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Jörg Schulte

From Greek to Hebrew: Saul Tchernikhovsky and the Translation of Classical Antiquity

Saul Tchernikhovsky (1875–1943) can be regarded as the first European poet who wrote in the Hebrew tongue – not only because he introduced more European genres and metres into Hebrew poetry[1] than any other Hebrew poet; his poetry is European in a sense in which Hebrew has always been a part of the European cultural heritage. When two of the first historians of modern Hebrew literature, who were among Tchernikhovsky's closest friends,[2] stressed the humanist element in modern Hebrew literature, they understood Hebrew humanism not only as a counterpart to the religious tradition in Jewish history but stressed at the same time that Hebrew

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[1] For the history of translation of classical texts into Hebrew, see Yaacov Shavit, The Reception of Greek Mythology in Modern Hebrew Culture, in: Asher Ovadiah (ed.), Hellenic and Jewish Arts. Interaction, Tradition, and Renewal, Tel Aviv 1998, 431–448; idem, Athens in Jerusalem. Classical Antiquity and Hellenism in the Making of the Modern Secular Jew, London 1997; Salomon Dykman, Athens and Jerusalem. Literary Relations between the Jews and the Greeks, in: Ariel. A Review of the Arts and Sciences in Israel 12 (1965), no. 11, 5–18, and 94–96; Cyril Aslanov, Les voies de la traduction des œuvres de l'Antiquité classique en hébreu, in: Études classiques 65 (1997), 193–210; see Robert Singerman, Jewish Translation History. A Bibliography of Bibliographies and Studies, Amsterdam 2002; ʿAminadav Diḳman, Targumim basifrut ha-ʿivrit beteḳufat ha-modernizam [Translations into Hebrew Literature in the Period of Modernism], in: Yirmeyahu Yovel (ed.), Zeman yehudi ḥadash [New Jewish Time], 5 vols., Jerusalem 2007, vol. 3, 128–131; idem, Targumim basifrut ha-ʿivrit beteḳufat ha-teḥiyah [Translations into Hebrew Literature in the Period of the Hebrew Renaissance], in: ibid., 94–98; Zohar Shavit, Fabriquer une culture nationale. Le rôle des traductions dans la constitution de la littérature hébraïque, in: Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales 144 (2002), no. 2, 21–32.

[2] See Yosef Kloyzner, Darke li-ḳer'at ha-teḥiyah ṿeha-ge'ulah. 'Avtobiyografyah 1874–1944 [Ways of Reading the Hebrew Renaissance and the Redemption. Autobiography, 1874–1944], Tel Aviv 1955, passim; Naḥum Slushts, Leneshmat Sha'ul ben Toviyah Ṭsherniḥovsḳi. Mebaser ha-teḥiyah [On the Death of Saul ben Toviyah Tchernikhovsky, the Herald of the Renaissance], in: ʿAm va-sefer, October 1944, no. 1, 3 f.; idem, Raḥshe ḥaver neʿorim [Whisperings of a Childhood Friend], in: Ha-'arets, 8 July 1932, 5; idem, Shiḥrur ha-'adam veha'ezraḥ. Lehofʿato haḳeruv shel ha-kerekh ha-ʿashiri ṿeha'aḥron shel kol kitve Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi [The Liberation of Man and the Citizen. Upon the Occasion of the Publication of the Tenth an Last Volume of Tchernikhovsky's Complete Works], in: Ha-Tsiyoni haklali [The General Zionist] 8, 1933.

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humanism was yet to be discovered as an essential part of the European humanist heritage.[3]

Saul Tchernikhovsky sought for poetic answers to the question why Hebrew had always been a part of European history. In July 1921, he wrote the sonnet *Ḥaniba'al* (Hannibal), which continued the sequence of *Sonetos 'akum (*Sonnets of Paganism) published in the previous year; in 1923, he included the sonnet in his *Maḥberet ha-sonetot* (Book of Sonnets) published in Berlin. The sonnet can illuminate some aspects of how Tchernikhovsky translated classical antiquity into Hebrew culture.

יוֹם גדוֹלוֹת אָ וְיוֹם הֲרַת עוֹלָמוֹת בָּאִים:
אִם רוֹמא תְהִי הַכֹּל אוֹ קַרְתְּתָא־חֲדְתָּא אֶפֶס?
בַּכַּף הָאַחַת – שֵׁם, בַּכַּף הַשְּׁנִיָּה - יֶפֶת,
וּבְיַד הַגְּזֵרָה הִיא שְׁתֵּי כַפּוֹת הַמֹּאזְנָם.

הָיִתָ אַתָּה שַׂר שֶׁל שֵׁם, נֵץ גְּבַהּ־עֵינָם
בֵּין תַּרְנְגוֹלֵי־לוּל וְשֶׂכְוִים לִמוּדֵי רֶפֶת,
הוֹי בּוֹנֶה מִגְדַּל־עֹז עַל מַסַּד חוֹל וָגֶפֶס:
הַכְּנַעֲנִי - תַּגָּר־סְתָם,יִשְׂרָאֵל - עַם תַּנָּאִים!

בֶּן־רוֹמָא, שׁוּר הָהָר, הִסְתַּכֵּל בַּעֲרְפִלָּיו,
שָׁם חֲנִיבַּעַל בָּא, פָּרָשֵׁי־לוּב בְּחוֹל־עָב?
אֱמֹר לְלִבְּךָ הָס, וְתִשְׁמַע נַחֲרַת פִּילָיו...

אַךְ עֵינֵי נִינֵי־צוּר בְּאֵשׁ־כִּילַי מוֹצְאִים סְפוֹרוֹת
לַהוֹן שֶׁל טַבְּעוֹת־פָּז, – גִּבּוֹרָם מוֹדְדָן בִּדְלָיָיו;
יְצַו – וְעָרָיו הֵם יַנְחִילוּ שְׁמוֹ לְדוֹרוֹת – – –

It was a great day and a day pregnant with worlds to come:
Will Rome find its end or shall Carthage be nothing?
On the one side Shem – on the other Japhet.
And in the hands of fate – the two pans of the scale.

You were the leader of Shem, at eye-level with the hawk
between chicken in the chicken coop and grouse raised in the barn.
Woe to him who builds a strong tower on a ground of sand and clay:
The Canaanite is a simple trader, and Israel is a people of teachers!

Son of Rome, look at the mountain, observe its mists:
Does Hannibal come there, a Libyan horseman in a cloud of sand?
Tell your heart to be silent, and you will hear the snorting of his elephants …

The eyes of the grandsons of Tyre were led by the fraudulent fire of
the uncountable wealth of golden rings – their hero measures them in buckets;
if he commands – his cities will leave his name as inheritance for future generations.

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[3] Nahum Slouschz, La renaissance de la littérature hébraïque (1743–1885). Essai d'histoire littéraire, Paris 1903; idem, Ḳorot ha-sifrut ha-'ivrit ha-ḥadashah [History of Modern Hebrew Literature], Warsaw 1906; Iosif Klauzner, Novo-evreiskaia literatura [Modern Hebrew Literature], Odessa 1912.

Yom gdolot ’az veyom | harat ʿolamot ba’im:
’im Roma’ thi hakol | ’o Ḳarta’-ḥadta’ ’efes?
Bakaf ha’ḥat Shem | bakaf ha-shniyah Yefet.[4]
Uvyad hagzerah af | shte kapot hamo’znayim.

Hayita ’atah ṣar | shel Shem nets gvah ʿeynayim
bein tarnegole-lul | ṿeshekhṿim lmude-refet.
Hoy boneh migdal-ʿoz | ʿal masad ḥul ṿegefes:
ha-Knaʿni tagar stam. | Yisra’el ’am-tana’im.

Ben-romi, shur ha-har. | Histakel bʿarpilaṿ,
sham Ḥanibaʿal ba’, | parashe-luv bḥul ʿav?
’Emor lelibkha: has. | Fen tishmaʿ naḥrat pilaṿ …

’Akh ʿeine nine-tsur | b’esh-kilai mots’im sforot
lahon shel ṭabʿot-paz | giboram moddan bdalyaṿ…[5]
Yetsav – ṿeʿaraṿ hem | yanḥilu shmo ledorot – – –[6]

Ḳarta’-ḥadta’, the New City, is, of course, Carthage, founded according to the legend by Phoenician colonists under the princess Elisa or Dido in the eighth century BC. Tchernikhovsky refers to the battle at Cannae on August 2 in 216 BC in which the army of Carthage under Hannibal defeated the numerically superior army of the Roman Republic. The end of the second line contains an echo of the fate of Edom (which had been identified by rabbinical commentaries with Rome) prophesied in the book of Isaiah (34:12): “ṿekol sareiha yehyu ’efes” (“and all its princes shall be nothing”), but the interesting connection is made in the following line: Carthage here is identified with the Semitic cultures of Phoenicia and Judea so that the battle at Cannae becomes a battle between the Roman world (personified by Japhet) and the Jewish world (personified by Shem). Hannibal is the leader of Shem.

