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Schechter's approach to Jewish liturgy

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There have been three occasions in the course of my academic career when I have given close attention to the life and work of Solomon Schechter. The first instance was in the early years of my stewardship of the Genizah Collection at Cambridge University Library when I researched his relationship with the University Librarian of his day, Francis Jenkinson.¹ Early in the current century I was invited to compose the entry about Schechter for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB)² and in 2015 I gave a lecture at a conference to mark the hundredth anniversary of his death. This article is an expansion of that lecture.³

What I wrote in my mini-biography for the ODNB may here be briefly summarized. Schechter demonstrated a lively imagination and enthusiasm, as well as great erudition. He combined a commitment to rabbinic Judaism, a passion for broader learning, and an undoubtedly radical streak with an attachment to traditional observance, if not to Orthodoxy. His marriage in 1887 to Mathilde Roth of Breslau smoothed some of the rougher edges of his personality and toned down at least the religious side of his radicalism. He made adjustments to his inherited religious commitment, perhaps in the light of his personal brilliance and independence of mind, without betraying its most central values. He had a respect for piety, an admiration for integrity, and a suspicion of the bureaucratic and clerical aspects of organized religion.

The question to be addressed in this paper is whether such an assess-

1 The results of that research later appeared in Stefan C. Reif, "Jenkinson and Schechter at Cambridge: An Expanded and Updated Assessment", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (hereafter, *Transactions*) 32 (1992): 279–316.

2 Stefan C. Reif, "Solomon Schechter", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 49 (Oxford University Press, 2004), 207–10.

3 The conference, "Solomon Schechter's Life and Legacy: A Jewish Scholar in Victorian England (1882–1901)", was convened by Theodor Dunkelgrün and held at St John's College, Cambridge, on 22 Nov. 2015.

ment essentially holds good for his approach to Jewish liturgy in its broad sense. In none of my earlier work did I give any specific attention to this topic and I therefore welcome the opportunity of examining this aspect of Schechter's scholarship and drawing some conclusions about his contribution to this area of scientific (or critical) Jewish learning. In order to achieve this goal, I have been greatly indebted to the work of Adolph S. Oko, without whose comprehensive and accurate bibliographical guide to Schechter's scholarly output it would have been much more difficult to tackle the subject here before us.⁴

Bibliographical source

Oko was born near Kharkov, Russia, in 1883. Having received his education in Germany, he went to the United States in 1902, where he worked in the New York Public Library. In 1906 he was recruited to the library staff of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, and became its head librarian in 1907, retaining that position until 1933, when he resigned, apparently because of some scandal concerning his family arrangements. He then moved to London where he was the editor of the *Contemporary Jewish Record* until his death in 1944. Under his administration the Hebrew Union College library was transformed. A new building, designed to hold 40,000 volumes, was opened in 1913, but so great was the rate of expansion that a second building was needed in 1931. In 1911 he began a collection of Spinozana, which he brought to unusual completeness. He also began the development of the college museum. Shortly after the First World War, Oko visited Europe and purchased 18,000 items, including the Edward Birnbaum music collection, as well as manuscripts and printed books. Throughout his life Oko was a devoted student of Spinoza, resulting in *The Spinoza Bibliography* (1964).⁵ In addition, he wrote other bibliographies, among them the one on Schechter just noted. It is this bibliographical study of Schechter that provides the raw material for building any sound structure relating to the scholarship of that famous Romanian rabbi who, together with his colleague Charles Taylor at St John's College, obtained

4 Adolph S. Oko, *Solomon Schechter, M.A., LITT. D.: A Bibliography* (Cambridge University Press, 1938).

5 Biographical data for Oko is derived from *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 12 (1972), 1355, as well as an internet presentation by the American Jewish Archives and the Hebrew Union College, entitled "A Glimpse into the Life of Adolph S. Oko", at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_y7pJ-4EU6A, accessed 10 Aug. 2016.

some three quarters of the Cairo Genizah treasures and gifted them to the University of Cambridge.⁶

Herbert Loewe, who occupied Schechter's post at Cambridge in later years, wrote a highly favourable review of Oko's study in the *Cambridge Review* in 1939. He warmly welcomed "this admirable book" which showed us "what Schechter's attitude was to questions of the day . . . and is replete with material presented in . . . an attractive form." Loewe concluded that it would be "of special interest to those who knew him and loved him in Cambridge and in the United States."⁷ In a letter to Loewe of 7 July 1939, which was once in his son Raphael's library and is now in my possession, Oko states that, despite its anonymity, the review is clearly identifiable as the work of Loewe given its "economy, its grace and generosity".

