A New Rhetoric for Modern Jewish Studies:
Moses Gaster's Redefinition of Jewish Homiletic Concepts

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…the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues.
(Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* 201)

In the history of Western rhetoric, there are conspicuous gaps waiting to be filled and barriers still waiting to be broken down in an overall act of integrative synthesis. Such an attempt at integration is the topic of this paper, which aims at retracing the comparative methodology applied to the rhetoric of storytelling in the work of Moses Gaster, a scholar trained in the academic study of Judaism, a discipline known initially as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Closely related with the general program of reform of Modern Judaism, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was born as a discipline that sought to apply a program of integration and research to the history of cultural transmission; as such, the modern study of Judaism followed a rigorous and systematic program of inquiry into an ever broader area of resources, trying to understand how the struggle for Jewish emancipation could be supported by the work of the humanist scholar. In this context of modernization, the work and the ideas of Moses Gaster stand apart, both for their originality and for their omissions, as we shall see. They are today still either unrecognized or greatly misunderstood, leaving a massive gap in the understanding of this important area in the history of ideas.

Moses Gaster was born in Bucharest in 1856, in a Jewish middle-class family; after finishing high school in Bucharest, he went to Germany and enrolled in both secular and religious studies, obtaining a doctorate in Romanic studies from the University of Halle in 1877 and, in 1881, a rabbinic diploma from the Jűdisch-Theologisches Seminar, the famous

theological seminary of Breslau and the intellectual centre of the newly established discipline of Jewish studies. There he studied with illustrious scholars representing the new discipline: Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875), Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891) (history), and David Rosin (1823-1894) (Rabbinic Philology, homiletics, and *midrash*). After his return to Bucharest, Gaster took an active part in the intellectual life of the recently liberated Romania,[1] publishing and teaching on Romanian popular literature, which was at the time a disciplinary sub-field of Romanian philology. Instead of considering his Eastern European roots a handicap, he was able to see in them an opportunity for building a new field of cultural studies. At the same time, he also took an important part in the fight for the recognition of civic rights for Romanian Jews; in 1885, during one of the anti-Semitic backlashes, he was expelled and forced into exile. On his arrival in England, he was invited to give the Ilchester lectures at Oxford, a series of conferences in which he described and analyzed important structural elements of the East European culture, mostly Romanian, defined by him as "Greeko-Slavonic [sic]."[2] In the following years, he became Haham of the Sephardic community and a leader of the budding international Zionist movement.

His research also flourished, and he published an impressive number of scholarly books and papers: for some, Gaster indeed tried to do too much, while, for many others, he remains a polymath, whose knowledge of the popular culture was both widely encyclopaedic and minutely precise. In retrospect, one can recognize today that, due to this great diversity in scholarly interests, Moses Gaster's grasp of the dynamics of theories and methods that, at the time, tried to make sense of a vast and barely charted territory was not only quite extensive but also

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[1] Romania gained state independence in 1877, after the war against the Ottoman Empire.
[2] The theoretical conceptualization of the ancient and popular cultures of the Romanians is still a matter of intense controversy, since the debate is perceived as bearing geopolitical consequences. Gaster's definition of Romanian culture as "Greeko-Slavonic" stresses the religious character of the Romanian culture and neglects the powerful Latin influences. In the end, this definition has a powerful effect of opposing the religious and the linguistic in the representation of popular ethnic identity.

exceptionally accurate. He seems to have been mainly interested in articulating a comprehensive theory of the meta-literary tale, in its dual realization as popular (i.e., ethnographical and folkloric) and religious short story. Thus, his scholarship extended to an analysis of both the classical folkloric ("popular") story and the rabbinic short story, or *aggadah*,[3] following in his theoretical articulations a complicated road as he tried to adjust his thought to the methodological lexicon of the times. Starting as an adept of Friedrich Max Műller's theory of solar mythology, in time he developed a personal theory that stresses the changing and adaptive capacity of the popular culture, with a central focus on communication, migration, and contacts. His, therefore, is a broad anthropological and humanist vision that privileges communication. To his fellow folklorists, engaged in the survival interpretation of popular literature that was prevalent at the time, he would often recommend: "Stop looking for origin and start looking for transmission!"[4]

