

**200 Years of Wissenschaft des Judentums: Historiography, Ideology, and the Challenge of a Useable Past**

**Veranstalter:** Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem; Cymbalista Jewish Heritage Center; Tel Aviv University; Landes-Offensive zur Entwicklung Wissenschaftlich-ökonomischer Exzellenz (LOEWE); Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main; The Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg; The Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Antwerp; Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich; The Historical Society of Israel; The Fritz Thyssen Foundation

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**Bericht von:** Meirav Reuveny, Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem / Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The opening session of the conference addressed the beginnings of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (WDJ). OFRI ILANY (Jerusalem) spoke about the Christian Hebraism of the 18th century, focusing on the dialogue between Johann David Michaelis and Moses Mendelssohn. Both Michaelis and Mendelssohn championed science and objective scholarship, but they differed in regards to the effect that the study of the Bible and the Hebrew language had on the way that the Jews of their time were treated.

RACHEL LIVNEH-FREUDENTHAL (Jerusalem) addressed the founders of the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*. Their belief in freedom as a fundamental value of modern society led them to demand freedom for Judaism and equality for Jews not by rejecting their Judaism but through their attachment to it. According to this model, WDJ would reshape Jewish culture into a universal culture, in line with the modern political landscape.

After greetings from the German Ambassador to Israel, Clemens von Goetze, ISMAR SCHORSCH (New York) delivered the keynote lecture, which addressed Heinrich Graetz's Biblical criticism. Graetz rejected the Masoretic version of the Bible and emphasized the importance of discovering the precise meaning of the Hebrew text, claiming that misreadings of the text had laid the

foundations of prejudices toward Jews. His criticism of biblical texts served as a tool for Graetz to trace the narrative of the social history of the Jews, emphasizing their literary creativity and theological singularity. Moreover, his research expressed his desire to impart to the *spätes Judentum* the same respect that ancient Judaism enjoyed, thereby establishing Judaism as a force able to produce a great culture not only in the distant past but also in the present and future.

The first day ended with a roundtable discussion on Jewish Studies in Israel today, chaired by TOMER PERSICO (Tel Aviv), with the participation of Rabbi JEHUDA BRANDES (Alon Shvut), RACHEL ELIOR (Jerusalem), MAOZ KAHANA (Tel Aviv), and Ofri Ilany.

The first session of the second conference day addressed the interrelationship between WDJ and the concept of Judaism. DANIEL BOYARIN (Berkeley) discussed the invention of the concept of *Judentum*: while the traditional concepts referred to all the aspects of the Jewish way of life and not merely to religion, the idea of *Judentum* perceived Judaism solely as a religion. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is thus similar to Christian research in its fundamental perceptions, assuming a separation between literature and life in exploring the history of the Jews.

CHRISTIAN WIESE (Frankfurt am Main / Philadelphia) discussed the reception of the new concept of Judaism, both in WDJ research and in political movements affected by it. Abraham Geiger and Moses Hess debated the role of Jews and their cultural heritage. Ahad Ha'am also criticized the apologetic nature of WDJ, claiming that it ignored the spiritual needs of present day Jews. Many of those critics called for *Jüdische Wissenschaft*, which would research various aspects of Jewish life in the past and the present.

The next session addressed lesser known figures and directions in WDJ. MAYA SHABBAT (Beersheba) spoke about the rabbi and scholar Shimon Bernfeld and his unique position during the national-Zionist era of the study of Judaism. Bernfeld presented popular scientific publications and criticized Zionism in polemical articles. Bernfeld's 'Galician' image and his advocacy of a traditional alter-

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native to WDJ impacted the reception of his research.

AYA ELYADA (Jerusalem) discussed the work of Max Grunbaum on old-Yiddish texts. Grunbaum was one of the 19th century WDJ scholars who rejected the view of Yiddish as a corrupted language undeserving of academic research. His transcripts and interpretations expressed the current desire of German Jews to find their place as a religious minority by reinforcing their loyalty to their religion as expressed in those texts.

The following session focused on national historiography. ISRAEL BARTAL (Jerusalem) traced the shifts in the perception of Jewish history and how these perceptions were received and how they impacted the political sphere. Graetz's well-known *Geschichte der Juden* was read in Eastern Europe in Shaul Pinchas Rabinovitz's Hebrew translation, which was in fact a rewriting of the original: Rabinovitz transformed Graetz's emancipatory orientation into a national solution for Jewish history.

