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## SÜSSKIND OF TRIMBERG.

THE Jews, as a race, have always been characterized by their adaptability, the facility with which they accept the conditions surrounding them. The Jew, whom no land can call exclusively its native, is no stranger in any of the civilized nations of the globe. Everywhere he takes an active part in the development of art, science and culture. The Jewish contributions to German literature are noteworthy and voluminous. Süsskind von Trimberg, the subject of the present paper, is the first Jew of whom mention is made in that literature, and whose reputation has continued unsullied, not even over-estimated, down to the present day.

Of Süsskind's works, some two hundred lines of poetry are all that is still extant. We do not know whether he ever wrote much more than what we have. His writings do not offer much in the way of mere textual criticism.

First, as to the MSS. No MS. which we still possess can be referred back to Süsskind himself, and to none of his contemporaries does the idea seem to have occurred to edit and collect a series of Minnesongs in MS. form. The MSS. that we have post-date Süsskind's time by one hundred to one hundred and fifty years at least. The most famous MS. is the Rüdiger von Manesse's. This, the work of a patrician town-councillor of Zürich in Switzerland, was made at the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is merely an *omnium gatherum* of every sort of Minnelied, in no regular order, the MS. being simply the dumping-ground for the poetry of the twelfth and thir-

teenth centuries<sup>1</sup>. Of course, such a MS. does not give us an idea of what Süsskind's *own* language was. To how many critical emendations and infiltrations of foreign textual matters Süsskind's lines may not have been subjected in the process of copying? But the illustrations with which the MS. is embellished are unique. The armorial bearings of the one hundred and forty poets, represented by their works, are drawn, and, in many cases, scenes from their lives are added. Süsskind, the Jew of Trimberg, is shown before the lord of the land, with a long beard and the odious Jew's cap, shaped like a cone, as if he were telling his master of the power of thought or of the true nobility.

But this is not our only Süsskind MS. The Rüdiger von Manesse's MS. reposes now in Heidelberg, where there is also another MS. of Minnelieder, known as the Heidelberger 'C' MS. This, too, is only a *codex receptus*, in which not so many poets' writings are preserved. In addition to these, we have the Weingärtner, Jenaer and Wiener MSS.

In Kohut's *Geschichte der deutschen Juden* (at p. 100), a fine reproduction of the Rüdiger MS. will be found; here also excellent translations of the verses into N.H.G. are given. These are very valuable for the purposes of comparison with the original M.H.G. Other N.H.G. versions of the poems are given in Goldbaum's *Entlegene Culturen* and Livius Fürst's *Süsskind von Trimberg*, this last being the basis of the English translation made for Karpeles' *Jewish Literature*.

Franz Delitzsch's article on Süsskind, which appeared in an early number of *Der Orient*, gives M.H.G. readings of the poems, based on the original MS. Of course, von der Hagen's *Minnesinger* (Leipzig, 1838) was the first work

<sup>1</sup> The language of the Rüdiger von Manesse's MS. is that of the classic period of the thirteenth century. This then, as will be shown later, accounts for the controversy over the poet's dates, but the argument founded hereon is not very convincing.

on the subject, and the primary source for all subsequent investigations. But von der Hagen's is a faulty edition of the poems, because the variations in the readings do not seem to be justified on a perusal of the MS.

Süsskind composed his songs in the M.H.G. language, because Jewish culture in the Middle Ages was an integral part in the larger German life, and not distinct and differentiated. Then there were many wandering bards in Germany: the poetry of Provence was rivalled by the German in its exquisite depth and power. Süsskind must have been attracted by the Minnesingers, for these at first were tolerant and humane. Wolfram von Eschenbach based his *Parzival* on the brotherhood of man. Walther von der Vogelweide, the most famous of the Minnesingers, considered Christians, Jews, and Mohammedans children of the one God<sup>1</sup>.