Tchernikhovsky had learned from Livy’s account on the Punic wars that Hannibal ordered the golden rings to be taken from all slain Roman noblemen and to be sent to Carthage as evidence of the number of Romans who perished during the battle.[7] The sonnet’s last line is a deliberation on what might have happened if Hannibal had marched against Rome after the victory of Cannae. However, there is no classical source stating that the gold of the rings had any influence on Hannibal's decision not to attack Rome in the aftermath of the battle.

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[4] “Yefet” and “refet” in line 6 were pronounced “Yefes” and “refes,” respectively, in the Ashkenazic accent, rhyming with “’efes” and “ṿegefes.”

[5] The word “bdalyaṿ” (in his buckets) is stressed on the first syllable and rhymes with “pilaṿ,” whereas “bʿarpilaṿ” and “bḥul ʿav” are stressed on the last syllable.

[6] Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Maḥberet ha-soneṭot [Book of Sonnets], Berlin 1922, 103; idem, Shirim [Songs], Tel Aviv 1955, 316; the transliteration reflects the poetic pronounciation which is governed by the poetic metre (i.e. *sheva* and *ḥataf* are transliterated only when they are pronounced as syllables for metrical reasons).

[7] Livy, Ab urbe condita, XXIII, 12.

Tchernikhovsky's most important source for *Hannibal* was another sonnet. In his collection *Les Trophées* (1893), the French poet José-Maria de Heredia, whom Tchernikhovsky acknowledged in the preface of his *Book of Sonnets* as the greatest sonneteer of all times, had published a sonnet with the title *Après Cannes* (After Cannae). This sonnet is part of the sequence *Rome et les barbares* (Rome and the Barbarians), which might even have inspired Tchernikhovsky's sequence *Sonnets of Paganism* as a whole.

Un des consuls tué, l'autre fuit vers Linterne
Ou Venuse. L'Aufide a débordé, trop plein
De morts et d'armes. La foudre au Capitolin
Tombe, le bronze sue et le ciel rouge est terne.

En vain le Grand Pontife a fait un lectisterne
Et consulté deux fois l'oracle sibyllin;
D'un long sanglot l'aïeul, la veuve, l'orphelin
Emplissent Rome en deuil que la terreur consterne.

Et chaque soir la foule allait aux aqueducs,
Plèbe, esclaves, enfants, femmes, vieillards caducs
Et tout ce que vomit Subure et l'ergastule;

Tous anxieux de voir surgir, au dos vermeil
Des monts Sabins où luit l'œil sanglant du soleil,
Le Chef borgne monté sur l'éléphant Gétule.[8]

Heredia describes the state of fear and disturbance which ruled Rome after the defeat at Cannae. The final tercet gives the same vision of Hannibal rising on a mount that can be found in Tchernikhovsky's *Hannibal* (the choice of words is dictated by the poetic metre): "All fear to see rising, on the red ridge of the Sabine Mounts where the bloody eye of the sun is shining, the one-eyed chief on the Getulian elephant." We can see how Tchernikhovsky perceives a theme of classical antiquity through the prism of European literature. Tchernikhovsky's Hebrew sonnet fulfills all formal requirements both of the Russian and of the classical French alexandrine in which De Heredia wrote *Après Cannes*.

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[8] José-Maria de Heredia, Les trophées, Paris 1893, 73; "After Cannæ: One consul killed; one to Venusia fled, / Or to Liternum; the Aufidus runs o'er / From dead and arms; lightning has struck full sore / The Capitol; the bronze sweats, and the heavens look dread. // Vainly the God's feast has the Pontiff spread, / And twice the Sibyl's Oracle did implore, / The grandsire, widow, orphan, weep yet more, / Till Rome in consternation bows her head. // Each evening to the aqueducts they swarm: / Plebs, slaves, the women, children, the deform / All that the prison or the slum can spew // To see, on Sabine Mount of blood-hued dyes, / Seated on elephant Gaetulian, rise / The one-eyed Chieftain to their anxious view." Sonnets from the Trophies of José-Maria de Heredia. Rendered into English by Edward Robeson Taylor, San Francisco, Calif., 1906, 74.

Some of the best Russian imitations of De Heredia were composed by the poet and translator Petr Buturlin.[9] As De Heredia wrote on antique myths and deities, Buturlin (who also translated several of De Heredia's sonnets) often used pagan Slavonic myths. And just as Buturlin had turned to Slavonic myths, Tchernikhovsky turned to the Jewish past, in particular to that component which was connected to classical antiquity.

As for the content of the sonnet *Hannibal*, there are two obvious questions: What were the sources that prompted Tchernikhovsky to make Hannibal the leader of the Jews and Phoenicians (the grandsons of Tyre) alike? And why was this connection between Carthage and the Jewish world so alluring for the poet?

At the time the sonnet was written, the only person to have made a claim about an ancient Hebrew civilization which included Tyre and Sidon was the scholar and translator Nahum Slouschz.[10] Nachum Slouschz was born in the early 1870s in the province of Vilna and moved to Odessa in 1881, where he belonged to a Hebrew-speaking group that included Joseph Klausner and Saul Tchernikhovsky. Slouschz published the results of his archeological research in numerous journals in Russian, Hebrew, and French. In 1921, he published a series of articles on Eber and Kanaan in *Ha-shiloaḥ*,[11] the same journal in which Tchernikhovsky's sonnet was printed for the first time.[12] His interpretation of Hannibal can be found in a number of earlier articles[13] that Tchernikhovsky might have read before he wrote the sonnet on 21 July 1921. I quote instead from Slouschz's English book *Travels in North Africa* (1927) that contains a summary of the hypothesis developed in several articles:

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[9] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Maḥberet ha-soneṭot, 18.

[10] Jörg Schulte, Nahum Slouschz (1872–1969) and his Contribution to the Hebrew Renaissance, in: idem/Olga Tabachnikova/Peter Wagstaff (eds.), Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture (1917–1937), Boston, Mass., 2012, 109–126.

[11] Naḥum Slushts, ʿEver uKnaʿan [Eber and Kanaan], in: Ha-shiloaḥ 37 (5682), 237–242, 351–364, and 519–525; 38 (5682), 132–138, and 273–277; 39 (5682), 128–134, and 308–311; 41 (5682), 238–243, 346–352, 443–454, and 502–511.

[12] Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Ḥanibaʿal, in: Ha-shiloaḥ 40 (5682), 57 f.

[13] Nahum Slouschz, La civilisation hébraïque et phénicienne à Carthage, in: Revue tunisiénne 18 (1911), 213–239; Naḥum Slushts, 'Iyye Ha-Yam [Islands in the Sea], New York 1919; idem, ʿAl ḥarbut Ḳatargah [On the Ruins of Carthage], in: Ha-mitspeh [The Observation Point] (Cracow) 3 (20 January 1911), 5 f. Some Hebrew texts on Hannibal have been collected in Yosif 'Arikha', Giborim ba-maʿarakhah. Parashiyot ḥayehem u-teḳufatam be-aspaḳlaryah sifrutit ṿe-hisṭorit [Heroes in Battle. Chapters on Their Lives and Times in the Mirror of Literature and History], Tel Aviv 1978.

> “Carthage!” – Slouschz exclaims here – “Kart Hadshat […], the great city of Hannibal, which for centuries kept in check the might of Rome, and the fall of which preluded and perhaps determined the fall of the Hebraic sister-city – Jerusalem; Carthage! whose every vestige was destroyed by her Roman enemy – […] nearly four thousand inscriptions in the ancient tongue of Canaan have been unearthed in the city of Carthage […]. And we Hebrew writers, we who write and feel in our biblical tongue, have recognized at once that this so-called Phoenician language is nothing more nor less than Hebrew – a pure Hebrew dialect, nearly the same as was spoken in the country of Israel […]. The population of Carthage was Palestinian in origin and Hebraic in civilization, and if, instead of succumbing, the city of Hannibal had triumphed over Rome, it is probable – nay, almost certain – that Hebrew, and not Latin, would have become the dominant language of the Mediterranean countries. It is certain, then, that it was in a Hebrew dialect that Hannibal commanded the troops which he led across the Alps.”[14]

The idea of a Hebrew-speaking Carthage became a reality when Slouschz’s Hebrew translation of Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Salammbô* was published in Warsaw in 1922 (which was later highly praised by Zalman Shneour and Leah Goldberg).[15] The princess, her noblemen and mercenaries were – sixty years after the first publication of the novel – relieved of the burden of speaking a most elegant French and began to speak in their very own language. The translator explains as well that the goddess Astarte had been called *“harabt”* or *“rabatenu,”* as he had found in the inscriptions – a rare combination of translation and scholarship indeed.[16] In 1943, the translation served Yitsḥaḳ Katsenelson as inspiration for his drama *Ḥanibaʿal.*

Nachum Slouschz did not reduce the Phoenician- or Punic-Roman relationship to a conflict analagous to the conflict between Israel and Edom, but rather imagined it as a long lasting bond of mutual cultural influence. He undertook to write their common mythology in his short history of the Mediterranean under the title *Be’iye ha-yam* (On the Islands of the Sea), edited in New York in 1919 and later largely extended into *Sefer ha-yam* (The Book of the Sea), a history of the Mediterranean from the third millenium BC to the early modern period, published in Tel Aviv in 1948. The ideas of Slouschz and Tchernikhovsky were picked up by Adolph Gurevitch (Adayah Gur Khoron), one of the founders of the Canaanite movement.[17] In the early 1930s, he published a series of articles in Vladimir Jabotinsky's journal *Razsvet* (Dawn). In one of them he described Hannibal as a "more than heroic figure, the Bar-Kochba of the West, the greatest of commanders," and claimed him for the history of the Hebrews.[18] His interpretation, however, was a far cry from the humanistic idea of Tchernikhovsky.

