

THE 2005 PAUL LECTURE

Professor Michael Brenner

“The Same History is
not the Same Story:
Jewish History and
Jewish Politics”



THE ROBERT A. AND SANDRA S. BORNS
JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

THE DORIT AND GERALD PAUL
PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF GERMANS
AND JEWS

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University of Munich

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Forward

In October, 2005, Professor Michael Brenner delivered two lectures as part of Indiana University's Dorit and Gerald Paul Program for the Study of Germans and Jews. The first, presented in Bloomington, was entitled "The Same History is Not the Same Story: Jewish History and Jewish Politics." The second, given in Indianapolis, was "Zionism as International Nationalism: Paradoxes of a New Political Movement." We are very pleased to share with interested readers the text of the first of these two lectures, delivered October 27, 2005.

Dr. Michael Brenner, Professor of Jewish History and Culture at the University of Munich, is a young but exceptionally productive scholar. He has written or edited some thirteen books and scores of essays that cover topics ranging from Jewish culture in Weimar Germany to the history of Zionism to Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany. *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, which he co-edited with Michael Meyer, was the winner of the 1997 National Jewish Book Award for Jewish History. The Borns Jewish Studies program faculty invited Dr. Brenner to deliver the Paul lectures because of his many accomplishments but also because we see in him the future of Jewish-German scholarship. The fact that he was once a visiting faculty member in our program was an added inducement to bring him back to Indiana.

The focus of the lecture presented here is not German-Jewish history per se, the focus of much of Dr. Brenner's research, but the nature of history itself as an academic undertaking. The essay opens with a brief and very helpful overview of Jewish historiography in the last two centuries, beginning with nineteenth century figures like Isaac Markus Jost and Heinrich Graetz and ending with reflections on contemporary Israeli, American, and German historiography. Brenner highlights the way Jewish historical scholarship was shaped by shifting ideological and apologetic concerns, finding echoes of earlier debates in contemporary historical scholarship. In Brenner's account, we may be at a watershed moment in Jewish historiography, a time when "postmodern relativism" may finally put an end to the apologetic tendencies of Jewish historiography, but that does not preclude a bright future for Jewish historiography itself. To the contrary, Brenner suggests that the field is now excellently positioned to produce a history of itself.

All in all, the essay reveals how one of the brightest Jewish historians in Germany today views the nature and future potential of the historiographi-

cal enterprise within the field of Jewish Studies and academia in general. We hope that scholars in the field will find the claims that Brenner makes worth reflecting on and debating.

Dr. Brenner's lectures, and this published essay, were made possible by the Dorit and Gerald Paul Program for the Study of Germans and Jews, a program established to encourage scholarship here and in Germany on the multifaceted interrelationships between Germans and Jews. We are extremely grateful to Dorit and Gerald Paul for their generosity and vision in establishing this unique program, which has encouraged outstanding scholarship in one of the most vital periods of Jewish cultural history and given American audiences more exposure to leading German scholars like Dr. Brenner.

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The Same History is not the Same Story: Jewish History and Jewish Politics

The Modern Jewish Historiographical Tradition

"What do I know of history? If it so much as carries the name of history, be it natural history, political history, or intellectual history, it never wanted to enter my head; and I yawn whenever I have to read something historical -- unless its style keeps me awake."¹ Moses Mendelssohn's words of 1765 to his friend, the historian Thomas Abbt, reflect the general feeling of unease about history within the European Enlightenment and its Jewish counterpart, the Haskalah, as well as long-standing attitudes toward postbiblical history among Jews throughout the centuries. British historian Herbert Butterfield's description of the biblical Jews as "a people not only supremely conscious of the past but possibly more obsessed with history than any other nation that has ever existed" does not apply to later centuries.² But when, in the Age of Romanticism, the Enlightenment primacy of philosophy was gradually replaced by a general obsession with history, the Jews became part of this obsession - as of so many other developments within European society.

