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## Is there still a “Jerusalem School?” Reflections on the state of Jewish historical scholarship in Israel

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**Abstract** This essay examines the study of Jewish history in Israel at the juncture of two currents: the ongoing expansion of an international community of Jewish studies scholars and the waning interest in the field in Israel itself. Mindful of the latter trend, it is easy to adopt a declensionist narrative, according to which the “Jerusalem School,” with its monolithic and Palestinocentric view of the past, has run its course. And yet, that framing occludes a number of novel tendencies in Israel, arising in the present “post-post-Zionist” moment, that expand the contours of Jewish historical scholarship in productive ways. They include: the well-known and controversial work of the “New Historians;” the work of a succeeding generation of scholars who have brought new intellectual and methodological openness to the study of Zionism; the work of Israeli scholars who have introduced a new measure of reflexivity through careful examination of the history of Jewish historiography; and the work of Israeli scholars who have eschewed the once-regnant view of an “immanent causality” in Jewish history. In conclusion, the article suggests that kernels of these trends were present in the founding generation of scholars at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, though the current generation of scholars is both more critical toward the Zionist nationalist narrative and more global in its orientation.

Fifteen years ago, I had occasion to pose the question: “Was there a ‘Jerusalem School’ ”? The question was meant to clarify whether there was a unified and coherent historiographical perspective that emerged out of the founding generation of scholars of the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The answer offered then was a qualified one, suggesting that the founders’ “belief in the continuity and immanence of Jewish history stands somewhat at odds with their professional charge to contextualize the past.”<sup>1</sup>

This qualified response was less an attempt at evasion than at precision; the tension between their a priori commitment to the continuity and immanence of Jewish history, on one hand, and their fealty to the norms of the historical discipline, on the other, was constitutive of the founding generation of scholars. Moreover, the presence of these two ingredients helps explain the polysemy of the term “Jerusalem School.” As I noted earlier, the term has come to assume a variety of different connotations over the decades, serving as a Rorschach test for those in the field of Jewish studies.<sup>2</sup> For some, the term conjures up a research enterprise characterized by textual mastery borne

of a native familiarity with Hebrew language sources. For others, it symbolizes the flip side of such mastery—namely, a kind of philological pedantry that fails to catch the forest amidst the trees. For some, it represents an iron-clad teleology that reduces Jewish history to life in—or the quest to return to—the ancestral Jewish homeland. For others, this “Palestinocentric” focus has served as a necessary corrective to previous generations’ neglect of the Land of Israel as the central axis of Jewish history.

The diverse understandings of the term reflect more than the biases and idiosyncrasies of individual observers. They reflect deeply entrenched and competing sensibilities that have accompanied the enterprise of Jewish historical scholarship in the State of Israel (and in the Yishuv for a quarter century before). Now sixty years after the creation of the State, it seems an opportune moment to assess the state of the field—and, concomitantly, to revisit the question of whether there is a Jerusalem School today.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, commemorative moments are, to a great extent, artifices, no more likely to mark terminal points, ruptures, or momentous events than other dates. And yet, they can and often do encourage introspection and reflection. As such, the sixtieth anniversary of the State of Israel was a catalyst not merely to celebrate the achievements of Jewish historical scholarship, but to acknowledge weaknesses, tensions, as well as new directions.

Mindful of the multiple vectors at work in the case before us, I propose to offer in the following essay two alternative readings of the state of Jewish historical research in Israel (mainly devoted to the modern period). These readings are largely personal and impressionistic, and as such, are intended to capture larger trends rather than minute nuances. Each seems valid and reasonable, and yet the two stand in considerable tension with one another. The first notes the considerable success over the past sixty years in planting in Israel a vision of Jewish history revolving around the axis of Zion and rooted in the ideological and institutional foundation of the Zionist movement. The second traces a series of recent developments in the study of Zionism, Yishuv, and the State of Israel that resist the linear quality of that earlier vision. The clash of the two, which harks back to the defining tension mentioned at the outset, also has an important generational dimension. Increasingly, Israeli scholars have joined a broad and growing international community of Jewish studies researchers, a trend that stands in striking contrast to the declining appeal of Jewish studies within a troubled Israeli university system.

## I

It is unquestionable that the past sixty years have brought with them considerable achievement in the academic discipline of Jewish history in Israel.

When Judah L. Magnes opened the first World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in July 1947, the field of Jewish studies was, much like the Jewish world at large, reeling from the devastation of the Shoah. Magnes declared in his opening address:

Our first obligation is to rise in honor of the memory of the centers of learning that were destroyed and the scholars who were consumed in the terrible Shoah that descended upon us in the past years. Who can count the losses? Who can recall the names of all of the victims? Who can assess the scholarly and religious forces that were destroyed?<sup>4</sup>

At that time, there was but one university in the Yishuv, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to undertake what the chief Congress organizer, Ben-Zion Dinaburg (Dinur), called “the sacred obligation” to revive Jewish studies.<sup>5</sup>

Since that time, four more universities—and now dozens of colleges—have arisen in the State of Israel to join in the work of studying the history, thought, literature, and culture of the Jews. Scores of faculty members teach hundreds of students in the various fields of Jewish studies, supported by a huge output of scholarly publications. To a great extent, another major goal that Dinur articulated at the first World Congress—to create a world center of Jewish scholarship in Zion—has been achieved.

