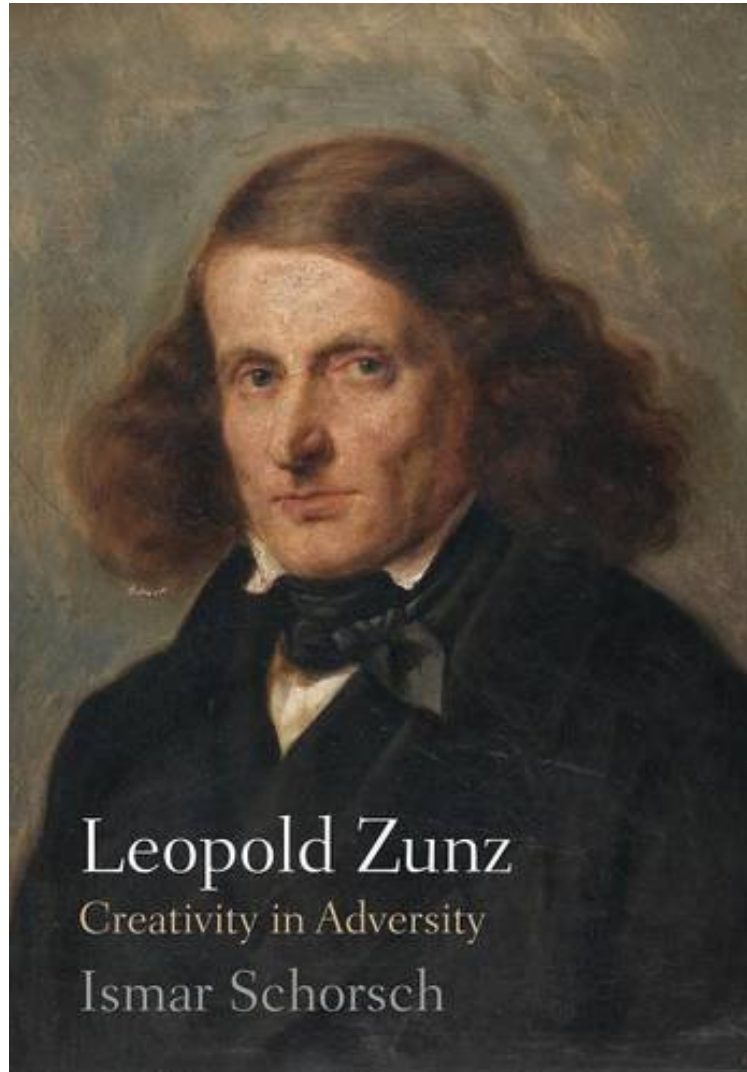


(Download pdf) Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity (Jewish Culture and Contexts)

## Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity (Jewish Culture and Contexts)

*Ismar Schorsch*

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**Ismar Schorsch : Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity (Jewish Culture and Contexts)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Leopold Zunz: Creativity in Adversity (Jewish Culture and Contexts):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Tour De Force! By Steven M. Glazer In short, Ismar Schorsch has produced the definitive biography of Leopold Zunz. Masterfully interspersing biography and intellectual history, he has captured both Zunz's personality as well as his three-fold dedication to a) scholarship, b) the Jewish People, and c) political emancipation - a dedication matched only by his love for Adelheid, from whose death in 1874 Zunz never

fully recovered. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. sometimes dry, but nevertheless informative  
By Michael Lewyn  
This dry but informative biography tells readers quite a bit about Zunz, a leading 19th-century Jewish intellectual who wrote primarily about the history of Jewish prayer and thought. Some questions it answers are: \*What did Zunz believe? Like many Conservative Jews today, Zunz believed the Torah was the product of multiple authors, but (mostly) defended traditional observance. (The book doesn't make it clear why he didn't become a traditional rabbi instead of an intellectual, perhaps because not enough is known about his youth). \*What motivated him? Partially the desire to fight for emancipation and against anti-Semitism. In the first half of the 19th century, German Jews were in limbo- just emancipated enough to attend universities, but not able to enter many careers without conversion to Christianity. Zunz wanted to break the glass ceilings that held German Jews back. But as long as Jews were viewed as intellectually backward by non-Jews, they would not be treated as equals. Zunz appeared to believe that if Jewish creativity over the centuries was studied as intensively as Christian creativity, Jews would be treated more respectfully. As Schorsch writes, "the extension of equality to Jews hinged on granting Judaism its rightful place in the cultural firmament of the West." And if I am reading this book correctly, Zunz may have also believed that Jews themselves would be more likely to stay Jewish if they knew more about their heritage. \*Why is he important? Zunz was one of the fathers of the study of Judaism not merely as a timeless religious tradition, but as one with an evolving history.

In 1818, with a single essay of vast scope and stunning detail, Leopold Zunz launched the turn to history in modern Judaism. Despite unending setbacks, he persevered for more than five decades to produce a body of enduring scholarship that would inspire young Jews streaming into German universities and alter forever the understanding of Judaism. By the time of his death in 1886, his vision and labor had given rise to a historical discourse and intellectual movement that devolved into vibrant sub-fields as it expanded to other geographic centers of Jewish life. Yet Zunz was a part-time scholar, at best, in search of employment that would leave him time to study. In addition to his pioneering scholarship, he was as deeply engaged in ending the political tutelage of German Christians as the civil disabilities of German Jews. And to his credit, these commitments did not come at the expense of his loyalty to the Jewish community, which he was ever ready to serve. Zunz once quipped that "those who have read my books are far from knowing me." To complement his books, Zunz left behind a treasure trove of notes, letters and papers, documents that the distinguished scholar of German Jewish culture, Ismar Schorsch, has zealously utilized to write this, the first full-fledged biography of a remarkable man.

"Using an abundance of archival sources absent from the existing literature, Ismar Schorsch presents not only a biography of the most important figure in the nineteenth-century development of the academic study of Judaism but also an unparalleled depiction of his historical context. The book expands our understanding of both Leopold Zunz and modern Jewish Studies." Michael A. Meyer, Hebrew Union College  
"In this gripping and elegantly written book, Ismar Schorsch illuminates not only the contours of Leopold Zunz's remarkable life and scholarship but also what was politically and intellectually at stake in the academic study of Judaism in the nineteenth century. These are issues that endure beyond their original German context, and anyone interested in Jewish Studies, modern Judaism, or the challenges of modernity more generally will learn a tremendous amount from this thoughtful study." Leora Batnitzky, Princeton University  
"In this masterful biography, Ismar Schorsch brings to life arguably the greatest of the nineteenth-century pioneers of Jewish scholarship. The portrait of Zunz that emerges is of a deeply learned, courageous, and visionary scholar whose work remains the starting point for many areas of inquiry. We are indebted to Schorsch for this loving and critical appraisal of a true giant." Jay M. Harris, Harvard University  
About the Author  
Ismar Schorsch is the Chancellor Emeritus of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Herman Abramovitz Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish History. He is the author of, among other works, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914*; *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*; *Canon Without Closure: Torah Commentaries*; and the editor and translator of *Heinrich Graetz: The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*.