

# Dialectic of Separation

Judaism and Philosophy in the Work  
of Salomon Munk

**Perspectives in Jewish Intellectual Life**

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Judaism and Philosophy in  
the Work of Salomon Munk

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# Acknowledgements

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Reading Salomon Munk's letters and the biographical notes written by his contemporaries, one is struck by the number of friends, teachers, and colleagues with whom he shared his discoveries and ideas. According to Heinrich Heine, it was precisely this generosity in sharing his research, and his propensity for dialogue—both with the contemporary scientific and philosophical community and with the authors of the past, whom he considered a living part of that community—that distinguished Munk within the landscape of mid-nineteenth-century European scholarship. This book, which provides a bridge over which to enter into dialogue with this rarely studied yet (in scholarly circles) well-known philosopher, philologist, and historian of philosophy, is indebted to numerous scholars who guided me in my research, and to various public and private institutions.

It was a grant from the Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center in Jerusalem that first allowed me to embark on my research, which began with the discovery of Munk's letters, previously considered lost. I am grateful to the librarians and archivists of the National Library in Jerusalem—in particular, Stephan Litt and Paul Maurer, who guided me down the dark corridors of unexplored collections and helped me decipher barely legible documents, aiding me not just with materials but with their knowledge and expertise. I also wish to thank the Leo Baeck Institute in Jerusalem for granting me access to documents not yet available to the public. It was in Jerusalem that I met many of the people who, through their knowledge of languages and their philological sensibility, opened up for me the intellectual worlds evoked in this book. Many thanks to my friend, the philologist Evelyn Burckhardt, for her advice, and to Thomas Hünefeldt.

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The notion that any inquiry into the history of philosophy is necessarily also a philosophical inquiry is one of the underlying themes of this book. In documenting the erudition of its protagonist, *Dialectic of Separation* touches on various disciplines, investigating the origins and questioning the validity of the accepted limits of each. I wish to thank all those scholars who—though their areas of expertise often lay elsewhere—offered to discuss and share their research with me. Special thanks to Kathrin König-Pralong and the ERC MEMOPHI project of the University of Freiburg, which granted me the privilege of presenting my research in its seminars and final conference—“Outsiders” and “Forerunners”: Modern Reason and Historiographical Births of Medieval Philosophy—which in turn offered me an important opportunity to reflect on the relationship between historiography, medieval philosophy, and the concept of cultural transfer.

I am happy to have had the privilege of meeting Steven Harvey of Bar-Ilan University, and the pleasure of discussing Munk in the graduate seminar organized by my colleague George Kohler. Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues and friends at the Institute of Jewish Studies in Halle and in Hamburg, especially Giuseppe Veltri, who accompanied the genesis and development of this project. Last, but not least, special thanks to Irene Kajon and the Philosophy Department of the Sapienza University of Rome, where I studied and worked, and to Ismar Schorsch and Gad Freudenthal for their unwavering support and valuable comments and suggestions.

Rome, July 13, 2016



# Introduction

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*Es gibt keine philosophie-geschichtliche Untersuchung, die nicht zugleich eine philosophische Untersuchung wäre.*

—Leo Strauss<sup>1</sup>

Leo Strauss's claim that any research in the realm of the history of philosophy is also a philosophical inquiry is relevant also to the work of the German Jewish philologist, Orientalist, and historian of Jewish philosophy Salomon Munk. Though largely unknown today outside scholarly circles, Munk's name—which was closely bound to the Science of Judaism, the movement responsible for the emergence of Jewish Studies as an independent field of academic study during the nineteenth century—is inseparable from the history of Jewish philosophy and from the discussion surrounding the very meaning of that expression. It is therefore necessary to briefly examine the history of the term we now use to describe this area of research in order to better evaluate the importance of Munk's contribution and to shed some light on his pioneering scholarship.