Academic references

As is well known, Schechter was appointed in 1890 to teach Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature at Cambridge in succession to Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy, who had died earlier that year. A good starting point for any comments on his liturgical interests would therefore be the numerous testimonials that were submitted to the University of Cambridge in support of his application.⁸ The list of those who offered such written support reads like a veritable Who's Who of Hebrew and Jewish scholarship at the end of the nineteenth century. Such leading savants as Hermann Adler, Wilhelm Bacher, N. Brüll, T. K. Cheyne, S. R. Driver, J. Freudenthal, M. Friedmann, Richard Gottheil, H. Graetz, M. Güdemann, S. J. Halberstam, Adolf Jellinek, David Kaufmann, Israel Lewy, S. Maybaum, A. Neubauer, David Rosin, A. H. Sayce, Moritz Steinschneider, and I. H. Weiss stress his deep knowledge of rabbinic literature, especially Talmud and Midrash, and his scientific approach to their study. A few samples will illustrate what they all had to say.

Wilhelm Bacher writing from Budapest on 14 April 1890, states that his publications demonstrate "das er die rabbinische Litteratur in ihren sprachlichen und inhaltlichen Eigentümlichkeiten und Schwierigkeiten vollständig beherrscht und dass er mit selbständiger Auffassung und

6 Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), esp. 90–95.

7 Herbert Loewe, review of Oko, *Schechter*, *Cambridge Review*, 12 May 1939, p. 394.

8 *Application and Testimonials for the Post of Lecturer in Talmudic in the University of Cambridge* (London: Wertheimer, Lea and Co., 1890).

wissenschaftlichen Urtheil in ihren Geist und ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung einzudringen befähigt ist” (in my translation: “that he has completely mastered all the linguistic and textual characteristics and difficulties of rabbinic literature and that he is able to penetrate with an independent mind and scientific judgment its essence and its historical development”).

On that same date, in Vienna, Isaac Hirsch Weiss declares: “In seiner Schriften hat er gezeigt eine ungewöhnliche Belesenheit in allen Fächern der jüdischen Literatur in Bibel, Talmud, hebräischer Sprache und Exegese, eine vorzügliche Begabung in der Kenntniss der rabbinischen Lexicografie und Bibliografie” (in my translation: “He has demonstrated in his publications an uncommon erudition in all subjects of Jewish literature, in the Bible, Talmud, Hebrew and exegesis, [and] a remarkably competent knowledge of rabbinic lexicography and bibliography”).

From the University of Oxford, Adolf Neubauer, exhibiting more than a hint of his own theological *tendenz*, has this to say on 29 May: “Mr Schechter frees himself from the orthodox point of view, and adopts frankly the results of the critical school concerning the Talmudic literature . . . [he] shows a remarkable acquaintance with Rabbinical literature in all its branches.”

Schechter as liturgist?

It cannot go unnoticed by anyone subjecting such remarks, and indeed those of all Schechter’s other referees, to a close reading, that there is no specific mention of Jewish liturgy. To obtain some insight into how Schechter approached this subject, we may return to Oko and check the introduction to his bibliographical study to see whether there are any germane comments. Having earlier noted that his publication “bears the imprint of the Press of his (adoptive) Alma Mater”, that is Cambridge University Press, Oko goes on to evaluate, on the basis of his extensive bibliographical study, Schechter’s scholarship:

The range and depth of his attainments touched both Jewish Wissenschaft and Jewish life: pre-Talmudic literature and sects, Talmud and Midrash, law and legend, history and *liturgy* [my emphasis], mysticism and ethics, Karaite polemics and Gaonic apologetics; the social life of the times of Ben-Sira; the communal life of the Egyptian Jews in the Gaonic period; the intellectual and spiritual activity of the Jews in Palestine in the sixteenth century; the domestic concerns of the German Jews in the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries; the theological notions of English Jewry at the close of the nineteenth century – a range extraordinary indeed.⁹