Of course, the story of this aspiration is longer than sixty years. Several decades earlier, in late 1924, the Institute of Jewish Studies of the soon-to-be opened Hebrew University was inaugurated with the goal of becoming the major center of research of its kind in the world. At the opening, Judah Magnes readily observed the sanctity of the occasion, declaring the new Institute to be “a holy place, a sanctuary in which to learn and teach, without fear or hatred, all that Judaism has made and created from the time of the Bible until our days.” This sacralized sentiment was almost always accompanied by another sentiment, which Magnes articulated clearly in a memorandum from 1926:

Since the highest aim of the Institute must be scientific investigation, this means that we do not want our Institute to be like a provincial faculty or to make it a factory for exams and doctoral degrees. Our desire is that the Institute stand on a *scientific* plateau that is permeated throughout with *science*, and whose goal is the development and revival of Jewish science. . .

The sense of sacred responsibility to create a major center of scholarship was imparted to the first members of the Institute, including the two historians, Yitzhak Baer and the aforementioned Ben-Zion Dinaburg (Dinur).

Dissimilar in origin, temperament, and outlook, the German Baer and the Eastern European Dinur joined forces in Jerusalem to lay a new foundation for the study of Jewish history. One of the first fruits of their collaboration was the journal, *Zion*, which first appeared in 1935 under their joint editorial control. In their opening programmatic manifesto, *Megamatenu*, Baer and Dinaburg articulated a guiding principle that has been a cornerstone of Jewish historical scholarship in Israel ever since: “Jewish history is the history of the Jewish nation.”<sup>6</sup> Taking aim at the “theological-literary character” (*tsiviyona ha-te’ologi-sifrut*) of earlier Jewish historiography, particularly nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany, Baer and Dinaburg sought to normalize the Jewish historiographical condition by nationalizing it—that is, by placing the Jewish nation as the prime agent and object of research. At the same time, their own excavation of the “immanent forces” guiding Jewish history gave a quasi-theological and decidedly exceptionalist quality to this “nation.”

It strikes me that this exceptionalist, even quasi-theological, character has remained part of Jewish historiography in Israel. It lives on in the separation of departments of Jewish history from those operating under the curious name of “general history.” I remember encountering this separation when I commenced graduate studies in Jewish history—or more accurately, in the Department of the History of the People and Land of Israel (*Toldot `am veverets Yisra’el*)—at Tel Aviv University twenty-five years ago. Crossing the border to general history was neither common nor encouraged. My sense then was that Jewish history was to be primarily understood, just as Baer and Dinur had advocated in 1935, as the history of the Jewish nation, whose natural home and site of fulfillment was the Land of Israel. I also had the strong sense that Jewish history in this decidedly Zionist framing held a privileged place in the Israeli academy, where universities served to advance the national mission and train the future leaders (political, intellectual, and military) of the state. Even in a period of intense national contention—I began studying at Tel Aviv University at the outset of the exceptionally divisive Lebanon War of 1982—the centrality of the Zionist strand in the fabric of Jewish history was pronounced. It was not only that a key organizing principle for the study of Jewish history was the history of the Jews of Erets Yisrael, or the movement of Jews to it over the ages—consistent with the “Palestinocentric” charge advanced by Dinur as far back as his 1919 anthology, *Toldot Yisra’el*. It was that a large number of those engaged in researching modern Jewish history were scholars, in one way or another, of Zionism. This was certainly the case at Tel Aviv University, where one could study Zionism with an impressive contingent of departmental faculty: Moshe Mishkinski, Matitياهو Mintz, Lloyd Gartner, Yosef Gorny, Robert Rockwell, Ya’akov Shavit, and Anita Shapira, among others. To be sure, this Zionist orientation in the study of Jewish history was hardly unique to Tel Aviv in the 1980s. It was no less present at the

Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to which, of course, the moniker "Jerusalem School" was initially and most consistently attached. Indeed, in the wake of Dinur, the Hebrew University cultivated its own strong emphasis on the study of Zionism and the Land of Israel, perhaps most obviously in the work of Shmuel Ettinger, but also in several generations of scholars in the Department of Jewish History and Institute of Contemporary Jewry including Moshe Davis, Yisrael Kolatt, Shmuel Almog, Evyatar Friesel, Gideon Shimoni, Ezra Mendelsohn, Hagit Lavsky, and Yisrael Bartal.

The initial ideological commitment to recast Jewish history as the history of the Jewish nation, together with the preponderance of scholars studying Zionism and the Land of Israel, has lent an unmistakable character to Jewish historiography in Israel. Consistent with the ambitions of the first editors of *Zion*, this concentrated focus on the agency of the Jewish nation and the locus of Zion has, to a great extent, reordered the priorities of previous European-based Jewish research, both that of 19th-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and of early 20th-century Eastern Europe (and especially Yiddish) scholarship. Moreover, the emergence of an unprecedented density of scholars and a strong institutional foundation has allowed for the dissemination of historical thinking and values in the broader society, and especially in primary and secondary schools, in line with the Zionist-Israeli project.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to deny the evident heterogeneity in the methods and interests of the second- and third-generation scholars (or even their first generation forebears), many of whom have written about subjects other than Zionism or the Land of Israel in their work. It is to take stock of the common thread in their research, as well as the distinctiveness of the institutional setting in which they operate. Never before had Jewish historical scholarship found as stable and hospitable a home for research, instruction, and the training of teachers as in Jerusalem—and later, in Israel. In earlier settings, scholars of Jewish studies found employment only in rabbinical seminaries or precariously funded research centers. In Israel, scholars of Jewish history have realized the dreams of their precursors by making their professional homes in state-sponsored universities and colleges, in which they craft a national narrative of the past and train generations of teachers.