HANAN HARIF's (Jerusalem) lecture focused on the orientalist Shlomo Dov Goitein. It was Goitein who, in his exchanges with Dinur, Jacob Katz and others, asserted that the history and culture of oriental Jewish communities from the Middle Ages onward had been almost entirely neglected. Yet despite his important work in this field, Goitein himself regarded the history of oriental Jews as something separate from mainstream Jewish history, a view that endured in Israeli historiography for many decades thereafter.

The final session of the day was dedicated to the renowned scholar Gershom Scholem. CHRISTOPH SCHMIDT (Jerusalem) discussed Scholem's critique of WDJ, expressed in his construction of Jewish history and culture around mysticism. Scholem sought to weave his historical narrative of anarchy by focusing on phenomena such as Sabbateanism, thereby moving away from the political orientation of the science of Judaism.

FEDERICO DAL BO (Barcelona) addressed the concept of Paulinism and showed how Scholem's perception of the Talmud reflects this concept. In Scholem's view, the Talmudic law is messianic in its notion of 'the messianic days' – the use of traditional texts to justify

Sabbateanism; and the institution of Midrash is an expression of the messianic nature of Jewish law, which is able to change the established order.

GEORGE Y. KOHLER (Ramat Gan) addressed Scholem indirectly by discussing WDJ's perception of the Kabbala. WDJ's rejection of the Kabbala did not derive from its irrational nature. Rather, they sought ethical and universal guidance for modern Judaism, whereas the Kabbala offered an exploration of the deep meaning of reality, which rendered it dangerous in the eyes of that generation.

The third day of the conference was dedicated to the relationship between the study of Judaism and Ideology. TOM NAVON (Haifa) discussed Marxist Jewish historiography of scholars such as Raphael Mahler, Moshe Katz, and Abraham Leon. They were forced to confront the paradox between nationalism and Marxism by reinterpreting Jewish history, for example by pointing out the exceptional economic circumstances of Jews scattered among the nations.

MICHA GOTTLIEB (New York) discussed the thought of Samson Raphael Hirsch, focusing on the question whether scientific research could be undertaken alongside religious beliefs or dogmas. Hirsch argued that a scholar who failed to seek the guidance of God in the Torah could not properly understand its laws, and that the traditional reader was better suited to study its texts. Scientific pluralism, according to Hirsch, could accommodate both scientific and traditional approaches.

RONIT IRSHAI (Ramat Gan) reviewed WDJ's methodology, addressing feminist scholarship and its perception of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in scientific research. Irshai discussed the different approaches taken by feminist research, and raised the fundamental question of whether objectivity in scholarship and of scholars themselves is at all possible or even necessary while the source texts themselves exhibit ideological bias.

ANDREA SCHATZ (London) addressed WDJ's attempts to tackle the divide between Eastern and Western Jewry in the past and the present. On the one hand, the Maskilim saw medieval Sephardic culture as a role model, but on the other hand treated Sephardic history as a separate topic that found no place in

scholarship and in the present. This lecture corresponded both with Hanan Harif's paper on the exclusion of oriental Jewish history in Israel, and with Christian Wiese's discussion of the criticism leveled at WDJ.

KERSTIN VON DER KRONE (Washington D.C.) discussed modern Jewish scholarship and the question of whether Judaism has dogmas. During 1926/27 the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* carried several articles on the issue. Isidor Scheftelowitz insisted that as a scholar and rabbi Leo Baeck was obliged to teach the Jewish dogmas to his community; Baeck responded by agreeing with Moses Mendelssohn that there were no Jewish dogmas, but at the same time rejected the idea of a religion of reason.

ALEXANDER A. DURBAU (Tübingen) addressed Lazarus Goldschmidt's translation of the Babylonian Talmud. The question whether a translation of the Talmud should be apologetic or rather reveal the essence of Judaism occupied translators. Goldschmidt claimed that his translation (1896) was intended to fight anti-Semitism, but he drew criticism and personal attacks accusing him of ignorance of the Talmud.

The last session was dedicated to questions of center and periphery. NOAH GERBER (Tel Aviv) discussed Jacob Roman who was actively engaged in the process of transferring the contents of the Aleppo Genizah and other Ottoman communities' libraries to the West to make them available for western research of Jewish and oriental texts. During this process Roman was a key mediator between the Jewish Ottoman manuscripts and Western university libraries. Nevertheless, Roman's own research has been neglected.