If we look at which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish historical works are to be found on the book shelves of Jewish history lovers we will encounter those familiar-looking ten- or eleven-volume sets of the same size, the same color, the same title and author. The first observation, then, is that we deal first and foremost with the grand histories of grand historians interested in the totality of Jewish history. This is not to forget the enormous achievements of specialists, who wrote biographies and bibliographies, and whose monographs covered social and intellectual history as well as religious and legal aspects. However important these studies were and often remain, they stand in the shadow of the pioneering works of Jost and Graetz, of Dubnow and Baron. Their multi-volume Jewish histories from biblical times to the present are by definition universal Jewish histories, despite their different titles: Isaac Markus Jost's *History of the Israelites* (1820-29), Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews* (1853-75), Simon Dubnow's *World History of the Jewish People* (1925-29), and Salo Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1937, 1952-1983).

Behind the slight variations in their titles lurked, of course, different ideological motifs: While Jost's "Israelites" signified a religious community,

Graetz's "Jews" marked a first step towards a national history, a development concluded by Dubnow's use of the term "Jewish People." Jost's history was also a weapon in German Jewry's fight for Emancipation, while Graetz was interested in making the by now more acculturated German Jews conscious and proud of their own history and culture. Dubnow's political platform was reflected in his own party in Russia, the *Folkspartey*, as in his historical writing. His vision for a national autonomy among East European Jews was founded on his historical analysis of the Jews as a national minority throughout history -- or, should we perhaps say that his historical analysis was determined by his political agenda advocating Jewish autonomy?

Already in the early decades of the twentieth century, Dubnow's notion of a world history of the Jewish people was viewed critically. Thus, the most eminent German-Jewish historian at the time of the publication, Ismar Elbogen of the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, wrote in his review of the first volumes of Dubnow's *World History of the Jewish People*: "The term *World History of the Jewish People* is not correct, since no single people, not even the Jewish one which is dispersed over the whole world, has a world history."³ When Elbogen published this review in 1926, he already might have had in mind a quite different concept of writing Jewish history. Only a few years later, he, too, would embark on a grand Jewish history project, only this time not as the sole author but rather as the editor of a collective enterprise, which was to employ some of the most gifted Jewish historians at the time. The project failed because of the economic crisis and the Nazi rise to power, but Elbogen's intuition that Jewish history could no longer be written from the beginnings to the present by a single historian proved correct.

However, even collaborative universal Jewish histories, such as the Jerusalem-based *World History of the Jewish People* (which was aborted after a few volumes), never even came close to the success of their predecessors; perhaps because in such projects the pretention to write a non-personal "objective" history was even more clearly visible (in the sense in which Lord Acton thought of the Cambridge Modern History, whose contributors were exhorted to reveal neither their country, their religion, nor their party, and who would be able to satisfy in an account of the battle of Waterloo French and English, Germans and Dutch alike);⁴ perhaps simply for the reason Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has stated: "No symphony was ever written by a committee."⁵

There was to be one last symphony, but it remained an unfinished one. In its eighteen volumes, Salo Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* superseded by far the earlier universal histories in terms of the quantity of material and the sophistication of methodology; but it was clear that even

his long and creative life (he began his first version in his thirties and ceased writing only briefly before his death at age 94) did not suffice to complete a full-length Jewish history. While Dubnow, and to a certain extent Baron, could still go back to the sources in their universal Jewish history, today even Jewish histories in a narrowly defined national context, such as multi-volume collaborative enterprises along the lines of the five-volume *The Jewish People in America* or the four-volume *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, can only summarize the hundreds of studies in specialized areas that appear every year in the form of monographs and articles.⁶

Not only was there a shift in the format of Jewish history writing but also in its interpretation. For a nineteenth-century historian like Graetz, Jewish history could be seen as "*Leidens- und Gelehrten-geschichte*": internal Jewish history was conceived mainly as intellectual history, while "external" history (or "foreign relations," so to speak) was seen in terms of discrimination and persecution. The twentieth century brought a decisive change. It was Simon Dubnow who first set out to systematically analyze structures and organizations, thus turning from intellectual to social history, and it was left to Salo Baron in his famous 1928 essay "Ghetto and Emancipation" to fundamentally challenge the traditional juxtaposition of a long dark age of persecution with the bright times of Enlightenment and Emancipation.⁷ Long before others spoke of the dialectics of the Enlightenment, Baron already employed such an approach to Jewish history. Around the same time, a school of Zionist scholars, based at the new Hebrew University, where Jewish history was a separate discipline, rose in Jerusalem. This was the platform where Gershom Scholem was to claim that Jewish Studies had to descend from the salon, in which it dealt with the highpoints of Jewish history, to the basement of neglected and often embarrassing subjects including mysticism, superstitions, and Jewish criminals.⁸