Herein lies an irony. Zionism sought to embed its own sense of unique virtue in the very institutions called upon to normalize the Jewish condition. This was not unlike other nationalist movements which have similarly oscillated between exceptionalist and normalizing tendencies. And yet, Zionism, famously described by Trevor-Roper as "the last, least typical" among them,<sup>8</sup> has had an unusual and ongoing foil, the Diaspora, against which to hone its exceptionalist blade. This exceptionalism, it strikes me (both as an erstwhile student and as an interested contemporary observer), still can and does shape institutional priorities. Even in an age of diminishing resources and competing priorities, the study of modern Jewish history in Israeli universities

continues to place a good deal more emphasis on Zionism, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel than on any other subject. By contrast, it is quite instructive to note that German-Jewish history, which is in a sense the ideological antithesis of the Zionist emphasis (and a pillar of scholarly strength in the Diaspora), has often found its strongest representation in Israel not in Jewish history departments, but in “general history” (for example, Steve Aschheim, Dan Diner, Frank Stern, Shulamit Volkov, Yfaat Weiss, and Moshe Zimmermann).

What we thus notice, from a *longue durée* perspective on the Israeli academy, is a process of localizing Jewish history by linking it inextricably to the Land of Israel. This current has been fortified in recent decades by a further institutional development: the emergence of discrete research institutes (The Ben Gurion Research Institute at Ben-Gurion University), departments (Haifa University), and journals (*Israel Studies*, *Iyunim bi-tekumat Yisra'el*, *Yisra'el*) devoted to the study of the Land or State of Israel. At one level, it is not hard to justify scholarly attention of this sort, given Israel's enduring and gripping political challenges, multicultural society, and contemporary salience. But at another level, Land/State of Israel studies programs run the risk of perpetuating, albeit under a new name, the exceptionalist “Palestinocentric” worldview of earlier generations—and in the process, of replicating the very pattern of segregation that separates Jewish from “general” history, although in this case, the particular effect is to isolate the study of Israel from the proximate Palestinian and broader Middle Eastern contexts.

It is interesting to ponder what effect the emergence of a discrete Israel studies field will have on the declining interest in Jewish studies in Israeli universities. As has been oft observed, fewer students are taking courses, and fewer faculty positions are being filled in Jewish history.<sup>9</sup> Rather than commit themselves to studying the parochial local culture (via Israeli or Jewish studies), students in Israeli universities have increasingly voted with their feet over the past decade, traveling to far-flung countries and then returning to Israel to explore the societies, languages, and cultures of those countries (especially those of Asia).

This general pattern of declining interest poses an interesting contrast to developments in North America, where Jewish studies has undergone a veritable explosion of growth over the past quarter century. Almost all major universities and many smaller colleges have programs, chairs, or centers in Jewish studies, with perhaps the largest plurality of students studying modern Jewish history. And yet, unlike in Israel, Jewish history is taught in the overwhelming majority of cases in self-standing departments of history in which the Jewish experience is embedded in a wide and comparative context.

Just as in Israel, it is interesting to see what impact the recent arrival of Israel studies on the scene in North America will have. Inspired to a great

extent by the desire of Jewish donors (after the Second Intifada) to present Israel in a positive light on college campuses, new chairs and centers in Israel studies are housed in various departmental settings. Regardless of whether they are institutionally linked to Jewish studies programs, they constitute a source of competition to Jewish history, literature, and related fields, especially in a constant state of financial pressure. It is entirely conceivable that this competition might push each field toward new pathways of innovation. It is also possible that the relationship between the two could become a zero sum game, with funding, students, and faculty positions shifting from one to the other.

Alongside the important and inescapable question of financial resources, there is also a central intellectual challenge posed by the growth of Israel studies in North America and Israel. The question is not only one of navigating between scholarship and advocacy—or between the often divergent interests of researchers and philanthropists. Those tensions are as old and persistent in Jewish studies as the modern discipline itself. Rather, a paramount question that will have to be addressed with wisdom in coming years is how to assure a sensible intellectual and institutional balance between studying sixty years of the State of Israel's history, momentous and eventful as they have been, and studying 3500 years of Jewish history.

## II

Streaking throughout the account of Israeli scholarship that I have just presented is a linear thread, extending from Baer and Dinur's "Megamatenu" of 1935 to the development of Israel studies today. Over the course of time, the organizing principle of Zionism has inspired and shaped a body of research in Israel that regards the Jewish nation as the chief causal agent—and the Land of Israel as the central axis—of Jewish history.

This narrative, which reinforces the image of a largely cohesive "Jerusalem School," is, as narratives tend to be, partial. Competing Israeli and Palestinian versions of history both contain a great deal of truth about their respective national movements, but they are, and only can be, partial. Such is the ineluctable property of historical narrative itself. In the case of Israel scholarship on Jewish history, there is indeed another story that can be told, one that complicates the assertion of a triumphant "Jerusalem School" bent on promoting its single-minded Palestinocentric vision. The counter-narrative that I propose to unravel begins with the recognition that Jewish studies, like the Israeli academy (and society) at large, has entered a new global phase. The advent of instantaneous information technology (email and internet), the frequency of travel, and the new opportunities (for teaching



and sabbatical) provided Israeli scholars by the expansion of Jewish studies programs in North America and Europe have all contributed to a weakening of national boundaries in scholarship. The fact that Israeli scholars in Jewish history often spend time abroad, regularly attend conferences (e.g., the annual Association for Jewish Studies conference), and publish in English not only allows for regular contact and exchange with colleagues in Europe and North America; it produces a less localized and insular Israeli scholarship.

I would like to take note of four trends that reflect this opening of intellectual borders; the first three relate specifically to the writing of modern Jewish history, and particularly to Zionism, and the fourth to a larger current in Israeli scholarship. As we make our way toward the end, we will discover that the tendency to resist the orthodoxy of a nationalist rendering of Jewish history is not altogether new, but in fact had roots in the very mix of intellectual and cultural sensibilities that was present at the inception of the Jewish historical enterprise in Palestine.