BRIAN HOROWITZ (Tulane) discussed Simon Dubnov's quest for a useful past and how his search for historical examples of autonomous Judaism impacted his historical research. Dubnov rejected the theological approach to Jewish history such as that of Graetz, and approached the Jews as a national collective that had defied the historical pattern whereby peoples would disappear after losing their territory.

#### Conference Overview:

*Greetings:* Shmuel Feiner (Jerusalem / Ramat Gan) / Dan Laor (Tel Aviv) / Vivian Liska (Antwerp) / Miriam Eliav-Feldon (Tel Aviv)

#### *The Beginnings of the Science of Judaism*

Ofri Ilany (Jerusalem): Jewish-Christian Dialogue in 18th Century German Hebraism

Rachel Livneh-Freudenthal (Jerusalem): Acknowledging the Past at the Service of the Future: The Founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

#### *Keynote Lecture*

*Greetings:* Dr. Clemens von Goetze, German Ambassador to Israel

Ismar Schorsch (New York): In the Shadow of Wellhausen: Heinrich Graetz as a Biblical Critic

#### *Roundtable: Jewish Studies in Israel Today*

Tomer Persico (Tel Aviv) / Jehuda Brandes (Alon Shvut) / Rachel Elior (Jerusalem) / Maoz Kahana (Tel Aviv) / Ofri Ilany (Jerusalem).

#### *Judaism and Jewish Studies*

Daniel Boyarin (Berkeley): What Was *Judentum*?

Christian Wiese (Frankfurt, Main/ Philadelphia): *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Jewish Nationalism in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century: Mutual Perceptions and Debates.

#### *Politics, Tradition and the Study of Judaism*

Maya Shabbat (Beer Sheva): Heretics, Agnostics and Other Zionists. The Zionist Congress and the Politics of the Science of Judaism

Aya Elyada (Jerusalem): *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the Study of Yiddish Literature in 19th Century Germany.

#### *National Historiography*

Israel Bartal (Jerusalem): Berlin – Petersburg – Jerusalem: The Shifts in the Zionist Historiography

Hanan Harif (Jerusalem): 'We Came to Rebel, but Found Ourselves Continuing along the Path'? Jewish Studies in the Early State of Israel and the History of Oriental Jews.

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Gershom Scholem

Jerusalem, in: H-Soz-Kult 02.06.2018.

Christoph Schmidt (Jerusalem): Gershom Scholem's Theory of Kabbala and Political Theology. A Revision of an Argument

Federico Dal Bo (Barcelona): 'Paulinismus' in the Science of Judaism. On Scholem's Reception of Paul and its Discontents

George Y. Kohler (Ramat Gan): *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Kabbala-Research.

*The Study of Judaism and Ideologies I*

Tom Navon (Haifa): Marxist Jewish Historiography

Michah Gottlieb (New York): Samson Raphael Hirsch and Scientific Pluralism

Ronit Irshai (Ramat Gan): Feminism, Gender and Ideology in Scholarship.

*The Study of Judaism and Ideologies II*

Andrea Schatz (London): Where Was Europe? Historical Time, Place and *Wissenschaft* after the 'Damascus Affair'

Kerstin von der Krone (Washington D.C.): On Fundamental and Systematic Matters: Modern Jewish Scholarship and the Question of Dogma

Alexander A. Dubrau (Tübingen): Scholarship and Ideology: Lazarus Goldschmidt's Translation of the Babylonian Talmud into German and the Debate over the Translatability and Textuality of the Talmud

*Center and Periphery*

Noah Gerber (Tel Aviv): Jacob Roman: A Jewish Hebraist before Zunz

Brian Horowitz (Tulane): Simon Dubnov's Conception of Russian-Jewish Historiography Is Wrong: Why, When and How.

*The Future of the Science of Judaism*

Irene Aue-Ben-David (Jerusalem) / Vivian Liska (Antwerp) / Avriel Bar-Levav (Ra'anana) / Rachel Heuberger (Frankfurt am Main).

Tagungsbericht *200 Years of Wissenschaft des Judentums: Historiography, Ideology, and the Challenge of a Useable Past*. 18.02.2018–20.02.2018,