are Sardinia, Albania, and the like. Rather than (or at the very least, in addition to) orientalist curiosity, I would posit that a particular form of geography is at play here, alongside particular literary conventions in general, that are in fact not unique to this one book. This imagined geography is most reminiscent of the *Arabian Nights* and its influence, as is echoed in other contemporaneous Frankfurt (Oder) novellas. Reading *Riter Gabein* in its local context readily clarifies this aspect of the story.

To return to the question of *Riter Gabein's* genre conventions, Robert Warnock, who dismisses *Riter Gabein* as a corrupt prose adaptation that distorts the original's meaning, calls it a "sentimental story of parting and reunion."⁶⁰ Warnock's dismissive attitude notwithstanding, the novella before us is in fact sentimental, preoccupied with the evils and pain of great distances between loved ones. The removal of most of the adventure content and the major emphasis on the theme of parting and reunion, particularly of family, is only further emphasized by the newly recovered chunk of the story.

The theme of parting and reunion, often with the flourish of shipwreck, is typical of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas, appearing in nearly all of them. It is arguably one of their most Jewish features. Consider the role of the narrative of the discovery voyage and return in maskilic literature.

58. See also Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, 348–49.

59. Oehme, *The Knight without Boundaries*, 131–64.

60. Robert Warnock, "Frühneuzeitliche Fassungen des altjiddischen Artushofs," in *Auseinandersetzungen um jiddische Sprache und Literatur*, ed. W. Röhl (Berlin, 1986), 13–14.

The drama of embarking on a journey to far-off lands only to finally return home has been described by Iris Idelson-Shein as one both typical of and intrinsic to the project of maskilic translation, in that it embodies maskilic aspirations of the discovery of that which lies beyond the pale of traditional Jewish life and discourse, as well as the desire to remain in, and encourage adherence to, the Jewish fold.⁶¹ This may well explain the emphasis on this theme in the works before us, as selected and reworked for a Jewish audience.

When compared to the six Zaks novellas, *Riter Gabein* has some singular features as well. Besides the lengthy inserted prayers, it exhibits greater intervention in the plot than any of the works for which we have a known source, in that it only really uses *Viduvilt's* opening sequence of events rather than abridging its entire narrative framework. Given that we have an additional, undated edition of this work with no time or place of publication, it is possible that it originates elsewhere. But in significant respects, it certainly fits in with the norms of its time and place of creation, making it, at the very least, the consequence of a well-contextualized local selection.

Let us now examine one final storybook—one undertaken by a publishing agent who seems to have had a different sort of project in mind but who ultimately created yet another “sentimental story of parting and reunion.”

A SINNER'S (SURPRISING) REDEMPTION

I now turn to an extraordinary book that might not have naturally been included in my repertoire if its striking resemblances to the other works described did not render it an exception that proves the rule. Publishing agent Zvi Hirsh ben Meir Bashevits of Frankfurt (Oder) appears to have had slightly different literary tastes than his colleagues the Zaks, and did not publish novellas like the ones the Zaks commissioned (or like *Riter*

61. Idelson-Shein, “No Place Like Home.” Ken Frieden has also written extensively about travel in maskilic literature, though his emphases are more relevant to “thicker” descriptions of travel than the ones found in the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas. Frieden also paints Haskalah literature as novel and revolutionary in ways that do not manifest themselves in the low-key project before us; see Frieden, *Travels in Translation*.

Gabein). However, he published a different sort of popular reading material, likely meant for youths, among them two unacknowledged translations of the 1778 epistolary anthology *Moralische Briefe zur Bildung des Herzens* (Moral letters for the education of the heart) by Johann Jacob Dusch (1725–87).

Dusch's anthology is a work of epistolary fiction, made up of exchanges of up to several letters apiece, centering on personal and ethical dilemmas. The letters are confessional, and the plots they lay out, while deliberately compelling, are secondary to their emotional and edifying aspects.⁶² This apparently appealed to Bashevits, who did not generally opt to print prose.

The first of these Dusch translations, titled *The Tale of Avinadav*,⁶³ was published in 1791 and reprinted in 1793. The second, *Moral Letters*, was published in 1800.⁶⁴ These two works help underscore the specific, and changing, concepts of translated literature in Frankfurt (Oder) in two ways. The first involves an exploration of how *The Tale of Avinadav* was packaged and presented to the reader, which reveals surprising resemblance to the Zaks'es novellas. The second is a comparison of the language of these two rather similar projects, undertaken by one man roughly a decade apart from one another.

The Tale of Avinadav (1791), published very soon after *Riter Gabein*'s publication, is both markedly different from the Zaks'es novellas described above and also an illuminating case for comparison. Like *Riter Gabein*, it not only provides the reader with a story of adventure, travel, and family reunion, but in doing so it also engages in significant genre bending.

