**The Life and Research of Rabbi Dr. Julius Theodor**

Julius Theodor (1849-1923) was one of the leading experts in the area of Midrash Aggada research. His major work, a scientific edition of Bereishit Rabba (completed by Hanokh Albek) is a foundation of Judaic studies research. His influential articles deal with key topics which are relevant to Midrash research even in this day and age. His diverse research activity did not take place within the walls of academia. The majority of his scholarly studies were written in his home in the small town of Bojanowo, located in the Prussian province of Posen, where he served as rabbi for thirty one years. From his home, he corresponded closely with various researchers but did not leave any disciples to perpetuate his legacy and work after his death. These facts may explain why I knew so little about Julius Theodor before I began writing this chapter. Aside from an article by Akiva Posner, a short entry in the Jewish Encyclopedia and in Encyclopaedia Judaica, in addition to some concise biographical information that appears in lists of the rabbis of the German Reich, virtually nothing has been written about this central, significant scholar. The absence of knowledge regarding his life is also connected to the bitter fate of his small family, which underwent upheaval between the two world wars and suffered greatly. As far as I was able to verify, it is fairly certain that no direct descendants of Julius Theodor are living today, so that the legacy of this great scholar has nearly been erased. Even Theodor’s photograph seems to have disappeared from the pages of history; it did not appear among the photographs of the students of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary, nor in the few entries and information regarding his town Bojanowo. It was with great effort that I was able to obtain it. The information in this introduction was collected and pieced together from small, scattered pieces of information gathered with the gracious assistance of scholars worldwide, through searches in archives, from letters that survived, items from the press and information from the web. May this introduction be a memorial to this great scholar, his family and the small Jewish community of Bojanowo.

(photograph 1: Julius Theodor)

1. From Childhood to the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary

Julius Judah Noah b. Tuvia Theodor was born on 13 Tevet 5650, December 28, 1849, in the town of Schmalleningken/Smalininkai in Eastern Prussia.[[1]](#footnote-1)Julius’ father, Tuvia Goldberg of Kovno, was adopted as a child by distant relatives from Königsberg and took on their family name, Theodor.[[2]](#footnote-2)Julius Theodor studied at the Friedrich school in Königsberg/Kaliningrad and sat for the matriculation exams in the Elizabeth gymnasium in Breslau. In 1868 he commenced studying philosophy and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Breslau. Simultaneously, he studied in the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary between 1868 and 1878.[[3]](#footnote-3)

(Photograph no. 2: Symbol of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary)

The Breslau Rabbinical Seminary was a prolific center for the research of Judaic studies during this period, and the first of its kind in all of Germany. It offered a Jewish-Rabbinic education in the spirit of the critical approach to Judaic studies (Wissenschaft des Judentums) and trained rabbis who also held academic degrees.[[4]](#footnote-4)The Seminary, which opened in August of 1854, was headed during its first twenty years by Zacharias Frankel and was active until the Nazis closed its gates and destroyed it in November 1938, the day after Kristallnacht.[[5]](#footnote-5)Frankel was the scion of a prominent rabbinic family from Prague. He earned a reputation as an expert in Judaic studies as well as a man who held moderate religious views.[[6]](#footnote-6)As opposed to the pioneers of Judaic studies in Germany, Leopold Zunz, Moritz Steinschneider and Abraham Geiger, who wished to conduct the study of theology and Jewish philology within German universities, Frankel was of the opinion that Judaic studies should be learned in an independent Jewish institution. This position was in line with popular opinion during that period in the Jewish communities of Germany and Austria.

1. In the government region of Gumbinnen (Regierungsbezirk Gumbinnen), in Lithuania of today. See Josef Rosin, Smalininkai, in: *Pinkas Hakehillot – Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities from Their Foundation till after the Holocaust*, Dov Levin (ed.), Lithuania, Vol. 8, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1996, p. 437 (Hebrew). Very little is known about this town. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tuvia’s adoptive father was a watchmaker. His sons were the banker Hermann Theodor and Jacob Theodor who established a well known tea company in Königsberg. I thank Nancy Theodore for the information about the family and for the family tree she sent me in her letter of 13.11.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frederick T. Haneman, “Julius Theodor”, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12, New York & London 1905, p. 125; Shmuel Noach Gotlieb, *Sefer Oholei Shem*, Glauberman Publishing House, Pinsk, 1912, Boyanowo, p. 523 (Hebrew); Akiva (Artur) Baruch Posner, "Dr. Julius Theodor", in: *Hochmath Israel: Science of Judaism in Western Europe*, Vol. II, Simon Federbush (ed.), Ogen and Newman Publishing House, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 286-291 (Hebrew); Michael Brocke and Julius Carlebach (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner*, II: Die Rabbiner im Deutschen Reich 1871-1945, Vol. 2, München 2009, (no. 2620), pp. 608-609; Moshe David Herr, “Theodor, Julius”, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, second edition, Vol. 19, Detroit 2007, p. 692; Additional important information appears in a newspaper article published in honor of Theodor’s seventieth birthday: Felix Goldmann, “Dr. J. Theodor (Bojanowo)”, *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 83, Nr. 51 (28.12.1919), pp. 581-583. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context : The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, New England University Press, Hanover and London 1994, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Guy Miron, "The Breslau Rabbinical Seminary: The Last Generation", in: *From Breslau to Jerusalem: Rabbinic Seminaries, Past, Present and Future,* Guy Miron (ed.), Schechter Institute, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 98-99 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On Frankel’s religious-ideological approach against the backdrop of the clashes between Reform and Orthodox Judaim, see: Rivka Horwitz, *Zacharias Frankel and the Beginnings of Positive-Historical Judaism*, Zalman Shazar, Jerusalem 1984 (Hebrew), p. 11-41; Schorsch*, The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, pp. 255-265. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)