Until the nineteenth century, the term “Jewish philosophy” was used primarily by Christian Hebraists with reference to Jewish theology and mysticism. The first scholar to employ it in a more specifically philosophical context was the great eighteenth-century historian of the German

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss's comment (in his essay “Der Streit der Alten und der Neueren in der Philosophie des Judentums”) refers to Julius Guttmann, *Philosophie des Judentums*; see Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften: Philosophie und Gesetz-Frühe Schriften* (Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 1997), 29.

Enlightenment Jacob Brucker,<sup>2</sup> who in his *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (1742) used the term “Jewish philosophy” to refer to two different aspects of the Jewish tradition, distinguishing between a “philosophia Iudeorum exoterica” and a “philosophia Iudeorum esoterica,” by which he meant the Kabbalah. Brucker described the Kabbalah as “a kind of enthusiastic philosophy ... which sprung from the Alexandrian schools, and mixed Oriental, Egyptian, Pythagoric and Platonic notions with the simple doctrine of the Hebrew Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> Although Brucker recognized the existence of a philosophical strain within the Jewish tradition—albeit only in the eleventh century, when, according to him, Aristotle’s doctrine of morals began to gain recognition in Jewish circles in the wake of the Jewish reception of Peripatetic doctrine—he stopped short of according Jewish philosophical authors any measure of originality.

Although Brucker—a rigorous Protestant who had a special interest in emphasizing the influence of non-Catholic traditions on medieval philosophy—initiated the use of the term “Jewish philosophy” to refer to a specific philosophical context (as opposed to theology and mysticism), his successors typically used it a negative way, denying its originality and relevance for the history of philosophy. It was in response to this belittling use of the term “Jewish philosophy” by Brucker’s successors until Hegel that Munk first adopted it to underscore the importance of the Jewish philosophers who, in the Middle Ages, had sought to create an original (though admittedly precarious) synthesis between Judaism and philosophy—a synthesis Munk considered nearly impossible, given his definition of philosophy itself as a rational current of thought born in Greece, extraneous to Jewish religious tradition and irreconcilable with Mosaic doctrine. Although this concept of Jewish philosophy is severely limited when viewed in the context of our present-day debate, given that it is partly founded on clichés typical of the very scholars against whom Munk himself had polemicized, it nevertheless exerted a profound influence on the development of a modern history of Jewish philosophy. In general,

2 Catherine König-Pralong, *Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne: De Pierre Bayle à Ernest Renan* (Paris: Vrin, 2016), 20.

3 William Enfield, *The History of Philosophy from the Earliest Periods: Drawn Up from Brucker’s Historia Critica Philosophiae* (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1837), 402.

Munk's work can be said to have contributed to a new awareness, within modern philosophical historiography, of the importance of Jewish philosophy and its close link to Arabic and Islamic philosophy.

For Munk, Jewish philosophy was inseparably linked to the history of the Mediterranean—more precisely, a particular corner of the Mediterranean: Andalusia and the city of Cordoba, the heart of Muslim Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, where the three monotheistic religions had managed to coexist over a relatively long period of time. Although considered a romantic fantasy by some, many contemporary historians, including Fernand Braudel and David Abulafia,<sup>4</sup> see this ideal image of Andalusia as the home of coexisting cultures and ethnic groups as grounded in fact and worthy of further exploration.

The ideal of religious coexistence had particular significance for Salomon Munk, a German Jew influenced by the ideals of the Science of Judaism, the movement founded in 1819 by Leopold Zunz, and the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden.<sup>5</sup> The Verein's attempt to affirm the idea of an emancipated Judaism based on universalism came at a time in which the Prussian government's restrictions on Jews threatened to undermine the initial achievements of Jewish emancipation. The Verein was the first public expression of the Science of Judaism, which strove for the advancement of the scientific (primarily philological and historical) study of the Jewish tradition, with the aim of establishing Jewish studies as an academic discipline in German and other European universities. It was in this context that a select group of Jewish scholars, who possessed a firm knowledge of Arabic, were drawn to study the influence of the philosophical tradition on medieval Jewish authors, in particular those of the Golden Age of Judaism in Spain.<sup>6</sup> Among these scholars was Salomon Munk.