Increasingly concerned with a functional understanding of cultural phenomena, Gaster did indeed look for a unifying semiotic element of what he and his contemporaries believed to be two separate, yet not entirely unrelated, cultural fields: the religious tale and the "popular" story. Thus, when, in 1924, he published his *Exempla of the Rabbis*, Gaster did indeed achieve a *redefinition*[5] of the rabbinic tale within a field of the Humanities that was already looking for a formalistic (and—arguably—a pre-Structuralist) approach. I believe that this redefinition is important for many reasons, signalling a turning point in the study of Jewish oral literature and opening the way towards a new and more complex understanding of the relationship between

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[3] אגדא

[4] See *Gaster Anniversary Volume* (1936) and *Gaster Centenary Publication* (1958). Gaster's interest in the communicative dimension of the folkloric narrative, particularly the Jewish one, is expressed in an early study *Jewish Folk-lore in the Middle Ages* (1887), where he stresses that the specific contribution of the Jews to an ideal universal stock of literature, constituted also by their mediation and "spiritual" exchange between East and West.

[5] The concept of *redefinition* has its origin in rhetoric (first mentioned by Quintilian), being currently used by Quentin Skinner as an epistemological construct that links the past and the present in a continuous yet complex intellectual history of ideas.

Jewish and non-Jewish traditions, between parallel histories of oral creation and communication, and ultimately between the sacred and the secular. Last, but not least, Gaster's bold redefinition of the *aggadah* as *exemplum* did indeed anticipate a renewal of the scholarly interest in preaching that is—once again—intensely explored nowadays.

In his complex and multifaceted cultural synthesis, Gaster's identification of the *exemplum* with the *midrashic aggadah* is quite paradigmatic, engaging a significant reconceptualization of the Jewish homiletical tradition by linking it with the history and the terminology of classical rhetoric, of Aristotelian-Ciceronian genealogy, yet preserving a significant link with the pre-modern tradition of the *derashot*,[6] at the centre of the mainly medieval religious tradition of sermon composition. In my present contribution, I would like to probe in some detail the full impact of this cultural translation, by examining the correlations and the differences between Gaster's study of *exempla* and the study of *exempla* and *aggadot* by his contemporaries.

When Moses Gaster started his study of the rabbinic tale, he knew that he was already continuing in the scholarly tradition of great forerunners, the founding fathers of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: the first generations of the *Haskalah* scholars realized the importance of retrieving the history of liturgical traditions in support of their claim that Judaism has survived by change and adjustment. Starting with Leopold Zunz's foundational study *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* (The History and Development of Jewish Homiletics), published in 1832, the exploration of homiletic practices and discourses became the focus of examination for many scholars: Adolf Jellinek (1821-1894), David Kaufman (1852-1899), Sigmund Maybaum (1844-1919), Louis Ginzberg (1873-1953), and

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[6] *Derasha* (pl. *derashot*): "sermon" in Hebrew.

Wilhelm Bacher (1850-1913), to cite only a few.[7] The entire movement that strove to adjust and renew the traditional knowledge of the Jews, correlating and synchronizing it with the modernizing movements in the Western world, was strongly predicated on the basic assumption that the values of change and progress were necessarily positive. At the same time, another basic assumption was the one that articulated the reality of change and progress through the possibilities of an efficient educative process: instruction had to be persuasive and the pulpit should also be used towards this goal.[8]

Sermons and sermon composition thus have an extremely important function within the general project of popular betterment: homiletic, or the rhetoric of preaching, receives a central significance. Much as their Protestant and Catholic colleagues, the Jewish scholars also believed in the fundamental merits of instruction and edification. In their fight for Jewish modernization, the founders of the Haskalah looked then into the traditions of synagogue practices of eloquence in order to discover and rebuild a tradition of instruction from the pulpit that, in their opinion, could be traced back to Biblical times. At Breslau, in particular, the homiletic tradition was highly valued: Gaster's interest in the sermonic tale was probably born at the seminary, where, in the footsteps of Manuel Joel and under the guidance of both Heinrich Graetz and David Rosin, the study of preaching models became central to the knowledge of Jewish tradition. The Jewish *artes praedicandi* were also perceived in their quality of witnesses from the past, which had to be modified and adjusted to modern times. But, like many reformers, in their haste to change and critique, the first generations of the scholars of the Haskalah jettisoned most of the *derashot*