At thirty pages, *The Tale of Avinadav* is physically bigger than any of the novellas surveyed here, though the work is not actually longer. This is a bilingual book, where “Yiddish” (by which I here mean spelled like German transliteration but includes Hebraisms) follows Hebrew on every page, and it actually includes two separate compositions (each bilingual).

62. Thomas O. Beebee, “Johann Jakob Dusch and the Genealogy of Epistolary Fiction,” *Journal of English and German Philology* 91.3 (1992): 360–82.

63. NLI 8 = 23V 14 352, accessed August 6, 2024, https://www.nli.org.il/en/books/NNL_ALEPH990010496540205171/NLI.

64. Zfatman, *Bibliography*, 156 (no. 160); Ossnat Sharon-Pinto, “Maaseh Avinadav vehu igeret musar”; “Igrot Musar,” JEW TACT Database.

The opening Hebrew paratext, (preferred over the “Yiddish” here for clarity), reads:

In pure language and elegant use of figurative Hebrew [*melitsa*⁶⁵]
 full of morals, to prevent sin
 [of] a man who followed temptation
 and the contents of the letter are overleaf
 and in addition: a wonderful tale that occurred to Avinadav, who wrote this
 letter, put forth by the authors of [other] nations and translated into the
 holy tongue.⁶⁶

The reader is therefore promised a letter of great moral value, followed by a story (*mayse*) translated from a non-Jewish language (or languages) that tells of the further history of the eponymous Avinadav of the letter.

The first composition is a generally faithful translation of a letter titled “Zerim an den Charites,” from Dusch’s *Moralische Briefe*. The letter before us is, typically of Dusch’s work, an example of contrite self-torment. It is preceded, in this Hebrew and Yiddish translation, by an original introduction that explicates its backstory:

The content of the letter is full of morals and reproof, written to serve as an example, of a man named Avinadav of Egypt who fell into darkness while chasing worldly pleasures. He followed his eyes into committing adultery with his mistress, named Re’uma, and betrayed his wife, the woman of his youth, disobeyed his father and refused to heed him, until he lost all he had for the sake of a whore. [He] fled his homeland and went to sea, and a storm came and cast his ship onto another land, the land of Africa and India, where his fortunes took a turn for the worse: he was taken hostage by the black Negroes [*ha-kushiyim ha-shehorim*], [who] shackled him [and forced him] into all manners of hard labor, and as he repented his misdeeds he wrote this letter to his brother-in-law, his wife’s brother, to ask for his forgiveness for all his crimes, and these are his words.⁶⁷

65. *Melitsa* is a maskilic term.

66. *The Tale of Avinadav* (Frankfurt [Oder], 1791), National Library of Israel, 1a. All translations are based on the Hebrew.

67. *The Tale of Avinadav*, 1b.

The letter is addressed to the writer's brother-in-law, whose kin he had so licentiously betrayed. The following expository passage may give an idea of the actual letter's style:

And if I, woeful as I am, having saddened your pure spirit, may be bold enough to disturb the peace of your pure soul with these words of grief, or if I, who caused your ceaseless tears by wounding your soul by reason of your beloved and chaste sister, could procure from you one more tear which, in your mercy, might fall on behalf of my descent into the abyss of destruction and oblivion as the wicked do, please, honorable one! Hear how the heavens took their vengeance against me on behalf of you and your sister's covenant.⁶⁸

The letter concludes with a pledge by the miserable sender to compose an additional letter soon, during another brief respite from the arduous labor imposed by his captors, and is signed "Avinadav"—a name that does not appear, of course, in the German source text. In the source book, this letter is indeed followed by others of similar nature. But in an interesting twist, in this Jewish version, the second composition appended to this "moral letter" is of a different nature entirely; it is an adventure story set in Egypt, apparently translated from a different source. The narrative revolves around a mysterious orphan raised by a humble shoemaker and his wife, who are generously compensated by an unidentified benefactor. Ultimately it is revealed that the boy is the rightful king, the secret son of an exiled nobleman sent to a remote wilderness. This nobleman survives there in Robinson-esque manner, and encounters his fellow expatriate, the weeping and remorseful Avinadav, the signatory of the previous letter of repentance, whom he rescues and ultimately brings back to Egypt, where he facilitates a reunion between Avinadav and his family, employing the letter as a dramatic tool:

And so [Claros the Elder, father of the king] sent word for Yehoyada [the letter's intended recipient] and his sister [Avinadav's wife] to come to the royal palace, and they did not know why they were being called to the king and they were very frightened. And when they came before the king and

68. *The Tale of Avinadav*, 2a.