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4 David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Penguin, 2014), 783.

5 On the history of the foundation of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, see Ismar Schorsch, *Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 323.

6 On the link between the origin of the Science of Judaism and the study of Iberian Sephardic Jewry, see Carsten Schapkow, *Role Model and Countermodel: The Golden Age of Iberian Jewry and German Jewish Culture during the Era of Emancipation* (London: Lexington, 2016), 91–139.

In establishing the basis for the future study of Jewish philosophy as a central moment in the general history of philosophy, Munk made a fundamental contribution to the history of Jewish and Arabic philosophy that parallels the work of Zunz and Moritz Steinschneider in the realm of “Jewish literature” and that of Isaak Marcus Jost and Heinrich Graetz in the field of “Jewish history.”<sup>7</sup>

Munk eventually chose to flee the restrictive, anti-Jewish atmosphere of Prussia to settle in Paris, where he dedicated himself to the study of Oriental languages—studies that would lead him to discover, collect, and analyze the unpublished texts of medieval Arabic thought. Munk, as I will show in detail, worked closely with other German-Jewish scholars who sought, over the course of the nineteenth century, to bring back to life the texts of the Andalusian Judeo-Arabic tradition<sup>8</sup> and assert the study of Jewish sources, thought, and history as an integral and essential part of the European university curriculum. Although this enterprise was not always successful, and although it is still difficult, even today, to evaluate their methods and goals, one thing is clear: Munk’s merit was that of having openly challenged the Orientalists and historians of philosophy of his time with his studies, which showed the interconnectedness of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thought during the Middle Ages.

The aim of this book is to reconstruct the life of this extraordinary scholar, which played out among the world of his German-Jewish origins, his early studies in Berlin, and the most prestigious French academic institutions, and to examine his oeuvre, which spans the most diverse academic disciplines, from philology and linguistics through Oriental languages to philosophy and the history of philosophy, thereby underscoring

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7 The Science of Judaism, as represented by Munk’s teachers and friends Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger, and Eduard Gans, asserted the idea of a Judaism that could be critically analyzed in all its aspects and considered a subject of academic study, thereby “legitimizing” the survival of Jewish life in the modern world. The nineteenth century saw a significant increase in the scope of Jewish scholarship; no longer limited to the traditional study of the Law, the new discipline came to embrace all manifestations of Jewish life and history, including the manifold influence of Islamic culture on Judaism. This “new science,” which shaped the definition of the nascent field of Jewish studies, emphasized history and philology while focusing on the history of Jews under Islam.

8 Schapkow, *Role Model and Countermodel*, 305.

the originality of his scholarship. The impetus for such a reevaluation and contextualization (which in turn inspired an analysis of Munk's thought as a historian of philosophy) came from my discovery, in the archives of the National Library in Jerusalem, of a collection of letters<sup>9</sup> written by Munk to his family and colleagues between 1827 and 1867.

For Munk as for his fellow scholars, correspondence represented a way of sharing scientific knowledge, information, political ideas, and new thoughts; many of these letters amount to miniature treatises on a broad range of topics relevant to our discussion, including Judaism, philology, and philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Upon Munk's death in 1867, his family donated his letters, along with the rest of his estate, to the Theological Seminary of Breslau. Forty-four of these letters were published in 1899 by Marcus Brann;<sup>11</sup> the rest of Munk's estate disappeared after the seminary was shut down by the Nazis in 1938, and it was until recently presumed lost. In 2009, the catalogue of the National Library archives contained references to only a handful of letters written by Munk to his mother in Glogau, while a significant number of other, uncatalogued letters lay "hidden" among other papers on the shelves of the Marcus Brann Archive in Jerusalem.

