

Introduction I

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Unteroffizier Franz Rosenzweig began writing *Star of Redemption* toward the end of the First World War, on the Macedonian front, on August 22, 1918. Having contracted malaria shortly thereafter, he worked on his text in various hospitals, as the German army retreated in defeat. The thirty-year old Rosenzweig partially wrote the book in an army hospital in Belgrade, which he entered on September 25, 1918. Much later, on June 4–5, 2012, the same city hosted an International Conference, *Rosenzweig für Anfänger / Rosenzweig for Beginners* at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, at which the majority of texts in this volume were initially presented. The book that came about in the midst of the First World War opposed above all abstract philosophy as such and classical German Idealism, but also served to deconstruct “Rosenzweig the philosopher” and create a “New Thinking,” as well as a Jewish Philosophy.

On August 27, 1918 Rosenzweig writes to Gertrud Oppenheim:

“(…) I am deeply involved in developing my letter (of November 1917) to Rudi (Rudolf Ehrenberg) into a book. It’s going to be quite fantastic, entirely unpublishable, equally scandalous to “Christians, Jews, and heathens” – but I’ll learn what I need to learn in the process, and that’s enough. For the present... the introduction. I’ll probably write to you again tomorrow. I just noticed that I am sending you this insolent announcement of my system on Hegel’s birthday. It’s a pity about him! Only Nietzsche (and Kant) pass muster!”

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This was a book written in dire circumstances, with the first two sections scrawled on army postcards. After Belgrade and Kassel, Rosenzweig continued writing it in Berlin where he completed it on February 16, 1919. Even though some friends and Christian cousins tried to convince him to publish it in some Christian publishing house, he refused resolutely, setting himself the fundamental task of preparing and publishing the text in Hebrew. A one-volume edition of *Der Stern der Erlösung* came out in 1921 from the Frankfurt publisher Verlag Kauffmann, with a three-volume second edition put out by Schocken, Berlin in 1930.

In 1976, *Stern* appeared in Rosenzweig's *Gesammelte Schriften* and since 1988 as a single edition in the Suhrkamp Library (11th edition 2018). A digital scan of this has been publicly available on the server of the University Library of Freiburg since 2002, and since 2009 the digital copy of the first edition from 1921 can be accessed via the University Library of Frankfurt am Main. Since 2014, a team of researchers has been working on the development of an online platform for collaboratively annotating the Star of Redemption in the spirit of the Digital Humanities. The prototype of this platform is already accessible and usable at <https://www.annotatedstar.org>.

These stages of the publication history show: Rosenzweig's assessment that the Star could not be published was – fortunately – a touch too skeptical. Behind Rosenzweig's assessment was probably the fear that the book would not find its readers because its thoughts and arguments were so difficult to grasp and comprehend. In any case, shortly after the publication of *Stern*, Rosenzweig was clearly more optimistic about the mark it would leave. In January 1923, he wrote in a letter to Rudolf Hallo: "Our work will be honored to us by Germany at most posthumously..." (GS I, 887). As far as the reception of the Star of Redemption is concerned, this assessment has indeed proved to be correct. After an initially hesitant reception, the Star is still today, and today perhaps more than ever, intensively read, discussed, received, critically questioned, and thought about further. What has remained is that Rosenzweig's argumentation is demanding and difficult – for professionals in philosophy and theology as well as for everyone who simply out of interest in religion and faith wants to find inspiration in the Star of Redemption.

The following introductions are intended for this interest. Each book of the Star of Redemption is treated individually and its argumentation is reconstructed step by step. The authors elaborate the central patterns of argumentation on which Rosenzweig's train of thought is built. The introductions allow those who wish to read *The Star of Redemption* to see the "big picture" in each chapter. On this basis, reading "en detail" can then bring further inspiration.

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