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[14] Nahum Slouschz, Travels in North Africa, Philadelphia, Pa., 1927, 228.

[15] Gusṭav Flobert̩, Ṣalambo, trans. by Naḥum Slushts, Warsaw 1922; see Le’ah Goldberg, Sifrut yafah ʿolamit be-targumeha le-ʿIvrit. Hartsa’ot be-ḳurs le-safranim [World Literature in Hebrew Translation. Lectures for a Course for Librarians], Tel Aviv 1951, 15; Zalman Shne’ur, Ḥ. N. Byaliḳ u-vene doro [H. N. Bialik and his Contemporaries], Tel Aviv 1958, 91; Yitsḥaḳ Katsenelson, Ḥanibaʿal, in: idem, Ketavim aḥaronim 5740–5744 [Posthumous Writings], Tel Aviv 1956, 241–297.

[16] Flobert̩, Ṣalambo, 323 f.

[17] See Yaʿaḳov Shavit, Hebrews and Phoenicians. An Ancient Historical Image and its Usage, in: Studies in Zionism 5 (1984), no. 2, 157–180; idem, The New Hebrew Nation. A Study in Heresy and Fantasy, London 1987.

Tchernikhovsky himself returned to the idea of Hebrew Carthage in 1939, when he wrote the sonnet *Hayehudim basha'ar* (The Jews in the Gate)[19] which contains the Latin line "Heu ante portas! Heu!" alluding to the famous phrase "Hannibal ad portas."[20] The sonnet is written in the same metre (Hebrew alexandrine verse) as the first sonnet on Hannibal, but in the Sephardic accent (with the word stress on the ultimate syllable).

Heu, ante portas! Heu!
הוּא כְּבָר אֶל מוּל הַשָּׁעַר!
כָּאן חַנִּיבַּעַל, כָּאן! קָרוֹב מְאֹד כִּי בָא!
(יוֹם יוֹם פְּלִיטִים שָׁבִים... הַקּוֹנְסוּל מַה קִּוָּה?)
סוֹעֵר וּבִכְבֵדוּת, כָּעָב לִפְנֵי הַסָּעַר.

!Heu, ante portas! Heu
דָּרַךְ אַרְיֵה שֵׁם, נָעַר!
חֵיל כְּנַעֲנִים, לוּבִים, קַרְתָּגָאִים וּשְׁבָא...
וּבִדְמְדוּמֵי יוֹם בָּא כְּלוּם וֶנוּס זֶה זִיוָהּ
אוֹ כְּבָר חֹד־קוֹבָעוֹ מַבְרִיק בְּקָרַחַת יָעַר?

עָבְרוּ חָלְפוּ שָׁנִים, נָפְלוּ בְּנֵי־שֵׁם בְּזָמָּה,
וּבְשַׁעַר־טִיטוּס כְּבָר גַּם יְהוּדָה נָדָמָּה,
גַּם רוֹמָא נֶאֶלְמָה מִלָּחֶם וּקְרָבוֹת,

וְרוֹמָא חֲדָשָׁה קָמָה עַל חֳרָבוֹת, –
וְהַפַּחַד טֶרֶם סָר, וְעוֹד גָּדוֹל הַצָּעַר:
“שֵׁמִים עָלַיִךְ, עִיר! וְהַיְּהוּדִים בַּשָּׁעַר!”

Heu, ante portas! Heu! He is already in front of the gate!
Hannibal is here! He has come very close!
(Every day refugees return home … What does the consul hope for?)
He rages heavily, as a cloud before the storm.

Heu, ante portas! Heu! The lion Shem marched and roared!
An army of Canaanites, Libyians, Carthaginians, and Sabaeans …
Does Venus shine when the twilight comes,
or is it already the edge of his helmet, that sparkles in the glade of the forest?

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[18] Alraïd [Adayah Gur Khoron], Ierusalim i Karfagen [Jerusalem and Carthage], in: Razsvet, 17 January 1932, 12; idem, Finikiitsy [Phoenicians], in: ibid., 27 December 1931, 6; idem, Evrei i Khanaan [Jews and Canaan], in: ibid., 20 November 1931, 6; idem, Evrei i Rim [Jews and Rome], in: ibid., 17 January 1932, 9; idem: Evreistvo nakanune stolknoveniia s Rimom [Jews on the Eve of the Conflict with Rome], in: ibid., 14 February 1932, 6.

[19] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 641.

[20] Cicero, Orationes Philippicae, I.5.11.

Years went by, the sons of Shem fell in Zama,
and in the Gate of Titus Judah has become silent,
also Rome has fallen silent, from the fight and the battles.

A new Rome rose upon the ruins, –
but ere the fear vanished, the anxiety was still great:
“The Semites are near to you, city! The Jews are at the gate!”

Heu, ante portas! Heu! | Hu’ kvar ’el mul hashaʿar!
Ka’n, Ḥanibaʿal, ka’n! | Ḳaruv me’od ki ba’!
(Yom yom pliṭim shavim… | ha-ḳonsul mah ḳivah?)
Soʿer uvikhvedut, | kaʿav lifnei hasaʿar.

Heu, ante portas! Heu! | Darakh ’aryeh Shem, naʿar![21]
Ḥeil knaʿanim, luvim, | ḳartaga’im ushba’…
Uvdimdume yom ba’ | klum ṿenus zeh ziṿah
’o kvar ḥod-ḳovaʿo | mavriḳ bḳaraḥat yaʿar?

ʿAvru ḥalfu shanim, | naflu bne-Shem be-Zamah,
uvshaʿar Ṭiṭus kvar | gam Yhudah nadamah,
gam Roma’ ne’elmah | milaḥem uḳravot,

ṿeRoma’ ḥadashah | ḳamah ʿal ḥaravot, –
ṿhapaḥad ṭerem sar | ṿeʿod gadol hatsaʿar:
“Shemim ʿalayikh, ʿir! | ṿhayehudim bashaʿar!”

Whereas the first sonnet referred to the battle of Cannae (which was victorious for Hannibal), the second sonnet highlights the battle of Zama in 202 BC which sealed the defeat of Carthage in the Second Punic war. The fall of Carthage is presented in one line with the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD commemorated in the Arch of Titus.

But what does the idea of the Hebrew Carthage have to do with the reception of classical antiquity? If we look at the early history of vernacular poetry in Europe, we find that the humanists were searching for connections between their own legendary ancestors and the epics of Homer and Virgil; among the most famous works are Ronsard’s *Françiade* and Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion*. A mythic national hero figuring in one of the marginal episodes of the *Iliad* would be the *carte d’entrée* into European literature, providing the point of departure for a national epic in imitation of Homer and Vergil. And who were Antenor, Francus, Astyanax or Brutus compared to Hannibal, the strongest opponent of the descendants of Troy? The idea of a Hebrew-speaking Hannibal accorded Hebrew literature a place in a broader European tradition. Tchernikhovsky was well aware of foundation myths: in his monograph on Immanuel of Rome he refers to Livy’s account on the myth of Antenor.[22]

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[21] Jer. 51:38.

[22] Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, ʿImmanu’el ha-Romi. Monografyah, Berlin 1925, 29.

Via Carthage, Hebrew culture had always been present in one of Europe’s best works: it was now up to Europe to discover this unknown elements of a common cultural heritage. Nachum Slouschz and Saul Tchernikhovsky were well aware that any translation within a shared cultural heritage is essentially different from a translation which lacks this common sphere. Only a common shared bond will enable the search for common points of reference – in historical and mythological references as well as in the translator’s search for an expression and its etymology.

