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Rewriting and translating historical “fact” into fiction in the historical novel

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1 Historical “data” concerns not only facts, as we all know, but memory (individual as well as collective), language, cultural heritage (“real” or invented). In his 1975 History Remembered, Recovered, Invented, Bernard Lewis encompassed the multiplicity of functions historiography offered in the birth of national feelings. In the 19th century, para-historical popular writing was also used to prop up a national consciousness, often in the form of the historical novel. It is of course no wonder that this genre flourished in the 19th century, the most important period for the novel, for historiography and for nationalism. What interests us here is to find out 1) how narrating / rewriting / updating historical data works, in other words how historical “facts” are translated into fiction, 2) how this process can serve various ideological purposes, be it hidden agendas or quite open political / cultural goals, and 3) how translations of this historical rendition work for a different public, at a different time and place, for different ideological purposes. Using the word translation in the more general Jakobsonian sense (Jakobson, 1959: 232-239), I would like to suggest that this process in fact involves a triple translation: that of history into historiography, that of historiography into fiction, and that of fiction in one language / culture / period into fiction in another.

2 The test case presented here is a 19th century German-Jewish novel for youth, written in 1842 by Eugen Rispart (alias Isaak Asher Frankolm), under the scientific-sounding title of Die Juden und die Kreuzzfahrer in England unter Richard Löwenherz [The Jews and the Crusaders in England under Richard the Lionheart].

3 The German-Jewish historical novel for young readers, written in Germany and in German in the 19th century, was an outstanding tool for conveying new historical images
concerning Jewish tradition, Jews and Judaism, through the back door, so to speak (Ben-Ari, 1997). In a period when mainstream Jewish writers considered popular novels “doubtful”, if not altogether “trashy”, this particular genre, the historical novel, was taken up enthusiastically by community leaders, teachers and scholars, prolific in their religious and polemic writing, who not only did not shun the popular genre, but applied themselves to it. Fearing that Jewish youth would be attracted by the German historical novel, so popular in the first half of the 19th century, they turned to the historical genre under various didactic pretexts, mostly that it was a variation of the highly esteemed biography (Feiner, 2002: 112). The most prolific and most significant of the writers, Dr. Marcus Lehmann of Mainz, of the Neo-Orthodox camp, and Dr. Ludwig Philippson of Magdeburg, of the Reform camp, were both editors of influential papers, read in Jewish communities throughout Europe: Lehmann’s Israeleit and Philippson’s AJ (Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums [General Journal of Judaism]). The dozens of historical novels and stories they wrote were usually published in installments in the literary section of the paper (“Feuilleton”), then published in book form.

Eugene Rispart, a pioneer of the popular historical novel (the first being Phōbus Philippson with his Die Marannen dating from 1835), published his novel in 1842. In 1861, it was reprinted by the Institut zur Förderung der israelitischen Literatur, then under the direction of Dr. Ludwig Philippson, Dr. I.M. Jost, and Dr. A.M. Goldschmidt. The novel dealt with a controversial subject: the tragic mass-suicide of the Jews of York in the 12th century.

Rispart / Frankolm received his doctorate from the University of Leipzig as early as 1817, and directed a small school in Königsberg, before leaving for Breslau. He was one of the first liberal Jewish scholars to demand reforms in Jewish prayers and education; he held confirmation ceremonies for boys and girls, innovations that turned the Königsberg community against him and made him move to Breslau, where he set about writing his chronicle of Jewish life in England during the time of the Crusades. I will offer a reading of his novel as a historical novel in the footsteps of Walter Scott, as a pseudo-historiographical text, and as a belles-lettres rendition of Jewish Reform ideology.

The historical episode of the Jews of York begins in 1190 with the preparations for the coronation of Richard the 1st, king of England. The king’s advisers warn him against inviting the Jews to the ceremony in Westminster Abbey, so as not to arouse violence against them. The second crusade is about to begin, and animosity against the Jews is on the increase. Several prominent Jews from York, among them Benedict (or in his Hebrew name Baruch) and Jocenus (Josce / Jossen), who have arrived with rich presents for the new king, do not heed the warning and approach the entrance of the church, thinking they could go unnoticed. They are intercepted by the crowd and are subjected to its fury. They are severely beaten and some are taken to a nearby Cathedral to be baptized by force. Benedict, baptized against his will, recants his Christianity before the king the following day and dies shortly after. The riots continue apace when Richard goes to France to prepare for the crusade. The citizens of York, hearing about the incident in London, attack and plunder Benedict’s house, murdering his wife and children and several other Jews who had found refuge in the strong stone house. His friend Jocenus, fearing the same fate, organizes the community and asks the governor to protect them. The governor, aware of Richard’s favorable attitude towards “his” Jews, offers the royal castle as refuge for the Jews and their fortune. The mob is infuriated and murders the few Jews who were hesitant to take refuge in the castle. Unfortunately, the governor has to
leave the castle on some business, and upon his return, is refused entrance by the Jews who fear a plot against them. The governor turns to the high sheriff, and together they summon all citizens to reclaim the castle. He eventually regrets this move, for the mob attacking the castle becomes uncontrollable, but it is too late. The mob is incited by the thought of blood and booty, and by the low-ranking clergy, especially a minor friar, who keeps shouting “Destroy the enemies of Christ!”. The Jews run out of water and food and realize they cannot keep holding the castle. Encouraged by the advice of a foreign Rabbi, they resolve to commit mass-suicide. Some sources name Rabbi Yomtov de Joigny as that foreign Rabbi, a scholar of great renown who had come to York from France in order to act as the spiritual leader of the community. After having burnt and destroyed the gold and jewels they have brought with them, the besieged Jews of York slaughter the women and children and finally each other. The few who would not take part in the suicide are massacred by the mob when the gates are opened and the bloodthirsty masses find the defenders dead and their wealth gone. The mob then forces its way to the Cathedral, where records of debts due to Jews are kept under seal, force open the boxes and set the papers on fire in the sanctuary. Upon hearing about the York massacre, King Richard is displeased. He sends a Bishop to punish the wrongdoers. By then, the ringleaders have fled to Scotland and the others refuse to take the blame. The governor and sheriff are removed from their office, and the citizens are to pay a fine for the destruction of the castle. No graver punishment is inflicted. Exactly 100 years after the painful events, in 1290, the Jews will be expelled from England, officially not admitted back till 1649.