Then, too, the Jews from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries took an active interest in German poetry, especially in the court-epics and folk-songs. Correspondingly the Makamat<sup>2</sup> poets in Spain were the first to recognize Dante's genius. The Jewish interest in contemporary German culture was so deep that a common form of expression relating to the court of King Arthur was much in use among the Jews too.

<sup>1</sup> Livius Fürst has:—

“Süsskind! Gott grüss dich!’ Walther spricht’s;  
 Und freundlich, milden Angesichts,  
 Springt grüssend er von seinem Ross  
 Und winket der Gefährten Tross;  
 ‘He! Wolfram, Biterolf! Heran!  
 Seht diesen braven Sänger an.  
 Ja, Süsskind ist es, der mir werth  
 Vor allen, den ich singen lehrt:  
 Er ist ein Jude! Mir ist’s gleich;  
 Mich soll in meiner Künste Reich  
 Kein Glaube scheren und kein Stand.’”

Cf. Livius Fürst, in *Illustrierte Monatshefte für die gesammten Interessen des Judenthums*, vol. I, p. 14 ff. (1865).

<sup>2</sup> The Makamat poetry is a form between the epic and the dramatic.

At this time the names of the German Jews were either Biblical or Greek in their origin. But newly-formed German variants from other sources are also to be noted<sup>1</sup>. Süsskind (which is the modern form) as a name<sup>2</sup> is derived from Provençe.

Süsskind von Trimberg was born in Trimberg, or rather in the village nestling at the foot of the hill of that name. This is in Franconia (now Bavaria); Trimberg, where the lords of the land dwelt, being situated near Würzburg on the Saale.

Coming now to Süsskind's dates we find that on this subject there is much confusion. A Jewish physician in the Lepers' Hospital in Würzburg, indeed in the deed<sup>3</sup> he is referred to as *judæo Suzkint*, contracted in 1218 with the charitable foundation of Saint Theodoric for a site for this hospital. For this plot of ground he agreed to build a canal for the Saint Theodoric monastery. The Jewish witnesses to this early deed of sale (in addition to the Caleman and Liberman mentioned above) were Boniface, i. e. Süsskind, Sconeman, and Abraham. This Süsskind (our poet himself, or his ancestor in all probability) must have been wealthy, while the poet as such is generally represented as a poor man. Meyer, in his fanciful account of Süsskind, makes him rather the major-domo of the lords of Trimberg<sup>4</sup>. The accuracy of this account is much to be

<sup>1</sup> In the deed (cf. infra), Caleman from Kalman (Kleonimos) is an example of the Greek, Liberman de Grunsvelt (Liebermann), like Süsskind, of the German.

<sup>2</sup> Bonfils, Bonifan, Bonenfant, Gutkind, Süsskind. Another form of the last is Suzkint. Cf., on the whole subject, Zunz's *Namen der Juden*.

<sup>3</sup> This deed will be found in Lang's *Bayrischen Regesten*. Cf. also von der Hagen, s. v. "Süsskind, der Jude von Trimberg," where much that is of interest is given.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Zeitsch. f. deutsches Altertum*, v. 38, pp. 201 ff., John Meier in Paul-Braune's *Beiträge*, v. 20, pp. 340 ff., 576. The writer of the present paper has a complete bibliographical note on Süsskind, which as yet remains unpublished.

doubted. In the "Speyrer ahtbuch" of 1341 we find a reference to one Süsskind, a Jew<sup>1</sup>.

Now it is certain that Süsskind von Trimberg, the only Jewish Minnesinger, flourished at some time between 1218 and 1341. No one has given us (even approximately) the dates of his birth and death: the entire question has engendered much controversy, but two theories have in the main been evolved. The Jewish writers (following von der Hagen) place Süsskind at *circa* 1220. They point to the reactionary anti-Jewish laws of 1221, and maintain that most of Süsskind's poems must have been written before this period. They declare emphatically that Süsskind was always a Jew, and that with these laws in force, he determined to live as a Jew. We have his own words:—

"Why should I wander sadly,  
My harp within my hand,  
O'er mountain, hill, and valley?  
What praise do I command?"

