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'The Most Historical of All Peoples'
Nationalism and the New
Construction of Jewish History
in Nineteenth-Century
Germany

by

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In Memory of Amos Funkenstein

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‘The most historical of all peoples’ – this is how the Russian-Jewish historian Simon Dubnow described the Jewish people in 1898, at a time when many were of the opinion that for almost two thousand years there had not been a Jewish people, that its history had ended in ancient times. Dubnow took the view that, unlike others, the Jewish people had always been, at all times, a historical people. In other words, it had always played an active part in the historical development of the civilized world, even though, once Jerusalem had been destroyed, it was a widely-dispersed people, without state or territory, held together only in a spiritual sense. ‘And if there are historical and unhistorical people on earth, then the Jewish people can undoubtedly be called the most historical (*historicissimus*)’.¹

It was from this point of view that Dubnow was to write his ten-volume *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* twenty years later, after he had emigrated to Berlin to escape the Bolshevik regime. He was then to flee from the Nazi regime – though to Latvia, not Palestine, because he felt he belonged to the Jews of the Diaspora. In 1941, when the Germans occupied the Baltic states, he was shot. His concept of the most historical of all peoples emerged, in terms of experience, from Russian and Polish Judaism, but in academic terms, from Germany. It was the product of historical research by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. This is what in the course of the nineteenth century historicized the ‘longue durée’ of Judaism. In the age of historicism and nationalism the central pillar of national unity was no longer religious consciousness but historical consciousness. Dubnow learnt and accepted this from the research of German-Jewish scholars.

This is the topic I have chosen for this year’s Annual Lecture. You may well ask: what has it got to do with Anglo-German relations? Firstly, I would say this: the

topic is part of the major issue of modern nationalism, which, of necessity, has always played an important role in the work of the London institute. Indeed, in recent years, for obvious reasons, it has aroused renewed public interest, by no means only in Germany, and has given rise to new academic discussions. The attempts at a Jewish national history are a special form of this. What I mean is that by looking at Jewish history, we can learn a good deal about the importance, and indeed the dubiousness of national history, about the reality and fictionality of nationalism.

There are also other reasons. It is true that the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is of German origin and was developed especially in Germany. Above all, a synthesis of Jewish history soundly based on sources was a specific German-Jewish need. The work of Heinrich Graetz was translated into many other languages, because there was nothing comparable anywhere else. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century research into Jewish history began to develop in other European countries as well, as exemplified in 1887 in England by the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall. But this is less significant than the fact that in 1933 the German *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had to emigrate. Many academics fled to England, and the activities of the Leo Baeck Institute in London over the last forty years can, in a way, be regarded as a piece of German historical science in England. The Leo Baeck Institute established links with British colleagues and non-Jewish German historians in the Federal Republic earlier than the *Britisch-Deutscher Historikerkreis* (Anglo-German Group of Historians).²

So, I shall be talking about Jews in Germany in the nineteenth century and their attempt to cultivate Jewish history, to develop a new understanding of it, not simply as Jews – that is the problem – but as Germans, as citizens

of one of the German states, and, most of all, as active members of the German *Kulturnation*. As preconditions, four major changes in Germany should be mentioned. First, the intellectual and cultural development of Germany since the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century: the rise of the German *Kulturnation*, the development of literature and philosophy under the influence of idealism and romanticism, the new humanism with its special interest in Greek Antiquity, the rationalization and moralization of the Christian religion. Second, academic developments, especially the changes in, or even genesis of, the discipline of history, the emergence of a specific mode of historical thinking which was later to be called 'historicism'. Third, political changes: the end of the Old German Reich, the rule of Napoleon, and the ever-growing movement for national unification. There was still no clearly defined, geographically locatable German people, though attempts were made to construct such a thing. Some call it the invention of the German people. Fourth, last but not least, Jewish emancipation and assimilation in the light of the three factors just mentioned: German culture, a new discipline of history, and the development of the German nation. Compared to western Europe, the Jewish minority in Germany was particularly numerous, and compared to eastern Europe, more upwardly mobile and interested in education. The Jews wanted to assimilate, but at the same time be aware of their historical particularity.