A hypothesis concerning ancient Hebrew-Greek cultural contacts that was similar to the ideas of Nachum Slouschz was developed independently by the French classicist Victor Bérard. Tchernikhovsky quotes at length from his *Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssée* (1927)[23] in the postface to his Hebrew translation of the *Odyssee*.[24] In a nutshell, Bérard’s hypothesis was that Phoenician sailors kept their nautical secrets and produced some sort of encoded travel diary which later – via Hebrew and Greek intermediaries – became the source for the *Odyssee*.[25] Tchernikhovsky translated the following passage from Bérard’s monumental study: “This masterpiece [i.e. the *Odyssee*] appeared through an interaction [‘recoupement’ in the original, *‘mezigah mekhupelet’* in the Hebrew translation] of Greek tradition and Semitic influences.”[26] It is noteworthy that Bérard’s study served James Joyce as main inspiration for the Jewish-Greek epic *Ulysses*.[27] Following Bérard’s interpretation, Tchernikhovsky rendered in his translation of the *Odyssee φοίνικες* (Phoenicians) as “*Kenaʿanim*” or “*ʾanshei Kenaʿan*.” Josef Patai recalled (in an unpublished review to Nachum Slouschz’s *Book of the Sea* how the poet read to him his translation of the *Odyssey* at the shore of the Baltic sea and suddenly exclaimed: “*Hari zo keʿein shirah ʿivrit maḳorit mamash!*” (“Is this not an original Hebrew song!”).[28] He also described the poet’s joy to have found Bérard’s discoveries.[29] Tchernikhovsky’s ideas renew the ancient humanist dream of an affinity between the vernacular and ancient Greek, maybe best known from the humanist and lexicographer Henricus Stephanus (Henri Estienne).[30] He had nurtured the dream of a Greek-Jewish connection from early on, when he wrote the poem *Bein ha-metsarim* (Between the Mountain Peaks)[31] in Odessa in 1898. Here, the son of the rabbi dies as a volunteer for the *“ʿam ʿolam,”* the “eternal people”[32] (a common designation for the Jewish people but used by Tchernikhovsky for the Greeks). The Turkish suppressors trample on the *“degel hatkhelet”* (the blue flag)[33] – at the time a name for the newly created Jewish flag; Tchernikhovsky uses it for the flag of the Greek insurgents.

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[23] Victor Bérard, Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssée, 2 vols., Paris 1902–1903.

[24] Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, ’Aḥrit-davar [Afterword], in: idem, ’Odiseyah [The Odyssey], Tel Aviv 1991, 469–480.

[25] “Il est donc possible que, du périple sémitique au poème grec, le passage ne se soit pas fait aussi directement qu’il nous semblait d’abord. Il put y avoir un intermédiaire, peut-être plusieurs intermédiaires, les uns sémitiques, les autres grecs. […] On comprendrait que les Sémites aient communiqué aux Hellènes quelque poème ou conte terrifiant plus volontiers qu’un périple exact. De tout temps, les thalassocrates ont gardé secrets leurs renseignement de navigation.” Bérard, Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssée, vol. 2, 572.

[26] Ibid., 577 (“Ce chef-d’œuvre apparut au ‘recoupement’, se je puis dire, de la tradition grecque et de l’influence sémitique: ainsi, dans presque tous les pays et presque tous les temps, les grandes œuvres d’art sont le double produit d’une tradition nationale et d’une influence étrangère”).

[27] Lynne D. Childress, Joyce and Bérard. “Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssée” as a Source for “Ulysses” (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford, 1993).

[28] Gnazim Archive Tel Aviv, Nachum Slouschz, fond 3203–1.

The sequence of *Sonnets of Paganism* also contains the sonnet *Ṿezot li-Yudah* (And This is for Judah)[34] written in June 1920. The subtitle *Maḥzon ha-sibilah ha-romit* (A Vision of the Roman Sybil) refers to the so-called “Sibylline oracles,” a collection of utterances that were composed or edited between the middle of the second century BC and the fifth century AD. Books 3 to 5 of the “Sibylline oracles” were composed by Alexandrian Jews. Written after the destruction of the Temple by Titus, they are imbued with an uncompromising hatred for Rome. Tchernikhovsky’s friend Joseph Klausner had worked on the “Sibylline oracles” in 1906.[35] He returned to the topic when he prepared the book *Sefarim ḥitsonim* (The Outside Books, i. e. Pseudo-Epigrapha) in 1919, but their printing was interrupted at the end of the year.[36] Klausner had planned to reedit the poetical Hebrew translation of Joshua Shteinberg which had first been published in the anthology *Me’asef* in Warsaw in 1887.[37]

The subtitle of Tchernikhovsky’s sonnet could suggest that it contains a poetic adaption of a passage of the “Sibylline oracles.” However, the similarities are restricted to certain general topoi. The Sybil had warned the

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[29] Yosef Paṭai, Yesodot datiyim bashirat Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi [The Religious Foundations of Tchernichovsky’s Poetry], in: Metsudah [The Fortress] 3–4 (1944–1945), 249–270, here 263.

[30] See Henri Estienne, Conformité du langage françois avec le grec, Paris 1853.

[31] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 63–69.

[32] Ibid., 66.

[33] Ibid., 68.

[34] See Deut. 33:7.

[35] Yosef Kloyzner, Sefarim ḥitsonim, in: ’Otsar ha-yahadut: Ḥoveret ledugma’ [Treasure of Judaism. An Exemplary Volume], Warsaw 1906, 95–120.

[36] Joseph Klausner, The Messianic Idea in Israel. From its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah, New York 1955, 371 f.

[37] Yehoshuʿa Shṭeinberg, Maṣa’ gey’ ḥizayon. Sefer ḥazon ha-sibilot lemshorere ha-yehudim ha-helenim [Travail in the Valley of Vision. The Book of the Sibylline Oracles of the Hellenist Jews], in: Sefer ha-me’asef [Anthology], [Warsaw] 1886, 1–56.

"daughter of Latin Rome, clothed in gold and luxury, drunken full oft with thy wedding of many wooers, thou shalt be a slave-bride in dishonour."[38] It should be noted that this passage is omitted in Shteinberg's translation. Klauzner, who was working on a new and complete edition, might have shown it to his friend in Greek or even discussed a translation with him; Tchernikhovsky's sonnet follows the topos of debauchery (V, 162–178, and 386–397) and predicts:

יַפְתְּ אֱלֹהִים לְחָם וְתִגַּל בְּאֹהֶל יָפוֹת
וּלְמַחֲרָאוֹתָיו יֵט וּבְכַפָּיו שִׁיר־וֶרְגִּיל,
וּבְצַהֲלַת פֶּרֶד־בָּר וּבְגֵהוּק־שׂוֹבַע וְגִיל
יְטַמֵּא נְדִיבוֹת־עָם כְּשְׁפָחוֹת נֶחֱרָפוֹת.

וּפָעַר פִּיו בְּשִׁיר וּפְרִיצוּת וַחֲרָפוֹת.
בְּמוֹשַׁב מְחוֹקְקֵי־עָם עַל נְחֹשֶׁת וְעַל גְּוִיל,
וּבְהֵיכַל־אֱלֹהִים פָּרֹכֶת־דְּבִיר וּכְלִיל
מַעֲטָפוֹת יַעַשׂ לוֹ לְרַגְלָיו הַמְּטֻנָּפוֹת.

וְרָעֲשָׁה הָעִיר וְזָעֲקָה וּתְהִי
בַּת־רוֹמָה אָז כִּנְחִיל־הַדְּבוֹרִים בַּכַּוֶּרֶת.
כְּבֹא לִרְדּוֹת דְּבַשׁ הַמְּגַדְּלָן אֶל הַגְּדֶרֶת.

וּפְלֵיטֵי־אֲוֶנְטִין יָרִימוּ קוֹל־הַנְּהִי
וְנָסוּ נִכְחָם מְקוֹם שָׁם צַר מִבְצָרָם מְחִתּוֹת,
וּשְׁאָר־יְהוּדָה אַף עִמָּהֶם בְּשַׁעַר־טִיטוּס.

And God multiplied Ham; and he denudes himself in the tent of the beauties,
bends himself over the latrines, and in his hands [he holds] the songs of Vergil,
whinnying like a wild mule, he belches from satiation and pleasure,
pollutes the noble women of the people as abused maidservants.

His mouth is open wide in song, promiscuity and insult.
In the seat of the legislators of the people, on copper and on parchment,
in the temple of God, he uses the holy curtain and the seam
of the garment for his dirty feet.

The city will be plunged in tumult, it will shout, and then
Rome will be like a swarm of bees in the beehive,
when the beekeeper comes to its gate in order to collect the honey.

The refugees at the Aventine hill will raise their voices in lamentation,
and they will flee to a place and their fortress will be narrow from the terrors,
And then will the rest of Judah be with them in the Arch of Titus.

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[38] Herbert Bate, The Sibylline Oracles. Books III–V, New York 1918, 62; see Shṭeinberg, Maṣa' gey' ḥizayon, 20 (the lines 336–572 of the third book are omitted). Tchernikhovsky must have been interested in Shteinberg's translation as they belong to the first attempts to write Hebrew hexameters.