"Full well they know the singer  
Belongs to race accursed;  
Sweet *Minne* doth no longer  
Reward me as at first.

"Be silent, then, my lyre,  
We sing 'fore lords in vain.  
I'll leave the minstrel's choir,  
And roam a Jew again.

"My staff and hat I'll grasp, then,  
And on my breast full low,  
By Jewish custom olden<sup>2</sup>  
My grizzled beard shall grow.

"My days I'll pass in quiet,—  
Those left to me on earth—  
Nor sing for those who not yet  
Have learned a poet's worth<sup>3</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> "Item der rat hat überkomen, das man Sûzkind den iuden vâhen sol," &c. Cf. Meier, *loc. cit.*, where this is quoted *in extenso*.

<sup>2</sup> This, it is claimed, proves that Süsskind had once abjured Judaism for Christianity, but had returned to the old faith in the day of adversity.

<sup>3</sup> The English versions (here given) are from Karpeles' *Jewish Literature*,

These laws were enacted so that the Jews might be distinguished and set off from the Christians. The Jew's hat, conical in shape with the yellow tip, was the badge of identification. Innocent III demanded that these laws be strictly enforced against the German Jews, and Friedrich II, Hohenstaufen, the Emperor, was but too ready to execute the Sovereign Pontiff's behests. The Jews had been like the Christians in all respects. In speech, in dress, and in thought, the differences hitherto had been slight<sup>1</sup>.

Some say that in reality Süsskind was no Jew, or at least did not profess Judaism until after the promulgation of the laws of 1221. Parallels between his religious attitude and Heine's are drawn: he inclined to the atheistic, and returned only to Judaism as an old and disappointed man. It is argued that Süsskind was seemingly a Christian, so that he could come to the courts and take part in the lyric contests of the Minnesingers. But this theory does not accord with the poems of his that have come down to us. The Minnesinger (in this case, the baptized Jew would have been a zealous Christian) sang of the Virgin Mary. But this is not the burden of Süsskind's song. In the first place, late in life he saw that "he was on the fool's path with his art" and could not hope to win the favour of princes. Should we have had

Philadelphia, 1895, pp. 182 ff. The original, in part, is (following Delitzsch's reading):—

“Ich vvar uf der toren vart  
 Mit miner künste zvvare  
 Das mir die herren nicht vvént geben  
 Das ich ir hof vvil vlichen  
 Und vvil mir einen langen bart lan vvachsen griser haren  
 Ich vvil in alter iuden leben,” &c.

<sup>1</sup> The Jews' position in the first part of the Middle Ages was better than that which they occupied in the second part. Of course, economic and social causes effected this change in Jewish conditions. The laws against the Jews were codified by the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (s. v. 68th Canon). The whole question cannot be considered here. Cf., however, Roscher in *Zeitsch. für die ges. Staatswissenschaft*, Tübingen, 1875, XXXI, pp. 503 ff.; Scherer, *Die Rechtsverhältnisse der Juden in den deutsch-österr. Ländern*, Leipzig, 1901.

this note of despair, distinctly Jewish in tendency, from a Christian? The idea that Süsskind was a proselyte to Judaism rests on no authority. Not only were stringent and repressive measures against such practices passed, but it is more probable that the Jew would seek fame among his Christian fellow singers than that a Christian would ally himself with the "despised nation of Jews." Secondly, his poems are filled with Jewish thoughts. Then, too, all the facts that we have prove him to have been a poor *Jew*, surrounded by a wife and a numerous offspring, for whom there was no opportunity as a royal treasurer (the office usually filled by rich Jews then), and to whom Christianity surely could hold out no prospects of ultimate success.

The Christian writers, who have treated the subject, place Süsskind among the classical poets of the second half of the thirteenth century. His language contains the usual M.H.G. peculiarities. He is not differentiated from other Minnesingers by linguistic individuality, and he handles his own Middle German dialect of the M.H.G. language with rare grace and charm<sup>1</sup>.