7 This is the episode Eugen Rispart chose as background for his historical novel. His protagonists are the historical participants: the two friends Benedict-Baruch and Jocenus-Jossen and their families; their daughters, Malka and Hadassah, are fictitious. The 1096 episode itself, and much more so the permissibility of the York martyrdom, even in the face of massacre, was, until the 19th century, a painfully avoided subject in Jewish collective memory. Whether this was a happy selection and how Rispart activated it for his purposes will be analyzed below.

The influence of Walter Scott’s novel on Jewish literature, through its translations into German

8 Rispart wrote the novel twenty years after the publication of Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe in its German translation, and this requires some explanation. The appearance in England of the Waverley Novels in 1814 started a wave of excitement that can be described as nothing short of a Scottomania in the whole of Europe. Especially enthusiastic were the Germans, who reacted with dozens of translations, adaptations and finally Scott-like Germanic novels. The 1830s-1840s presented a momentary reaction to the historical novel, with the Gegenwartsromane [novels of the present]. Soon, however, the German historical novel made a glorious comeback, reaching a peak in the years between 1850 and 1871 when it was put to the service of Bismarck’s Kulturskampf and the unification of Germany. In fact, half of the novels published between 1850 and 1875 were historical novels (Eggert, 1971: 27, 207). German Jews found it hard to identify with this Germanic-nationalistic type, but could find no better available models: the French novel they admired could not serve as model in the Germany of the post-Napoleonic era, while the English philo-semitic novels (such as Disraeli’s Alroy or Tancred), suggesting national solutions for what, still innocently enough, came to be known as the Jewish problem, were deemed dangerous by
a community striving for emancipation and continually blamed for being a “state within a state”. Following Herder’s acknowledgement of the Jewish legacy as the esteemed origin of Christian culture, their solution was a return to a glorified Hebrew past, with thematic and literary elements appropriated erratically from the European inventory. Scott’s novels, such as *Ivanhoe*, offered a very precise model: a love intrigue, woven into a historical political intrigue, both happily solved in a “golden way”, set in a romantic atmosphere, with damsels in distress for handsome fearless knights to rescue. A very general outline of this recipe could be appropriated, and Rispart, as I will show below, did just that.

9 Note that, in what concerns the treatment of Jews, Scott’s novels, though not outrightly negative, were ambiguous. *Ivanhoe* presents the figure of Isaac of York, who, although much more complex than his Shakespearean counterpart, is a Shylock figure of a usurer. True, it also presents the romantic endearing figure of Rebecca, a model taken up by Leopold Sacher-Masoch and other German and European writers, infatuated with the beautiful dark sorceress-like Jewess. But Rebecca remains controversial too, mysterious, oriental and forbidden, as will be shown below. Rispart’s German-Jewish novel attempts to attenuate these elements: his heroines have no mysterious healing power, and his protagonists are not thrifty usurers; nevertheless, his appropriation of Scott-like themes must have seemed controversial in the eyes of German-Jewish readership.

10 The political intrigue Rispart selects can hardly meet with a Scott-like happy ending. Following Scott, Rispart chose the period of Richard the Lionheart, but the episode described, ending in massacre, mass-suicide and the eradication of a whole Jewish community, is tragic to a point that Jewish tradition refrained from commenting on it. Moreover, as illustrated in my research, these motifs were not popular with the liberal German-Jewish camp, intent on avoiding narration of pogroms (Ben-Ari, 1997). Scott’s novel does, however, eventually promise a co-existence between the sworn enemies, Saxons and Normans, with its final betrothal of Ivanhoe and Rowena, and this was a message Rispart may have wanted to convey. Rispart’s novel ends with the hope that so much bloodshed must be followed by peace. It also ends, symbolically, with the young Jewish lovers, refugees of tragic York, leaving England for a brighter future in Portugal. Since Rispart’s readers conceived of 19th century Germany in terms of a Golden-Age Spain / Portugal, his ending must be seen as hopeful. In *Ivanhoe* Rebecca expresses a critical view of England, when she parts with Rowena before leaving for Portugal (see Reference Texts n° 11). The people of England, she says,

> are a fierce race, quarreling ever with their neighbours or among themselves, and ready to plunge the sword into the bowels of each other. Such is no safe abode for the children of my people [...] Not in a land of war and blood, surrounded by hostile neighbours, and distracted by internal factions, can Israel hope to rest during her wanderings. (Scott, 1890 [1819]: 448)