All these developments in the 1920s and 30s marked a new beginning of Jewish historiography, which did not occur in a vacuum but which, of course, was part of larger tendencies. When Dubnow spoke of a "sociological approach" to Jewish history, Max Weber's spirit was visible to most educated readers, just as the New History launched by the Annales School in France had its impact on Jewish historiography as well. This is not to say that there were no peculiarities of Jewish history, and therefore history writing, from its long duration, the differences in periodization, and its dispersion over five continents to the long period of statelessness and the never-resolved tension between religious and national elements. The central demand of new historians to retreat from the primacy of political history, for example, had little meaning in Jewish history. Jewish historians did not have much to retreat

from. Jewish history between the destruction of the ancient Jewish commonwealth and the establishment of the State of Israel some sixty years ago was never a political history in the sense of states, rulers, and armies. Thus, it was rather a provocation to traditional views when historians, such as Ismar Schorsch and David Biale, argued in our own time that Jews too have had their own political history in the diaspora – though it be it without kings and generals.⁹

Schorsch and Biale's integration of the political dimension of Jewish history was different from what David Vital had in mind when he opened his recent volume in the Oxford History of Modern Europe with the sentence, "This is a political history."¹⁰ What then follows in Vital's next 1000 pages is, I would say, the epitaph not only of the grand Jewish histories but also of a school of "rise-and-decline" history, which juxtaposes the rise of Zionism and a Jewish state with a steadily progressing assimilation in the diaspora. As a result, political history in Vital's understanding means policies conceived not *by* the Jews but *towards* the Jews. More than that, while his early chapters contain some of the most intelligent discussions of internal Jewish developments during the 18th and 19th centuries, the twentieth century in his account is basically devoid of any internal Jewish history. He treats that as a dead body waiting for resurrection in the holy land. In his interpretation, Vital runs counter (or neglects?) a large number of studies that emphasized the vitality of modern diaspora Jewish communities, many of which may themselves in turn be explained as reflecting the personal motivations of their writers.¹¹

The positive evaluation of diaspora existence, which characterizes much of Jewish historiography outside Israel during the last two decades, has itself found its critics within American Jewish academia. Thus, Todd Endelman – himself a historian of Jewish assimilation, and therefore especially aware of the constant warnings of a vanishing diaspora (from early twentieth-century Zionists like Arthur Ruppin and Felix Theilhaber to late century prophets of doom like Bernard Wasserstein) – evaluated this new tendency as follows: "Whether intentional or not, the underlying message of their work has been that Jewishness can thrive outside the State of Israel, that a creative and healthy Jewish life is possible in the diaspora, that Zionist-inspired scholarship was wrong in predicting the inevitable disintegration of western Jewry." As one possible explanation for such a new historical trend, Endelman suggests that "because those historians feel both 'at home' in America and 'comfortable' about their Jewishness they tend to stress the ability of earlier generations in Western diaspora communities to do the same." Endelman sees the main reason for the new defense of diaspora Jewry against its critics not so much as a response to a Zionist-centered historiography or the hailing

of diaspora existence but a reaction against the indictment of prewar European Jewry by influential authors like Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg. He reminds us, therefore, of a central aspect of modern Jewish historiography, which we should keep in mind in our further discussions even when not referring to it explicitly: any study of modern Jewish history of the last fifty years is written with the deep consciousness of the ultimate fate of European Jewry and has to be read with different eyes than a historical work produced before the 1930s.

Contemporary Issues of Modern Jewish Historiography

Two major themes stand out among the numerous recent debates about Jewish history. First is the retreat from certainties which defined the classical view not only of Jewish history but also of Jewish Studies as an academic discipline. With the impact of postmodern and relativistic ideas on academia in general, both the canon of Jewish Studies and the place of Jewish Studies in the academic canon have been increasingly questioned. A second theme revolves around the traditional tension between Jewish Studies as a scholarly field of research and the ideological - political use made of it. Lucy Dawidowicz once claimed, and I would fully support this claim: "Every people, every nation has used its history to justify itself in its own eyes and in the sight of the world. But surely no people has used its history for such a variety of national purposes as have the Jews."¹²

