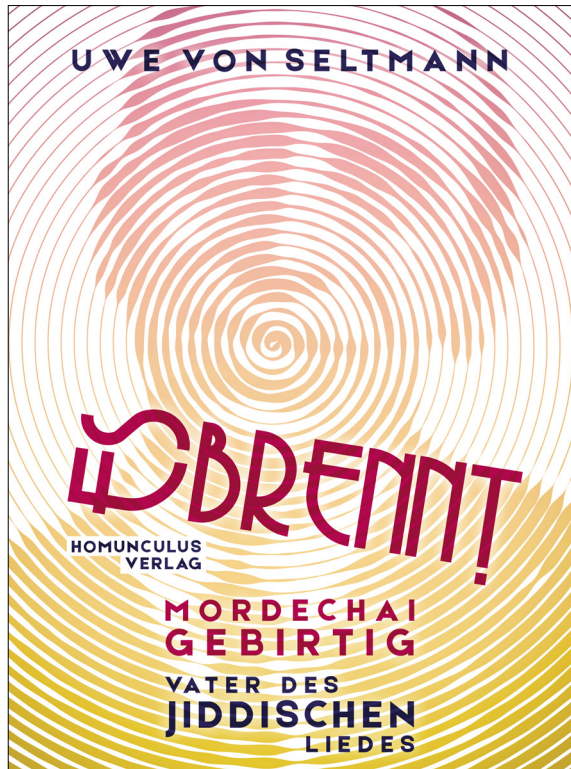


IT'S BURNING. Mordechai Gebirtig, Father of the Yiddish Song by Uwe von Seltmann

»A monumental biography.«

»A standard work of Yiddish song and Jewish life in *kroke*.«



OT: Es brennt. Mordechai Gebirtig, Vater des jiddischen Liedes

Genre: Biography

Pages: 400 (17,0 x 24,0 cm)

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Illustrated with more than 200 photographs, facsimiles and time-related documents.

ABSTRACT

This is the first biography of Yiddish poet and songwriter Mordechai Gebirtig (1877–1942) in the past twenty years, in addition, the first in German and, in the case of a translation, the very first in English. *It's burning* is a comprehensive book based on the latest knowledge about this icon of Yiddish culture and chronicler of the Shoah, full of important new discoveries. In addition to Gebirtig's life and work, this biography covers a wide range of topics – from the Yiddish language to the city of Krakow and East Jewish music, culture and history. It is richly illustrated with more than 200 photographs, facsimiles and time-related documents.

ABOUT THE BOOK

According to Italian artist Rudi Assuntino, the Yiddish poet Mordechai Gebirtig would be as popular as the Gershwin brothers, if history had gone differently and if millions of Jews and their culture had not been wiped out. Gebirtig, also called the »father of the Yiddish song«, was murdered by German National Socialists in the Krakow Ghetto in 1942. However about 170 of his poems and songs survived the Shoah. They are still an important testimony to Jewish-European culture to this day and are sung and interpreted by renowned artists worldwide. Gebirtig's most famous song *S'brent* (*It's burning*) was the unofficial hymn of Jewish resistance fighters during the Nazi era, today it is sung in Israel on every Holocaust Memorial Day.

This volume has been the first biography of Mordechai Gebirtig within the past twenty years – a pioneering work and a book against oblivion. From archives in Poland (*Jewish Historical Institute*), Israel (*Ghetto Fighters' House, Moreshet*) and USA (*Yiddish Book Center, YIVO*) author Uwe von Seltmann has collected numerous new discoveries on the life and work of the Krakow poet. Song examples, photographs, time-related documents and facsimiles illustrate this book and make it a fascinating journey to Yiddishland for beginners and experts alike.

Statements

Gebirtig's life story is told by Uwe von Seltsmann in an impressive way, with countless details he found in archives, with many photos, documents and facsimiles, with songs and poems, some of which are presented here for the first time in German translation. And yet the term ›biography‹ is only conditionally suited to this four hundred page large-format volume. Rather, it is a ›literary journey into Yiddish Land‹, as Seltsmann himself calls it, telling of its development and its political background, customs, language and atmosphere.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

The fact that these testimonies can now be read together with his folk songs, couplets and philosophical poems in German, and that the forgotten genius Gebirtig is thus given late honour, cannot be praised enough. Von Seltsmann excellently translates all Yiddish texts and presents them in Latin letters, so that everyone can let Gebirtig's prophetic pogrom song ... have its gloomy effect on them. A monumental biography ... compiled with love, down to the last pictorial document.

Die Welt (newspaper)

It does not seem exaggerated to describe Seltsmann's book as pioneering work. The author has meticulously searched archives in Europe, Israel and the USA for testimonies from Gebirtig's life. ... An attempt to save Mordechai Gebirtig's legacy and the Yiddish language from oblivion.