What date, then, is to be assumed as giving the exact period of Süsskind's life? It is certain that he did not flourish *before* 1200; it is equally an assured fact that, in his poetic development, he is to be connected with the laws of 1221. The other Süsskinds, mentioned in contemporaneous MSS., may or (as is most probably the case) may not have been identical with the poet of Trimberg. The linguistic evidences are not at all conclusive. We have stated before that the MSS. cannot be referred back to Süsskind himself, hence the claim cannot be made incontrovertibly that *their* language is Süsskind's own. On the other hand, the laws of 1221 found him, we are credibly informed, an aged man.

The Minnesingers preserved their early poems by oral tradition. Perhaps, Süsskind composed many verses,

<sup>1</sup> We find *ê*, *ae*, and *fründe*, but only here and there, for the earlier form *friunde*. These are distinct philological advances.



voluminous songs of love and romances. Perhaps, with the laws of 1221 in force, he set to work to obliterate all traces of these earlier writings of his, and transmitted to posterity only the few poems that we now have. The poem on the equality of rich and poor, the farewell to the lyric art, must have been inspired by adversity. A later editor would readily have made these poems conform to the linguistic peculiarities of his own times. Moreover, the changes in the history of the German language have been slow and gradual, so that the language-theory advanced rests on utterly false premises. As regards Süsskind's Christianity, nothing more than that all the known facts point to his having been a pious and steadfast Jew, can be said.

Six poems, out of a much greater number, perhaps, are all of Süsskind's work that is now extant. We take up the consideration of these few lines.

The first is a poem of three strophes, wherein virtue is proclaimed to be the only true nobility<sup>1</sup>. Vice ever undermines the purest virtue. As the roses are to be sought among the thorns, so man finds true nobility where he least expects to meet with it.

The Arabic-Jewish philosophers of Spain, especially the ethical writers like Solomon Ibn Gabirol, taught that the qualities of the soul are made manifest through the five senses, each of which is in turn composed of four humours. These may be controlled by the will, and thus brought to work for good or evil. If Süsskind knew nothing of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, he nevertheless tells us in

<sup>1</sup> For convenient reference the first lines of the poems are given. The numbers show the order of treatment in the present paper, following von der Hagen and Delitzsch:—

1. "Wer adellichen tuot den vvil ich han für edel."
2. "Gedenke nieman kan ervvern den toren noch den wise."
3. "Kiung herre hochgelopter Got vvas du vermacht."
4. "Svvie vil das menseche zuo der vvelte guotes habe."
5. "Wa heb' uf unt niht envint."
6. "Ein vvolf vil iemerlichen sprach."

this first poem that there are five pigments in the best "virtue"-electuary, viz. fidelity, generosity, strength, and discipline, tempered with the saving grace of moderation<sup>1</sup>. These constituents, when mixed together and administered as a medicine, are efficacious against spiritual ills. This strophe is not a medical receipt in doggerel, an amulet for all dangers. The electuary indeed was an allegorical picture of the distinctively Jewish wisdom of the Middle Ages<sup>2</sup>. This part of Süßkind's poems does not necessarily make him the physician of Würzburg mentioned in the deed of 1218.

Following this strophe, Süßkind speaks of death and the vanity of human wishes in general. He expresses his firm belief in a future immortal state. These lines are to be noted as proof of the fact that Süßkind was a Jew. An anti-Semitic biographer<sup>3</sup> says that here Süßkind *discloses his Judaism*. The poet does not feel, with the Christian, the joy of the life everlasting; he is the poor Jew of socialistic tendencies. And yet the same writer declares that in his poems Süßkind does not appear as a Jew!

But what have we, besides the poems and the Rüdiger von Manesse's MS., to prove that he was a Jew? The

<sup>1</sup> The word corresponding to the fifth virtue is very obscure in the MS. Both von der Hagen and Delitzsch give variant readings, neither of which seems to us to accord with the MS. itself.