11 Rispart would not be so blunt as to describe England as “a land of war and blood”. What his heroine, Hadassah, says to Queen Eleonore before leaving for Spain is more evasive. The queen wonders how the girl could leave her “homeland”, while Hadassah claims a Jew has no homeland:

> „Nach Toledo? Du willst dein Vaterland meiden?“
> „Hat die Judin ein Vaterland ?“ Versetzte Hadassah schmerzlich. (Rispart, 1861 [1842]: 482)

12 Hadassah remains adamant when the queen tries to persuade her she will be safe in England.
The love intrigue is no less problematic in both novels. Scott’s Rebecca, who uses her “Jewish” medical knowledge to heal wounded Ivanhoe, is well aware of the knight’s romantic interest in her. Chaste and prudent, she delicately reminds him that she is a Jewess and that he has promised his heart to his beloved Rowena:

I know not whether the fair Rowena would have been altogether satisfied with the species of emotion with which her devoted knight had hitherto gazed on the beautiful features, and fair form, and lustrous eyes, of the lovely Rebecca; eyes whose brilliancy was shaded, and, as it were, mellowed, by the fringe of her long silken eyelashes, and which a minstrel would have compared to the evening star darting its rays through a bower of jessamine. But Ivanhoe was too good a Catholic to retain the same class of feelings towards a Jewess. This Rebecca had foreseen, and for this very purpose she had hastened to mention her father’s name and lineage. (Scott, 1890 [1819]: 259)

Secretly in love with Ivanhoe, Rebecca is realistic enough to know this love is “folly”: “I will tear this folly from my heart, though every fiber bleed as I rend it away!” (ibid.: 277). She is proud of her past tradition, as is obvious from the way she rejects another Christian admirer, Brian de Bois-Guilbert, at the same time trying to improve his image of the Jew (see Reference Texts n° 2).

Rispart’s novel, however, goes a step further in presenting a love affair between a Jewess and a Christian, though there is no doubt that it must be impossible and cannot end happily. The lovers are none other than Malka, the beautiful Jewess of York, daughter of Jocenius / Jossen, and a mysterious Knight Errand who had rescued her from a furious mob, later to be revealed as Richard the Lionheart himself. That the damsel in distress should fall in love with her rescuer is natural enough, within this model, and gives Malka a chance to compare her physically magnificent Sir Knight with the pale weak Jewish youngsters she is acquainted with. But that Richard, king of England, should fall desperately in love with the beautiful Malka (Regina, queen in literal translation) is the kind of wishful-thinking we would not expect in a German-Jewish 19th century novel. The young king, previously portrayed as a hopeless womanizer, is deeply in love for the first time in his life. Malka, ignorant of the identity of her mysterious rescuer, plans to convert to the Christian faith and marry him. When Richard hears of the fate of the Jews of York, it breaks his heart as he thinks his beloved “to whom his heart belongs” was among them. Queen Eleonore, his mother, has to comfort and reassure him that Malka had died before the massacre (see Reference Texts n° 3). Whether we do or do not find this love intrigue convincing is beside the point. What we should look for is the hidden message intended for the young German-Jewish readers, in tears over the heroes’ lot. In fact, Rispart weaves his plot with cunning. A second couple eventually survives, replacing the first, and helping the reader form an opinion of the doubtful future of a mixed marriage. Malka is supposed to marry Don Joseph Abudal, a prince-like Sephardi Jew from Portugal. Her secret love to her Knight forces her to reject him, and Abudal eventually finds solace with Hadassah, her best friend. Malka’s name, remember, was already connotative (meaning “queen” in Hebrew, but well known to Jewish readers in Germany as well). Hadassah’s name is no less evocative: it is the second name of Esther, the savior of the Persian Jews according to the biblical Book of Esther. Although the novel seems to revolve around Malka rescued from the mob and loved by Richard, the real heroine turns to be Hadassah. She is the one who will survive, while Malka will die of a broken heart. She will remain true to a proud Jewish tradition, while Malka will vehemently preach conversion. Though not as fatally beautiful as her friend, Hadassah is sane of body and mind, dutiful and
moral, and therefore elected to be the survivor. So will her beau—a nobleman from a
country where Jews may practice their religion and be productive citizens in a non-Jewish
society. Don Joseph combines wisdom, learning and valor, he organizes the defense of the
Jewish community of York, which he is visiting. He does not look like a Jew: he looks like a
foreign prince, and no one even “suspects” he is Jewish. Was the romantic reader
disappointed? Could be. But Rispart leaves no doubt as to which of the couples he favors.

Both Malka and Hadassah reject the model of the weak helpless Ghetto Jew, though Malka
is content with muscle and chivalry, while Hadassah prefers a combination of muscle and
brain. Taking up a Scott-like model, Rispart introduces new images of Jews, Judaism and
their relationship with the society around them. However, he walks a tight rope here,
instilling hope of romantic forbidden love with the Super-Knight of all times, Richard the
Lionheart, openly discussing the possibility of conversion for the sake of ardent love,
disregarding Rebecca’s (or Scott’s) prudent warning. Adopting a Scott-like model may
have proved to be too provocative, and may explain why other German-Jewish writers
refrained from using this model.