This is a broad and complicated topic, so firstly let us consider what the non-Jewish German intellectual élite, during and after these changes, thought about their cultural tradition, and especially what they thought about the corresponding role of the Jews. I shall then look at the intellectual élite of German Jews and their attempt, after the Enlightenment, and under the influence of romanti-

cism and historicism, to reconstruct medieval and modern Jewish history. This is the group connected with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in particular Leopold Zunz. More specifically, I shall be looking at the various attempts to present an entire Jewish history, from Jost to Heinrich Graetz, who, at a time of growing nationalism, was to incur the wrath of Treitschke and the anti-Semites. Linking up with this, I shall also try to show the different ways in which non-Jewish German historians, from Mommsen to Sombart, took an interest in Jewish history.

So let us first have a look at what the non-Jewish German intellectual élite thought about their cultural tradition and the Jews in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Recent works on the subject, especially the major article 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse' in the last volume of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, have investigated how these concepts were revalued and changed from the late eighteenth century onwards.³ The ancient term, which had been part of the formula 'Heiliges Römisches Reich deutscher Nation', was combined with the modern French concept of a political nation. And the 'deutsche Volk', as a collective entity, as an active subject, was virtually invented and projected back into the past. At the end of the eighteenth century Michael Ignaz Schmidt had given his massive German history the title *Geschichte der Deutschen* (in the same way as people at that time, and later, talked of the *Geschichte der Juden*). Now, between 1825 and 1837, Heinrich Luden wrote a *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes*. In the nineteenth century 'Volk' and 'Nation' increasingly came to be used synonymously and were given top rank in the hierarchy of political and moral values.

In terms of cultural tradition, Herder had argued that each people had to be understood and appreciated in its individuality. But Winckelmann and his successors gave

preference to the ancient Greek people, on the basis that only they, and after them the Romans, had developed 'higher, truly intellectual education', art, literature and 'learned culture'.⁴ For this reason Friedrich August Wolf focused his studies of Antiquity on these peoples. Scholars felt no such inclination towards a similar study of the Jews. Since the Enlightenment they had been interested in the Jews as modern Europeans, not in their specific national character, and not in their religion (except in so far as it was generally deist), nor was much attention paid to their literature. In any case, scholars did not focus on these features of Judaism for *positive* reasons, and this was because Jews *lived* in Germany at that time. Any interest there may have been in a Jewish individuality was almost exclusively for the purpose of condemning it. The most erudite non-Jewish expert on ancient and modern Judaism in the late eighteenth century was the Göttingen Orientalist Johann David Michaelis. He wrote the most vehement response to Christian Wilhelm Dohm's book *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, a response in which he strongly opposed equal rights for Jews. Throughout his entire argument he does not speak of Christians and Jews, but of Germans and Jews. He sees the Jews not as a religious minority, but as a foreign people.⁵ The question of social equality for Jews was made into a national question. Herder, too, speaks of a different, separate people. Fichte even refers to a state within a state. So during and after the Napoleonic era the new national historicism had an ambivalent effect on Judaism. Friedrich Rühs, historian at the new University of Berlin, provoked a controversy (even anti-Jewish riots) in 1815, when he stated that Judaism was not simply a religion, but a nation, a state; the Jews could not, therefore, be citizens of a Christian state at the same time.⁶

It was Hegel, the most important philosopher of his-

tory between the Enlightenment and historicism, who found a compromise. He took a positive stance on the question of emancipation and also on the role of the Jews in world history, but he historicized Judaism all the more firmly. He conceded that the Jews had played an important and specific role in the development of universal history, but maintained that this role was confined to ancient history. The greatest achievement of the Jewish people, or its *Volksgeist*, was its religion, its new concept of God, which marks the shift from the oriental to the occidental principle. According to this interpretation, it is what gives Judaism its enduring significance and at the same time pins it down to a specific historical period. For what it developed into later was Christianity, which takes the Jewish concept of God out of its national context, 'denationalizes' it. It is fair to say that this view of ancient Judaism was very common amongst the non-Jewish German educated bourgeoisie. It fitted into their image of history. For German Jews it was debatable, to say the least.