Relativistic and postmodern thought have shattered the critical and provocative views of the by now old "New History" of the Annales School and its successors, and new sub-disciplines ranging from gender studies to microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte* are making inroads in Jewish history as well. In a recent article Joseph Dan stressed that "the enormous impact of the breakdown of ideologies, the void opened at our feet with the demise of the meta-narratives in the context of which Jewish studies developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cannot be ignored." Dan, who holds the Gershom Scholem Chair at the Hebrew University and is not known to be an outspoken postmodernist, nevertheless judges this development as being altogether positive. His conclusion is that any university teacher would be laughed out of class today if he tried to "educate" in a traditional sense by pointing out what is right, what is wrong, what is true, and what is false: "He may favor a particular approach and he may say so in class, yet he should always point out that next week or next year another analysis, based on new material or new understanding of the old material, may change that completely. He cannot present his students with 'the truth'; at best he can describe where he stands at this moment in our perpetual quest for an ever-elusive

truth." In more concrete terms, this means for our subject that any search for an essence of Judaism, so typical for 19th-century scholars, any old Zionist narrative which tells the story of return as an "inevitable result of exilic existence," or any educational role of teaching Jewish history in order to reduce antisemitism is today illusory.¹³

Recent debates about Jewish history have indeed shown a clash between younger scholars relativizing old "truths" and older, more established, colleagues who have defended the master narrative, which happened to be in many cases at the same time the narrative of their own masters. Thus, Moshe Idel, in his *New Perspectives on Kabbalah* questioned almost all of Gershom Scholem's basic assumptions, while the so-called New Historians in Israel strongly challenged the foundation stones of the State of Israel. Finally, Israel Yuval's challenge of the traditional blood libel account during the Middle Ages constituted for some historians a forbidden act of questioning basic assumptions about antisemitism. Although all three debates started in Israel in the 1980s and 90s, they certainly had their repercussions outside the Jewish state and the Hebrew language, and they were discussed broadly in other settings as well.

Idel refuted Scholem's historical understanding of Jewish mysticism as insufficient. His own approach is "phenomenological" rather than "philological" and includes the practical mystical "experience" of the scholar. Rational reconstruction of the exterior circumstances of the Kabbalah, according to Idel, does not do justice to the phenomenon as such. It was not only his postmortem attack against the giant of Israeli academia, Gershom Scholem, but also Idel's postmodern tendency, which provoked the fierce and very personal reactions in the late 1980s.¹⁴

The challenge by the "New Historians" in Israel was a different one. While Idel questioned sources and methods of earlier scholars, their leading representative, Benny Morris is, with respect to methods, a rather conventional scholar of political history. The differences in content are highly political: Were the Arabs expelled from Palestine/Israel in 1948 or could they have stayed? Did Ben-Gurion and his associates exhaust all possibilities of a peaceful settlement in the Near East? And the second major complex: Did the Zionist leadership do enough to rescue European Jews during the Holocaust? These arguments are part of a general revision of traditionally held opinions in Israeli society, part of the slaughtering of holy cows. And they caused vehement reactions, like the frontal attack upon Morris by the Israeli writer Aharon Megged, who did not question his sources or methods, or even his results, but rather the very aspiration to reverse an Israeli master narrative.¹⁵

The argument over Israel Yuval's article on the medieval blood libel, published in the Israeli journal *Zion* in 1993, invited a comparable rereading of medieval antisemitism. Yuval stressed the motif of vengeance, often connected with blood, in the concept of redemption among medieval Ashkenazim. He then applied this motif to the martyrs of the Crusades in 1096 (*Kiddush hashem* as an act which accelerates redemption), and argued that this behaviour was received as especially cruel by Christians and that it constituted the necessary background for a deeper understanding of the first blood libel accusations.¹⁶

A later issue of *Zion* contained numerous responses to Yuval. This is not the place here to deal with the content of his claim but rather with the nature of the discussion. As was the case with Idel and Morris, Yuval was personally attacked and discredited. The respected historian Ezra Fleischer argued that Yuval's results should be totally disregarded, since they "are decidedly outside serious research. Those articles should have never been written, but if they were written, they should not have been printed, and if they were already printed, it is appropriate to forget them as soon as possible."¹⁷