his father Claros, Claros the Elder said to Yehoyada's sister: Do you have a husband named Avinadav? And he asked Yehoyada whether this was his sister, and they both replied: Yes, my lord. And so Claros the Elder said: Here is this letter I found on one of the distant islands, and it must be for you, and he gave them the letter which Avinadav had written there among the negroes, and they read it and wept. And he went on to say: but how can you weep for him? Does his letter not show that his sin is greater than can be borne? And they replied: We forgive him, were he only here. And the king opened the inner room where Avinadav waited, dressed in fine clothing given to him by the king, and they recognized him and embraced him and wept with joy, after which the king gave Avinadav great wealth [. . .] and he remained there with his wife in great honor, and Yehoyada was happy to see them joyfully reunited. The End.⁶⁹

The insertion of the name Avinadav into the last pages of this second text, an addition that contributes little to the plot or themes of the novelistic tale in and of itself, is obviously meant to sew these two compositions together. We therefore have before us a book that begins as a specimen of one translated genre—here a fictional confessional letter meant for moral edification—and morphs into a novella of tragic overseas separation and final happy reunion. When placed alongside its contemporary *Riter Gabein*, we have a better context for understanding the conception of both. The popularity of reunion-themed novellas highlighting international travel is unmistakable, and the bending of distinctive “foreign” forms into this generic mode appears to be habitual. Three of the Zaks'es' novellas based on known works (*Princess Helene*, *Bovo's Tale*, and *Sailor Robinson*) exhibit a third path toward similar end products: great abridgment. We may reasonably assume that those novellas, whose sources are hitherto unknown, were similarly worked by their Frankfurt (Oder) publisher to fit this mold.

YIDDISH, JÜDISCH-DEUTSCH AND THE HASKALAH

While this essay is by no means a linguistic endeavor, some comments should be made about the wording and spelling of Frankfurt (Oder) prose, which seems to have caused some confusion in the past: *Riter Gabein's*

69. *The Tale of Avinadav*, 15a–15b.

Latin transliteration, for instance, in which the Hebrew spelling it appears to emulate does not seem to follow the conventions of Yiddish. It is therefore helpful to note that *Riter Gabein's* actual style of spelling (namely, German-reminiscent *H's* and double letters, as in *The Tale of Aminadav* and the Zaks novellas) is typical of many works printed in Frankfurt (Oder) during the period under discussion, including works rife with Hebraisms, such as *The Tale of Avinadav*. Another instance is *Gedulat Moshe*, a prose work about the life of Moses first translated from Hebrew into Yiddish in Frankfurt (Oder) by (or commissioned by) Itsak and Naḥman Zaks, later publishers of many Jüdisch-Deutsch novellas. In 1769.⁷⁰ Given that Yiddish spelling had yet to be standardized at this time, this seems to point to a locally accepted style of spelling more than anything else. The gradual dropping of Hebraisms, on the other hand, appears to tell a more complicated story.

In 1800, about a decade after publishing *The Tale of Avinadav*, Zvi Hirsch Bashevits published another bilingual translated excerpt from Dusch's *Moralische Briefe*. This time he did not include any novelistic flourishes and instead introduced the work as that of a prominent rabbi who preferred to remain anonymous, perhaps now considering this (false) framing of the moralistic work to be more attractive. But *Igrot musar* is different from *The Tale of Avinadav* in another significant way: its language is without Hebraisms. In fact, Bashevits makes a point of introducing the book in its first subtitle as written "in good, clean German," followed by "Iber zetst in Loshn Koydesh bi-leshon tsaḥ ve-naki" (translated into the holy tongue clearly and correctly). Here, then, we have an elaborate choice: two entirely separate and unmixing languages, each purposefully correct and "clean."

This new trend is very much in keeping with the German Haskalah movement and its preference for both German and Hebrew as markers of superior German Jewish culture, rather than the Yiddish "jargon." Dozens of Jüdisch-Deutsch books and pamphlets, or bilingual works combining Jüdisch-Deutsch and Hebrew, were published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many of them schoolbooks or translations meant to provide accessibility to classical Hebrew sources or liturgy for a young or

70. *Sefer gedulat Moshe* (Frankfurt [Oder], 1769).

unlearned readership through a language more culturally desirable than the hybrid vernacular, Yiddish.⁷¹

The Zaksess seem to have followed the same trend as Bashevits: in 1792 they published a short geographical translation, *Seder hare 'olam*, with Hebraisms, while in 1802 they published a very similar work, *Klayne yeografie oder erd Beshraybung*, with no Hebraisms. It therefore seems likely that for this printing locus, a lingual turning point came about in the last decade of the eighteenth century: While still printing exclusively in Hebrew letters, printers opted for a language closer to German than to Yiddish, conforming to the Haskalah's linguistic sensibilities. Again, it is helpful to examine this issue in the context of local printing.