The inclusion of liturgy among his special competences and interests is also noted by his colleague at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Alexander Marx, but with a clear indication that Schechter, in spite of his stated intention, had not yet got around to completing any intense study of this subject. Marx writes in his essay on Schechter: “To Liturgy also he only rarely refers in his publications outside of his treatment of its theological aspects, and still he was very deeply interested in this branch, lectured on it in the Seminary, and intended to write a comprehensive review of all the recent publications in this field.”¹⁰ That he lectured at the Seminary in this field of Jewish studies has also been noted more recently by Mel Scult: “His courses included Jewish theology, Jerusalem Talmud, Midrash, and the history of Jewish liturgy”.¹¹

In the absence of any overall treatment of liturgy by Schechter, we are obliged to turn again to Oko and to check his list of publications for any items that might reflect his views of aspects of this subject. Fortunately for our purposes here, there is no shortage of such items from his years in London, before he came to Cambridge, from his period at that university, and from his time in New York after 1902.

In the newspapers

In 1887–88, there was some discussion, and apparently no little controversy, about the proposal to introduce a triennial rather than an annual cycle of pentateuchal readings on Sabbath mornings at the Berkeley Street Synagogue in London. There must have been those who denied that there ever had been such a historical practice, and Schechter, perhaps encouraged by Claude Montefiore who had theological sympathies with the Reform preferences of that synagogue, weighed into the debate via the columns of the *Jewish Chronicle* on 13 January 1888. Writing from 8 Gascony Avenue, Kilburn, London, he begins by stating that he himself is “quite indifferent to the question, whether the introduction of the Triennial

9 Oko, Schechter, xi, xvi.

10 Alexander Marx, “Solomon Schechter”, in his *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1944), 390, repr. in his *Essays in Jewish Biography* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 245.

11 Mel Scult, “Schechter’s Seminary”, in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 2 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), vol. 1, 65.

Cycle of Reading the Law in the Berkeley Street Synagogue ought to be considered as a most orthodox act, or only fairly orthodox or not orthodox at all". He wishes merely to clarify the historical situation that they did read according to a Triennial Cycle in Palestine and that the reference in Bavli, *Megillah* 29a, undoubtedly testifies to this. Schechter cites numerous medieval sources and modern scholars and argues that the custom was not superseded until the end of the twelfth century, as indicated by the reports of Benjamin of Tudela in the mid-twelfth century. He concludes: "I hope that I have placed beyond doubt the reality of the Triennial Cycle in Palestine. I should perhaps add that some writers believe that the Law was read in Palestine once in three-and-a-half years, or twice during each Sabbath of Years (שמיטה)." ¹² Schechter's scholarly assessment is remarkably sound except that we now know from Genizah sources that the custom continued into the thirteenth century. He takes no side in the matter of practical liturgical revision.

Towards the end of that same year, 1888, Schechter again involved himself in a liturgical jousting match, on that occasion in connection with the use of English in the Orthodox synagogal service. The Orthodox cleric Simeon Singer, who is famous for his work on the new "authorised daily prayer-book" that was published in 1890 with the sanction of Acting Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, was on the more progressive side of modern Orthodoxy and planned to introduce, among other innovations, translations from the English Bible into his services. Schechter was not greatly enamoured of Anglo-Jewish ministers of religion but in this instance he defended Singer's liturgical plan in the *Jewish Standard* and a few years later jointly edited with him some Talmudic Genizah fragments in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. ¹³ In reviewing Siegmund Maybaum's German book on Jewish homiletics in the *Jewish Chronicle* of two years later, he pointed to the multifunctional purpose of the synagogue and the value of the sermon as edification, thus demonstrating that he was not in favour of the narrower notion of the synagogue being used exclusively for statutory, communal prayers. ¹⁴

As will already have been appreciated, the *Jewish Chronicle* in Schechter's

¹² Solomon Schechter, letter, *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, JC), 13 Jan. 1888, p. 6.

¹³ Solomon Schechter, letter, *Jewish Standard*, 2 Nov. 1888, p. 8; *Talmudical Fragments in the Bodleian Library*, ed. Solomon Schechter and Simeon Singer (Cambridge University Press, 1896).