In a careful analysis, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has pointed out that the fierce reaction to Yuval's article can only be explained in the broader context of the "New Israeli History."¹⁸ We may go even one step further and ask ourselves if those debates do not have much deeper roots in Jewish historical writing and should therefore be seen in conjunction with the debates over 19th-century Jewish historiography. Writing of a minority, and an often-persecuted one at that, Jewish historians were in a different role than most authors of clearly defined national histories. When Immanuel Wolf, one of the founders of the *Verein*, declared in his outline of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that "scientific knowledge of Judaism must decide on the merits or demerits of the Jews, their fitness or unfitness to be given the same status and respect as other citizens," he gave voice to a motif that, in many variations, also resounds for later generations.¹⁹ Long after Jews were granted "the same status as other citizens," the refutation of still-existing antisemitic stereotypes often appears as an outspoken or clandestine motif in the occupation with Jewish history.

Idel, Morris, and Yuval may be wrong in their assessments of Kabbalah, the War of Independence, and the origins of the blood libel. That it is not the point, however, of the critics who accuse them of a lack of sympathy for "the Jewish cause." It seems there is more at stake than history: the Middle East conflict and the refutation of antisemitic myths seem not to allow discussion of Jewish history in the same tranquil waters in which one can move when discussing Danish or Portuguese history. Perhaps only the "German Histori-

ans Debate” and its various successor waves can compete with the intensity of debates in modern Jewish history. In both cases, more than just the past is at stake.

Where Jewish history is concerned, outstanding questions abound. Is Jewish history today discussed with the same openness as other histories? Is it possible to disclose all sources and discuss them freely in a country that still sees itself in a state of war with other countries which have not made any effort to discuss their versions of the same story in an open and scholarly fashion? Is it possible to write about Jewish criminals and discuss Jewish vengeance plans when antisemitism is still very much alive and the Holocaust is denied or relativized even in some semi-academic circles? Can a non-Jewish scholar write on those topics with the same ease as a Jewish scholar perhaps could?

For the first generation of Zionist scholars it seemed clear that what they called “apologetics” was a remnant of diaspora societies. They were convinced that the Jewish State would, among many other things, create the conditions under which those questions would become obsolete and under which apologetics was no longer a necessary element within Jewish historiography. Once it was no longer necessary to defend its position within a non-Jewish and potentially hostile surrounding, Jewish history could assume a new openness. Yitzhak Baer and Benzion Dinur claimed this most categorically in the first new issue of the journal *Zion* in 1936: “The age of apologetics is over.”²⁰ Gershom Scholem was more complex in his analysis but almost as enthusiastic about the future possibilities of Jewish Studies and Jewish history in a Jewish society: “Zionism brought about the first basic change... The new valuations of Zionism brought a fresh air into a house that seemed to have been all too carefully set in order by the nineteenth century. This ventilation was good for us. Within the framework of the rebuilding of Palestine it led to the foundation of centers like the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where Judaic studies, although central, are pursued without any ideological coloring. Everyone is free to say and to teach whatever corresponds to his scholarly opinion without being bound to any religious (or anti-religious) tendency. As a result, great opportunities lie open to treat Jewish sources, the Jewish past, and Jewish spiritual life with new profundity and liveliness.”²¹

Scholem’s own reaction to Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, however, which he criticized not for scholarly sins but for the author’s lack of empathy for the Jewish people, reveals deep residues of the thought of the teachers he critiqued. “In the Jewish tradition,” Scholem wrote, “there is a concept, hard to define and yet concrete enough, which we know as *Ahavat Yisrael*: ‘Love of the Jewish People...’ In you, dear Hannah, as in so many

intellectuals who came from the German Left, I find little trace of this." He continues, "In circumstances such as these, would there not have been a place for what I can only describe with that modest German word – *Herzenstakt*?"²² *Ahavat Yisrael* and *Herzenstakt* are rather unusual criteria in the scholarly world. It would be hard to imagine similar demands among historians outside nationalistic camps in most Western societies. Yet we should not easily dismiss Scholem's position as chauvinistic or irrelevant. Many scholars would agree that what he calls Arendt's "flippancy" is indeed problematic: to call Leo Baeck the Jewish *Führer* makes us shiver. In short, both Arendt's and Scholem's positions seem possible only in a discourse by Jewish historians on modern Jewish history.