How does a German-Jewish novelist activate
historical data: Rispart’s “translation” of Jost / Tovey

As we know, although a modern historical consciousness already awoke among German
Jews in the eve of the 18th century, it was not till the early 19th century that Jewish history
began to be written according to modern concepts. This was done by members of the
Wissenschaft des Judentums, [Science of Judaism], established in 1819 as part of the Reform
movement, and premised on the critical investigation of Jewish literature and culture,
including rabbinic literature, using scientific methods to analyze the origins of Jewish
traditions. This association of young Jewish intellectuals, equipped with the idealistic
conceptual apparatus of Hegel, understood Jewish history as a progressive unfolding of
the idea of Judaism resulting from natural historical factors rather than acts of
Providence. The predecessor of this modern historiography was Isaak Markus Jost
Maccabees to the Present Day [Geschichte der Israeliten seit der Zeit der Maccabäer bis auf unsere
Tage] (9 volumes between 1820-1828), supplemented later on by New History of the Jews
from 1815-1845 [Neuere Geschichte den Israeliten von 1815-1845] (1846-1847), and History of
Judaism and its Sects [Geschichte des Judenthums und seiner Sekten] (1857-1859), were the first
works to use scientific tools in assembling a comprehensive Jewish history. Although later
critics claim that Jost’s History was concerned above all with presenting the Jews in a
favorable light to non-Jews, he and his enthusiastic colleagues in the Wissenschaft des
Judentums are acknowledged for their pioneering work in inaugurating modern Jewish

Rispart based his bellestristic account of the York massacre on the historical data supplied
by Jost (1827: 119-126), who in turn found his source in the English clergyman and
historiographer De Blossiers Tovey’s Anglia Judaica. Needless to say, Tovey’s account was
favorable to the Jews. Attempting to appear as “scientific” as possible, Rispart chose a
German sounding pseudonym, though the Institut edition was published under the
scientific-sounding Dr. Frankolm. Aware of the doubtful status of novels about to be
introduced in Jewish culture, he chose a long “historiographic” title.
Periodization and selection of historic material, that is, how “history” is presented, into which periods it is sub-divided and which periods are preselected for presentation, are of major interest in research on the historical novel. So is the issue of activating history, that is exploiting the historical past for the use of the present (Feiner, 2002: 184-219, following Gay, 1966: 32). In the case of Rispart, the question of selection is not easy to answer. Why select a problematic period of massacre and mass-suicide, a subject the Reform movement tended to avoid? Descriptions of pogroms and martyrdom were not favored by writers of historical novels of the liberal camp, not because such events did not occur in Germany—the notorious Hep-Hep pogroms of 1819 were still fresh in people’s memory—but precisely because they did. Jost and his friends felt they had better evade such chapters in Jewish history, so as not to incite hatred and undermine the efforts to bridge the gap between Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, the attitude of Jewish tradition towards the 1090 mass-suicide was not unequivocal; some scholars interpret the silence of the Tosafists to the episode as disapproval, others as silent approval, though all share the feeling that such extreme tragic measures cannot be openly criticized.

Nevertheless, following Jost’s courageous report of the York massacre, Rispart must have thought the episode could be harnessed to the needs of the present. With proper “handling”, he could sharpen the distinction between the past and the present, nurturing an optimistic approach to positive modern trends, as was Philipson’s explicit aim (see Feiner, 2002: 240). The contrast with the dark Middle Ages could emphasize the benefits of the enlightened present, encourage people to believe that Bildung is the answer, that closing the gap between Christians and Jews is the solution, rather than extreme measures such as mass-suicide.

Whether Rispart’s episode selection was a happy one is a different question altogether; his name does not figure among the prominent writers in 19th century German-Jewish literature, and in fact he did not write any additional novel. It seems that, being among the pioneers, he was still inexperienced with the selection of favorable historical material that would eventually be adopted by the Reform movement. The topic of Kiddush Hashem [martyrdom], carefully avoided by the Reform, would later be adopted by historical novels of the Neo-Orthodox movement, not as queasy as the Reform in selecting “dark” historical periods, and inclined to follow the historiography of the more “Jewish” historiographer Heinrich Graetz. Rispart’s greater success will eventually be in his translations/adaptations in Eastern Europe and in Israel (see third part).

Rispart “manipulated” the historical data in order to compensate for the problematic choice of this particular period. He did this by undermining certain elements, changing or amplifying others, and by certain stylistic techniques, which I would like to discuss.

1) While “translating” historical data into novel material, Rispart put the stress on the mob’s part in the massacres and on the part played by the lower clergy, inciting the mob, against the will of the king, the nobility and the heads of church. This was not in line with the period’s non-Jewish historiography. In contrast with Rispart’s King Richard, the great protector of the Jews in love with Malka, the average (Christian) 19th century history book presents rather dry accounts of Richard’s attitude. Palmer’s describes the king’s indignant reaction to the massacre in York in pecuniary terms, arising from the fact that “the law provided that all debts owing to a deceased Jew should revert to the crown” (see Reference Texts n° 4a). So is a more modern account in A History of the Jews in England (see Reference Texts n° 4b), explaining that the northern barons destroyed records of their indebtedness to the Jews in the hope that they could “liquidate the debts”.