¹⁴ Solomon Schechter, 'Jewish Homiletics', review of Siegmund Maybaum's *Jüdische Homiletik*, JC, 15 Aug. 1890, p. 11.

day was committed to including scholarly discussions in its coverage and Schechter used its columns in 1891 for an essay entitled "The Praying Woman: A Sketch". He began with references to the wife of Noah, as well as to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and Miriam, and continued through Jewish history until nineteenth-century Eastern Europe.¹⁵ When he published his first collection of essays in 1896, Schechter, as already noted by Oko, omitted these biblical personalities, made some minor alterations in the wording, and altered the title to "Woman in Temple and Synagogue".¹⁶ By that time, he was apparently anxious to express a historical interest in institutional, rather than only personal matters. It was therefore no longer simply a matter of listing the spiritual activities of pious women but also stressing the role they played in public worship, as in the Temple and the synagogue. He was thus one of the first critical scholars to pay attention to the liturgical role of Jewish women within the development of Judaism. This was well appreciated by a writer in the *Expository Times* who expressed himself in most enthusiastic terms:

But the woman of devotion, so far at least as Judaism is concerned, it has been left to this century to discover. No writer, until Mr. Schechter came, sang her praises or even recognised her presence. There were times in the history of both the Temple and of the Synagogue when she held a position of some importance. Yet, until Mr. Schechter published his learned *Studies in Judaism*, of which some notice has already been taken, no attempt had ever been made to give, even in outline, the history of woman's relation to public worship.¹⁷

Manuscript descriptions

Schechter followed his Cambridge predecessor, Schiller-Szinessy, in tackling the scientific description of the Hebrew manuscripts at Cambridge University Library but, like him, failed to achieve anything approaching a completion of this mammoth task. Of special interest in this present context is the manner in which he dealt with two liturgical manuscripts in a series of articles entitled "Notes on Hebrew Mss in the University Library at Cambridge" that he published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, then edited in London by his close associates, Israel Abrahams and Claude Montefiore.

The first of these, Add. 434.1, is the liturgical commentary of Judah b. Yaqar whom Schechter correctly identifies as the teacher of Nahmanides

15 Solomon Schechter, "The Praying Woman: A Sketch", *JC*, 13 Feb. 1891, pp. 18–19.

16 Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1896), 313–25.

17 *Expository Times* 8 (1896–97): 1–3.

(Moses b. Nahman). Schechter provides the text and translation of comments made in the manuscript on part of the *musaf amidah* (additional service) for festivals in order to point out what the author regards as the sources of the rabbinic prayers:

We have here the programme of the author, who thinks that the prayers, though introduced by the Men of the Great Synagogue, are nevertheless based not only on the Scriptures, but influenced also by the Aggadoth and the Midrashim. And these, especially Midrash Tehillim, the Tanchuma, the Pesikta Rabbathi (under מתן תורה), and the chapters of R. Eliezer, are the authorities to which he appeals often in his explanations of the prayers [that is, throughout the Ms.].

As well as noting the authorities cited in the manuscript, Schechter also mentions the use of mystical ideas but adds his own assessment: “Occasionally, he sees also in the prayers references and hints to the Sephiroth. But in general his interpretation is *sober and sound* [my emphasis], founded on both Talmudim and the Midrashim”. Schechter reports that the author denies that the evening service implies that God carries away the sun each evening to a distant place (גולל אור מפני השך), simply that He makes day and night into distinct entities. He also cites without translation examples of the rites followed and points out that they are parallel to the Spanish and French customs. He also argues, however, that there are characteristics that could indicate that the work reflects some of the traditions of Provence and northern France. What we have here, for the first time in this examination of Schechter’s approaches to Jewish liturgy, is a clear indication of the critical and historical researcher at work. Schechter followed his predecessor, Schiller-Szinessy, in referring to the kabbalistic content of the work and in characterizing the author’s overall approach as “sober”. His own description, on the other hand, expanded considerably on what Schiller-Szinessy had noted in his unpublished catalogue of some decades earlier.¹⁸

The second liturgical manuscript, Dd.5.38, contains the *Sefer Ha-Minhagot*, correctly assigned by Schechter to Asher b. Saul of Lunel and not Asher b. Meshullam, as supported by S. J. Halberstamm. Schechter dates the work to the early thirteenth century since Maimonides is the

¹⁸ Solomon Schechter, “Notes on Hebrew Mss in the University Library at Cambridge”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* (hereafter, JQR) 4 (1892): 245–55. See Stefan C. Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 269; Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy’s handwritten catalogue of manuscripts, Cambridge, University Library, Or.1119, fols. 165–166.