<sup>2</sup> In the original the strophe itself reads:—

“Kein besser latvverie nie gemachet vvert  
 Als ich ler und kinnde von sinneklicher art  
 Gesund ze laster vvunden und ze schanden siuchten  
 Mit funf bimenten rein sol si gemenget sin  
 Triuvve und zuht milti und manheit hoert darin  
 Dabi sol maset bülveru smeken und truchten  
 Dise latvverie ist er genant ein bals ob allen spisen  
 Mit ir vvirt schanden not entrant  
 Si zimt nicht dem unvvisen Wem si vvont stete bi  
 Der ist vor houbt schanden vri  
 Wol im des lib der latvverie bûchse si  
 Sin reines lop sin hoher nam  
 Wirt blaeten und frûhten.”

<sup>3</sup> Roethe, *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, XXXVII, pp. 334 ff.

poems, despite the contradictory statement mentioned above, are of a distinctive Jewish character. The strophe that we are now considering teaches us the Judaism of the men of religion and wisdom of the time, whose influence, not that of soothsayers and necromancers, Süsskind surely felt<sup>1</sup>.

The second poem, consisting of but one strophe, depicts the freedom, rapidity, and buoyancy of a poet's thoughts, which penetrate stone, steel, and iron, quicker than flashes of lightning.

In his third poem (two strophes), Süsskind sings of the glory of God in the manner of the Psalmist's "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork<sup>2</sup>." But Süsskind's are characteristic verses, too, and those in praise of good women are filled with singular charm and individuality:—

"Almighty God! That shinest with the sun,  
That slumb'rest not when day grows into night!<sup>3</sup>  
Thou Source of all, of tranquil peace and joy!  
Thou king of glory and majestic light!  
Thou allgood Father! Golden rays of day  
And starry hosts thy praise to sing unite,  
Creator of heav'n and earth, Eternal One,  
That watchest ev'ry creature from thy height!

. . . . .

"Pure woman is to man a crown,  
For her he strives to win renown.  
Did she not grace and animate,  
How mean and low the castle great!  
By true companionship, the wife  
Makes blithe and free a man's whole life;

<sup>1</sup> Roethe, loc. cit. These verses, too, influenced later German poets of Jewish extraction. Cf. S. Gelbhaus, *Freidank's Bescheidenheit*, Frankfurt a. M., 1889, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xix. 1, &c.

<sup>3</sup> "Du liutest mit dem tage und vinsterst mit der nacht." This further evidence in favour of the belief in Süsskind as a Jew is the *Ma'rib 'arabim* of the Jewish Evening Prayers.

Her light turns bright the darkest day.  
Her praise and worth I'll sing away<sup>1</sup>."

In his poem, Süsskind describes death, want and privation. Death levels all—rich and poor alike; against his sickle no magic arts (nigromantie) avail. Even the prophets of the Bible died. He tells us of the knights, Herr Hebauf, Herr Findenichts, Herr Noth von Darbian and Herr Dünnehabe, who are certain to bring want and woe with them. Then follows the exhortation to rich and poor; they should aid each other as best they can, for the needs of both are great. This is the least original part of Süsskind's poetry: he follows slavishly the traditions of the M. H. G. aphoristic lyrics, and the Jewish social theories.

In the fifth poem, Süsskind tells us that he is now fallen on evil days, and must needs bid farewell to poetry<sup>2</sup>. He is now poverty-stricken; and in the evening of his life he acknowledges his failure, and decides to practise the lyric art no more.

In his sixth and last poem, Süsskind speaks of that despised thief, the wolf, who was provoked to commit these excesses by Nature. In reality, he is innocent: the real culprits disseminate lies about him so as to fasten on him their own guilt. This wolf represents the Jew, who became a usurer in the last resort, and for whom his own co-religionist Süsskind pleads<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, Süsskind is prominent as the sole representative of the Jews among the Minnesingers of the Middle Ages. He is the only Jew who practised the art which gave to the world the exquisite, often inimitable, and at all times, voluminous series of romances of the *Minne*. These mediaeval lyric forms cannot be characterized easily.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karpeles, loc. cit.; Prov. xxxi. 10, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. supra.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Frankreich und Deutschland*, Wien, 1880, p. 134. Chapter V of this work gives a complete picture of Jewish conditions in Europe at this time.