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Rispart would go to great efforts in describing how highly Jocenus / Jossen is regarded by the king and how unlike the common usurer’s type he is. His “translation” of the historical material would also underplay the role of greed, emphasized in almost every account of the episode, that drove the mob and many of the noblemen to relentlessly attack the castle with the besieged Jews in it. It would underplay the role of envy that the luxurious way of life the Jews were leading aroused in their neighbors. Such descriptions were common in non-Jewish historiography (see for instance Jenkins and Huie [1844: 156-157], which goes to great lengths in describing the Jews’ riches). Even Jost comments on Benedict and Jocenus’s stone houses: “Beide waren sehr reich und besassen in York grosse, gewissermassen befestigte Häuser, die fast das Ansehen von Ritterburgen hatten.” [Both were very rich and possessed big fortified houses in York, that looked almost like knights’ fortresses.] (1827: 121) But he hastens to add that the Jews asked for shelter in the castle, just until the Crusaders go on their way, “da die Einwohner theils friedlich gesinnt, theils durch die bewaffnete Besassung leicht im Zaume zu halten waren” [for the citizens were either peaceful or could be held under control by the armed occupiers] (ibid.: 122).

To cite a popularized example, here is the way Littell’s famous Living Age (1888) explains why the Yorkists hated the local Jews. Note that The Living Age was not a history book, it was an American magazine that, in 1844, started publishing selected articles previously published in English and American magazines. The passage keeps citing “old chroniclers” and may serve as a mirror to popular renditions of historical episodes. An article called “A Tragic Page from the History of an Old City” provides a very detailed answer as to why not a stone of the ancient Jewish quarter called Jubbergate had remained in York, concluding that “money, probably was at the bottom of this tragedy, as of most others; for the Englishmen were poor and extravagant, and the Jews unscrupulous and grasping” (see Reference Texts n° 5).

Activating the historical data also supplied Rispart with the possibility of introducing pertinent Reform issues in the back door so to speak. The love story between Malka and Richard, and especially Malka’s excited speeches in favor of conversion, offered such an opportunity, by leading to a painful issue in a world where assimilation was growing. Rispart cleverly magnifies the impossibility of intermarriage by driving it ad absurdum (a simple Jewish girl and the king of England!), at the same time acknowledging that such situations, however painful, may and will occur. Twenty, thirty years later, extreme Reform novelists and converted Jews will offer the possibility of intermarriage in their historical novels[17]; not so Rispart. Nevertheless, he doesn’t leave enlightened girl readers without an equivalent for a Knight in Shining Armor—the model of the Spanish / Portuguese Jew, a wise, brave man of the world is the answer: a model of the New Jew.

This translation of fact into fiction can also make use of style. In what concerns the mass-suicide, for example, the best technique the novel adopts in “properly” presenting this horrifying end is not presenting it at all. In contrast to various rather detailed accounts given in the period’s historiography, including Tovey’s and Jost (Jost, 1827: 119-126), the reader is not given a direct description of the mass-suicide, but an indirect reported version of the events, extremely short, a few lines told by the few survivors (Rispart, 1861 [1842]: 461). The “excuse”, namely that neither Hadassah nor her beloved Don Joseph Abudal were present in the castle, is not convincing since so far Rispart proved to be a know-all writer, providing all the details of the siege. Tovey (1738: 22, also quoted by
Hyamson, 1908: 45), and Jost in his footsteps (1827: 122), cite in full the speech made by
the Rabbi visiting with the community of York, encouraging the besieged to perform
mass-suicide rather than give in to the raging mob outside the castle (see Reference Texts
nº 6). His speech echoes the one made by the leader of the Sicarii rebels under Roman
siege before the notorious Masada mass-suicide of the 1st century AD, and since Masada
is to become an integral part, after 1920, of modern Zionist ideology, the subject will be
taken up later. Suffice it to note here that the gap in Rispart’s narration of the York
massacre is conspicuous.

So is the relatively subdued tone of voice. One should bear in mind that, in the 19th
century, historiography and historical novels did not differ much in style, and Rispart
could give in to an emotional tone of voice without seeming too sentimental.
Historiographers would tell a story, often interrupting it with emotional outbursts, while
novelists would often lean on scientific tools, even scientific footnotes, not very far
removed from historical accounts of the period. Tovey’s 1738 account of the York
massacre (in this case, his explanation as to why the Jews were suspicious of the governor
of the castle) uses question marks, psychological remarks and emphases:

> [When the Governor had to go away on business] some crafty person among their
Enemies, pretending great friendship, insinuated to them that his business was to
conclude a treaty with the rioters, about delivering them up, on condition that he
was to have the largest share of the booty. What was to be done in this case? Fear
notoriously cuts off all succours of reason. They were afraid the Governor might
possibly betray them; they therefore believed he certainly would do it.
> [Here Tovey explains why some Jews accepted to be baptized]
> How powerful is the fear of death! Several of them, as it is said, consented. (Tovey,
1738: 22)

Jost also uses the interrogative-exclamatory form: “Welchen Menschen musste nicht ein
Schaudern bei solchem Anblick durchbringen?” [What man would not shudder at such a
sight?] (Jost, 1827: 124):

Seeing that the boundaries between historiography and belles-lettres writing seemed to
have been blurred, Rispart’s avoidance of “show” for the sake of “tell”, or rather “not
tell” is significant, reflecting his awareness of the ambivalence of his selection.