The extant literature on Munk is very scarce.<sup>12</sup> The only biography of the scholar we possess was written more than a century ago by Munk's

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9 This discovery owes much to research carried out by Michel Espagne in the archives of the Warsaw and Jerusalem libraries. Already in 1985, Espagne—who, together with Michael Werner, had initiated the study of cultural transfer between France and Germany—had inquired as to the whereabouts of the letters of Munk's estate, at that time considered lost. The National Library in Jerusalem responded with copies of a handful of letters by Munk, noting that these were the only documents from Munk's estate contained in the catalogue. Only after my discovery was the extant part of Munk's correspondence finally catalogued in the National Library's Marcus Brann Archive.

10 Asher Salah, "Steinschneider and Italy," in *Studies on Steinschneider: Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal (Boston-Leiden: Brill, 2012), 411.

11 Marcus Brann, "Aus Salomon Munk's nachgelassenen Briefen," *Jahrbuch für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* 2 (1899): 148–203.

12 Moïse Schwab, *Salomon Munk, membre de l'Institut, professeur au Collège de France: Sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1900); Brann, "Aus Salomon Munk's nachgelassenen Briefen."

assistant in Paris, Moïse Schwab,<sup>13</sup> who drew primarily on his personal acquaintance with Munk and on documents from the latter's *Nachlass* in Breslau, which was lost during World War II. Neither this biography nor any of the various biographical sketches written by Munk's contemporaries was ever amended or republished.<sup>14</sup> This helps explain why Munk has remained all but forgotten until the present day, and why the nature and import of his thought were never critically evaluated. Today, following the rediscovery of a part of the documents that had been presumed lost, it has become urgent and necessary to renew our study of this unique figure. It is just such a critical analysis of Munk's oeuvre and philosophical approach, alongside an examination of the entire spectrum of philosophical tendencies that converge in his work, that is the aim of this book.

In the single existing biography of Munk, published in 1900, Munk's former secretary, Schwab, notes that in order to fully appreciate the significance of Munk's oeuvre, it is necessary to consult a wide range of secondary sources, in addition to Munk's own writings.<sup>15</sup> The present book represents the first attempt at such a comprehensive analysis, integrating information provided by Schwab with new material from the National Library and Leo Baeck archives in Jerusalem and examining the relationship between Munk's work and the scholarly world around him.<sup>16</sup> The discovery of Munk's letters served as an important point of departure for

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13 David Sidersky, *Moïse Schwab: Sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris: Imprimerie F. Deshayes, 1919), 17.

14 Samuel Modlinger, *Reminiscenz an Munk oder über den Wert des Orientalismus für die Kulturgeschichte: Vortrag, gehalten im "Verein für Bildung und Geselligkeit" zu Lemberg* (Lemberg: Ossolinski, 1867), 5–32; Adolph Jellinek, *Gedächtnissrede auf den verewigten Herrn Salomon Munk* (Wien: Herzfeld & Bauer, 1867); Leopold Löw, "Salomon Munk (1803–1867)," *Ben Chananja* 10 (1867): 454ff.; George Alexander Kohut, *Solomon Munk: An Appreciation Written on the Occasion of his Centenary, April 29th, 1902* (New York, 1902); Brann, "Aus Salomon Munk's nachgelassenen Briefen."

15 Schwab, *Salomon Munk*, 8–236. This biography, while offering a basis for further research on Munk's life and work, remains a partial and unsystematic reconstruction based on Schwab's personal acquaintance with Munk and on the documents to which he had access as Munk's secretary.

16 Additional work in both public and private archives will be necessary before we can fully reconstruct Munk's correspondence with his fellow German scholars and colleagues in France.

my work. Using these letters, which I analyzed together with the fragments published by Schwab, I was able to explore Munk's scholarship in the context of a broader historical and biographical reconstruction, and to identify various themes and aspects of his oeuvre that, as soon became clear, were organically intertwined.