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[7] For a classic and quite comprehensive overview of the fundamental changes in the nineteenth-century Jewish ideology of homiletics, see A. Altmann's two studies: "The New Style of Preaching in Nineteenth Century German Jewry" and "Zur Frűgeschichte der jűdischen Predigt in Deutschland: Leopold Zunz als Prediger." A complex and lucid view of the history of the German Haskalah is given in Michael A. Meyer's *Judaism within Modernity*. The current renewal of scholarship in Jewish traditional and modern homiletics is mentioned further.
[8] "The Jewish preacher is first and foremost a teacher of Torah," writes Ely E. Pilchik in *The Textual Sermon* (88).

tradition, thought to be embarrassingly primitive for the new age of modernity. Gaster, in contrast, chose to focus his scholarship on this particular field of narrative tradition, otherwise ignored or neglected, realizing its value.

Nowadays, the history of Jewish preaching is able to recover a living and lively tradition of homiletic practices and discourses[9] that has long been neglected; but, especially in Gaster's times, the general tendency has been to think about the homiletic tradition of the Jews in terms that were highly segregated, following trends and models that were quite close to the religious presuppositions of the scholars involved, so that different historical traditions remained enclosed within already differentiated denominational fields. Gaster's analysis, however, was different because it was programmatically comparative. As I have already mentioned, Gaster also started by studying the *aggadot* as a particular type of discourse in the Talmudic and post-Talmudic ages, with an interest in the identification of the "popular" stream. He looked deeper than most into the functional articulation of these collections of stories and decided that, in fact, the tales he was studying qualified as *exempla*. This realization allowed him to align them with similar storytelling *corpora* and, in turn, he could proceed to a comparative study of reappraisal and redefinition. His comparative redefinition has at least two elements that deserve our attention: one is the definition of *exempla* in terms of rhetorical conceptualizations characteristic of the nineteenth-century understanding of the past, the other is the consequence of this definition for the future paradigm of Jewish Studies.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, the academic research of *exempla* became a scholarly discipline that brought together a careful philological methodology and an assumption of return to a history of the "popular" voice that was otherwise lost. This new disciplinary field

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[9] Among others, by David Ruderman, Marc Saperstein, Fabrizio Lelli, Jean-Pierre Rotschild; see the Works Cited.

was the study of "folk-lore," actively engaged in the search for scholarly recognition. The timely rediscovery of large sermonic *corpora* encouraged a type of scholarship that was fast becoming multidisciplinary and comparative. In the beginning, the effort was focused on the retrieval and classification of the tales, within linguistic and national limits, but soon the sheer quantity of the material made necessary an intense work of conceptual revision. Starting with the last decade of the nineteenth century, every *exemplum* specialist was challenged by the difficulty of defining the object of his or her study: the ubiquity of medieval *exemplum* is only matched by its polymorph typology, and this, in turn, necessitates comparative methods in both evaluation and discussion.

The disciplinary regime of the *exempla* study was by its discursive location transitional and interdisciplinary, bringing together notions from folklore, poetics, rhetoric, and Biblical criticism. These studies seem to have appropriated the "mission" of the folkloric studies, first articulated by Herder in the eighteenth century: to retrieve the popular spirit by collecting its anonymous creations living in oral variations as stories.[10] In a similar way, the homiletic *exempla* were also thought to be representative of the culture of the people, frequently hidden by the higher forms of the written culture. In fact, they had the added interest of being preaching aids, thus pointing to a pragmatic context. As such, the medieval collections of *exempla* clearly revealed normative codifications that were an integral part of the collections. Sermons, in turn, were shaped by pre-existing sermonic models and revealed a specific eloquence pointing to a rhetoric proper to the public religious space. The academic study of *exempla* became an endeavour that defined a particular field in the humanities, a discipline that brought together

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[10] See Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung des Menschheit* (1774), *Alte Volkslieder* (1774), *Volkslieder* (1778), and others. For Gaster, as for other Jewish thinkers, this vocation would also be supported by similar views expressed by Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the main voice of the Jewish Emancipation.

methodologies that adjusted and adapted to the study of the higher culture the methodological

practices and procedures proper to the study of the oral, "lower" culture and that sought to

impose on both an integrative semiotic. At the same time, the study of *exempla* provided an

important link between the sacred and the profane in a culture that was increasingly secular. The

many studies and collections of *exempla* published between 1890 and 1920 are illustrative in this

sense.