Jüdische Allgemeine (Jewish newspaper)

Von Seltsmann has researched intensively, traced contemporary witnesses and documents worldwide and translated many of Gebirtig's songs into German for the first time. From this he weaves a comprehensive picture that shows the poet as a worker-revolutionary in the struggle for humane living conditions, as a sensitive melancholic, as a linguistically powerful guardian of his Yiddish mother tongue and as a tough fighter for the rich culture of the Jewish population. ... The result is a real find, not only for Klezmer lovers and Gebirtig connoisseurs.

Nürnberger Nachrichten (newspaper)

In his book *It's burning* (*Es brennt*), author Uwe von Seltsmann not merely creates an impressive panopticon of past times, but also a stirring appeal not to

have these times repeated today. A book highlight both typographically and in the placement of pictorial material as well as in dealing with reading flow.

Simone Scharbert, poet, Fixpoetry.com

As a songwriter Mordechai Gebirtig has left a unique piece of work to posterity: For over 40 years he has expressed Jewish life in Eastern Europe in all its facets of everyday life, from the worries about daily bread to the longing for the golden land and to the resistance to fascism in songs and poems that are folkstümlich in the truest sense of the word. Uwe von Seltsmann has been outstandingly successful in telling us about Mordechai Gebirtig's life, suffering and work in such a way that the reader has already embarked on a journey to yiddish land after the first few sentences. 200 printed song examples lend the zinger fun noyt a voice and make this great book a standard work of Yiddish song and Jewish life in kroke.

Dr. Bertram Nickolay, Berlin, initiator and co-editor of Yiddish music anthology *Sol Sajm*

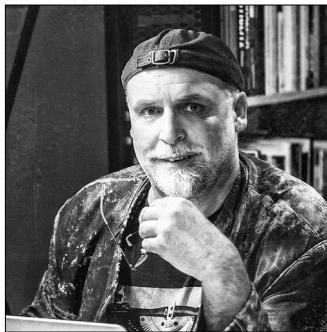
Es brennt is an important and wonderful book that has deeply moved me. Beyond the incomprehensible tragedy of the life of Mordechai Gebirtig and of Eastern European Judaism, it is a testimony of a wonderful man. Gebirtig's quite different idea of retribution and his deep love for people are deeply impressive. At times, Gebirtig's sensitive lyrics and melodies have reminded me of Gundermann, who was also a simple labourer but at the same time full of wisdom. Congratulations on a book whose layout is also of very high quality.

Stefan Seidel, Leipzig, Chief Editor of *Der Sonntag*

Uwe von Seltsmann has written a wonderful book about Mordechai Gebirtig and his world. He not only traces the biography of the great songwriter, but also points out connections, backgrounds, networks, social conditions and historical developments. Seldom have I read a book on Jewish history in Eastern Europe which has succeeded so impressively in making the atmosphere in Yiddish-speaking countries palpable. The book is very clarifying – and at the same time goes to the reader's heart.

Prof. em. Dr. Heiko Haumann, Department of History, University of Basel

THE AUTHOR



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Uwe von Seltmann was born in Müsen in 1964. Since 2007 he has been living mainly in Krakow as a freelance publicist, documentary writer and researcher. Over the past 15 years he has been invited to around 600 international lectures, panel discussions and movie screenings in Europe, Israel and the USA. He is renowned in the worldwide Yiddish community. He has written and published nine books in German so far, which mostly deal with the familial, social and political effects of the Nazi era on present-day society. His book *Todleben* (en.: *Deathlife*), which he wrote together with his wife Gabriela von Seltmann, has been translated into Polish (*Gabi i Uwe*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warsaw). He is the director and co-producer of the Yiddish documentary *Boris Dorfman – A mentsh* (2014) and serves as the Deputy Head of the Krakow based *Art, History & Apfelstrudel foundation*.

MARKET RELEVANCE

Written in Polish the last biography of Mordechai Gebirtig is already twenty years old and many of its contents have turned out to be inaccurate. *Es brennt* not only corrects these mistakes, but also presents a wealth of new insights into Gebirtig's life and work, supplemented with numerous song examples and contemporary documents. Among many other things, the book contains a first publication of a newly discovered song by Gebirtig and comprises a complete index of Gebirtig's songs and poems for the very first time.

The topics of Jewish culture and history attract increasing interest today. Modern klezmer bands have been booming since the 1980s, bringing Jewish music closer to a broad audience. Since Yiddish is the language of many klezmer songs, it also experiences a revival, both within and outside the Jewish population. Mordechai Gebirtig is a central figure in Yiddish culture; his songs are part of the Jewish cultural heritage and to the permanent repertoire of every klezmer band.

Gebirtig and his family were victims of the Shoa, which plays a special role in this book. 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. The necessity and the desire to come to terms with the crimes of this world war, especially the Holocaust, remain unbroken.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The book is aimed at all those who want to learn more about Jewish Eastern European culture and history, the Yiddish language, Jewish music and historical Krakow. Prior knowledge is not necessary, the information is conveyed in an accessible and narrative way. The book is therefore highly suitable as teaching material for students. However, it also offers new and thoroughly researched insights for experts and connoisseurs.

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