Yaft ʼelohim leḤam[39] | ṿeyitgal bʼohel yafot
ulmaḥarʼotaṿ[40] yeṭ | uvkhapaṿ shir Ṿergil,
uvtsahlat pered-bar | uvgehuḳ-ṣovaʿ ṿgil
yeṭameʼ ndivot-ʿam | kishfaḥot neḥerafot.

ufaʿar piṿ beshir | ufritsut ṿaḥarafot.
Bemoshav mḥoḳḳe-ʿam | ʿal nḥoshet ṿeʿal gṿil,
uvhekhal-ʼelohim | parokhet-dvir ukhlil
maʿaṭfot yaʿash lo | leraglaṿ hamṭunafot.

ṿeraʿashah ha-ʿir | ṿezaʿḳah utehi
bat-romah ʼaz kinḥil | ha-dvorim bakaṿeret,
keboʼ lirdot devash | hamgadlan ʼel hagderet.

Ufleṭe-ʼaṿenṭin | yarimu ḳol-hanhi
ṿenasu nikhḥam mḳom | ṣam tsar mivtsarah mḥitot.
ushyar-yehudah ʼaf | ʿimahem bshaʿar Ṭiṭos.[41]

The sonnet is certainly one of Tchernikhovsky's most difficult poems. It has never been translated nor received any considerable scholarly attention. The main difficulty lies in the first line which contains a pun on the blessing of the sons of Noah. Israel Bartal has shown (in a different context) that the name *"Ḥam"* was used as a name for Russians,[42] and it seems that this meaning is at least alluded to. The last line refers to the depiction of the Jews in the Arch of Titus. Tchernikhovsky might have been inspired to the topic by the sixth line of De Heredia's sonnet *After Cannae* quoted above: "Et consulté deux fois l'oracle sibyllin."

The most beautiful sonnet in the sequence *Pagan Sonnets* is *ʿAshtarti li* (My Astarte)[43] which imitates the votive epigrams of the *Anthologia Graeca* (VI, 209; IX, 602; XVI, 159–170) from which Tchernikhovsky later translated three epigrams in order to include them into *ʿAma' dedahava'* (The Golden People).[44]

In some of his idyls and longer poems, Tchernikhovsky carefully suggests that his heroes are distant descendents of those ancient Hebrews who were seafarers and in contact with the Greek world. The most explicit example is *Sava' maflig le'Odesah (*Grandfather sails to Odessa) where Tchernikhovsky speculates about his sailing grandfather and his companion Ḥavrilo:

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[39] Gen. 9:27.

[40] 2 Kgs. 10:27.

[41] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 315 f.

[42] Yisraʼel Bartal, Ha-Lo-Yehudim ṿe-ḥevratam be-sifrut ʿIvrit ṿe-Yidish be-Mizraḥ ʼEropah beyn ha-shanim 1856–1914 [Non-Jews and Gentile Society in Eastern European Hebrew and Yiddish Literature, 1856–1914], Jerusalem 1980, 104 and passim.

[43] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 289–290. The sonnet has been translated e.g. by Robert Alter in Stanley Burnshaw (ed.), The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself, Detroit, Mich., 2003, 45–47.

[44] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 793 f.

וְאוּלַי, הַשֵּׁם הוּא יוֹדֵעַ! בְּעַצְמוֹת אֲבִי־אֲבוֹת־אָבִיו
פִּעֲמָה (אַחַת מִשִּׁשִּׁים) אוֹתָהּ הָרוּחַ שֶׁהָיְתָה
עִם בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ לְפָנִים עַל סַלְעֵי חוֹף עֶצְיוֹן־גָּבֶר,
אוֹמְרֵי שִׁירֵי־הַיָּם בְּמִשְׁכְּנוֹת זְבוּלוּן לְחוֹף יַמּוֹ,
יוֹרְדֵי הַיָּם בָּאֳנִי – עִם סְפִינוֹת צִידוֹנִים אוֹפִירָה.

And perhaps – only the Lord knows! – in the veins of his father's fathers,
there beat one drop in sixty of the same spirit that was
with the sons of your people of old on the stones of the shore of Etzion Geber,
chanters of songs of the sea, in the huts of Zebulon on the shore of the sea,
who went down to the sea in ships – with Phoenician galleys to Ophir.

Ṿ'ulai, ha-shem ha-yodeaʿ! Beʿatsmot ʾaví-ʾavot-ʾavaṿ
Piʿamah (aḥat mishishim) ʾotah ha-ruaḥ shehaitah
ʿim benei ʿamkha lefanim ʿal salʿei ḥof ʿEtseyon-Gaver,
ʾomrei shire-hayam bemishknot Zevulon lḥof yamo.
Yorde ha-yam ba'ani – ʿim sfinot tsidonim ʾOfirah.[45]

The expression *yorde ha-yam* is taken from the book of Isaiah (42:10) or from Psalm 107:23. It suggests that the *Tanakh* speaks about the ancient Hebrew sailors that Nachum Slouschz had been so fond of. Tchernikhovsky gives the Dnepr river on which his grandfather sailed its Greek name Boresthenes, which takes the same place in the metrical line as it would in Greek. He sails in a small boat which Tchernikhovsky calls *"ratsḥanit"* (from the biblical *ratsaḥ*, "to dash to pieces") – a translation of the Russian *dushegubka*. To describe the calm on the water Tchernikhovsky uses the Aramaic word *galinah*,[46] a loanword from the Greek *γαλήνη* used by Homer five times in the Odyssey alone.[47] With the penultimate stress, *galinah* takes the same position in the metrical line as *γαλήνη*. As if he wanted to direct our attention to his Homeric allusions, Tchernikhovsky quotes Homer's *ὑγρὰ κέλευθα*[48] and sends his grandfather on the *"derekh hamayim haleḥah, kedivre Homeros hayvani"* (the wet path of the waters, as the words of Homer the Greek go).[49] The boat moves in a "*bidharah ḳalilah*" (light gallop)[50] – Tchernikhovsky here repeats the comparison between boat and horses that he knew from the *Odyssey* (XIII, 81–83).

As a mediator between the Greek and Hebrew worlds, Tchernikhovsky had one important predecessor – the rabbi and scholar Aharon or (as he called himself in France) Armand Kaminka.[51] The two Hebraists met during Tchernikhovsky's early years in Berlin. For some time Tchernikhovsky lived next door to the actress Miriam Bernstein-Cohen who held a degree in medicine, too; they shared long discussions on medicine and on literature. Miriam Bernstein-Cohen also translated from Russian into Hebrew, among other works Pushkin's poem *Poltava*. In her memoirs, she notes that she introduced Tchernikhovsky to Aharon Kaminka.[52] Kaminka had earned himself an outstanding role in the reception of classical antiquity in Hebrew, when in 1887 he published (in the journal *Kneset Yisra'el*) an introduction into Greek poetry which contained a translation of the twenty-third song of the *Iliad*.[53] The two translators must have met in 1923 or 1924, because Miriam Bernstein-Cohen moved to Palestine in 1924. This was at the time when Tchernikhovsky had just finished his complete translation of the *Iliad* (in the introduction to which he refers to Kaminka).[54] The Genazim Archives in Tel Aviv contain a small poem by Kaminka dedicated to Tchernikhovsky (written after a reading of Tchernikhovsky's longest poem *The Golden People*) dated 16 August 1938, in which Kaminka praises his follower as "a genius of poetic metre" *("ga'on ha-neginah")*.[55]

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[45] Ibid., 704.

[46] See Daniel Sperber, Nautica talmudica, Leiden 1986, 138.

[47] Homer, Odyssey, V, 391, and 452; VII, 319; X, 94; XII, 168.

[48] Homer, Odyssey, III, 71; IV, 842; IX, 252; XV 474; Iliad, I, 312 (in opposition to *κέλευθος τραφὲρη*, "dry path").

[49] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 704.

[50] The word appears in Judg. 5:22.

Among contemporaries, Kaminka was acknowledged as the father of the synthesis between Greek and Hebrew poetry. Kaminka had stressed – far more explicitly than Tchernikhovsky ever would have done – the common roots of both cultures as well as their constitutive role for European culture. In his "Introduction to Greek Poetry," he states:

> "Greek and Hebrew literature together [*shteyhen ke'eḥad*] have spread their forms to all cultured people and languages. The two were the foundation for the spiritual life of all enlightened nations. While still alive, the two awoke a sleeping Europe to a new life at the beginning of modern times. But at a time when different reasons merged to weaken the influence of the spirit of Hebrew literature on the nations and deprive it of its significance for life, the influence of the Greek spirit and literature grew stronger, and during the period of classicism it laid open the portals of education for youth and established the foundation of the new world literature [*ha-literatura ha-ḥadashah haklalit*]."[56]

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[51] A bibliography of his works can be found in: Salomo Rappaport (ed.), Festschrift. Armand Kaminka zum siebzigsten Geburtstage, Wien 1937.