In Gaster's case, however, the overlapping fields of narratology and cultural (or

folkloristic) ethnography provided an opportunity to reshape the generic typology of the short

rabbinic story, which, in turn, made Gaster perceive it as a particular realization of a rhetorical

structure. This means that he had to reorient the purely religious approach to the Jewish

narrative, mostly represented by rabbinic theology, in order to include the tale or the story in a

wider and more comprehensive discursive frame; so, instead of focusing on the religious content

of the tale, Gaster's approach stressed the quality of orality in its presence and transmission. In

turn, this approach engaged a revision of his former tale-theory, mostly secular, in order to

accommodate its study to a predominantly religious and scriptural context. In this way, Moses

Gaster had to reshape and rethink a complex set of methodological assumptions and thus

accomplished a paradigmatic shift in methodology, which, in turn, led to his new understanding

of the Talmudic tale. Consequently, the medieval collections studied by him have been included

in a new interpretive paradigm that is controversial because it still displays the contradictory

ideological pressures that lead to its main constitutive strategies. On the one hand, Gaster had to

take into account the traditional opinion according to which the *aggadot* belong to pre-Talmudic

times, thus satisfying the principles of the *Volkskunde* (ethnographic) ideology of his time.[11] On

the other hand, in order to accomplish this task, he had to acknowledge an element of change

and, in turn, this element is justified by the change in the preaching tradition itself. Or, change in

preaching and praying practices was—as we have seen—also advocated by the Jewish reformers

of his time, who were eager to support their ideology of Jewish modernization by an argument

from tradition. This signification is clearly seen if we also examine Gaster's sense of social

meaning pervading his ideology of Judaism as an ethnic religion.[12]

In Gaster's view, the homiletic practice is essentially and centrally defined by its social

value, by its being situated in the religious public space. This is a space of community affiliation,

of shared knowledge, and of congregational ties that both define and represent Jewish identity

through a powerful awareness of sociability. The "exempla of the rabbis" then have an iconic as

well as an indexical meaning because they are located at the very centre of a culture of shared

worship: stories transmit codes of practical behaviour, of ideal attitudes, and of various cultural

practices, foregrounding social rules, procedures, and normative ethical structures. The

normative meaning of the *exemplum*, is, in the context of the Rabbinic Talmudic culture, defined

by its very existence as an associative element in the overall Halakhic (legalistic) frame.

According to Gaster, the rabbinic *exemplum* is shaped by its homiletic function, and it is

indeed this specific discursive function that satisfies the needs of social meaningfulness; in turn,

this particular yet central signification changes any previous meaning these tales might have had

in the past, in different contexts:

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[11] Nowadays, the general opinion is that the stories studied by Gaster as *exempla* are medieval, and thus definitely post-Talmudic. The earlier dating currently reproached to Gaster is also a result of his desire to retrieve and reinvent a Palestinian heritage.

[12] The complex redefinition of the Jewish religion as both civic ideology and plural paradigms of the sacred forms the topic of a different study, in progress.

> The character of these stories becomes then somewhat altered. The tale is no more told nor listened
> to for the mere pleasure of telling or listening. It is not the mere aesthetical enjoyment of the
> production of a lively and poetical fancy as they were when told and heard for the first time. In the
> new collections they are made to serve a purpose: they are told as an "exemplum" in order to teach
> a lesson, to convey a "moralisatio". They serve, so to say, as a basis for sermons. They are the
> starting points for homiletical interpretations of the Scriptures and are not merely incidental
> illustrations as in ancient times. (Gaster, *Exempla* 6)

A careful study of the illustrative tale is then an open invitation to perceive the *aggadah* in a new paradigmatic frame and is bound to realign it with the prevailing parallel scholarship in the field, studying the preaching tools as integrated into medieval rhetoric.[13] Defining the *aggadah* as *exemplum* leads to its virtual integration in a rhetorical tradition that has for centuries been thought alien at best, and hostile at worst, many times misunderstood and misjudged: the Christian tradition of preaching, or sacred rhetoric.[14]