Each poet was said to have invented his own measure, the use of which he jealously guarded. As there were a large number of Minnesingers, an infinite variety of metres was developed. In the decline of the art, the measures often were extravagant fancies; but Süsskind<sup>1</sup>, who belonged to the classical period, shows spirit and talent in his poems. The five iambics are correctly and artistically constructed<sup>2</sup>. Form and purity of rhyme and metre he maintained. The strophes, divided generally into three parts, can be recognized easily, which is not the case, however, with the numbers and the length of the verses.

Süsskind, who seems to have been the disciple of Walther von der Vogelweide, was no real Minnesinger. The latter's poems always had love for their theme. For his lady-love, whose colours he wore, he bore innumerable hardships. But of whom could the Jew Süsskind sing? His "poems are not at all like the joyous, rollicking songs his mates carolled forth; they are sad and serious, tender and chaste. Of love there is not a word<sup>3</sup>." He is not like that Minnesinger who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for his lady-love. Süsskind, the Jew of Trimberg, is like the Jew Jehuda ben Halevy, of whom the Jew Heine sings:—

“Ohne Dame keine Minne,  
Und es war dem Minnesänger  
Unentbehrlich eine Dame,  
Wie dem Butterbrot die Butter.

“Auch der Held, den wir besingen,  
Auch Jehuda ben Halevy  
Hatte seine Herzensdame;  
Doch sie war besondrer Art.”

<sup>1</sup> Roethe, loc. cit., claims that his being a Jew is the sole explanation of Süsskind's prominence in the literary history of the Middle Ages.

<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Meyer (*Allg. Ztg. d. Judentums*, Jahrg. 60, p. 355 ff.) says that his hymns are spurious. Meyer claims that "somewhere" Süsskind speaks of assumed virtue.

<sup>3</sup> Karpeles, loc. cit., p. 185.

The Jews have an idyll of love in the Song of Songs: "Lo, thou art beautiful, my beloved!" Here, "Princess Sabbath" is the ideal: here we note the differences between the soul-life of the Jew and that of the German Christian. "Unbridled sensuousness surges through the songs rising to the chambers of noble ladies. Kabbalistic passion grows in the mysterious love of the Jew. The German minstrel sings of love's sweetness and pain, of summer and its delights, of winter and its woes; now of joy and happiness, again of ill-starred fortunes . . . Mysterious allusions, hidden in a tangle of highly polished, artificial, slow-moving rhymes, glorify, not a sweet womanly presence, but a fleeting vision, a shadow, whose elusive charms infatuate the poet in his dream<sup>1</sup>."

This is the burden of the exiled Hebrew's song. The German Christian's melodies are bright, blithe, and joyous, the former's are serious and gloomy. The Minnesinger mingles light sentimentality with the continuous change from grave to gay; Süsskind's didactic poetry entralls the mind, not by enrapturing the heart, but by the dark fascination and gloomy moodiness of the Semitic temperament, as expressed in these lyric outbursts.

Süßkind of Trimberg's poems are as much a part of Judaism as the works of the most pious Biblical commentator, or of the learned historian of Jewish culture. He shows us the Jew from a novel standpoint. We value him for his work in what remains, for Jews, an untrodden field of endeavour, and for this reason we make him the subject of our research and literary presentation<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Karpeles, loc. cit., p. 186. Goldbaum's *Entlegene Culturen*, Berlin, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> In this connexion I desire to express my thanks to my cousin, Herr Ferdinand Heinemann, of Frankfurt a. M., for his kindness in assisting me with my investigations for the present paper.