[52] Miriam Bernstein-Kohen, Ke-ṭipah ba-yam [Like a Drop in the Sea], Ramat Gan 1951, 158, and 196.

[53] Aharon Kaminka, Mavo' leshirat ha-yavanim [Introduction to the Poetry of the Greeks], in: Kneset Yisra'el 2 (1887), 128–160.

[54] Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Mavo' [Introduction], in: idem, Sefer 'Ili'as le-Homeros [Homer's Iliad], 2 vols., Vilna 1930, vol. 1, I–XLII, here XXXVIII.

[55] Genazim Archives, I–40633.

[56] Kaminka, Mavo' leshirat ha-yavanim, 129. The same idea can be found, in a much more ideological form, in the works of Zeev Jabotinsky, who wrote in 1926: "We Jews do not

Then Kaminka describes the particularity of a translation from Greek to Hebrew: “We welcome the face of Greek poetry not as a new people lacking knowledge and in need of these treasures, but as a great people possessing its own dominion, a coeval and a companion of the Greek people from ancient times.”[57] A translation from Greek to Hebrew was “not an ascent and a rising for us, even when we make way for a more sublime Greek poem, but it is the poem that gains in value [*ẓakhtah bmaʿaltah*] by being dressed in a royal garment in a Hebrew shape.”[58]

The common point of reference for the Jewish translators in the first half of the twentieth century was Ahad Ha’am’s essay *Ḥiḳui ỵe-hitbolelut* (Imitation and Assimilation), which contained the following passage:

> “If those who made the Greek Septuagint translation of the Bible for the Egyptian Jews had at the same time translated Plato into Hebrew for the Jews of Palastine, thus familiarizing our people with the Greek spirit in its own land and through the medium of its own language, it is highly probable that a similar process of transition from self-effacing to competitive imitation would have taken place in Palestine, but on an even higher plane, and with consequences even more important for the development of the Jewish spirit. In that case there would have been no ‘traitorous enemies of the covenant’ among our people, and perhaps there would have been no need of the dangerous Hellenising movement in Palestine, and perhaps there would have been no need of the Maccabees and of the whole chain of events which had its source in that period. Perhaps – who knows? – the whole course of human history might have been entirely different.”[59]

The essay (which was quoted many times by Hebrew translators)[60] not only set the frame for the literary work of Tchernikhovsky’s generation – the “enrichment of the national individuality by means of competitive imitation”[61] – but also contained a glance at European humanist culture.

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share everything in common with the so-called East [praised by Martin Buber] […]. We are going to Palestine first for your national convenience and second in order to extend the borders of Europe to the Euphrates […]. Europe is ours; we were among its main builders. For over 1,800 years, we gave it no less than any other of the great nations. Apart from that, we began to build it long before its beginnings, before the Athenians began to build it.” Idem, Vostok [The East], in: Razsvet (26 September 1926), 3–6, here 4 and 6.

[57] Kaminka, Mavo’ leshirat ha-yavanim, 130.

[58] Ibid.

[59] ’Aḥad Haʿam, Ḥiḳui ỵe-hitbolelut [Imitation and Assimilation], in: idem, ʿAl parashat derakhim [At the Crossroads], 2 vols., Berlin 1921, vol. 1, 169–177, here 172.

[60] Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Mavo’, in: idem, Sefer ’Ili’as le-Homeros, ḥeleḳ ri’shon, XXXVII–XVIII [Homer’s Iliad, First Part]; Yosef Kloizner, Yahadut ỵe’enushiyut [Judaism and Mankind], 2 vols., Warsaw 1905, vol. 1, 99; Mordekhai Rabinzon, Sifrutenu he-ḥadashah [Our New Literature], Vilna 1913, 267; Shlomoh Shpan, Masot u-meḥḳarim [Essays and Studies], Tel Aviv 1964, 43; see David Ben-Gurion, Yiḥud ỵe-yiʿud. Devarim ʿal biṭḥon Yisra’el [The Gate of Unity and Mission. Writings on Israel’s Security], Tel Aviv 1971, 123.

[61] ’Aḥad Haʿam, Ḥiḳui ỵe-hitbolelut, 173.

In Tchernikhovsky's œuvre, the interaction between Greek and Hebrew sources can be traced to his early poem *Mot ha-Tammuz* (The Death of Tammuz) of 1908 – a lament on the death of Tammuz and the call to search him in the exuberant beauty of a mountain landscape. At first sight, the subject of the poem seems to be biblical or oriental but not Greek. The prophet Ezekiel (8:14) saw – in a vision of the Jerusalem Temple – women at the gate of the inner forecourt, weeping for Tammuz: "Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." The manuscript of Tchernikhovsky's poem (preserved in the National Library in Jerusalem) shows that this verse was added handwritten as a motto to the poem by Joseph Klausner.[62] The key to the Greek source is the identity of the Babylonian/Syrian Tammuz and the Phoenician/Greek Adonis which had been claimed for the first time in the third century by Origen and later by Jerome.[63] On the basis of their identity, which Tchernikhovsky certainly knew, since he translated both the Babylonian lament on Tammuz (from the German edition)[64] and Theocritus's ninth eclogue "The Women of Syracus or the Women at the Adonis Festival,"[65] Bion's *Epitaph of Adonis* can be identified as the main Greek source for the poem. In Bion's elegy, the phrase "I lament Adonis, fair Adonis is dead!" is repeated so often that it can be called a refrain. Tchernikhovsky combined the Greek *Αἰάζω τὸν Ἄδωνιν, ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις*[66] with the words *"ts'enah u-r'enah"* (Come and see) from the Song of Songs (3:11). The result is: "Ts'enah u-bkhenah / bnot Tsiyon la-Tamuz" (Come and bewail, / daughters of Sion, Tamuz). The following amphibrachic line "La-Támuz habáhir, la-Támuz ki mét" echoes the Greek refrain *ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἄδωνις*, but Tchernikhovsky went one step further: The words *"ts'enah u-bkhenah"* can be read as an amphibrachus (if the sheva in *"tse'enah"* is counted) but it will be pronounced (in Ashkenazic Hebrew) as a catelectic dactylic dimeter (– v v – v) which is also called "adoneus," because classical authors believed that Adonis was originally bewailed in this meter (created by the words *ὦ τὸν Ἄδωνιν*). The adoneus is a part of the hexameter in Bion's elegy: the so-called bucolic diaeresis (between the fourth and the fifth foot of the hexameter) produces an adoneus at the closure of the line; in the same way the amphibrachic lines of Tchernikhovsky's *Death of Tammuz* end on adonei.

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[62] Tchernikhovsky referred to Ezekiel again when he choose a passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 53b) as the motto for his sonnet cycle *Leshemesh* (To the Sun). The first line of the first sonnet (written in 1918) reads: "I was to my God like Hyacinth, like Adonis". Idem, Shirim, 301.

[63] Origenes, Selecta in Ezechielem 8:13–14, Jerome, In Ezechielem 8:14.

[64] Kitve Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi [The Works of Saul Tchernichovsky], 10 vols., Vilna 1929–1933, vol. 3, 108–114.

[65] Ibid., 89–102.

[66] Marco Fantuzzi (ed.), Bionis Smyrnaei Adonidis epitaphium, Liverpool 1985, 19 (line 1).

There are at least two more passages in Bion's elegy which have provided Tchernikhovsky with motives for his poem. The daughters of Zion rise in order to run through the thicket *("la-ḥorshah")*, through valleys *("biḳʿot")* and over the seeds of thistle *("zaruʿa ḳimshonim")*,[67] whereas Aphrodite "having let down her hair, rushes through the thicket *(ἀνὰ δρυμὼς)*, / mourning, unbraided, unsandaled; and the thorns *(βάτοι)* / cut her as she goes and pluck sacred blood. / Wailing shrilly, through long winding dells *(ἄγκεα)* she wanders."[68] Also the evocation of the mountains, the trees, and the springs *("maʿyanot")* has a parallel in Bion's eclogue: "Alas for Cypris / say all the mountains, and the tree, 'Alas for Adonis!' / And the rivers weep for Aphrodite's woes. / And the springs in the mountains shed tears for Adonis."[69] The line *"καὶ νέκυς ὢν καλός ἐστι, καλὸς νέκυς, οἷα καθεύδων"* (although he is a corpse he is beautiful, a beautiful corpse, as if asleep)[70] seems to be reflected in Tchernikhovsky's eighth stanza: *"Pen yishan, pen yanom liktarto shel ʾerez"* (lest he sleeps, lest he slumbers in the scent of the cedar).[71] It is remarkable that the scent of cedarwood is connected to Tammuz because fragrance, and particularly the fragrance of breath, is an attribute of Adonis not only in Bion's elegy[72] but also in many imitations (e. g. in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* or in Shelley's *Adonaïs*).