The first of these trends is, in many respects, the most obvious and well-documented: the emergence of that loose band of scholars known as the “New Historians” in the late 1980s, principally, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Tom Segev, and Avi Shlaim.<sup>10</sup> While diverse in their methodological approaches, views of scholarship, and political stances, they nonetheless mounted a challenge to existing assumptions in Israel regarding the struggle of Zionism against the Arab enemy. Taking aim at received wisdom, they called into question the relative weakness, solitary position, and behavior of Jewish forces during the 1948 War. They also sought to overturn the belief that Zionism operated on an exalted moral plane. In doing so, they situated Zionism within a broader non-Jewish context, especially noting its role as the ally of a hard-edged and self-interested European colonialism that aspired to amass influence in the Middle East.

The conscious effort to overcome a narrow and exceptionalist view of Zionism (and the struggle for Palestine) prompted this cohort of historians to publish their works beyond the Israeli academic world—and significantly, in the English language. In fact, it is no coincidence that this group of scholars left Israel in order to receive graduate training. By doing so, they exited the conceptual universe of Israeli scholarship and adopted a wider contextual lens. And yet, the New Historians have had a substantial impact in Israel, provoking impassioned debate about Israel’s past during the 1990s, drawing the frequent attention of fellow scholars and politicians alike, and ultimately reshaping the way in which Israeli society remembers its history.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, some of their most controversial conclusions have been integrated both into the Israeli academic establishment and popular consciousness. Perhaps the most notable example is the assertion, made with particular focus by Benny Morris, that Jewish/Israeli forces forcibly expelled Palestinian Arabs from

their home during the War of Independence. Once deemed an invention of Palestinian propagandists, this claim has come to be accepted widely by Israeli historians of Zionism. Few concur with Ilan Pappé that there was a conspiratorial “Consultancy” that devised a premeditated plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians,<sup>12</sup> but most Israeli students of the 1948 War would agree that expulsions by Jewish/Israeli forces did take place in the course of the fighting.<sup>13</sup>

This conclusion has contributed to an important, though difficult, process of maturation in which Israeli academic culture has challenged foundation myths of the society in which it is embedded, including ones that it helped to construct. While opening up historical questions long considered settled, this jarring conclusion has also helped burst the bubble of self-induced opacity in which Israeli historians often denied any meaningful link between their work and the surrounding political environment. The New Historians, scholars who consciously chose to train and write outside of that bubble (even if not all of them saw their projects as explicitly political), thus have played a central role in expanding the horizons of Israeli historical scholarship. Among other effects, the reception of their work back has provided an impetus—both as positive inspiration and negative response—for the study of Israeli politics and history.

Second, the opening of boundaries has also yielded an interesting expansion of horizons in the study of Zionism itself. The New Historians pushed the study of Israel into a wider analytical framework, at times animated by a declared “post-Zionist” agenda. In their wake—and in the wake of the stormy debate provoked by their work in the 1990s—a new generation of scholars, we might say a “post-post-Zionist” generation, has begun to approach the history of Zionism through new lenses. Previously ignored or neglected perspectives have won new attention, bringing this generation more in line with trends in the historical profession at large. Thus, in place of the familiar discussions of ideological strands and strains in Zionism (Labor/Herut, Haganah/IZL/Lehi), or of the movement’s central figures (David Ben-Gurion, Vladimir Zev Jabotinsky, Berl Katznelson, Menachem Begin) that marked earlier generations, the new cohort is interested in innovative forms of urban and cultural history (Anat Hellman and Orit Rozin),<sup>14</sup> gender history (Devorah Bernstein, Ofer Nur, and Rina Peled),<sup>15</sup> and intellectual history (Etan Bloom, Adi Gordon, Yotam Hotam, Nitzan Lebovic, Amos Morris-Reich, Boaz Neumann, Dimitri Shumsky, and Yfaat Weiss)<sup>16</sup> that recontextualize Zionism, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel. As against earlier generations of researchers, these scholars are less intent on accepting or, as with some New Historians, rejecting the core premises of Zionism. While quite conscious of the political ramifications (and sources) of their research, they nonetheless maintain a somewhat more detached stance toward their subject than did

their teachers (or the New Historians, for that matter). What is distinctive in this cohort is their creativity in seeking out new angles of observation that yield a more complex, fractious, and multi-faceted picture of Zionism, with particular attention to the philosophical roots of the movement in Europe.

Interestingly, the work of this group coincides with that of a group of young researchers outside of Israel (Michelle Campos, Roni Gechtman, Joshua Karlip, Cecile Kuznitz, James Loeffler, Kenneth Moss, Simon Rabinovitch, Barry Trachtenberg, and Jeffrey Veidlinger, among others) who have been casting a new eye on the history of Jewish nationalism over the past decade, in large part by exploring the rich terrain of Diaspora—and often, non-Zionist—Jewish nationalism.<sup>17</sup> The combined work of the two groups, Israeli and non-Israeli scholars, offers up the prospect of an important and broad re-interpretation of the history of early twentieth-century Jewish nationalism that does not presume the ultimate triumph of Zionism nor erase the crowded marketplace of nationalist ideas in the first third of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> The prospect of such intersecting labor can and should be expected in our current world of narrowing geographic and scholarly distance among Jewish historians the world over.