**Translated versions of the novel outside Germany promoting a new image of the Jew**

The analysis presented above already illustrated that neither the selection of the
historical “facts” nor their fictional translation was accidental. The episode was selected
and adapted so as to introduce certain new images concerning Jews and Judaism and
updating Jewish tradition via a seemingly innocent new genre—the popular novel for
youth. The model for the New Jew, according to Rispart, is three-fold: a) a Rabbi, both
learned in the Torah and courageous in battle; b) a citizen, Jocenus / Jossen, the pillar of
York Jewry, not a simple usurer but a financial adviser to the king and a brave resourceful
community leader; c) a free and proud Portuguese Jew, a prince-like figure of physical
and intellectual power. These New Jews are versed in Jewish as well as general knowledge,
they are no longer the feeble Ghetto Jews, they are not victims to be led like sheep to the
slaughter, and they prefer to commit suicide rather than be massacred by a raging mob.
Here is a short illustration of the exemplary counter attack of the besieged, headed by Jocenus / Jossen:


Knowing how much hope was invested in the new generation, it is not surprising that stories for youth would be chosen to carry new and often controversial messages. It was much harder for the prominent community leaders and educators involved to air their modern, sometimes subversive views on updating Judaism and Jewish tradition in their publicist or religious writing. The historical novel, being a combination of fact and fiction, offered a way of re-writing history, without the obligation to remain entirely true to it. The stories and novels were read, as was the custom in the 19th century, by the whole family, sometimes read out loud by the head of the family. Their writers were intent on presenting a positive historical image, they insisted on presenting the Jews as loyal German citizens, devoid of any national feeling. Sephardi / Portuguese Jews served as a model for citizens who, when allowed to practice their religion peacefully, contributed a great deal to their society (Schorsch, 1994: 71-92). These writers made an effort to dispel current fixed ideas about Jews. Jost concludes the York episode by calling it a “Trauerspiel”, a tragedy:

in welchem die stets der Geldgier und Feigheit nicht mit Unrecht angeklagten Juden, noch einmal innere Kraft und Lebensverachtung zeigten, während sie die Beschuldigung des Geizes auf die Werfechter des Christenthums zurück warfen. (Jost, 1827: 126)

The ambivalence, here, as well as in Rispart’s novel, lies in the grudging acceptance on the one hand of the criticism of the Ghetto Jew of the past, and on the other of the need to shape new models for the young readership. The inherent paradox lay in the somewhat naive belief that this would not instill national pride in the readers; that Reform notions such as refuting national feeling, rejecting the Return to Zion, or turning a national Messiah into an abstract idea of universal “messianism” could go hand in glove with romantically invoking the glorious past. What German-Jewish writers did not take into account (as opposed to Bismark and his collaborators in the Kulturkampf) was that their romantic rendition of Jewish history, invoking a whole repertory of Jewish heroes, myths, metaphors and symbols, would arouse national pride and become a basis for constructing national identity.

This challenge, with no ambivalence whatsoever, was taken up in Eastern Europe, where different conditions necessitated a different ideology. There was no Jewish emancipation in Eastern Europe, nor was there a chance of achieving equal rights. The oppressed Jews, facing pogrom after pogrom, realized toward the middle of the 19th century that the only solution was emigration, and a part of them envisaged the Return to Zion as their goal. This was the background against which the Revival occurred: a revival of the Hebrew language, literature, historiography, culture and hope. And it was in this ambiance that the German-Jewish novels were read and acclaimed, as preaching national pride and shaping an inventory of antique magnificent heroes. East-European Jews, many of them subscribers of the AZJ or the Israelit, could read the stories and the books in German. Others read their translations from German into Hebrew (and sometimes Yiddish), which were adapted according to new different ideological needs. Hebrew historical novels were written following these translations / adaptations, later forming the infrastructure for
literature in Israel. East European historical novels were disinclined to accept Jost’s “neutral” and fragmentary depiction of Jewish history; they frowned upon what they considered his attempts to paint Jewish history in more favorable colors, rejecting both his periodization and his presentation. They preferred more empathic historiographical renditions such as Graetz’s (written in mid-century), and later the modern historiography of Russian born Shimon Dubnov’s (1860-1941). Novels such as Rispart’s, whether directly or indirectly, thus played a major part in establishing a new national Hebrew literature. Let us briefly follow the fate of Rispart’s novel in Eastern Europe and in Israel.

Rispart’s novel was first translated into Hebrew by Miryam Markel-Mosessohn (first half published in Warsaw, 1869, second half in 1895), for a target public of maskilim [enlightened] of all ages. It is a famous translation, done by one of the first female Hebrew-enlightenment writers / translators. Her translation, the praises she received for it, and her detailed correspondence with Yehuda Leib Gordon, one of the greatest Hebrew poets of the day, give us an important insight into the different needs of East-European Jewry. Markel-Mosessohn already saw the necessity to change the title so as not to refer to Christians, calling it Ha-Yehudim Be-Anglia [the Jews in England] with the subtitle o ha-Yehudim ve-nose ha-zlav bimloch ha’melech Richard [or the Jews and the Crusaders in the days of King Richard], eliminating, throughout the novel, the persistent allusions to Christianity and the Crusades, and emphasizing the heroism of the Jews. Yehuda Leib Gordon, although full of compliments for her translation and in favor of her omissions, was against changing the title (Gordon, 2004: 240). Being a pioneer in Hebrew belteristic writing, Markel-Mosessohn was hampered by language constraints, and her style was flowery and high in register. The first part of her novel was highly acclaimed. Yet, when finally completed by the end of the century, Markel-Mosessohn’s translation did not arouse as much interest in the readers; the subject was no longer innovative, and her style had become old-fashioned (ibid.: 91).