One of the most conspicuous alterations introduced by Tchernikhovsky into the Greek lament is the replacement of Venus by the "daughters of Zion." Though the daughters of Zion are mentioned several times in the Old Testament,[73] the Jewish tradition does not connect them with the story of Tammuz. The connection between them and Tammuz goes back, as it seems, to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There, in the enumeration of the idolatrous transgression reported by the prophet Ezekiel, Tammuz is bewailed by "Syrian Damsels" and by "Sions daughters."[74] Mention of the river Adonis (which

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[67] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 254.

[68] Fantuzzi (ed.), Bionis Smyrnaei Adonidis epitaphium, 19 (lines 21–23).

[69] Ibid., 19 (lines 31–32).

[70] Ibid., 21 (line 71).

[71] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 253.

[72] See *"ῥαῖνε δέ νιν Συρίοισιν ἀλείφασι, ῥαῖνε μύροισιν / ὀλλύσθω μύρα πάντα· τὸ σὸν μύρον ὤλετ' Ἄδωνις"* (Sprinkle him with Syrian unguents, sprinkle him with perfumes. / Let all perfumes die: Adonis, your perfume, has died). Fantuzzi (ed.), Bionis Smyrnaei Adonidis epitaphium, 21 (line 77).

[73] Song of Sg. 3:11; Isa. 3:16–17; Isa. 4:4.

[74] "Thammuz came next behind, / Whose annual wound in Lebanon allur'd / The Syrian Damsels to lament his fate / In amorous dittyes all a Summers day, / While smooth Adonis from his native Rock / Ran purple to the Sea, suppos'd with blood / Of Thammuz yearly wounded: the Love-tale / Infected Sions daughters with like heat, / Whose wanton pas-

Milton knew from the eighth chapter of Lucian's *De dea Syria*) here at least indirectly identifies Tammuz with the lover of Venus.[75] The myth of Tammuz or Adonis thus provided Tchernikhovsky with an occasion to do what he loved to do most: To translate from Greek into Hebrew, to build this translation on an ancient connection between Greek and Hebrew traditions, and finally, to translate the Hebrew work into a genre and a poetic metre of European poetry.

Tchernikhovsky had certainly read Theocritus's *The Women of Syracus* already in 1902 when he imitated the dialogue between Praxinoa and Gorgo in the encounter between Gitel and Domaḥah in the first part of his idyl *Levivot*. In the second part of the idyl Gitel bakes *"levivot."*[76] When she sees the flour falling from her hands, she recalls the story of her own life – and of the life of her granddaughter Rezele (who is modelled on the poet's aunt, as becomes clear in his autobiography).[77] Gitel's whole life seems to be condensed in the falling motes of fine flour. The passage is difficult because Tchernikhovsky created some words that have not been accepted in Hebrew. Tchernikhovsky translated some of them for Leib Yaffe, who prepared a Russian interlinear translation for Vladislav Khodasevich. The Russian poet and critic translated the idyl into Russian hexameters for the *Evreiskaia antologiia* (Jewish Anthology).[78] On a postcard dated 16 May 1918 and preserved in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, Tchernikhovsky explains the word *ma'arokh* as *"doska na kot[oroi] raskatyvaetsia testo"* (a board on which dough is rolled out)[79] and translates: *"sniala so steny bol'-*

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sions in the sacred Porch / Ezekiel saw, when by the Vision led / His eye survay'd the dark Idolatries / Of alienated Judah". The Works of John Milton in Eight Volumes, ed. by John Mitford, London 1863, here vol. 2, 18.

[75] It is possibly that the phrase *"liḳuy neshamot"* (eclipse of the soul) goes back to a fragment of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the author of the elegy *Adonaïs*; the fragment reflects the lament of Venus: "He came like a dream in the dawn of life, / He fled like a shadow before its noon; / […] And the shadow that moves in the soul's eclipse / Can return not the kiss by his now forgot." The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, Oxford 1909, 478. Tchernikhovsky was familiar with Shelley's poetry and translated several of his works.

[76] The exact content of the word is often debated; since the poet Vladislav Khodasevich translated the title, possibly with the help of the author himself, as *"vareniki,"* the Yiddish word behind *"levivot"* may well have been *"varnishkes,"* which are today a synonym for farfel but can be found in older recipes as filled dumplings; Vladislav Khodasevich, Iz evreiskikh poėtov, St. Petersburg/Berlin 1923, 39.

[77] Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Meʻeyin 'avṭobiyografyah [Attempt at an Autobiography], in: Boaz Arpaly (ed.), Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi. Meḥḳarim u-teʻudot [Saul Tchernikhovsky. Studies and Documents], Jerusalem 1994, 17–141, here 57.

[78] Leib Yaffe/Mikhail Gershenzon (eds.), Evreiskaia antologiia. Sbornik molodoi evreiskoi poėzii [An Anthology of Young Jewish Poets], Moscow 1918.

[79] The dictionaries of the time translated the word as "rolling pin," see Yosif Ḳloyzner/ Yehudah Gur, Milon shel kis, me-ʻIvrit le-Rusit ṿe-Ashkenazit ume-Rusit le-ʻIvrit ṿe-

shuiu dosku sbituiu iz krepkikh lipovykh dosok rozovatogo ottenka s temnymi prozhilkami lezhashchimi na nei uzorom.”[80]

בָּאָה וְנָטְלָה מֵעַל הַקִּיר הַמַּעֲרוֹךְ הַגָּדוֹל:
לוּחוֹת עֲצֵי־הָאוֹג, אַדִּירִים וּוְרֻדִּים עָשׂוּהוּ,
וְרִקְמָה אֲמֻצָּה שֶׁל גִּידִים מְבַצְבֶּצֶת וְעוֹלָה עַל גַּבּוֹ.
שָׂמָה הַמַּעֲרוֹךְ עַל פְּנֵי הַשֻּׁלְחָן וַתִּקַּח הַנָּפָה,
נָתְנָה בַּנָּפָה הַהִיא קֶמַח־סֹלֶת מְאֹד דַּקָּה,
נִפְּתָה וְזָרְתָה מִיָּד וַתְּרַקֵּד בְּיָדֶיהָ הַמְּהִירוֹת.
כְּאַבְקוֹת הַשֶּׁלֶג הַצַּח נִתְחַבּוּ בְּנִקְבֵי הַנָּפָה
גַּרְגְּרֵי הַקֶּמַח וְכֹה נָחוּ עַל פְּנֵי כָל הַמַּעֲרוֹךְ,
גַּרְגֵּר שֶׁל אָבָק עַל גַּרְגֵּר. וְהָלַךְ הַמַּצָּע וְגָדֵל [...]
מַמָּשׁ כְּגַרְגְּרֵי הָאָבָק, הַנּוֹפֵל, הַיּוֹרֵד לְאִטּוֹ,
גַּרְגֵּר וְגַרְגֵּר לְבָד, נֶאֶחְזוּ, חָלְפוּ בְּמַחֲזֶה
יַרְחֵי גִּיטְל וְכֹל שֶׁעָבַר עָלֶיהָ – לְפָנֶיהָ,
טוֹבָה וְרָעָה, שָׁנִים שֶׁל עָמָל וְדַקּוֹת שֶׁל אֹשֶׁר.

From the wall she took the big baking board,
it was made of boards of the firm and reddish sumach wood;
patterns of red-brown sinews sprouted on its posterior.
This board she placed on the table: she took a sieve and poured
particularly fine flour into the sieve, and
she sifted and sprinkled; it [the flour] danced in her nimble hands.
The motes of the flour fell like flakes of snow through the holes
of the sieve and reposed on the surface of the baking board.
Motes fell on motes, and the layer of flour kept growing. […]
Just as the motes of the flour, that slowly fell and descended,
every mote on its own, the months of Gitel’s life joined together,
and passed like a dream, with everything she had lived through –
good and bad, years of hard work and moments of happiness.

Baʾah ṿenaṭlah meʿal haḳir ha-maʿrokh ha-gadol:
luḥot ʿatse-ha-ʾog, ʾadirim uṿrudim ʿaṣuhu,
ṿriḳmah ʾamutsah shel gidim mvatsbetset ṿeʿolah ʿal gabo.
Ṣamah ha-maʿrokh ʿal pne ha-shulḥan ṿatiḳaḥ ha-nafah,
natnah banafah ha-hiʾ ḳemaḥ-solet mʾod daḳah,
niptah ṿezartah miyad ṿatarḳed byadeyah hamhirot.

ʾAshkenazit. Ḥeleḳ rishon. ʿIvrit-rusi-ʾashḳenazi [Pocket Dictionary. Hebrew-Russian-German and Russian-Hebrew-German, First Part, Hebrew-Russian-German], Warsaw 1912 (the second part was never published). The same translation can be found in the contemporary word lists, see N. M. Novoselitsḳi, Ha-ʿolam ha-ḥitson [The External World], in: Sfatenu. Ḳovets muḳdash leshaʾalot harḥavtah ṿeteḥitah shel halashon haʿivrit [Our Language. A Collection Dedicated to the Expansion and the Revival of Hebrew] 2 (1922/23), 67–75, here 73.