Third, a related, if somewhat earlier, development has been a body of work that examines, contextualizes, and deconstructs the very enterprise of *historical writing* under Zionist auspices. In my own case, I remember perceiving quite palpably the Zionist framing of Jewish history when I was studying at Tel Aviv University in the early 1990s. I also remember sensing that it would be advantageous to gain critical perspective on this phenomenon by studying it from outside of Israel. This sense was confirmed when a distinguished and typically generous Israeli scholar discouraged me from studying the founding generation of Jewish historians in Jerusalem on the grounds that such study—namely, historiographical reflection—was best left to the twilight years of one's career. The implication, at least as far as I understood the conversation, was that studying historiography was not the same as studying history; it was a second-order endeavor to be indulged in only after the heavy lifting of archival work was completed.

Notwithstanding that advice, I commenced work on a dissertation that was eventually published as *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (1995). A number of other scholars of my generation also began to place the project of modern Jewish historians into focus, combining analysis of published writings texts with unpublished and archival sources. A key catalyst for many of us was Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor* (1982) which offered a sober portrait of the modern historian, but at the same time opened a whole new scholarly discourse on the intention and function of Jewish historical writing. Yerushalmi's key foil

in the ensuing debate over the relationship between Jewish history and memory was the late Amos Funkenstein, who ascribed to the modern Jewish historian a significance—as a “priest of culture”—absent from the account in *Zakhor*.<sup>19</sup>

Students of both Yerushalmi and Funkenstein have devoted themselves to excavating the terrain of the modern Jewish historian. Among the latter, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has been the most creative in the Israeli context.<sup>20</sup> Raz-Krozkotzkin’s writings on the notion of the “negation of exile” in Zionist historiography offered searching readings of the founding figures of the “Jerusalem School,” including Baer, Dinur, and Gershom Scholem.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, his claim that Zionism’s view of Jewish exile borrows from an earlier Protestant conception of the Jews’ fall from grace is one of the boldest attempts to get underneath the ideological infrastructure of the entire Zionist enterprise. Raz-Krakotzkin’s interest lies not merely in analyzing the work of past historians, but rather, as part of his unabashedly political agenda, in urging the contemporary historian “to return to the present that same past whose denial is a part of the present.”<sup>22</sup>

Raz-Krakotzkin’s doctoral work on Zionist historiography was not alone. In the same period, the sociologist Uri Ram and a pair of dissertation writers, Arielle Rein and Daniel Marom, embarked on studies of the historiographical and educational activities of Ben-Zion Dinur, the paradigmatic Zionist historian who served as Israel’s fourth Minister of Education.<sup>23</sup> The link between history and education in the work of Zionist historians, so pronounced in the case of Dinur, has continued to hold the attention of scholars in recent years. Yitzhak Conforti and Dan Porat have both studied the intersection of these two domains in their research, noting the transmission of Zionist values from the academic high culture to popular educational institutions and vice versa.<sup>24</sup> The nature of this relationship prompts Porat, among other historians of education, to study textbooks and curricula for signs of a national educational imperative.<sup>25</sup>

This growing body of work on Zionist historiography reflects a self-reflective moment in the history of Israeli scholarship. While not all regard their project as directly relevant to present-day politics as does Raz-Krakotzkin, one main effect of this body of work is to bore through the frequent professions of objectivity in Jewish historical studies in Israel in order to expose the ideological agendas and personal motives of the historians in question. The payoff for such an historiographical undertaking is not to dismiss out of hand the previous generation of scholars while unwittingly repeating their assertions of objectivity; rather, it is to understand with greater sensitivity and consciousness the context—including the motivations, emphases, and blind-spots—of one’s forebears. This act of understanding one’s predecessors, Herbert Butterfield averred, was itself an essential precondition

of self-understanding—that is, of one’s scholarly perspective in the here and now.<sup>26</sup>

An enhanced sensitivity may come about through increased attention and critical scrutiny to the institutions in which the Jewish historical establishment has been housed. A foundation for this kind of work is the two-volume series on the history of the Hebrew University initiated on the occasion of that institution’s seventieth anniversary in 1995.<sup>27</sup> In the wake of this large endeavor, Uri Cohen has written a work of historical sociology devoted to the relationship between the Hebrew University and the state and society it often claimed to serve.<sup>28</sup> Some years earlier, Menachem Klein examined the twin ideals of Torah and science—and the tension between religion and politics—into his history of Bar-Ilan University.<sup>29</sup> More research of this kind on the institutional history of Israeli universities and the higher educational establishment is needed—not only to clarify the framing of Jewish history in Israel, but also to make sense of the current quagmire in which the entire system finds itself.

A fourth, and final, trend that cuts against the mythic view of a Palestino-centric “Jerusalem School”—and merits our attention, even though it does not relate principally to modern Jewish history—is that work that challenges the notion of a unique causal force driving Jewish history via its chief agent, the Jewish nation, toward its geographic *telos* in the Land of Israel. Consistent with the exceptionalist cast of Jewish history, Yitzhak Baer was left to ask, in the final sentence of his short book *Galut* (1936), whether there may be a “power that lifts the Jewish people out of the realm of all causal history.”<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, his editorial colleague at *Zion*, Dinur, believed that a necessary Zionist corrective to previous generations of Jewish scholars must be to push to the foreground the “inner causality” animating the Jewish people (by drawing it back to its homeland).<sup>31</sup> True to form as a national “priest” (per Funkenstein’s and Anthony Smith’s term), Dinur replaced divine will with national will as the source of this causality. This transvaluation, we should add, helps make understandable the quasi-sacred aura surrounding the study of Jewish history in Jerusalem, as well as the need to separate it from the more profane “general history.”