In a conspicuous reversal of Scholem's vision, another Jewish historian, Eric Hobsbawm, recently questioned whether Zionist historians were capable at all of presenting a scholarly view of Jewish history. Perhaps not by chance he singles out Zionist historians who need to leave their convictions at home when occupied with Jewish history.²³ But why is or was the danger of distortion smaller among assimilationist Jews or the no-longer-existent diaspora-oriented nationalists and Socialist Bundists? Hobsbawm's statement is certainly no less absurd than the hopes of finding an objective way to present Jewish history in a Jewish society. Both positions make clear, however, that in the eyes of insiders as well as outsiders the questions which Jewish historians had to face under very different circumstances fifty or one hundred years ago remain unanswered even after the establishment of the Jewish state. Perhaps it is not the modern solution of a Jewish state but the postmodern relativism of contemporary scholarship that finally will put an end to the apologetic side of Jewish, as of any other, historiography simply because in such a setting it no longer makes any sense. Thus the surprising conclusion drawn by Scholem's successor, Joseph Dan: "The Age of Reason is no more, and with it vanished the need — or the possibility — for Jewish apologetics."²⁴

What, then, is the place of Jewish Studies, and with it Jewish History, in the academic context? Did it become, after a long and bitter struggle, part of the established canon of European scholarship or did its very existence contest the essence of this scholarship, which, as Susannah Heschel has recently claimed, was dominated by Christian contents and values. "The first practitioners of Jewish Studies," she writes, "saw the study of Judaism not simply as an addition to the general curriculum but as a revision of that curriculum, an effort to resist and even overthrow the standard portrayal of Western history. In this version, at the very heart of the West would stand the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature, not classical Greek civilization or the New Testament, and the history of Christian thought would be presented as a derivatory off-

shoot of Jewish ideas." The question—where does Jewish Studies stand?—is still very relevant today when, in contrast to nineteenth-century Germany, it is a universally-recognized academic field. Was the price Jewish Studies paid for this integration the abandonment of its critical challenge to the academic establishment? According to Susannah Heschel, that was indeed the case: "American scholars trying to overcome the exclusion of Jewish studies generally presented Judaism as part of the established curriculum, an ally of the canon of Western Christian civilization, not a challenge to it... Through multiculturalism, Jewish studies might be restored to its more interesting position as challenger of the established definitions of the Western canon. The study of Judaism might itself be transformed from the religion of white Western European Jewish males into a multivocal Jewish history that includes the geographic, gender, and class distribution of the Jewish experience."²⁵

We may ask the same question not only about Jewish Studies in general but also about Jewish history in particular. Where does it belong? Is it part of the canon, or is it rather a challenge to the established canon of *Wissenschaft*? When we follow Ernst Breisach's statement that our sense of history is that of "a story whose plot was devised by the course of Western culture itself," where, then, does Jewish history belong?²⁶ Is it part of Western culture or does it go beyond Western culture or even against it?

In the United States, the multicultural vision, not just of Jewish history but of history as an academic discipline, is perhaps not so utopian. Jewish history may be part of a broader history curriculum that includes Latin American, African, Far Eastern, and the diverse European histories. Or, it may be part of a new multicultural concept of area studies ranging from women's to African-American Studies. But in neither case does it play the exotic role that it does in many European and particularly German settings. Here, clearly under the impact of the Holocaust, even though only some decades later, Jewish history, like other disciplines within Jewish Studies, arouses new interest and is taught at numerous universities, though in a rather monocultural context. Jewish history, perhaps together with East European history, often remains the only clearly defined area while other historical fields make the nominal claim to represent universal history, which in practice means nothing else than German history in Germany, British history in Britain, French history in France, and so on. It is a response to the tragic past, and not to the needs of the present society, that in this case defines the German curriculum. One may thus pose the provocative question, whether a historical tragedy is required to spur the teaching of Islamic and Turkish culture to an extent comparable to Jewish Studies in a country which today is the home of two million Turkish Muslims and 100,000 Jews?

The same holds true for the integration of Jewish history in historical surveys of European or world history. Despite the enormous research being done in many languages during the last decades, general reference works usually show little interest in any kind of internal developments within Jewish history, and Jews are usually mentioned only when it comes to their persecution.