latest rabbinic luminary to be noted. Schechter quotes, in Hebrew without translation, from the introduction; lists in Hebrew the various *minhagim* (religious customs) that he finds interesting; and then cites, also in Hebrew, matters concerning statutory prayers. He then goes on to note the contents in English with details of the pagination, and provides a list of authorities mentioned in the work. Schechter offers no more than a minimal physical description. He does, however, pay special attention to matters of historical interest. One of these concerns the custom of praying the evening service before nightfall. Another deals with what Asher b. Saul has to say on the topic of head-covering: ונראה בעיני שהמנהג שלנו שאין אנן מברכים [עוטר ישראל בתפארה] משום דאין כל ישראל מכסין ראשיהן והולכין בגלוי ראש (in my translation: "It seems to me that our custom of omitting the benediction 'Who crowns Israel with glory' at the beginning of the daily morning service reflects the fact that not all Jews cover their head but walk around bareheaded"). While Schechter has followed Schiller-Szinessy's unpublished catalogue in naming the scribe and listing the customs included in the manuscript, he has limited the number of the latter that he cites. While Schiller-Szinessy summarized in English many of the customs, Schechter transcribed the original Hebrew text relating to only a selection of them, though sometimes at considerable length. His comments concerning the authorities cited in the manuscript were also more soundly based.¹⁹

A visit to Rome

A concern for what we would today regard as items of sociological and phenomenological significance within the broader liturgical context, rather than a commitment to the strict technicalities of scholarship relating to the historical development of liturgical rites, emerges from Schechter's comments on a visit to Rome in 1893. This was part of his research project to examine some Hebrew manuscripts in Italy that was funded by the University of Cambridge. He reported in detail on some aspects of his trip to Rome in the *Jewish Chronicle*. On noticing on the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome an inscription with an Isaianic verse (Isaiah 65:2–3) accompanied by the Latin words *Indulgentia plenaria quotidiana perpetua pro vivis et defunctis* ("Perpetual everyday plenary

19 Solomon Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew Mss in the University Library at Cambridge", *JQR* 5 (1893): 18–23, 350–51. See Reif, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 275–6, and Schiller-Szinessy's handwritten catalogue of manuscripts, Or.1116, fols. 98–99.

indulgence on every occasion for the living and the dead”), Schechter was inspired to think about the topic of prayers for the dead and commented: “Theologians who like to quarrel most about things they can know least, have for ages discussed the question, whether prayers for the dead are of any use; here the matter is decided by a simple advertisement.” He goes on to consider the idea of bringing comfort and happiness to those in the after-life and concludes that such a “thought is very consoling indeed, and it is not to be wondered at, that the Roman Synagogue could not entirely withstand its temptations and introduced into the offering-blessing after one is called up to the Torah, the words: ‘To the advancing of the soul of the departed’”. For Schechter the facts demonstrate “clearly that there was some Catholic influence at work”. Here Schechter is taking what he would have regarded as a modern and not a medieval attitude to relations between the dead and the living.²⁰

His next remarks relate to the use of the same building for more than one Jewish liturgical rite. He was impressed by the fact that the building in the Ghetto to which he had been alluding comprised four prayer-houses, devoted to Sephardi and Italian rites. As Schechter writes, it “speaks highly in favour of Roman Judaism, that they did not consider ritual differences of such importance, as to prevent them from forming one community for all charitable and congregational purposes”. Having noted the existence in Verona and Modena of congregations that retained the Ashkenazi rite that they had brought with them from more northern climes, he explains that their pronunciation of Hebrew is not, however, Ashkenazi but Sephardi. He expresses the wish that such an example should be followed in his own communities, presumably in Anglo-Jewry. Once again, he is almost a hundred years ahead of current practices in modern Ashkenazi orthodoxy. He goes on to clarify his views about this:

Not that I think for a moment that the Sephardic pronunciation is more correct than others. Each system has its own mistakes and corruptions; and it is more than probable that the prophet Isaiah, or even the author of *Koheleth*, would be as little able to follow the prayers in Bevis Marks [the main Sephardi synagogue in contemporary London] as in Duke’s Place [its Ashkenazi equivalent]. But since the non-Jewish scientific world has, though only by pure accident, accepted the Portuguese way of reading the Hebrew, I should like to see this imagined superiority of *Baruch* over

20 Solomon Schechter, “A Visit to Rome”, *JC*, 20 Oct. 1893, p. 10.

Boruch at last disappear, by pronouncing the *Kamets* a instead of o and accepting similar little changes, which are of no real importance to us.²¹

Schechter was critical of the lack of decorum in the synagogues he visited and saw this as a parallel to what he had experienced in Hasidic gatherings for prayer. He reported the constant movements of the congregants and the departure of most of them after the Torah reading, which he described as “not a very delightful sight”. This he saw as another influence of Italian Catholicism. Lest his readers draw one-sided conclusions from his remarks, he concludes his paragraph with a more balanced assessment concerning such synagogal behaviour: “A minus of decorum does not always mean a plus of devotion; just as little as respectability and stiffness are not to be taken a signs of real edification.”²² We are here encountering the fusion in the Jewish scholar of a respect for order with a love of true piety.

