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Guide to reading Life is with People

1. What are the aims of Zborowski and Herzog? See pp. 12, 13-15. What are the most serious limitations of the fundamental approach they adopt.
2. What data do they use? See pp. 24-26. Note in particular the source of most of the folkloristic material in the volume.
3. What principles do they use in selecting and presenting their data? See pp. 23-24.
4. How do their aims, data, and principles of presentation bias their "portrait" of the shtetl? Consider their attitude to ethnographic detail, regional variation, processes of change, intergroup relations, cultural isolation, history. See pp. 159-165, 148.
5. What are the reviewers objections to Life is With People? Watch for mistakes which the reviewers themselves make.
6. What is problematic with their discussion of Yiddish? See p. 33.
7. How does the system of social stratification operate? What are the criteria which define social status? What is the relative importance of yikhes, learning, wealth, sex, age, occupation? How does the priority of these various criteria change if you are a woman? To what extent are these criteria hereditary and to what extent are they acquirable, in theory and in practice? How may a status be acquired or lost? Where do Gentiles fit in?
8. How does this system of social stratification provide a basis for organizing social interaction? Consider the asymmetrical nature of reciprocity, the system of rights and obligations, avoidance rules, separation on spheres of activity, maintenance of social boundaries. What are the implications of the seating arrangements in the synagogue, the selection of people to read the Torah or to perform special rituals, access to education, child rearing responsibilities, livelihood responsibilities, class stereotypes?
9. How is conformity to accepted norms achieved without the use of police power or physical force? What are the deviations which people fear? What are the rewards for conformity and the punishments for deviation? How are the desire to preserve or improve one's social status and the belief in the authority of God used to maintain conformity to accepted norms? Consider the ways in which the pressures of public opinion are brought to bear on deviants (gossip, silence, public shaming, isolation, boycott, ostracism, exclusion for Tora reading and other honors, withdrawal of burial rights, sitting shive for live person, excommunication). See pp. 209, 218-220, 224-228.

October 26 Portrait of a Culture Approach and the Study of
Culture at a Distance

Zborowski, M. and E. Herzog. Life is With People: The Culture of Shtetl (New York, 1952). Schocken paperback.

Review by Werner Cahnman. American Sociological Review 17 (1952): 655-656.

Review by A. Ben Ezra. Jewish Social Studies 15 (1953): 183-185.

Review by Rafael Patai. American Anthropologist 54 (1952): 543-545.

Mead, Margaret and Rhoda Metraux, eds. The Study of Culture at a Distance (Chicago, 1953). See especially the interviews regarding sheyne un proste yidn, pp. 198-205.

Joffe, Natalie F. "The Dynamics of Benefice among East European Jews," Social Forces 27 (1949): 238-247.

Joffe, Natalie F. "Non-reciprocity among East European Jews," in The Study of Culture at a Distance (see above), pp. 386-389.

Landes, Ruth and Mark Zborowski. "Hypotheses Concerning the Eastern European Jewish Family," Psychiatry 13 (1950): 447-464.

Bienenstok, Theodore. "Antiauthoritarian Attitudes in the Eastern European Shtetl Community," American Journal of Sociology 62 (1956): 150-158.

Rosenthal, Celia Stopnika. "Deviation and Social Change in the Jewish Community of a Small Polish Town," American Journal of Sociology 60 (1954): 177-181.

Zborowski, M. "The Place of Book-Learning in Traditional Jewish Culture." Harvard Educational Review 19 (1949): 87-109.

Bienenstok, Theodore. "Social Life and Authority in the East European Shtetl Community," Southwest Journal of Anthropology 6 (1950): 238-254.

Rosenthal, Celia Stopnika. "Social Stratification of the Jewish Community in a Small Polish Town," American Journal of Sociology 59 (1953): 1-10.

The above are connected with the Columbia Project, Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures, 1947-49. The unpublished interviews and notes are available.

For purposes of comparison, see:

Ain, Abraham. "Swislocz. Portrait of a Jewish Community in Eastern Europe," Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science 4 (1949): 86-114.

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Zelkovitch, Joseph. "A Picture of the Communal Life of a Jewish Town in Poland in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Association of ose hesed in Lutomiersk," Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science 6 (1951): 253-266.

Shtern, Y. Kheyder un bes-medresh (New York, 1950); "A kheyder in Tyszowce (Tishevits)," Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science 5 (1950): 152-171. Compare with Zborowski on booklearning.

Abramovitch, Hirsh. "A litvish shtetl," Pinkes fun yekopo: oyf di khurves fun milkhomes un mehumes (Vilna, 1931).

Abramovitch, Hirsch. "Rural Jewish Occupations in Lithuania," Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science 2-3 (1947-48): 205-221.

Kligberg, Moses. Child and Adolescent Behavior Under Stress: An Analytical Topical Guide to a Collection of Autobiographies of Jewish Young Men and Women in Poland (1932-1939) in the Possession of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research (New York, 1965).

Birnbaum, S.A. "The Cultural Structure of East Askenazic Jewry," Slavic and East European Review 25 (1946): 73-92.