

Chava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, ed. *The Historical Writings of Joseph of Rosheim: Leader of Jewry in Early Modern Germany*.

Studies in European Judaism 12. Trans. Naomi Schendowich. Ed. Adam Shear. Leiden: Brill, 2006. xiv + 446 pp. index. append. \$195. ISBN: 90-04-15349-7.

Joseph bar Gershon of Rosheim kept the author, Chava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, busy for more than three decades. In 1970 she published the *Sefer Hammiknah* (the deed of purchase ספר המקנה, Jeremiah, 32:11–16), which she had worked on since the mid-1960s. Her research on Joseph's chronicles began in 1974 and ended in 1995; while *Joseph of Rosheim – Historical Writings* (ר' יוסף איש רוסהיים - כתבים היסטוריים) was published a year later in 1996.

The English edition has been possible thanks to the translation of Naomi Schendowich, which is very accurate and faithful to the original. Since this edition was published ten years after the original version, the bibliography has been updated by Dr. Adam Shear and includes all the references to scholarly works since 1995: however, all the notes, made by both Schendowich and Shear, were inserted in parentheses or square brackets, to keep the text's original structure.

R. Joseph (Josel) (1478–1554) probably started his public career in 1510, when the Jewry of Lower Alsace elected him to represent them to the authorities. His appointment extended far beyond the Alsace region and lasted until his death forty-five years later. His personality, wisdom, capability, and connections made him a profound participant in the political arena of the kingdom. R. Joseph lived in a very unstable era: the Turkish army threatened the borders from the east, in the west the French threatened Charles's hegemony in Europe, and alongside these conflicting external forces were interior conflicts between many different interest groups: princes, aristocrats, and cities, all trying to profit from this severe situation. And in the midst of all this, Martin Luther announced his new theological ideas.

The generally awkward living conditions of the Jews became almost impossible under these circumstances, and R. Joseph did all he could to make their life bearable. At times he had a small success at others he didn't. Most of the time his efforts ended in bitter frustration, and even endangered his life.

R. Joseph wasn't a leader who guided or directed his people, but he represented the German Jews to the institutions of the empire as well as to the local authorities for almost forty-five years. Each time the cities' delegates gathered, he was present at the Diet to ensure that the rights of the Jewish communities and individuals would be preserved and wouldn't change. Occasionally, he appeared before the emperor, Charles V, asking his majesty to renew old privileges and to confirm new ones. He also asked the emperor to intervene and revoke deportations

from different cities or even to force the cities to take back those who had been expelled. R. Joseph argued against those who incited against the Jews, especially concerning the blood libel.

Perhaps it is appropriate to characterize his activities as external ones, since he didn't deal with any internal issues such as education or intercommunity arrangements. He had all the qualifications that were needed to fulfill his mission: courage and endurance, ability to convince others, insight, political intelligence, good understanding of the Jews' immediate needs, and, above all, he had the ability to rebound after so many failures and to keep on.

Aside from his public and political activities, R. Joseph wrote several treatises and a short chronicle, which open a window to his inner world. The author, Chava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, examined R. Joseph's "Diary" and analyzed his entries by comparing them to dozens of documents scattered in many archives and libraries throughout Europe, mostly in Germany. Using her profound historian's skills, vast knowledge of the academic bibliography, and fluency in both Hebrew and German, Fraenkel presents an outstanding scholarly work. Moreover, her clear and fluent writing as well as the fine translation result in a most readable book.

The author's devotion to her research was emphasized by her dedication of the book in the preface "to the researches of R. Joseph of Rosheim . . . and above all to Dr. Ludwig Feilchenfeld, who broke new ground in his research on this project, but did not live to see the fruit of his labours." These lines were written on February 1995, a few weeks before Fraenkel herself died, on 12 March 1995, also without seeing the fruit of her labors.

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