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*Moses Gaster. Memorii, Corespondenta.* Edited by Victor Eskenasy. Bucuresti: Editura Hasefer, 1998. ISBN 973-9235-47-6. Pp. xxxv+467.

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Moses Gaster (1856–1939) was a distinguished Jewish scholar and rabbi, author of many works of exegesis, both Biblical and rabbinical; he was also a ground-breaking specialist in many areas of cultural studies: philology, folklore, comparative religion and comparative literature.

A graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and of Leipzig University, Gaster was both an active defender of Jewish rights and a scholar of encyclopedic erudition. He understood Jewish rights in the broader context of modern political citizenship and within the even broader frame of a modern redefinition of Jewish identity through a close attachment to the traditional heritage. In many ways, his career resembles that of the renowned Solomon Schechter who, also born in Romania, came to England and, finally, became a religious and educational leader in the United States. But while Schechter's path from the sacred text to the renewal of Jewish Studies proceeded through an intense study of the Genizah papers as well as through Talmudic explorations, Gaster's work was much more various, encompassing a large spectrum of interests. Being pervaded by a truly encyclopedic spirit, he was able to discover connections and correlations with basic cultural practices. His studies of comparative folklore and literature reveal a profound understanding of the humanities and an ardent passion for the languages and popular culture of Eastern Europe. This culture, little known or understood at the time, he approached through the study of the narrative structures in a comparative context. His comparativism was, in accordance with the age, perceived in a very broad anthropological framework. In turn, this study of Romanian mass culture in its various and "pristine" aspects allowed him a better grasp of the traditional Jewish culture, so that in his work and thought the phenomena of orality and cultural variation received continuous attention. Thus, from his Ilchester Lectures on "Greeko-Slavonic Literature and Its relation to the Folk-Lore of Europe during the Middle Ages," given at Oxford University in 1886, lectures that established his scholarly reputation in England, to his later studies, on Hebrew, Yiddish and Romanian literature, Moses Gaster was always interested in finding the cultural borders of historicity in order to arrive at a more precise understanding of the communication lines that unite humankind.

From the work on *Jewish Folklore in the Middle Ages* (1887) to the three massive studies *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel* (1899), *The Exempla of the Rabbis* (1924), and *The Maaseh Book* (1934), Gaster articulated a better and more complete understanding of the place, circulation and conditions of narrative structures in the Jewish culture at various levels. His studies dedicated to Romanian popular culture are nowadays classical. A supporter of the diffusionist theory of the popular tale, elaborated by Benfey (1809–81) in order to explain the European circulation of the old Indian folktales, Gaster modified and expanded its principles, forging a new and more complex methodological frame that allowed

him to relate the rich popular pre-Christian culture to the more elaborate forms of scholarly medieval culture. Accordingly, his interest focused mainly on the clarification of the way themes and motifs migrate to and from popular levels as well as between different languages and widely diversified cultures. This vastly erudite endeavour led Gaster to build a new and comprehensive theory of folk-narrative, in many ways comparable to that developed by better-known scholars of the time: L. Ginzburg, H. Gunkel, V. Propp and S. Thompson. His understanding of the rabbinic tales as *exempla* (parables or *mashal*) reveals his perception of the rhetoricity of the short narrative form, while the compilation structure that preserved these stories during the Middle Ages is seen as an integrative part of a complex discursive practice (preaching and counseling) representing an important dimension of a long process of identity formation at the community level. For this reason, Moses Gaster's examination of the Jewish tale illuminates a very broad comparative and historic approach to tradition. In the words of his son, Theodore Gaster, he "first lifted the vast repertoire of medieval Jewish legend out of the narrower channel of rabbinic literature into the broad mainstream of world folktale as a whole." His study *The Samaritan Oral Law and Ancient Traditions* (1932) identified a new and comprehensive area for the history of the public sphere as a realization of tradition; also, he was the first to identify the links between the newly recovered Samaritan literature and the Apocrypha-Pseudepigrapha.

The volume under review here is the first edition of a selection from Moses Gaster's lengthy memoirs and from his vast number of letters exchanged with political and cultural personalities of his time. While the correspondence part is a welcome addition to the selection previously published, (in 1985, by V. Florea as *M. Gaster in Correspondenta*), recovering the real dimension of an image that was deformed by censorship, the memories are, indeed, the main part of the volume. These are written in a highly readable prose, sometimes very vivid and animated, rich with the flavour of an age that took its stylistic standards from the classics. There are lively pages dedicated to his contemporaries as there are also a large number of segments that tell with erudition and dedication the life-story of a very gifted and productive scholar. They also shed new light on some of the most critical moments of the growing Zionist movement, thus conveying the sense of history in the making as Moses Gaster perceived it.

Since many of Gaster's accomplishments have been either unjustly forgotten or uncritically devalued, the edition of this extensive selection from his memorial writings and from his correspondence fills a void that has been deplored by scholars in both Jewish Studies and Romanian philology. It is also to be hoped that this edition announces a revival of critical interest in the work and thought of one of the main representatives of the second generation of scholars that so diligently founded and developed the discipline of Jewish Studies by applying their erudition to many different fields: folklore, philology, biblical studies, comparative religion.

The work of the editor, Victor Eskenassy, was not easy: he certainly did "clean up" many of the problems posed by the manuscripts, which are impres-

sive by their sheer volume; however, some minor errors remain, as do some gaps that are not “covered” by the selection. It is to be hoped that further work on the same sources will be able to better explore this precious resource of modern Jewish Studies and Western comparativism.

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*Hebrew Bible/Old Testament—The History of Its Interpretation I/1.* Edited by Magne Sæbø. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996. ISBN 3-5255-3636-4. Pp. 847.

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This huge tome, apparently somewhat better known in Europe than in North America, surveys, in twenty-two chapters, the history of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament interpretation from its beginnings through late antiquity. The book begins and ends with learned prolegomenon and epilogue by the editor and offers twenty chapters of analyses by an impressive list of contributors, many of whom have taken the opportunity to summarize and refine their own previously published books on the subjects they treat here. Section 1, some 230 pages, is devoted to the “Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation,” essentially the texts produced before Christianity. Section 2 deals with various Jewish and Christian texts, issues, and interpreters.

In Section One, Michael Fishbane looks at inner-biblical exegesis; Emanuel Tov and John Barton write about the implications of having a standardized text and its canonization. John Wevers discusses the Septuagint; Johann Maier, Bible interpretation in the Qumran texts. A lengthy piece by Folker Siegert surveys the Hellenistic interpretative literature, including Aristeeus, Philo, and the Jewish non-allegorists from Alexandria. The section concludes with a chapter by Robert Kraft and Steve Mason on canon and scripture in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Josephus.

In Section Two, Jarl Fossum discusses briefly the relationships between the Bible and various Christian and Jewish sects, including the Samaritans. The combined efforts of Jay Harris, David Kremer, Richard Kalmin, Jacob Neusner, and Etan Levine contribute two chapters on the early rabbinic texts: Mishnah, Talmud, Targum, and Midrash (75 pages).

The remaining 400 pages are devoted almost exclusively to Christian interpretation of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. They contain a study by Hans Huebner on interpretation of the Old Testament in the New; two by Oskar Skarsaune, on second- and third-century writers except Clement and Origen, and on the Old Testament canon and text in the early Greek church. J. F. Procope writes on philosophy and Alexandrian hermeneutics; J. N. B. Carleton Paget on Alexandrian interpretation (mostly Clement and Origen). Sten Hidal discusses the Antiochene School; and Günter Stemberger on exegetical contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire. Michael Weitzman describes the interpretative character of the Peshitta, and Lucas Van