NAHUM SLOUSCHZ (1871–1966) AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE HEBREW RENAISSANCE

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Nahum Davidovich Slouschz was born in Smorgan near Vilna in 1871, the son of David Solomon Slouschz, a rabbi, maskil and early Zionist. When he was four years old, his father settled in Kherson; a few years later the family moved to Odessa. Nahum Slouschz was two years the senior of H. N. Bialik, three years older than Joseph Klausner, and four years older than Saul Tcherni Chowsky.1 He belonged to their circle of friends in Odessa which became the cradle for the revival of Hebrew literature. When Nahum Slouschz died in Jerusalem at the age of 94 in 1966 he left a printed œuvre in five languages (Hebrew, French, Russian, English, and Yiddish), for which no-one has yet even attempted to produce a bibliography. There is, furthermore, a literary and scholarly estate of fifty boxes of manuscripts which have only partly been catalogued.2 If we had to determine one characteristic trait


of his different works it would be his role as an intermediary between
the European and the Hebrew worlds—not only because he made
them more easily accessible to each other, but more so because he was
searching for the unknown ancient connections between them.

In Odessa, Nahum Slouschz was one of the founders of the ‘Saftenu
’itnu’ society.\(^3\) In 1888, at seventeen years of age, he wrote the entry
‘Odessa’ in the Hebrew encyclopedia \(\text{Eshkol}\).\(^4\) He was the first of the
circle of Hebrew-speaking friends, mentioned above, to see Erets Israel
with his own eyes when he visited Palestine in 1891 on behalf of the
Odessa Palestine committee with the mission to establish a new settle-
ment. There he became a close friend of the family of Eliezer Ben-
Yehudah (whom he had already known and heard speaking in the
Sephardic accent in Odessa) and spent many hours in the house of
the first Hebrew-speaking child (Itamar Ben-Avi, who was then nine
years old).\(^5\) Back in Odessa in 1892, Slouschz published a Russian self-
instruction book on mnemotechnics (\(\text{Mnemotekhnika ili iskusstvo ukrepliat’}
\pamiat’\)) as well as one on bookkeeping (\(\text{Bukhgalteriia prostaia i dvoinaia v}
vosem’ dnei, po novoi metode}\). In 1893, he translated Paolo Mantegazza’s
\(\text{L’arte di essere felici (1886)}\) via French and published it in Jerusalem under
the title \(\text{Ha-’ishar me’ayin yimtsa’}\). The brief preface of the translator
reveals that he took great pleasure in providing the Hebrew language
with new terms from all disciplines. In 1896, Slouschz embarked on a
journey to Italy and Egypt from where he went on to his second visit to
Palestine. In 1897, he edited a Russian-Jewish paper, \(\text{Odesskaia Gazeta}\),
which today belongs to the bibliographical rarities of Russian Jewish
Culture. At the same time he published in Ben-Yehudah’s journal \(\text{Ha-
Hashkafah}\) his first travel writings \(\text{Masa’ be Litah (Journey to Lithuania)}\) and,
under the titles ‘\text{Arets ham and Masa’ be-Mitsrayim}\), observations from his
first journey to Egypt. He also published regularly in \(\text{Ha-Tsefirah, Ha-
Melits, Ha-magid, Ha-pisgah, Ha-’olam, Ha-’avatselet, as well as in the almanach Luah ‘erets Yisrael.}\)

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\(^3\) A.R. Malakhi reports an oath taken by Saul Tchermichowsky, Joseph Klausner
and Nahum Slouschz to dedicate their lives to the renaissance of the people, the land,
the language and the culture. See A.R. Malakhi, ‘\text{Naḥum Slushts’}, \text{Jewish Book Annual},
Hebrew section, 2 (1943), 30–33.

\(^4\) \(\text{Ha-Eshkol}\), the first general encyclopedia in Hebrew was begun by Isaac Gold-
mann in Warsaw in 1888; only six parts were published, and even the first letter of
the Hebrew alphabet was not completed.

\(^5\) David Smilenski, \(\text{Im bne ’artsi c’eri (Tel Aviv: Ho’ed ha-tisburi lehots’at kitvav shel}