The view of an inner causality driving Jewish history has been challenged in interesting and helpful ways in recent decades. One of the most notable cases was Yisrael Yuval’s famous and much debated article in *Zion* fifteen years ago (1993) on the relationship between Jews’ vengeance-filled, martyrological reaction to the First Crusade and the emergence of the Christian blood libel.<sup>32</sup> Yuval posited a subterranean pool in which cultural values could be exchanged between contiguous groups long assumed to be segregated and hostile—in this case, elements of a sharply anti-Christian Jewish sentiment was absorbed by the surrounding Christian milieu and then redirected back at Jews. This causal chain, the argument goes, was set in motion

not by sweeping cosmic or immanent forces, but rather by the interplay of social, political, and theological developments operating at the local level.

Yuval appeared to exit decisively the conceptual world of early generations of Jewish historians in Jerusalem who asserted an inner causality to Jewish history. Other historians have taken a further step away from that world, preferring to leave behind the notion of "influence" altogether, long a standard tool of historical investigation. One of the innovations of Yuval's approach was to point to the multi-directionality of influence, arguing that, in unconscious but consequential ways, Jewish culture had an impact on Christian culture, not merely the other way around.

The innovation of a number of Yuval's colleagues is to suggest that "influence" may not be the best way to describe the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures. Their presumption is that Jews were constantly and inescapably engaged in cultural negotiation and exchange with non-Jewish hosts. Rather than describe that negotiation as either glorious resistance or cowardly submission to "external" influence, they depict a space where Jews and non-Jews interacted with one another, swimming in a shared pool of social norms and cultural values. For example, the Jerusalem historian Lee Levine seeks to evoke this space in his discussion of the relationship between Judaism and Hellenism in late antiquity. Meanwhile, the Tel Aviv medievalist Jeremy Cohen calls upon scholars to pay careful attention to that which "is common to Jewish and Christian culture in the Middle Ages" rather than to depict two discrete entities that resist or appeal to the other. The emeritus Haifa historian, Kenneth Stow, for his part, seeks to introduce the notion of cultural bi-directionality between Jews and their hosts into his studies of medieval and early modern history.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most explicit critique of the "influence model" is offered by Moshe Rosman in a 2002 programmatic article, "A Prologomenon to the Study of Jewish Cultural History." In considering the nature of cultural exchange between Jews and Poles in medieval and early modern times, Rosman argues that "the usual impossibility of tracing modes of transmission renders the question of who influenced whom moot." As an alternative, he proposes to understand Jewish culture as the product of a ceaselessly dynamic, interactive, multidirectional "polysystem."<sup>34</sup>

It is not entirely coincidental that these scholars belong to a larger international cohort of Jewish studies scholars intent on pushing past a rigid model of influence (including Daniel Boyarin, Erich Gruen, Michael Satlow, Peter Schäfer, to name a few notable examples). With the exception of Yuval, those mentioned in the paragraph above are American-born and trained. Their exposure to a different set of historiographical practices and guiding assumptions than their Israeli-born colleagues, as well as to a different understanding of Jewish cultural formation (owing, to a great extent, to the late Gerson D. Cohen),<sup>35</sup> may have had a hand in forging new byways of research in Jewish historical studies in Israel. In particular, their rethinking of

the centrality of “influence” as a main tool of historical explication pushes us to rethink—and partially erase—the constructed boundaries that once stood between Jewish history and “general history.”

### III

The trends that we have just discussed suggest a more complicated picture of Jewish historical scholarship in Israel than the received wisdom of a mythic and monolithic “Jerusalem School.” Rather than yielding a tale of linearity, insularity, and ideological conformity, they bespeak a story of iconoclasm, innovation, and openness. But in considering this, we should note the persistent inclination of historians of one generation to believe that they have achieved a perspective and clarity not afforded their naive predecessors. Tempting as this impulse may be, we should not ignore the ways in which our scholarly predecessors at times confound our often uncharitable assumptions about them.

For example, Yitzhak Baer was the paradigmatic archival positivist among the founding generation of Jerusalem scholars. To add complexity to his intellectual profile, he also manifested in some of his major works—*Galut* (1936), *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (1945) and *Yisra'el be-'Amim* (1955)—an unmistakable historical exceptionalism that elevated the annals of the Jews to the level of *historia sacra*. When caught in this meta-historical reverie, Baer waxed nostalgic about the mystical powers guiding Jewish history. In other moments, he was keenly attuned to the fact that, on the ground, Jews and Christians interacted and exchanged cultural values with each other in medieval Europe. Writing in the pages of *Zion* seventy years ago, he discussed the “democratic character” of the medieval *kehillah*, a favorite theme of his that usually signaled his desire to assert a recurrent, cross-generational, and rather anachronistic Jewish ideal type, the democratically inclined pietist. But in his 1938 article, he pursued a different direction, insisting that the resemblance between the *kehillah* and the medieval Christian city: “. . . can only be explained by direct contact between Jews and Christians. Jews received from Christians concepts and definitions, which they then adapted to their own unique life conditions.”<sup>36</sup>

Baer did not yet maintain, as do some contemporary historians mentioned above, that “influence” may not be the most nuanced instrument for analyzing historical relations between groups. But neither could he deny that the *kehillah* form was a product of its local environment and not merely of a unique and mystical Jewish national life force.

Much more could be said about the ways in which the founding generation of Jerusalem scholars both satisfied and defied the stereotype of sacred priests

of a new national historiographical orthodoxy. Dinur, the arch Palestinocentrist, devoted a great deal of his considerable labors as an anthologizer—for example, in the ten-volume *Yisra'el ba-Golah*—to excavating manifestations of Jewish national culture in the Diaspora. In this sense, he revealed himself less as a doctrinaire negator of Exile, like some of his Zionist comrades, than as an instrumentalizer of Diaspora culture. Gershom Scholem, for his part, is notoriously difficult to peg in this context. He resisted a narrow Palestinocentric view of the past, criticizing those whom he believed guilty of such narrowness (for example, Dinur) and pledging frequent allegiance to the ideal of “pure science.” At the same time, he and his first-generation colleagues believed that the long-anticipated return to Zion of their generation enabled a new and salutary angle of observation onto the Jewish past from within the current of live history.