Schechter was impressed by the acceptance in an Orthodox synagogue of the minor reform of calling congregants to the reading of the Torah by simple reference to their status as priest, Levite or Israelite, or by the number of the section within the lectionary being used. Again, he hoped it would not be regarded as a heresy if he appealed to his own Anglo-Jewish communities to adopt this practice. The special Hebrew titles meaning “rabbi”, “teacher”, or “scholar” were inappropriate since nobody was properly qualified to assess their validity in each personal case. Evidently drawing upon his Cambridge University experience, he thought that no synagogal council had a proper “Board of Examination” to enable its members to decide the correct levels of such honorific titles, nor would those called to the Torah wish to be subjected to such a test of their religious or intellectual standing. His advice is that “the wisest course therefore would be to give up titles altogether, calling up all people alike in the way indicated.”²³

The tensions between Schechter's intellectual head and his religious heart are again to the fore in the remarks that he makes about the special vestments (“canonicals”) worn by the Jewish clergy in Rome. He points to the innovative nature of this practice and how it is despised by the “old orthodox rabbis” but he also mitigates this by explaining it as a “pardonable vanity”. He cannot then resist waxing a little facetious by

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

23 *Ibid.*

stressing the generosity of the rabbi in also allowing the beadle to have his own ecclesiastical uniform:

This vanity is greatly redeemed by the fact, that the preacher does not grudge his uniform to his humbler brother, the beadle, who is in most cases to be discerned from the officiating ministry only by the brass-plate on his breast, on which the word שמש [shamash, “beadle”] is engraved. Considering the great confusion arising by the meaningless Reverend and the universal white necktie, such a label, indicating the proper office of the bearer, might, perhaps, prove as useful among us, as it is among the Jews of Rome.²⁴

As apologete

The focus of my remarks may now be switched from modern Rome to medieval England and Germany. In 1894 Schechter chose to publish an edition and translation of an elegy (*qinah*) written at the end of the twelfth century by Menahem b. Jacob, who died in Worms in 1203.²⁵ The poet's theme was the martyrdom of many Jews in the violent attacks made on them in Boppard (in the Koblenz area of Germany) in 1179 and in York in 1190. Since the poem had previously been noted by Leopold Zunz and published by Abraham Berliner, Schechter's motivation could not have been exclusively scholastic and must also have had some element of polemic within it. He does carefully collate the readings of the Vatican manuscript with those of Rome, Turin, and Cambridge, but also chooses to make two major points that may be defined as belonging to the social and theological spheres rather than those of strictly textual scholarship. The first relates to the role of women in this act of martyrdom. Schechter was deeply moved “by the fact that the women proved themselves even more heroic than the men, and at many a critical moment it was the despairing courage and the tender conscience of woman which decided in favour of martyrdom.”²⁶ The second is obviously a polemical response to those who might regard the poet's expressions of deep resentment and his call for divine revenge as a spiritually inferior response that lacks the theological nobility of a statement of forgiveness. Solomon Schechter the Cambridge

24 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

25 Solomon Schechter, “A Hebrew Elegy”, *Transactions* 1 (1893–94): 8–14. The elegy was later included in *The Authorised Kinot for the Ninth of Av*, trans. and annot. A. Rosenfeld (London: C. Labworth & Co, 1965), pp. 171–2.

26 Schechter, “Hebrew Elegy”, p. 10. See also Ephraim Kanarfogel, “Solomon Schechter and Medieval European Rabbinic Literature”, p. 31 above.

scholar here cedes place to Rav Shneur Zalman Schechter the Jew and uses a liturgical topic to offer a powerful riposte to such a criticism of the poet:

The last three Stanzas are devoted to a prayer for the redemption of Israel, and implore the revenge of God upon the enemies of His people.