It is this biographical reconstruction, based primarily on Munk's unpublished letters and Schwab's biography, that forms the subject of the first chapter of this book. Chapter 1, "Salomon Munk (1803–1867): His Life and Work," deals with the early stages of Munk's career and the development of his approach to a scientific study of Judaism, and it shows how Munk's approach emerged against the dual backdrop of German new philology (which would become central in German universities in the nineteenth century, due in large part to the work of figures like August Böckh, Franz Bopp, and Georg Freytag), on the one hand, and French Oriental studies (spearheaded by Sylvestre de Sacy), on the other hand.

In Chapter 2, "Salomon Munk and the Problem of Jewish Philosophy," I examine Munk's study of medieval Jewish and Arabic philosophy, in particular his interpretation of Salomon Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides, his definition of Jewish philosophy, and his reconstruction, in *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, of the history of "philosophy among the Jews." All but forgotten after his death and rarely studied, Munk as translator of the *Guide* and the discoverer of Ibn Gabirol's *Mekor Hayyim* would nevertheless become a major reference for subsequent historians of Jewish philosophy, whereas the distinctive aspects of his intellectual personality—his multidisciplinary approach to philosophical texts, his affiliation with the Science of Judaism, the influence of the positivist-historicist approach typical of his time, and his historical-philosophical position, which confines Jewish philosophy to the sphere of medieval philosophy—were to fundamentally shape successive generations' conception of Jewish philosophy.<sup>17</sup> The same can be said of the underlying challenge that shaped Munk's intellectual career: the challenge of recognizing Jewish and Islamic

17 Reimund Leicht, "Neu-Orient-ierung an Maimonides? Orientalische Deutungsparadigmen in der jüdischen Aufklärung und der Frühen Wissenschaft des Judentums," in *Orient-Orientalistik-Orientalismus: Geschichte und Aktualität einer Debatte*, ed. Burkhard Schnepel et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011), 93–114.

studies as two distinct yet interdependent disciplines, linked by the study of medieval Arabic philosophy. In order to affirm the importance of the Jewish, Arabic, and Islamic traditions in the context of nineteenth-century German and French academic culture, Munk had to enter into dialogue and often lock horns with major scholars of his time, including the historian Heinrich Ritter, the Orientalists August Schmölders and Ernest Renan, and philologists and philosophers such as Schleiermacher and Hegel—encounters in which he challenged, time and again, the very premises of both speculative philosophy and the history of philosophy. In doing so, Munk seems to anticipate the work of the Jewish linguists and philosophers Heymann Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus, the founders of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (1859), and—according to Ivan Kalmar—forerunners of what we now call social and cultural anthropology.<sup>18</sup> Steinthal and Lazarus, who also published several early articles by Hermann Cohen, spoke out—in their research and in their philosophical critique of the concept of a “history of humanity” or “history of the human spirit”—against the notion of a hierarchy of cultures and the conception of culture in terms of race. Yet for all his intellectual audacity in these debates, Munk appears to have overlooked the historiographical clichés present in his own work, and the limits of the positivist concept of science he had employed in constructing a model different from the prevalently Christian approach characteristic of nineteenth-century German academia. Munk’s groundbreaking studies eventually came to fruition in the work of the leading Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century, who succeeded in avoiding these clichés and attempted to elaborate an original, modern Jewish thought for which Maimonides’s philosophical work served as a major source of inspiration. It is this influence of Munk’s work on prominent twentieth-century thinkers—specifically, Hermann Cohen, Julius Guttman, and Leo Strauss—that is the focus of Chapter 3, “Salomon Munk and Twentieth-Century Jewish Philosophy.”

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18 Ivan Kalmar, “The *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal and the Modern Concept of Culture,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1987): 671–90; and Kalmar, “Steinthal: The Jewish Orientalist,” in *Chajim H. Steinthal: Linguist and Philosopher in the 19th Century*, ed. Hartwig Wiedebach and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 139.