For the most part, every author that has previously studied the *aggadah* has indeed perceived it as an illustration of Jewish diversity in separateness and isolation. In order to develop his critical methodology of the *haggadic exemplum*, which is programmatically comparative, Gaster had to create a new discursive order, the order of modern Jewish rhetoric, which—in his time—was almost non-existent and in our own is slowly emerging. It is for this reason perhaps that his originality is hardly acknowledged, even within the discipline of the Jewish studies. The type of analogical comparatism thus practised is rather more "genetic" (not

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[13] He also stresses, later in his study, "I am reclaiming for the history of the homiletic literature not merely one but a number of books, whose connection with the sermon has not been sufficiently recognized."(*Exempla* 23).

[14] The first Jewish published text to even include the word "rhetoric" in its title (although not in its text) is probably Ludwig Philippson, *Die Rhetorik und Judische Homiletik* (1890). The book is a collection of papers published previously in the Jewish press and published posthumously by M. Kayserling, who probably did choose the title. In the original German text, the terminology used is usually either *Redekunst* ("art of discourse") or *Beredsamkeit* ("eloquence"). Despite its obvious fragmentation and lack of system, the publication offers a good image of the effort towards rhetorical theorization and reflection involved in the creation of a normative discourse regarding Jewish preaching practices. This was done by updating the elements of traditional Jewish liturgy through an adaptive process of imitation after modern Protestant homiletics.

quite "historical"), because its focus is towards the establishment and retrieval of the ancient root and origin, the very source of the *exempla*-tales. In Gaster's case, however, genetic comparatism and folkloric parallelisms coincide in a structural functionalism that is quite distinct in its analyses. Moreover, according to Gaster, the historicity of the comparative view is an integral part of what he perceives as the persistent part of the "Jewish spirit," the Jewish "Volksgeist" expressed in the communal discourse. In his thought, the main feature of the Jewish spirit would be a deeply ingrained sense of criticism, of freedom of expression. Speaking of Maimonides's attempt to simplify the interpretation of the Halakhic code by reducing its "shield" of historical explanations and thus considerably diminishing the argumentation from authority, Gaster notes,

> However great the respect may be in which men of learning are held in Judaism, however important may be the position assigned to them, there is nothing in it of blind obedience, of accepting their pronouncements in matters of law as final rules. The Jewish spirit always loves to soar in the free atmosphere of thought and research, and will never submit to be put into the strait-jacket of fixed forms and norms, unless at the same time the reasons are given, the whole mechanism of argument and discussion, of logical interpretation and deduction is laid bare.
> (*Studies and Texts* 703)[15]

The identification of the rabbinic tale with the exemplum leads Gaster to a careful method of abstracting and indexing his corpus, a methodology of a comparative style that is inclusive and broad. His abstracting and indexing of the aggadot found in the Sefer ha Masyiot, a collection of Hebrew tales from the Middle Ages, is thus similar to Crane's, Liebrecht's, and Oesterley's and, closer to us, to the one used by Tubach in his work.

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[15] Gaster adds, "We like to see the things grow, to watch them from their first inception to the final ripening, and we insist of being present during the whole period of evolution and growth. Every precept is at some time a religious duty, and we are not expected to perform them at the simple bidding of an individual, however highly placed in our estimation, unless we hear also the motive, the pros and cons of the controversy, and are placed in a position to adopt one decision or the other" (*Studies and Texts* 703).