In 1944, however, a new translation of the book, done by Menachem Zalman Wolfovsky, appeared in Israel, at a well known publisher’s—Am-Oved, in Tel Aviv, under a new title: Giborey Metzudat York [The Heroes of York Castle]. Wolfovsky continued in Markel-Mosessohn’s footsteps, stressing the bravery of the few against the many, this time, however, in analogy to the Masada martyrdom and modern Zionist ideology. As mentioned above, no direct reference to Masada was made in Rispart’s novel, since, in fact, only few Christian 19th century historiographers refer to the York mass-suicide in relation to the Masada event. In Israel, however, the novel was read against the background of the already established Masada myth, and Wolfovsky’s version enjoyed some popularity as a novel for youth (three editions were again published in 1965). In his introduction to the translation, Wolfovsky, citing the historiographer Graetz, offers a direct link to Masada:

And so died the besieged, killed by each other, in the same day of the month in which the last Zealots took their own lives after the fall of the Second Temple in the fortress of Masada. (Rispart, 1965: 9, my translation)

The style in the Israeli translation is again elevated, but what impressed me most, when I compared the latest translation to the original, was the complete lack of humor in Wolfovsky’s version. In Rispart’s original, there was a delicate streak of humor, presumably functioning as an attenuation of the impact of the tragic events, but also making the book more relevant, closer to the hearts of its young readers. Thus for instance, in the fourth chapter, Shifra, Hadassah’s mother, is depicted as a typical "Jewish
mother”, annoying, sharp tongued, constantly nagging, complaining that her daughter is out all the time and does not help with the house chores; until the moment when her daughter returns home, pale and sick-looking, when she is instantly overcome by worry and smothers the girl with love and tenderness. No humor is to be found in Wolfovsky’s translation of the episode, where the atmosphere is dark and heavy with foreboding.

**Conclusion**

In view of its time and circumstances, Rispart’s pioneering historical novel is an interesting attempt, in the very choice of theme, protagonists and period, to introduce new, even subversive, historical images to the Jewish-German community of his time. It has an even greater significance within the overall role of the historical novel in the emergence of Hebrew national literature and national identity. What this essay endeavored to present, however, was a threefold “translation” of memory into historiography and fiction, serving various, often contradictory, ideologies. Memory of a tragic controversial moment in Jewish history, hitherto kept in the shade, for different reasons, was first translated into different historiographical accounts by non-Jewish historiographers, then translated into modern Jewish historiography, with variations due to time, place and ideological need. Walter Scott’s romantic model was “translated”, in very rough outline, by one of the first writers of German-Jewish historical novels, towards the middle of the 19th century, with the York massacre as thematic historical core, in the aim of introducing new historical images through the “back door”. The same novel was then translated into Hebrew, twice, under different circumstances and for different readerships, in Eastern-Europe and in Israel, brandishing completely different ideological banners. The various “translations” of a single past episode, in its very selection and with, moreover, the manipulation it underwent in historiography and fiction alike, shed an interesting light on collective memory in general, and especially on nuances and ambiguities thereof which may otherwise remain allusive.

This research is about translation in more than one way. It uses the term in very different applications, starting with the very general sense of transfer from one semiotic context to another—in the Jakobsonian sense of inter-semiotic translation (historical event into written chronology)—, from one genre to another (historiography into popular novel), finally ending with the more popular sense of transfer from one language to another (German into Hebrew, for instance). In between, the intricate function of cultural contacts was investigated, for the transfer was not that of a text alone, but that of a model, or that of an intertext, to use post-structural terminology. And the transfer was studied not only from the point of view of text / model, but also from those of author / translator and (varying) reading publics.

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NOTES

2. Especially loathsome to the Reform were the stories of the present, depicting caricature-like images of Ghetto Jews, written by L. Kompert, A. Bernstein and K. E. Franzos, quite popular in the non-Jewish German reading public as well (Shedletzky, 1986: 115).

3. These were the two camps that were willing to accept a certain amount of change in Jewish culture and tradition. The two camps were, of course, in continual strife with each other.

4. The term feuilleton was invented by Julien Louis Geoffroy and Bertin the Elder, editors of the French Journal des Débats in 1800. Soon the supplement became the regular column devoted to entertainment and cultural issues. German newspapers, who then looked up to the French culture, adopted it as a literary supplement.

5. The books were then given to subscribers. Dr. Ludwig Philippson translated the Bible into German. Dr. Phöbus Philippson, Ludwig’s brother, a physician and historiographer, and Hermann Reckendorf, the Orientalist, famous for his first translation of the Koran into Hebrew, were also among the writers. The fact that several of these culture shapers had academic degrees is a result of a prolonged battle for emancipation of the Jews, ending in a more lenient policy that allowed a certain number of Jews into German universities. See Horch, 1985 for an illuminating historical overview.


7. This is a summary of the information given in most historical records from the 18th and 19th century, e.g. Tovey’s Anglia Judaica, 1738: 21-30. Jost, following Tovey, has a very similar account in Jost, 1827: 119-126. Also: A. M. Hyamson, 1908, and E. H. Palmer, 1874.

8. Next to Masada, this is considered the biggest mass-suicide in Jewish history. While historical records, Christian and Jewish alike, usually report that the mass-suicide comprised 500 men (1500 including their wives and children), the plaque in memory of the Jews of York in Clifford’s Tower commemorates 150 Jews. The Clifford’s Tower Internet site does not mention numbers.