[80] On the same postcard, Tchernikhovsky explains *“ha-maʿagilah”* as *“skalka”* (rolling pin), and *“saf”* as *“bol’shoi taz”* (large bassin); *“kfiṭedat-hodu ’amutsah”* (the colour of the dough) is translated as *“temnym indijskim topazom”* (in dark Indian topaz); for *“minzar”* Tchernikhovsky gives *“monastyr’”* (monastery).

K’avḳot ha-sheleg ha-tsaḥ nithavu beniḳve ha-nafah
gargre ha-ḳemaḥ ṿkhoh naḥu ʿal pne kal ha-maʿrokh,

garger shel ’avaḳ ʿal garger. Ṿehalakh ha-matsaʿ ṿegadal. […]
Mamash kegargre ha-’avaḳ, ha-nofel, ha-yored le’iṭo,
garger ṿegarger levad, ne’eḥzu, ḥalfu vamaḥzeh
yarḥe Giṭel ṿekol sheʿavar ʿaleiha – lfaneiha,
ṭovah ṿeraʿah, shanim shel ʿamal ṿedaḳot shel ’osher.[81]

The image is striking and can certainly awaken different associations in the mind of its readers. One such association is the “corpora quae in solis radiis turbare videntur”[82] described by Lucretius in *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things). Tchernikhovsky’s motes of flour might well be a very conscious recreation Lucretius’s motes of dust:

An image and similitude of this
Is always moving present to our eyes.
Consider sunbeams. When the sun’s ray let in
Pass through the darkness of a shuttered room,
You will see a multitude of tiny bodies
All mingling in a multitude of ways
Inside the sunbeam, moving in the void,
Seeming to be engaged in endless strife,
Battle, and warfare, troop attacking troop,
And never a respite, harried constantly,
With meetings and with partings everywhere.
From this you can imagine what it is
For atoms to be tossed perpetually
In endless motion through the mighty void.
To some extent a small thing may afford
An image of great things, a footprint of a concept.
A further reason why you should give you mind
To bodies you see dancing in a sunbeam
Is that their dancing shows that within matter
Secret and hidden motions also lie. […]
And thus it is that those bodies also move
That we can see in sunbeams, though the blows
That make them do it are invisible.[83]

Parts of *De rerum natura* had been translated by Israel Rall (1838–1893), who published the collection *Shire Romi* (Roman Poetry) in Odessa in

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[81] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 137 f.

[82] Lucretius, De rerum natura, II, 114.

[83] Lucretius, On the Nature of the Universe. A New Translation by Sir Ronald Melville, Oxford 1997, 39 f. (book 2, lines 112–128, and 139–141).

1867.[84] Rall regarded *De rerum natura* as a heretical poem that denied the existence of a divine providence – unlike Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which he had discerned a profound link to the cosmogony of the Holy Scriptures. This might have been the reason why Rall omitted the quoted passage and proceeded from line 108 in the second song straight to line 398.[85] And yet the image of the floating dust is present throughout his translation because for Lucretius’s “atoms” (a word which Lucretius himself famously avoids the Latin transliterated form) he consistently uses the Hebrew expression *ro’she ʿafarot* (literally “the heads [beginnings] of dust”) which he borrowed from the Book of Proverbs (8:26): *“ṿero’sh ʿafarot tevel*” (the beginning of the dust of the world).

There is some evidence that the motes of the flour were not an accidental phenomenon for Tchernikhovsky. In his later idyl *Ḥatunatah shel ’Elḳah* (The Wedding of Elka), the clouds of dust are a recurring motif: The idyl begins with the return of the livestock “in clouds of floating dust” *(“ṿeʿanene ’avaḳ poreaḥ”)*;[86] the carriages arrive in the same “clouds of dust” *(“ṿeʿanene ’avaḳ”)*,[87] followed by the family of the bridegroom.[88] The kurgan between Mikhailovka and Belozerka is covered with “floating dust” *(“’avaḳ poreaḥ”)*;[89] the width of the steppe mocks the way, which is only a “stripe that lets rise dust which lies in ambush for man.”[90] The expression *’avaḳ poreaḥ* also appears in Tchernikhovsky’s translation of the *Odyssey*,[91] where it is a translation of the participle *κονίοντες* (the one who raises dust). The history of the reception of Lucretius’s dust motes in European literature has not yet been written.[92] Tchernikhovsky’s prominent use of the motif suggests that the motes of flour (in *Levivot*) and dust (in *The Wedding of Elka*) are an image for the essence of life which had been felt by poets of the Greek and the Hebrew past and which – in a new manifestation – could provide the material for a new Hebrew poem.

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[84] Yisra’el Ra’ll, Shire Romi, Odessa 1867; Israel Rall founded the journal *Szem we-Jafet* (*Shem and Japhet* with a parallel French edition *Sem et Japhète*) in Lvov in 1887. See Noʿemi Zahar, Bein Shem ṿeYafet. ʿAl sugiyat targum ’eḥat basifrut ha-haṣkalah [Between Shem and Japhet. On a Translation Problem in Haskala Literature], Moznayim 62 (April 1988), 4–9.

[85] Ra’ll, Shire Romi, 50f.

[86] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 335.

[87] Ibid., 341.

[88] Ibid., 352.

[89] Ibid. The motif reappears in the poem *ʿAl tel he-ʿaravah* (On the Hill of the Steppe), ibid. 706 *(“be’avḳot maslulim”)*.

[90] Ibid., 153.

[91] Homerus, ’Ili’adah. ’Odiseyah. Tirgem mi-Yevanit Sha’ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi [Iliad, Odyssey, trans. from the Greek by Saul Tchernikhovsky], Tel Aviv 1954, 281 (Od. VIII, 122). I am grateful to Agata Grzybowska (Warsaw) for this hint.

[92] The motif of floating dust has become a part of alchemical imagery, see Lyndy Abraham, A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery, Cambridge 2001, 64f., and passim.

Tchernikhovsky's own attitude towards classical antiquity has often been described in reference to his poems *Lenokhaḥ pesel 'Apolo* (In Front of the Statue of Apollo). He was regarded as "the Greek" among the Hebrew writers but this became an ideological label rather than an appreciation of his philological skills. The poems discussed in this study show that Tchernikhovsky perceived classical antiquity through the prism of European literature and worked like the European humanist poets who translated classical antiquity into their national language. Armand Kaminka had highlighted the sole essential difference between Hebrew and the European languages: Only Hebrew was already spoken (and used as a language of poetry) when the greatest works of Greek poetry were written. Tchernikhovsky mentioned this particular feature of Greek-Hebrew translations only once;[93] the full extent of the phenomenon becomes clear solely through a philological analysis of his poetic work in which he interprets and recreates the ancient Greek-Hebrew cultural connections.

Perhaps Tchernikhovsky's position as an artist can be better understood from the poem *Ha-pesel* (The Statue),[94] in which members of all Greek tribes gather for the unveiling of a statue of Zeus. We can be nearly certain that Tchernikhovsky here was describing the statue of Zeus sculpted by Phidias at Olympia; according to a legend, Phidias had been inspired to create this statue by Homer's description of Zeus in the *Iliad* (I, 528–530).[95] When the crowd bows before the statue, only the sculptor remains standing and sees a vision even more beautiful than the statue, and which had accompanied him throughout his life "as a dream of creativity and mystery, and that had been woven into his existence."[96] The encounter between the Greek and Hebrew worlds, in which Tchernikhovsky's life-long friend Joseph Klausner discerned the foundation for his idea of European humanism,[97] was for Tchernikhovsky first and foremost a linguistic and artistic challenge.

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[93] Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shire 'Anaḳre'on [The Poems of Anacreon], Warsaw 1922, 6; see ʿAminadav Diḳman, 'Anaḳre'on ʿal ḳoṭev ha-ʿivrit. ʿAl shire 'Anaḳre'on betargumo shel Sha'ul Ṭsherniḥovsḳi [Anacreon in Hebrew. On Anacreon's poems in Saul Tchernikhovsky's Translation], in: Dafim lemeḥḳar basifrut [Notes on the Study of Literature] 13 (2001–2002), 273–294.

[94] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 459–462.

[95] Strabo, Geographica, VIII, 3, 30; Claire Cullen Davison, Pheidias. The Sculptures and Ancient Sources, London 2009, vol. 2, 966.

[96] Ṭsherniḥovsḳi, Shirim, 462.

[97] See the article Yosef Kloyzner, Yehudah veYavan. Shne hapakhim? [Judah and Greece. Two Opposites?], in: Rappaport (ed.), Festschrift. Armand Kaminka zum siebzigsten Geburtstage, 49–58.