But astute readers will have noticed that in terms of omitting Hebraisms, the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas *precede* the Germanizing trend: both *Princess Helene* and *Riter Gabein*, devoid of Hebraisms, appear before the Yiddish *The Tale of Avinadav* and *Seder hare 'olam*. Situated as it was between the Central European and the Eastern European book markets, it is possible that books with linguistic differences were intended for different audiences. But judging by the fact that the extant novellas (apart from Bashevits's *The Tale of Avinadav*) are uniformly devoid of Hebraisms, it also seems possible that this choice, rather than one of catering to the spoken language of its audiences, is a stylistic one: a "non-Jewish" language was thought befitting of novellas styled as foreign. This may have also been done consciously, if unassumingly, in service of maskilic linguistic aspirations—in which case the "German" novellas served as an early gateway into a new reading language for popular audiences.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The eight novellas before us all describe the concerns and tribulations of non-Jewish protagonists in a neutral, non-Jewish world, in stories borrowed from works belonging to genres that are traditionally such: chivalric romance, novella, overseas adventure. In this, they signal cultural foreignness, even if Jewish readers had been familiar with them for generations at this point, so much so that this "foreign" aspect of the work is really

71. See Shmuel Werses, "Yad yemin doḥah smol mekarevet," in *Hakitsa Ami* (Jerusalem, 2001), 238–80; Tal Kogman, *Ha-maskilim be-mada'im* (Jerusalem, 2013).

somewhat conservative in its own way: its foreignness would have been so familiar to readers as to render it domesticated. They emulate *Arabian Nights*-like geography, thereby emphasizing their international nature, as well as their translated nature. Certainly in the case of *Riter Gabein*, where we know this choice to be local rather than endemic to the selected source text, it was a choice to intensify the translation-like nature of an already conspicuously translated genre. And unlike local works presented by the same agents in Yiddish, these “foreign” works are put forth in a “foreign” language—one devoid of Hebrew words, the most obvious Jewish markers.

Gideon Toury has posited that as far as the translation’s target culture (here, Jewish culture) is concerned, pseudotranslations (literary works that pose as translations) *are translations* for all intents and purposes: they are understood as such and function as such in society.⁷² I would argue that this is the case with the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas, with the qualification that rather than being *either* a translation or a pseudotranslation, the products before us are a form of translation pastiche. It is fair to define at least most of them as translations (i.e., works with a known source, if not a very direct one), and at the same time we can recognize that their creators went beyond simply using borrowed cultural materials and took elaborate measures to color them as such—thereby blurring their own creative process. This is, in a sense, an inversion of translation theorist Lawrence Venuti’s idea that a fluent translation from one language and culture into another obfuscates the text’s true conditions of production and the inherent exertion of cultural power.⁷³ Certainly, an obfuscation is taking place, but it seems to point the other way: the Germanized language and “foreign” content obscure the fact that this literary product, whatever its primary origin, is really a specifically local, Jewish production.

The translation-like nature of the Frankfurt (Oder) novellas *must therefore be considered separately* from the question of to what degree these works should really be considered foreign imports and how “Jewish” they actually are. This suggestion is in keeping with André Lefevere’s discussion in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, which em-

72. Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 31–34.

73. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995; London, 2017), 1–34.

phasizes the social and political power inherent in processes of reception, rejection, reclaiming, and canonization of works regardless of whether—or more precisely, *how much*—they change in the process.⁷⁴ Acknowledging that the very aura of translation may generate a form of prestige, we may consider the particular relationship that may be discerned between an overtly “translated” text and the expectations of its target culture.

The Frankfurt (Oder) novellas exhibit clear affinities with maskilic trends in their language, themes, and some of the chosen source texts. At the same time, these storybooks are also very much a continuation of Old Yiddish printed literature: much like past iterations of the chivalric romance or the adventure novella, they are first and foremost a commodity that offers entertaining light reading with sometimes halfhearted gestures toward proper morality. That they may also offer youthful readers some practice in “proper” German serves as a reminder that one printed storybook may be many things at once.

Taken together, these works call for a nuanced approach to maskilic translation: compared to Satanov’s pretense in *Mishle Asaf*, they play a much less contrarian game of disguises. They accentuate their overt “foreign” nature through a kind of translation pastiche, a translation-like style, all the while retaining Jewish values and conventions and cooperating with both new Jewish trends and traditional ones. Although much Haskalah scholarship points to its confrontational nature and the culture clashes that ensued, we might do well to pay attention to those hybrid manifestations of a softer cultural shift, which combines novel cultural imports with a familiar foreignness its readers were intrinsically comfortable with.

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74. André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London, 1992).