10. Long examples are to be found in the Reference Texts volume.

11. “To Toledo? You want to leave your homeland?” “Does a Jewess have a homeland?” Hadassah replied with pain. The translations in the following examples are mine.


14. Tosafists were medieval rabbis from France and Germany, who created critical and explanatory glosses (questions, notes, interpretations, rulings and sources) on the Talmud. These were collectively called Tosafos (“additions”), because they were additions on the commentary of the well known medieval French rabbi Rashi. The Tosafists lived from the 12th century to the middle of the 15th century. Their Tosafos are very important to the practical application of Jewish law because the law will differ depending on how the Talmud is understood and interpreted.


16. Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), born Tzvi Hirsh Graetz in Prussia (now Poland), taught history at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslav (now Wroclaw). His History of the Jews was quickly translated into other languages and ignited worldwide interest in Jewish history.

17. Among the latter Georg Ebers, a converted Jew whose novels were fiercely attacked by German Jews of all camps (see Horch, 1985: 117).

18. Note that the Masada speech was reported by the famous Roman-Jewish historiographer Josephus Flavius, reflecting the Roman norm, according to which suicide was the greatest act of freedom an individual can make when faced with defeat. While Judaism totally rejected this view,
the martyrdoms of Masada—and later York—were acknowledged, albeit tacitly, as acts of heroism.

19. But the Jews did not lose their courage, and Jossen, having overcome his disappointment, showed the greatest activity. From the wall, too, arrows and stones came showering at the enemy, and some of the opponents sank in the dust.

20. In which the Jews, accused and not always wrongly, of greed and cowardice, again showed power and scorn for life, when they threw the accusation of avarice back at the protectors of Christianity.

21. Hebrew Enlightenment started with Moses Mendelsohn in late 18th century Germany, but regained strength in the 19th century in Eastern Europe. See Balin’s bibliographical note on Markel-Mosessohn.


23. Heinrich Graetz draws the analogy with the date, without mentioning the name of the site, see Reference Texts n° 7.

24. This is not the right framework to discuss the birth of the Masada myth and its role in Zionism. A few references were supplied in the text. See Feldman 2008: 125-157, for references to the Akeda, the biblical martyrdom tradition, medieval commentary and the crusades chronicles.

ABSTRACTS

Translations / adaptations / appropriations of historical and pseudo-historical texts were a common tool, in the 19th century, for enhancing new national images. In the era that saw the birth of modern historiography, modern nationalism as well as that of the modern novel, politicians, community leaders, culture shapers, writers, all became aware of the potential of the historical novel for introducing new and often subversive images in the backdoor, so to speak. This essay will provide an example of the intricate ways in which such procedures were undertaken, focusing on the following aspects: (1) how narrating / rewriting / updating historical data works, in other words how historical “facts” are translated into fiction, (2) how this process can serve various ideological purposes, be it hidden agendas or quite open political/ cultural goals, and (3) how translations of these historical renditions, both “scientific” and bellettistic, work for a different public, at a different time and place, for different ideological purposes. The test case will illustrate how a German-Jewish writer of the Reform camp in early 19th century Germany selected a very controversial episode in Jewish history (the 1190 mass-suicide of the entire Jewish population of York), and, following the model of Scott’s Ivanhoe, used it as a tool for introducing new Reform ideas to his Jewish readership. It will follow the translations of this novel into Hebrew, both in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century and in Israel in the middle of the 20th century, to show how the same historical data was used for enhancing national feelings and a sense of national identity.

Les traductions / adaptations / réappropriations de textes historiques ou pseudo-historiques furent couramment utilisées au XIXe siècle pour promouvoir de nouvelles images nationales. Au cours de l’époque qui vit l’naissance de l’historiographie moderne, du nationalisme moderne et du roman moderne, les politiciens, les personnalités influentes, les auteurs culturels et les écrivains prirent conscience que le roman historique pouvait, sans y paraître, introduire des images nationales nouvelles et souvent subversives. Cet article illustre la complexité des
procédés à l’œuvre sous trois angles : (1) le fonctionnement de la ré-écriture / révision des données historiques, ou comment les données historiques sont traduites en éléments fictionnels, (2) comment ce processus sert des intérêts idéologiques clairement déclarés ou dissimulés, et (3) comment les traductions de ces récits historiques – à valeur aussi bien scientifique que littéraire – fonctionnent selon les publics ciblés, le moment et le lieu de leur production et leurs buts idéologiques. Le texte du corpus illustre comment un écrivain juif allemand du début du xixe, appartenant au mouvement du Reform Camp, a choisi un épisode polémique de l’histoire du peuple juif (le suicide collectif de tous les Juifs de York) et l’a utilisé, suivant l’exemple d’Ivanhoe, le roman de Walter Scott, pour introduire des idées réformistes au sein du lectorat juif. L’étude des traductions de ce roman en hébreu, en Europe de l’Est à la fin du xixe siècle et en Israël au milieu du xx siècle montre comment les mêmes données historiques ont été utilisées pour promouvoir l’identité nationale.

INDEX

Mots-clés : ré-écriture, traduction, traduction intersémiotique, mémoire collective, roman historique, fictionnel et non fictionnel, identité nationale, Walter Scott, Rispart

Keywords: re-writing, translating, inter-semiotic translation, collective memory, historical novel, “facts” and fiction, national identity

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