Let us now turn to the intellectual élite of the German Jews. How did they historicize Judaism? A few years ago the American-Jewish historian Yosef Yerushalmi wrote a very impressive booklet called *Zakhor*.⁷ Here he points out that although the Jews had always cultivated a strong collective memory through their heightened awareness of the particularity of their religion and their people, they had never shown much interest in history or in historiography. Tradition and historical consciousness are not, he maintains, the same. Indeed it is striking that since the great national historiography of the Old Testament there had hardly been any coherent Jewish historiography. It is almost as if Jews no longer regarded what happened after the destruction of the temple as 'history', merely as a sort of waiting period, until history could recommence with the Messiah and the return to Jerusalem. On the other

hand, history before the destruction of the temple was something so holy that it could not be desecrated by historical research, let alone historical criticism.

Now, there are many objections to be made to Yerushalmi's overall picture. Amos Funkenstein has written a whole book to show that the Jews had, at all times, been historically conscious.⁸ Even Christian authors did not write coherent secular historiography until a much later date, and then, until well into the eighteenth century, it was primarily political historiography. How was a coherent history supposed to be written about a religious community scattered far and wide and not politically active? However that may be, the fact is that the German Jews' remarkable interest in history from the time of the Enlightenment onwards was a new phenomenon, especially their interest in their own history, in its entirety. It arose from the new discipline of history and the new and problematic dichotomy between ancient Jewish tradition and modern German culture, between Jewish and German nationality.

After Moses Mendelssohn, the German Jews felt they belonged to, and played an active part in the German *Kulturnation*. (It is well known that Mendelssohn's behaviour was even more 'national' than that of Frederick the Great, whom he criticized for preferring French culture). However, in the process of German nation-building, they ran into difficulties with their concept of themselves as a 'people'. As concepts started to change, as already described, German Jews lost, to some degree, their traditional notions of 'nation' and 'people'. In the eighteenth century the term 'nation' could still be used to describe every 'nationality', every national minority, every linguistic and cultural community. And this is how the 'Jewish nation' was perceived. Once 'nation' and 'people' had been given a new and heightened significance, the

terms could no longer be used quite so liberally. So now it was *Judenschaft*, *Judenheit*, and especially *Judentum*, or even simply 'the Jews'. In the nineteenth century the term 'tribe' (*jüdischer Stamm*) came increasingly to replace that of 'people' or 'nation', on occasion, of course, defensively or as camouflage, even though in biblical terms it was quite unhistoric (as we know, in the Bible the Jewish people was divided into tribes). This was comparable to, and no doubt also influenced by the new trend among historians to talk about the Germanic (or German) tribes (for example the Bavarians or the Saxons), instead of about peoples or nations.⁹ So even in the early twentieth century the term *Deutsche jüdischen Stammes* (Germans of Jewish tribe or origin) was still used – rather like the way in which the expression *deutschstämmige Juden* (Jews of German origin) is used in Israel today.

In 1819, as a reaction to anti-Jewish statements by Rühs and others, a few young Jews founded the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* in Berlin. It only existed for five years, but was the seed-bed for the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Its members wanted to contribute to the historical reconstruction and conservation of Jewish individuality, first as a political reform movement, and then almost exclusively in an academic sense. Their efforts were comparable to those of the Germanists seeking to preserve the German *Volksgeist*, or those of Wolf and Boeckh on behalf of ancient Greek civilization. Judaism was to be far more than just a religion and a modern denominational allegiance. But what remained at issue was how much 'more' it should be: a people, a culture, a group with a special historical tradition, or a special task for the future of mankind? Whatever it was, this Judaism no longer sought isolation, but openness. The leitmotif and aim of its history was no longer Jerusalem, but enlightenment and emancipation, German culture and

world civilization. The renaissance of Judaism had started with Moses Mendelssohn. According to Heinrich Heine, he was the Jewish Luther, who had led the Jews back to true and simple faith and had integrated them into the new *Kultur*nation. And constitutionally, too, they no longer wanted to be, or indeed could be, a corporation with special privileges and 'letters of safe-conduct' within the modern civil state. They regarded this state as an organized community, and were full of hope that the historical individuality of Judaism could be integrated into and conserved within such an organization. This optimism has often been criticized as utopian. The contradictions between the German and Jewish national consciousness were, it was said, insurmountable. The Jews had underestimated Germanic nationalism in its drive towards a unified national state, and had had to relegate their own national consciousness to far too lowly a position. The way things were to develop later seems to justify this criticism. None the less, it is fair to say that this model of dual nationality, with both parts reconciled to one another, with nationalism tempered accordingly, and with international openness, was by no means utopian. In fact, to a large extent, it was the guiding principle of the German-Jewish educated class in the nineteenth century, and indeed well into the twentieth century.