Once the similarity between *exemplum* and *aggadah* is recognized, Gaster is able to draw

some interesting consequences, since he is clearly able to integrate a whole terminological

register proper to the structural and exegetical rhetoric of the Jewish homiletics into the broad

rhetorical terminology of classical inspiration used by the *exempla* scholars. Furthermore, he will

follow the same methodology in redefining the status of the Yiddish collection of tales *Maaseh

Buch* (*Ma'ase Book*) and, later, will even try to discuss along similar lines the collection of

"popular" stories gathered and adapted by Anton Pann, a nineteenth-century Romanian folklore

editor and publisher. Gaster, like his English, French, and German colleagues engaged in the

study of *exempla*, is little interested in refining a differentiated typology of the illustrative tale:

for example, he does not distinguish between parable and story, or between the *mashal* and the

ma'aseh, a distinction that is today constituted as basic for the semiotic of the "midrashic

imagination."[16] He repeatedly defines the *haggadic exemplum* as a broad and all-inclusive

category of narrative structures, defined by a unique homiletic function: "אגדא (Agada, legend,

story)", or "*Mashal*, that is a parable, an allegory, a story […] *res gestae*, *Ma'aseh*, *or as I would

prefer to call them, Exempla*" (*Exempla* 4; emphasis mine).

As I have already argued, Gaster treats the *exemplum* as a narrative discursive class

defined by its homiletic function, a redefinition that is very close to that used by scholars

examining Western medieval preaching practices. Needless to say, this approach is quite distant

from the initial discussion found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (112-16). In turn this might explain the

fact that in Gaster—as in Crane, for that matter—there is a lack of rhetorical references to the

classical tradition of antiquity, even as it is used. Instead, the definition and discussion of the

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[16] See in this sense David Stern's many studies that show that between *parable/mashal* and
maase/exemplum there is a semiotic antagonism, the first being truly polysemic, the second univocally determined
by context; see Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (1996) and
Michael Fishbane's edited collection *The Midrashic Imagination* (1993).

exemplum are mostly related to homiletical sources and rhetorical medieval authors: Gregory,

Beda, and Alanus ab Insulis for Crane, explicit *midrashic* inspiration and critique for Gaster.

Consequently, the probatory function held by the *exemplum* in Aristotle (where it is the

rhetorical inductive counterpart of the *enthymeme*) is frequently replaced by the illustrative one.

Furthermore, it is repeatedly stated that this short illustrative tale has, beyond its original ethical

value, a strong aesthetic one and thus should also be appreciated as literature.

Before concluding this rather brief discussion, I would like to add a last note, this time

related to the relation between Gaster's work on Jewish *exempla* and the revival of scholastic

interest in the study of the medieval *exempla* currently taking place in many European countries:

France, Germany, and Italy.[17] The present-day study of *exempla* points, on the one hand, to the

great richness and variation of this narrative genre and, on the other, to its pragmatic

functionality within the medieval culture of sermonic communication. Just as Gaster was led by

his previous folkloric research to an understanding of the *haggadic* narrative material as

rhetorical, more recent scholarship on ancient and medieval Christian homiletic is trying to

differentiate between homiletic *exempla* and non-homiletic (or extra-homiletic) *exempla.* If the

rhetorical quality of the *exempla* is not really challenged, attempts to arrive at a better

understanding through the examination of a trans-discursive definitional comparison have led to

a more precise comprehension of the exemplary discourses in fields such as history, theology,

and pedagogy.[18] This better recontextualization of the *exempla* collections has also been

accomplished under a more thorough study of the argumentation function of the short narrative

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[17] All these countries have developed strong schools of *exempla* scholarship and have been the scene of an intense movement of retrieval, editing, and publishing of important collections of medieval and late medieval collections of *exempla*, in turn generating a renewed interest for the *artes praedicandi*. Among the most prolific scholars in this area are J.Cl. Schmitt, J.Berlioz, C. Delcorno, P. von Moos, M.A. Polo de Beaulieu, F. P. Knapp, and W. Haug.

[18] See Jean-Yves Tilliette, "L'*exemplum* rhétorique: questions de définition" in *Les exempla médiévaux. Nouvelles Perspectives* (1998), and Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im Policraticus Johanns von Salisbury* (1988).

form proper to the *exemplum*, an element clearly included in the classical Aristotelian-Ciceronian canon that forms the theoretical and methodical background for the use of *exempla* throughout the intellectual history of the West. This history is still awaiting the integration of the richly distinctive yet still segregated Jewish voice(s).