In concluding our survey, we are left with a rather banal, but inescapable conclusion: multiple and conflicting sensibilities shape the outlook of each historiographical generation. This is especially the case for the founding generation of Jewish studies scholars in Palestine, who were—and remained throughout their lives—in geographic and cultural transit between Europe and Zion. Those who followed them succeeded in fortifying that foundation, placing particularly strong emphasis on the local dimensions of Jewish history, especially with the implicit and explicit support of the State. For its part, the current generation of Jewish historians in Israel finds itself in the throes of its own cultural and intellectual journey, moving from the comforting confines of the local historiographical milieu, with its recognized scholarly strengths and political disposition, to a larger and less-known universe borne of a globalized world, with its substantial promise of methodological and intellectual boundary-crossing. The result is, at once, a pushing out of old conceptual horizons and the crafting of a new set of powerful lenses trained, among a host of diverse subjects, on Zionism itself.

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## Notes

1. David N. Myers, “Was There a ‘Jerusalem School’? An Inquiry into the First Generation of Historical Researchers at the Hebrew University,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994), 81.
2. *Ibid.*, 68. Perhaps the earliest use of the term was the Orientalist LA Mayer’s call in December 1926 for a “Jerusalem scientific school.”
3. This essay is a revised version of an essay commissioned by the journal *Zion* to assess the state of Jewish studies sixty years after the founding of the State of Israel. See Myers, “Ben



- Yisra'el le-`amim: hirhurim `al matsav limude ha-historyah ha-yehudit be-Yisra'el," *Zion* 74 (2008/09), 339–352. My thanks go to the editors of *Zion* for allowing the publication of an English-language version of this article.
4. *Divre ha-kinus ha-`olami le-mada'e ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1952), I: 4.
  5. Ben-Zion Dinaburg (Dinur), "'Avodah meshufefet u-mif'alim meshufafim be-mada'e ha-Yahadut ve-derakhim le-irgunam," *Divre ha-kinus ha-`olami le-mada'e ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1952), 42.
  6. "Ha-historyah ha-Yehudit hi hi toldoteha shel ha-umah ha-yisre'elit." See "Megamatenu," *Zion* 1 (1935), 1.
  7. See, for example, Ruth Firer, *Ha-sokhnim shel ha-hinukh ha-Tsiyoni* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-meuhad, 1985).
  8. See Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Jewish and Other Nationalisms* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 23.
  9. See "Israel no longer the world's 'Mecca' of Jewish studies," "Ha-arets," 7 February 2008 at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/951558.html>.
  10. Among the first books of this cohort were Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–1951* (Oxford: Basingstoke, 1988); and Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
  11. There are various works about the impact of this group of scholars, including Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians"* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); and Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Tsiyonut, post-Sho'ah: sheloshah perakim `al hakhashah, hashkahah u-shelilat Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006).
  12. Pappé advances this thesis in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, Oneworld, 2006).
  13. Derek Penslar observes that it "is now conventional wisdom that, as Benny Morris argued back in 1987, substantial numbers of Palestinians were expelled from their homes in 1948, and the Arab states' military capabilities were far less, and those of the Zionists far greater, than raw numbers would suggest." See Derek J. Penslar, *Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (London and New York, 2007), 44–45. To be sure, it was not only the New Historians who acknowledged and studied the phenomenon of expulsions of Palestinians by Jewish forces. Anita Shapira, often considered a cornerstone of the Jewish historical establishment in Israel, wrote about the phenomenon in her comprehensive article on the reception of S. Yizhar's story, "Hirbet Hiz'ah" (1949). See Shapira, "Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting," *Jewish Social Studies* 7.1 (2000), 1–62. Moreover, Israeli scholars (e.g., Rony Gabbay) and political figures (e.g., Meir Ya'ari and Avraham Cohen of Mapam, to take but two examples) openly discussed expulsions in a variety of settings from the time of the war to the late 1950s. I have discussed this phenomenon, which still requires much more attention, in "The Refugee Question: A New Look at Remembrance and Forgetting," lecture delivered at "History and Memory: A Conference in Honor of Prof. Anita Shapira," Tel Aviv University, 28 May 2008.
  14. See Anat Helman, *Or ve-yam hikifuha: tarbut tel avivit bi-tekufat ha-Mandat* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 2007), Orit Rozin, *Hovat ha-ahavah ha-kashah: yahid ve-kolektiv be-Yisra'el bi-shenot ha-hamishim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008).
  15. See Deborah Berrnstein, *Nashim ba-shulayim: migdar u-le'umiyut be-Tel Aviv ha-mandatorit* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2008), Ofer Nur, "The Hashomer hatzair youth