Whereas Cohen integrated Munk's studies in the context of his rediscovery of Maimonides, developing a new concept of Jewish philosophy based on the possibility of the existence of a philosophical rationality within the sources of Judaism, Strauss focused on Munk's interpretations of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, developing Munk's idea of the difficulty of reconciling Judaism and philosophy. Guttman, like Munk, focused his account of the history of Jewish philosophy on medieval Jewish religious philosophy. Like Munk—whose studies he knew well, even if he cites them only sporadically—Guttman felt the need to concentrate on the originality of the Jewish philosophical authors of the Middle Ages. Even though he shared Munk's opinion regarding the lack of originality of those medieval Jewish thinkers who had engaged in general philosophy, Guttman—in contrast to Munk—saw the work of these thinkers as addressing more specifically religious-philosophical problems, and as having created an original synthesis between philosophy and Judaism.

The book concludes with an appendix containing transcriptions of a selection of the hitherto unpublished letters by Munk, mentioned above. Though these letters represent only a small part of Munk's correspondence, they testify to the diversity and richness of his interests, revealing a scholar who generously shared his knowledge, seeking recognition and dialogue with the most prominent scholars of his time. The 261 letters in question, which span a period of almost forty years—from 1828, the year of Munk's emigration from Germany, to his death in 1867—offer crucial insight into Munk's relationship with his family in Germany and his colleagues in Germany and France. Much of this correspondence is still missing, resulting in significant gaps that hinder a more thorough study of the subject (for example, an examination of the correspondence between Munk and Steinschneider, which would be essential to an understanding of the relationship between these two similar-minded scholars). Luckily, there are exceptions: the appendix to Céline Trauttmann-Waller's book contains eight letters by Zunz and Munk.<sup>19</sup>

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19 Céline Trauttmann-Waller, *Philologie allemande et tradition juive: Le parcours intellectuelle de Leopold Zunz* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 290–304.

The numerous archives in Jerusalem, which contain documents of the period of the Science of Judaism, are now undergoing a process of digitalization and cataloguing, during which materials are often rediscovered—a process that, we hope, will allow us, in the near future, to complete the publication of Munk's correspondence with his letters to Steinschneider and other scholars of the time.

## CHAPTER 1

# Salomon Munk (1803–1867): His Life and Work

*Who has a finer, richer life than thee?*

*No night will ever reach thy spirit.*

*With wonder I thy work admire:*

*Radiance hast on it bestowed,*

*Enigma's veil cast aside,*

*And from the Depths drawn purest gold.*

—**Samuel David Luzzatto, “Sonnet for Salomon Munk”**<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 From Glogau to Berlin, 1803–1824: Munk, Philology, and the Science of Judaism

Salomon Munk was born in 1803 in Glogau, a Silesian town on the banks of the Oder. According to Marcus Brann, historian and teacher at the rabbinical seminary of Breslau, Glogau was the only town in the German Empire where Jews had lived continuously for six centuries, in a relatively poor region that, by the nineteenth century, had become home to a great number of Jewish scholars and people of learning. It was in Glogau, where the influence of Moses Mendelssohn had opened the Jewish community to the Enlightenment ideals of science and knowledge, that the young Salomon received his first Hebrew lessons from his father, Samuel.<sup>2</sup>

Samuel Lippmann Munk was an official in charge of recording the juridical decisions made within the Jewish community and of providing the Glogau municipality with legal translations and other documents

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1 Samuel David Luzzatto, *Poesie ed Epitaffi* (Padua: Crescini, 1879); my translation.

2 Brann, “Aus Salomon Munks nachgelassenen Briefen.”

## 2 Dialectic of Separation

pertaining to the Jewish court. It was he who introduced Salomon to the study of the Hebrew, and his wife, Melka, also gave their son a grounding in French—the language in which Munk was to compose the bulk of his oeuvre. When, in 1820, Munk’s teacher at the rabbinical seminary, Jacob Joseph Oettinger, was sent to Berlin to fill a rabbinical position, the seventeen-year-old Salomon followed him to the Prussian capital with the intention of continuing his rabbinical studies.<sup>3</sup>