With regard to this last feature in the poem, I should like to remark that all of us, I am sure, appreciate the noble sentiment expressed in the words: "Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But on the other hand, I venture to think, that such a declaration from the lips of a man who is not on the point of suffering himself, but is the witness or historian of the sufferings of others when the mob has attacked his home, murdered his wife and children, tortured his friends, plundered his sanctuaries, and cast his holy books into the fire – the man, I venture to think, who under such circumstances should suppress his natural sentiments of resentment, would prove himself neither divine nor super-human, but simply inhuman. Rabbi Menahem was no less a good Jew when he wrote this elegy, than Milton was a good Christian when he composed the famous sonnet, "On the late Massacre in Piedmont" [which opens with the lines 'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones/ Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold']; but to both Jew and Protestant these outpourings of great souls in ages long past, have but a literary interest. If they suggest anything in the present, it is to thank God for the tolerance of our own days.²⁷

The Cairo Genizah

Manuscript fragments had of course come to Cambridge from Cairo and from Jerusalem in the early 1890s, but it has to be acknowledged that Schechter was too busy with more complete codices and with his other research, his teaching, and the composition of his more popular essays, to give serious attention to what were at first glance barely legible scraps. The story of how this state of affairs changed and how much of the remainder of his scholarly activity was centred on the literary treasures that he brought to Cambridge from the Cairo Genizah is too well-known to bear repeating here.²⁸ It is, however, of concern to the present topic to notice how aware Schechter was of the importance of his Genizah discoveries for the history of Jewish liturgy. He characterized the liturgical finds as witnesses to the oldest rabbinic prayer texts, yet documented and drew attention to the huge number of liturgical poems that revealed "a whole

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ For details, see Reif, *Jewish Archive from Old Cairo*, esp. 70–72.

series of latter-day psalmists hitherto unknown.”²⁹ What is more, he also published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* some Genizah fragments of liturgy and his articles on these items are relevant to our assessment of him as a liturgist.

Schechter was apparently in a great rush to publish the first of these since his article appeared only about a year after his return “with the spoils of Egypt” and was no more than a provisional treatment of an ‘amidah text. He did not assign classmarks to the fragments but we now know them as T-S K27.33A and 33B, and T-S K27.18. Regarding the script and the content he states that they are “all written in very ancient hands . . . [and] represent as it seems [my emphasis] portions of the liturgy in their oldest form.” He cites the texts in Hebrew without translation and relates them to Yerushalmi and Sifre, referring only once in six crowded pages to a “Palestinian origin” for one of the *berakhot* (benedictions). In this respect, his approach is similar to that of Ismar Elbogen who, even ten years later, was not yet stressing the provenance of such items in the medieval land of Israel. Schechter summarizes: “There are also, as will be seen, many other peculiar rites in this Fragment, but those pointed out will suffice to show the early date of the fragment, and its importance for the study of the liturgy.”³⁰ It seems then that although he had the scholarly capacity to give closer attention to these liturgical fragments, he chose to be content for the moment with a brief survey and to leave the detailed analysis to a later date, a date that, sadly, never came.

It was in a memorial volume for David Kaufmann that Schechter chose to reveal another remarkable piece of liturgical evidence, subsequently given the classmark T-S 6H6.6. This time it was a version of the *qaddish* that had some Hebrew in places where Aramaic is the norm, and that looked forward to the arrival of the messianic age in the lifetimes not just of those ordinary worshippers in the synagogue but specifically of three distinguished rabbinic leaders. As well as pointing out parallels to this latter custom, Schechter also provides a transcription of the text, without translation or annotation.³¹ He apologized that he could not at that time expand on his treatment, but added at the proof stage a reference

29 Solomon Schechter, “A Hoard of Hebrew Manuscripts”, *The Times* (London), 3 Aug. 1897, repr. in his collected essays, *Studies in Judaism*, 2nd series (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society of America, and London: A. and C. Black, 1908), pp. 1–11.

30 Solomon Schechter, “Genizah Fragments: Liturgy”, *JQR* 10 (1898): 654–9.

31 Solomon Schechter, “Nushah Ba-Qaddish”, in *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, ed. M. Brann and F. Rosenthal (Breslau: Schles. [inger], 1900), 52–4 (= i, ii, iii).

to another fragment as an additional *qaddish* text with references to other rabbinic leaders, later identified by my revered teacher, Naphtali Wieder, as T-S 10H2.6.³² Given the attention accorded in subsequent years to the central significance of both fragments for the reconstruction of the rite of the land of Israel in pre-Crusader times, and its retention for some two centuries by refugees from the Holy Land living in Egypt, it is somewhat surprising to note that no mention is made here by Schechter of any Palestinian provenance.