- movement 1918–1924 from eastern Galicia and Vienna to Palestine: A cultural history," Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, 1994, Rina Peled, "*Ha-Adam he-hadash*" shel ha-mahpekhah ha-Tsiyonit: ha-Shomer ha-tsa'ir ve-shorashav ha-Eropiyim (Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 2002).
16. Among the important works of this group, see Etan Bloom, "The 'Administrative Knight'—Arthur Ruppim and the Rise of Zionist Statistics," *The Tel Aviv University Year Book for German History*, 35 (2007) (183–203), Adi Gordon, ed. "*Berit shalom*" vaha-Tsiyonut ha-du-le'umit: "ha-She'elah ha-'Arvit" ke-she'elah Yehudit (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2008), Yotam Hotam, *Gnosis moderni ve-Tsiyonut: mashber ha-tarbut, filosofiyat ha-hayim ve-hagut le'umit Yehudit* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), Dimitri Shumsky, "Historyografya, le'umiyut ve-du-le'umiyut: Yahadut tsecho-germanit, tsiyone Prague u-mekorot ha-gishah ha-du-le'umit shel Hugo Bergmann," *Zion* 69 (1, 2004): 45–80, and Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism," *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (Fall 2004), 93–117.
  17. See, for example, Gechtman, "Conceptualizing National-Cultural Autonomy—From the Austro-Marxists to the Jewish Labor Bund," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 4 (2005), 17–49; Joshua Karlip, "The Center that Could Not Hold: 'Am Sheydveg' and the Crisis of Diaspora Nationalism," Ph.D. Dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2006; Kenneth Moss, "Bringing Culture to the Nation: Hebraism, Yiddishism, and the Dilemmas of Jewish Cultural Formation in Russian and Ukraine, 1917–1919," *Jewish History* 22 (2008), 263–294, and Simon Rabinovitch, "Alternative to Zion: the Jewish Autonomist movement in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia," Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis, 2007. Mention should be made in this context of the researchers at the Simon Dubnow Institute in Leipzig under the leadership of Professor Dan Diner, who are actively engaged in exploring various aspects of the history of Diaspora nationalism. Meanwhile, a number of scholars including Michelle Campos, Abigail Jacobson, and Lital Levy have shed new light on the complex Zionist affinities of Middle Eastern Jews in the early twentieth century. See, for example, Michelle Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel': The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine's Sephardi Jews, 1908–1913," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37 (2005), 461–483.
  18. It must be noted that a number of Israeli scholars from an earlier generation have devoted themselves to the study of Diaspora Jewish politics, including nationalism. See, for example, the classic work of the late Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and from the same period, Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983). See more recently Daniel Blatman, *Lema'an herutenu ve-herutkhem: ha-Bund be-Polin, 1939–1949* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996); Yoav Peled, "The Concept of National Cultural Autonomy: the First 100 Years," in Jack Jacobs, ed., *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 255–270; Yosef Gorni, *Halufot nifgashot: miflegat ha-"Bund," tenu'at ha-polalim ha-l'Ivrit u-"Khalal Yiśra'el," 1897–1985* (Jerusalem, Mosad Bialik, 2006).
  19. Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory* 1 (1989), 8.
  20. Mention should also be made in the American context of Funkenstein's student, David Biale, who already in 1979 undertook a study of Gershom Scholem, probably the most important figure in Jewish studies in Israel during the twentieth century. See Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

21. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's two-part essay, "Galut mi-tokh ribonut," in *Te'oryah u-vikoret*, 4 (1993), 23–55 and 5 (1994), 113–132, as well as his "Yitsuga ha-le'umi shel ha-galut: Ha-historyografiyah ha-tsiyonit ve-yehude yeme ha-benayim," Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 1996. While working under Funkenstein for his doctoral studies, Raz-Krakotzkin was a master's student of another important Jewish historian who has frequently and intelligently weighed in on historiographical issues, Robert Bonfil. See, for example, Bonfil's critique of Yerushalmi in "How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish History?" *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 78–102.
22. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut mi-tokh ribonut," *Te'oryah u-vikoret*, 4 (1993), 49.
23. See Uri Ram, "Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur," *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995): 91–124, as well as Arielle Rein, "Ha-historyon be-vinui umah: tsemihata shel Ben-Zion Dinur u-mif `alo ba-Yishuv," Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2000, and Daniel Marom, "The Thought and Practice of Ben Zion Dinur as Educator," Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2000.
24. Yitzhak Conforti, *Zeman `avar: Ha-historyografiyah ha-Tsiyonit ve-`itsuv ha-zikaron ha-le'umi* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2006), and Dan Porat, "One Historian, Two Histories: Jacob Katz and the Formation of a National Israeli Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 9:3 (2003), 56–75, and "The Nation Revised: Teaching the Jewish Past in the Zionist Present (1890–1913)," *Jewish Social Studies* 13:1 (2007), 59–86.
25. See also Eyal Naveh and Esther Yogeve, eds., *Historyot: likerat di`alog `im ha-`etmol* (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2002).
26. Herbert Butterfield, *Man on his Past: A Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (Boston: Beacon, 1960), viii.
27. See Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd, eds., *Toldot ha-Universitah ha-`Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim: shorashim ve-hathhalot* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997) and Hagit Lavsky, ed., *Toldot ha-Universitah ha-`Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim: hitbasesut u-tsemihah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005).
28. Uri Cohen, *Ha-har veva-giv`ah: ha-Universitah ha-`Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim bi-tekufat trom ha-`atsma `ut ve-reshit ha-medinah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), 6.
29. Menachem Klein, *Bar-Ilan: akademyah, dat u-politikah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998).
30. Yitzhak Baer, *Galut*, trans. Robert Warshaw (New York: Schocken, 1947), 120.
31. This notion figures prominently in Dinur's introduction to the first volume of *Yisrael ba-Golah* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1958), 23ff.
32. Yisrael Yuval, "Ha-nakam veva-kelalah, ha-dat veva-`alilah mi`alilot kedoshim le-`alilot dam," *Zion* 58 (1993), 33–90.
33. See Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Latin Medieval Europe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), and *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
34. Moshe Rosman, "A Prolegomenon to the Study of Jewish Cultural History," *JSIJ* 1 (2002), 118, 119.
35. See his seminal 1966 address, "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History," in idem, *Jewish History and Jewish Destiny* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), 145–156.
36. Baer, "Ha-megamah ha-datit hevratit shel 'Sefer Hasidim,'" *Zion* 3 (1938), 1–2.