In the German context there are a few exceptions, the most important one being Thomas Nipperdey's masterful *German History*,²⁷ which contains a long chapter about the Jews that supersedes all previous attempts to integrate Jewish history into a general survey of German history. But is it really integrated? As Israeli historian Shulamit Volkov pointed out in an unpublished lecture, you won't find any passages about the Jews or the rather prominent antisemitism in his discussion of the Revolution of 1848. They find their place in German historiography, but it is a niche, to use a friendlier term than "ghettoization."

The History of Jewish Historiography

The first attempts to deal with the history of Jewish history writing were made by the scions of 19th-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, most notably Moritz Steinschneider in his essay on the *Geschichtsliteratur der Juden* which, however, like most of his writings was a bibliographical essay rather than a comprehensive historical analysis.²⁸ Naturally, Steinschneider and his colleagues dealt mainly with premodern accounts of Jewish history, an emphasis that can also be found in more recent attempts to analyze Jewish historiography, such as Salo Baron's essays on the topic collected under the title *History and Jewish Historians* (1964) and the more recent *Perceptions of Jewish History* (1993) by the late Amos Funkenstein. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's much acclaimed *Zakhor* (1989), which is not only the first comprehensive study but up to now the definitive systematic analysis of Jewish history writing, laid the groundwork for any contemporary discussion on Jewish history, but it does not focus on the history of modern Jewish history writing. After his profound discussion of premodern Jewish history and memory, Yerushalmi stresses the break and not the continuity in his concluding chapter on modern Jewish historical writing. *Zakhor* thus opens the way for a systematic discussion of modern Jewish historiography without undertaking such an attempt itself.

The most comprehensive attempts so far to summarize the achievements of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and modern Jewish historiography are a collection of essays and an anthology. Ismar Schorsch's *From Text to Context* (1994), which brings together the author's essays on modern Jewish scholarship,

underlines the same break between a traditional Jewish understanding of history and its modern transformation that Yerushalmi stressed in *Zakhor*. This break is also made clear in the only systematic anthology of Jewish history writing, Michael Meyer's pioneering *Ideas of Jewish History* (1987). In his introduction, which remains the most compact treatment of the subject, Meyer writes: "It was not until the nineteenth century that a reflective conception of Jewish history became central to the consciousness of the Jew. The reasons for this new concern lay first of all in a transformation of the cultural environment."²⁹

A comprehensive analysis of the subject is thus still lacking (with the exception of a Hebrew survey covering the period up to Graetz, written by Reuven Michael), as are full-length biographies of some of the most important Jewish historians, including Graetz and Dubnow.³⁰ Some recent monographs, most notably Robert Liberles' biography of Salo Baron, Susannah Heschel's work on Abraham Geiger, David Myers' treatment of the so-called Jerusalem School of Jewish historians, and Shmuel Feiner's groundbreaking study on *Haskalah and History*, have shown new interest in our understanding of the history of modern Jewish history writing.³¹ If only a decade ago the ground was not prepared to undertake a comprehensive summary of modern Jewish historiography, it seems that by now such an enterprise is not only possible but indeed constitutes a significant lacuna in the field of Jewish Studies.

Since most modern trends penetrate Jewish historiography only after they are discussed in a general historiographical context, we too have by now realized that "The End of History" will not come soon. What Ernst Breisach has to say about the future of history writing may well be true for our sub-discipline as well: "Rather than despair, historians should rejoice because the illusion of timelessness has faded and they once more are called upon to perform the key role of interpretation."³² Jewish history during the last century has arguably taken a rather twisted course with turns that are sometimes tragic and sometimes uplifting. Consequently, though, the writing of Jewish history has become a more complex and perhaps more sophisticated area of scholarship in our time. Maybe today it could even stop a Mendelssohn from yawning.

- ¹ Moses Mendelssohn to Thomas Abbt, 16th February, 1765. In G.B. Mendelssohn, ed. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by G.B. Mendelssohn, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1843-1845) 342.
- ² Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 80-81.
- ³ Ismar Elbogen, "Zu S. Dubnows Geschichtswerk," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 70 1926: 145.
- ⁴ See Geoffrey Barraclough, *Main Trends in History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publisher, 1991): 7.
- ⁵ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989) 95.
- ⁶ Henry Feingold, ed. *The Jewish People in America*, 5 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Michael A. Meyer, ed., *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (München: C.H. Beck, 1996-97.)
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