Moses Gaster's *Exempla of the Rabbis* brings a new and excitingly erudite voice to this overall history. His voice is an important contribution to discussions of the relationship between religious practices and ideas and other fields of scholarship in the humanities. By extending his research into orality along the lines inaugurated by the nineteenth-century studies of the *exemplum*, Gaster did, in fact, succeed in opening and articulating a new field, dedicated to comparative rhetoric, for the already respectable, yet mono-dimensional and still "enclosed" discipline of Jewish studies. His study of the Jewish homiletic register eloquently voiced the need for a systemic comparative approach to the vast and unruly "sea of tales."[19]

Appendix 1

Moses Gaster: Bio-Bibliographical Data

1856   Born in Bucharest, Romania, in a family of Sephardic and Ashkenazi ancestry.

1873   After being educated in Romanian public schools, Gaster went to Breslau and enrolled in the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he became a disciple of Heinrich Graetz and David Rosin; in the same time, he took university courses at Breslau and Leipzig, registering for a degree in Romanic philology at the University of Halle; among his professors were Wilhelm Dilthey (Philosophy), Franz von Miklosich (Slavistics), Gustav Gröber (Romanic philology), and Stenzler and Schmulders (Semitic philology).

1877   Earned his PhD under the direction of Gustav Gröber, the most influential Romanist of the period, who encouraged him to further study the Romanian language and literature. Gröber published Gaster's first research papers on Romanian phonetics in the prestigious *Zeitschrift fűr Romanische Philologie*.

1878   Gaster returned to Bucharest where he engaged actively in the Jewish movement for civil rights, collecte manuscripts and old books, and studied popular culture. Published on various topics of Romanian folklore and participated in the *Junimea* (Young Romania) circle, a national intellectual movement dedicated to the intensification and spread of Enlightenment ideas in Romania; within this great Modernity project, Gaster prepared a monograph on Romanian popular literature and an anthology of old Romanian texts.

1881   Graduated from the Breslau Seminary and was ordained rabbi.

1883   Publication of *Literatura Popularã Românã* (Romanian Popular Literature).

1885   In October he was forced to leave Romania by government decree; after a brief period in Vienna, he settled in England (where he would be granted English citizenship in 1893).

1887   Delivered the Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature [sic] at Oxford, under the sponsorship of Fr. Max Müller and on the recommendation of Franz von Miklosich and G. Ascoli. Became Chief Rabbi, *Haham*, of the Sephardic Communities of British Jews and served as principal of the Judith Montefiore Theological College in Ramsgate (publisher of the *Montefiore College Reports*).

1891   Publication of his two volume *Chrestomatie Românã*, a collection of early Romanian texts (sec. xvi-xix).

1894-1896   Publication, in a preliminary and partial form, of the *Exempla of the Rabbis* as a Montefiore College Report

1899   Publication of the *Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, a translation into English of a collection of Jewish medieval "legendary stories" with a lengthy critical introduction and a "full index."

1889-1924   Contributions to various publications of folklore, Jewish culture and religion, homiletics, Romanian and comparative philology, etc. Served as president of the Folklore Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and as vice-president of the Royal Asiatic Society. Maintained a vast correspondence with many important scholars and political figures. Already very active in the Zionist movement, became a key figure in the persuasive campaign that lead to British Government's granting of the Balfour Declaration, considered today the first political step in the creation of the Jewish national state. In characteristic manner, Gaster disagreed with the final wording of the document, expressing strong reservations as to its political expediency.

1918   Resigned as *Haham*, but retained some influence in English political circles, as in the wider circles of the international Jewish movements for freedom, emancipation, and statehood. After 1933, despite his advanced age, he would participate in the efforts directed to saving the German Jews from the Nazi persecution.

1924   Publication of *The Exempla of the Rabbis*

1925-1928   Publication of the 3 volumes of *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology*

1932   Publication of *The Samaritan Oral Law and Ancient Tradition*; the work opened a whole new field in the study of Jewish oral literature and raised the question of cultural diversity within Jewish and Hebrew traditions.

1934   Publication of *Maa'seh Book: Book of Jewish Tales and Legends Translated from the Judeo-German*

1936   Publication of his critical edition of *Anton Pann: Povestea Vorbii*, Gaster's last big work on oral communication and popular culture narration, dedicated to a Romanian popular storyteller, an iconic editor-publisher of mass literature and a religious composer of music.

1939   Moses Gaster died on March 5 after a short illness.

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