In his biography of Munk, Moïse Schwab relates how, having no money for a coach, the young scholar made the 200-plus-kilometer journey to Berlin on foot.<sup>4</sup> Once in Berlin, Munk sought out Leopold Zunz and Eduard Gans, two of the founders of the Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden (the “Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews” founded in Berlin in 1819), and also the famous *Sprachforscher* and philologist Carl Gottlob Zumpt, and began attending their lectures. Zunz in particular encouraged Munk to persevere in his study of history, languages, and linguistics—subjects in which Munk excelled. Zunz and Gans, who were to become Munk’s teachers and lifelong friends, awakened in him a curiosity for science and secular knowledge, decisively influencing him in this early stage of his career.

It was Abraham Geiger—a Reform rabbi who shared Zunz’s staunch belief in the regenerating power of science, philology, and philosophy applied to Judaism—who, in 1831, conceived the plan to publish a critical edition of the entire corpus of medieval Jewish philosophy, including Maimonides’s *Guide*. In a letter to Zunz from August 1834, Geiger speaks of the scope of his project, then still in the planning stage, noting that it would seek to “describe the impact of Maimonides ... the climax of the Middle Ages, in whom the entirety of Judaism, both Talmudic and philosophic, was united” and who represented “one of the most important historical moments in the development of Judaism.” Their task, Geiger added, would be to prove just “how important this man’s influence was on successive periods up until our own days.”<sup>5</sup>

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3 Schwab, *Salomon Munk*, 13.

4 Ibid., 14.

5 George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides’ Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: The Guide to Religious Reform* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 66.

At this time, Munk was already planning his own translation of the work into French from the original Judeo-Arabic—a project that would eventually reach fruition in 1856, when Geiger himself reviewed it in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*.<sup>6</sup> Geiger's project never materialized, but his enthusiasm and research—in 1835, Geiger published a long essay on Jewish thought up to Maimonides, which was to have formed part of the “introduction to a greater work on Maimonides' life and works”<sup>7</sup>—had a catalyzing effect on Munk, encouraging his interest in Maimonides already at this early stage of his career.

## 1.2 From Berlin to Paris, 1824–1828: Munk and the Development of Oriental Studies in France

During the brief period between 1824, when he began his studies at the University of Berlin, and his emigration to France in 1828, Munk dedicated himself almost exclusively to the study of the new philological method developed by August Böckh in his work on philological and linguistic hermeneutics, and by Franz Bopp in his studies on comparative historical and systematic linguistics.

On the advice of his friend and mentor Zunz, Munk also began attending Hegel's lectures in Berlin. Yet he soon became disillusioned with Hegel's philosophy—or rather, with “speculative philosophy” in general. While attending Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history in 1825 and 1826, Munk became conscious of the philosopher's complete disregard for the role and importance of Jewish and Islamic traditions in Western philosophy. Hegel saw Judaism as an antiquated religion destined to be superseded, as opposed to “true philosophy,” which was confined to the West—meaning Greek and German civilization. It is therefore not

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6 Abraham Geiger, Review of *La Guide des égarés: Traité de théologie et de philosophie par Moïse ben Maimoun, traduit pour la première fois sur l'original arabe et accompagné des notes critiques, littéraires et explicatives*, by Salomon Munk, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 14(1860): 732–33.

7 Abraham Geiger, “Die wissenschaftliche Ausbildung des Judenthums in den zwei ersten Jahrhunderten des zweiten Jahrtausends bis zum Auftreten des Maimonides,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Jüdische Theologie* 1(1835): 13.

#### 4 Dialectic of Separation

surprising that Munk developed a strong aversion to Hegel and speculative philosophy, an attitude that isolated him somewhat from other German Jewish scholars of the Science of Judaism, who—as we will discuss in Chapter 2—were typically influenced by Hegel and used his philosophy to further the introduction of Jewish studies in German universities.