Another article published by Schechter in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* also has a connection with the Genizah since it deals with the book of Ben Sira, the Hebrew text of which has been reconstructed largely on the basis of Genizah discoveries. In addition, the topic is related to the broader subject of liturgy since it concerns the relationship of Ben Sira to the *piyyutim* (Jewish liturgical poems) of the late talmudic and post-talmudic periods. Schechter argues strongly that the authors of the latter compositions are not totally innovative since the genre is already to be found in Ben Sira. He points to talmudic and midrashic texts that presuppose the existence of such poets while acknowledging that their work has effectively been lost. He suggests that there is sufficient evidence in Ben Sira of lyrical style and allusive content to trace the earliest form of liturgical poetry to that work of the second century BCE.³³ Once again, Schechter anticipated the work of more recent scholars. A number of them have described the verses of Ben Sira within the broader history of Jewish poetry and have made it clear that further research is required in establishing the precise link between Ben Sira and the *payyotanim* (composers of liturgical poetry).³⁴

On the synagogal sermon

Schechter returns to the history of the Jewish sermon in one of his later essays. He suggests that Leopold Zunz's *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* (Berlin, 1832) needs a revision in the light of the

32 Naphtali Wieder, *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and the West: A Collection of Essays*, 2 vols. (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998), vol. 1, 213.

33 Solomon Schechter, "The Hebrew Text of Ben Sira", *JQR* 12 (1900): 266–8.

34 See e.g. the note by Israel Abrahams, "Ben Sira as a Source of Hymnology", *JC*, 13 Feb. 1903, pp. 26–7; B. Hrushovski, "Hebrew Prosody", in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 13 (1972), 1195–1239; Eric D. Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Jenny R. Labendz, "The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature", *AJS Review* 30, no. 2 (2006): 347–92. I am indebted to my friend Dr Jeremy Corley for his helpful advice about the current state of scholarship in this connection.

latest manuscript discoveries, and that most of the work has to do with the use of *aggadah* as a source of Jewish tradition. Zunz's primary purpose was to demonstrate the sound Jewish pedigree of a synagogal sermon in the vernacular, but Schechter noted that he had expanded this almost beyond recognition. Schechter distinguished between objection to the sermon as such and dissatisfaction with its new centrality in modern Jewish worship. This new centrality meant "that it was he [the preacher] and not He [God] who was the centre of attraction". The content might also raise objection since it did not always tally with the message of traditional Judaism.³⁵ So here we see that the scholarly study of synagogal worship was a valid activity for Schechter, but that he had qualms about its being transformed into a justification for radical liturgical adjustment.

Conclusions

As a scholar of Jewish liturgy, Schechter adopted the positive-historical approach and displayed an erudite enthusiasm for manuscript discovery and analysis. Although he appears to have had the intention of writing at length and in detail on the history of the prayers, in the event his contributions to scholarship in this domain of Judaic studies was more limited. He reported novel discoveries in brief terms and never found (or devoted?) the time necessary for intense analysis. Either by force of circumstance or by deep-seated preference, he offered the world of learning broader overviews of numerous aspects of Jewish worship rather than their detailed examination. As an intellectual participant in Jewish worship, Schechter criticized formality but respected good order. He expressed impatience with approaches that were not strictly rational but appreciated that spirituality needed the heart as well as the mind. He welcomed minor adjustments in synagogal rites and activities, but only as long as those amended rites and activities continued to reflect a love of tradition. He was many decades ahead of his time in the proposals he made for Orthodox Jewish worship with regard to women, Hebrew pronunciation, decorum, Torah reading, and sermons. As an observant Jew, he expressed himself powerfully with regard to what constituted high levels of morality and spirituality, sounded a dismissive tone towards theologians, did not reject the need for an apologetic approach to some challenges, and displayed a sharp sense of humour, regardless of the

35 Solomon Schechter, "The Beginnings of Jewish Wissenschaft", in his *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915), pp. 173–93.

seriousness of the subject. In sum, I am relieved to report that I have now found little in his specific approach to liturgy that does not match what I wrote in my general assessment of him a dozen years ago.

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