Munk eventually decided to continue his studies with Zunz's teacher, Böckh, concentrating his efforts on philology, a scientific method whose significance—in Munk's eyes—lay in the fact that it could be applied with equal effectiveness to the study of Judaism. It was largely thanks to Böckh's influence that Munk chose to adopt philology, which he saw as a privileged method for rediscovering, in its full complexity, the world of the ancient texts that had been closed for centuries. For Böckh, a former disciple of Friedrich August Wolf, philology was a theory embodying a principle of organization on a par with the natural sciences, and it was charged with the task of establishing the concept of humanist study as a unity possessing its own coherent structure and idea. Böckh defined philology as the historical construction of life itself—of all forms of culture produced by the practical and spiritual tendencies of a given people. For Munk, this approach seemed to provide a method for a comprehensive study of Jewish life in all its aspects—tradition, language, and philosophy.<sup>8</sup> This shift from speculative philosophy to language and philology was to have profound consequences for Munk's career: the outstanding

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8 Both Wolf and Böckh fundamentally influenced Zunz. In his *Das Buch Zunz: Künftigen ehrlichen Leute gewidmet*, Zunz expresses his admiration both for Wolf's lessons and Böckh's seminars on Plato and on the history of philosophy. It was probably during these lessons that the young Zunz first conceived of the idea of a Jewish philology, the tasks and goals of which he would later summarize in his *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur* (1818) and hand down to his disciples and fellow scholars, including Munk. See Leopold Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur, nebst Nachrichten über ein altes bis jetzt ungedrucktes hebräisches Werk* (Berlin: Maurer, 1818), and Giuseppe Veltri, "Altertumswissenschaft und Wissenschaft des Judentums: Leopold Zunz und seine Lehrer F. A. Wolf und A. Böckh," in *Friedrich August Wolf: Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Reinhard Markner (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 41–42. See also Michael A. Meyer, *Von Moses Mendelssohn zu Leopold Zunz: Jüdische Identität in Deutschland, 1749–1824* (Munich: Beck, 1994), 181.

linguistic skills he acquired over the course of his studies would pave the way for his involvement in the debate with the most important non-Jewish Orientalists and historians of his time.

This same shift from philosophy to philology also explains Munk's curious indifference toward one of the most central figures of the philosophy of language at the time—the founder of the University of Berlin, Wilhelm von Humboldt. Both Munk's letters and Schwab's biography are silent on the subject of Humboldt's studies in the field of linguistics and philosophy of language. One possible reason for this indifference—an attitude probably influenced by Zunz, who was similarly distanced from Humboldt's philosophy—is Humboldt's ideal of education (*Bildungsideal*), which “reduces ancient philosophy and the genealogy of knowledge to the canon of Greek reason.”<sup>9</sup> The focus on national identity in the philosophy of Humboldt's time, coupled with his predilection for Greece as an intellectual and moral ideal, seemed to Munk to allow no space for Judaism. Another reason for Munk's silence on Humboldt's philosophy may be the disparity between the latter's approach to the study of language and Munk's own—which had been influenced by Böckh and Bopp. In contrast to Munk, who, in a positivist vein, approached language as something composed of “material aspects” or “sounds and signs” (*Schällen und Zeichen*),<sup>10</sup> Humboldt associated the distinctions between languages, ultimately, with a “diversity of representations of the world” (*Verschiedenheit der Weltansichten*).<sup>11</sup> He rejected the possibility of a categorical separation between language philosophy and empirical linguistics as it developed during the nineteenth century (and still exists today). For Humboldt, there could be no discipline of linguistics without a conceptual base and a firm philosophical grasp of its multifaceted object of inquiry. Munk, by contrast—as will become clearer in the course of this reconstruction—attempted to develop an essentially positivist, philological approach to the

9 Veltri, “Altertumswissenschaft und Wissenschaft des Judentums,” 32.

10 Salomon Munk, *Cours de langues au Collège de France, hébraïque, chaldaïque et syriaque: Leçon d'ouverture* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1865), 6.

11 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin: Druckerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften), 183.