I cannot discuss the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums* in detail here, except to say that Heinrich Heine was a member, and that the association dissolved itself in 1824. I should just like to talk briefly about Leopold Zunz, who was actually the most productive scholar in the association. As far as his objectives were concerned, he can be compared with the Germanist Jacob Grimm. He was first and foremost a philologist, not a historian or even a philosopher of history. His main interest was in language and literature, in particular the

'rabbinical literature' of the Middle Ages. He preferred to call this 'new Hebrew literature', since it encompassed all aspects of human activity and thought. Once so-called 'Jewish history' had ended, he perceived in this literature the 'unacknowledged cultural edifice' (*unerkanntes Kunstgebäude*) of an invisible historical coherence. For him, this was proof that even in the Middle Ages the Jews had been a *Kulturvolk*. 'Nowadays, and with great determination, we force German language and *Bildung* on the Jews, thereby – perhaps even unwillingly or unconsciously – sounding the death-knell of the new Hebrew literature. This is precisely why scholars are standing up and demanding a reckoning for what has been cast aside'.¹⁰ He devoted his entire life to attaining this scholarly ideal. Here is an anecdote, which is either very appropriate, or at least very imaginatively invented: when Zunz was very old, he was visited by Juda Leib Gordon, the Jewish reformer from Russia. He had reactivated the Hebrew language and had even written new Hebrew poetry, which he showed to Zunz. Zunz responded: 'How interesting! When did you live?'¹¹ Zunz did not found a school, and had no opportunity to teach at a university. When he applied for a chair of Jewish history and literature at Berlin university in 1848, he was rejected on the grounds that Judaism had now been integrated, no longer constituted a separate political community, a people within a people – nor indeed, did the Jews any longer want this, as they themselves so often stated. Apart from that, it was argued, there was no chair of Prussian or German history, or of Arabic or Greek philosophy – although they seem to have forgotten that there certainly was one for classical philology and Arabic studies.¹² So Zunz was considerably restricted, but none the less, he was the only member of the Verein whom young Jewish scholars came to regard as an established authority.

At a time when national histories were being written everywhere in Europe, Zunz did not consider a synthesis of Jewish history from the beginnings right up to the present day a viable project. The first Jewish writer to attempt such a thing was Isaak Markus Jost. Between 1820 and 1859 he published three different versions, each in numerous volumes.¹³ He approached his task with great methodological correctness, and in the spirit of the Enlightenment. He doubted whether a Jewish individuality had continued to exist throughout the centuries, in all the different places where members of the Diaspora were to be found. His historiography focused increasingly on the spiritual, even the religious elements as the essence of Judaism. This certainly corresponded to the main current of German-Jewish literary and historical scholarship in the mid-nineteenth century. What these scholars actually wanted to do was to take the place of the Rabbis as the traditional keepers of the Jewish identity. But the majority of them were Rabbis themselves and disseminated their ideas at Jewish schools and seminaries that were, to a greater or lesser degree, reformist in character. A leading figure in this was Abraham Geiger, a Rabbi in Frankfurt am Main, who gave lectures in Breslau and, from 1872 onwards, at the new *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin. As far as he was concerned, a history of the Jewish people only existed in the remote past. It was merely the precondition for the Jewish 'history of intellectual deeds' (*Geschichte der Geistestaten*) in medieval and modern times. But these were important deeds.¹⁴ In Geiger's view, Judaism had produced both Christianity and Islam, and had played its part in overcoming the dark Middle Ages, shaped by Christianity. Thus Geiger combined the religious, civilizing and enlightening achievements of Judaism, in order to strengthen the historical self-awareness of the modern, reformist Jewry.

The historical message of Heinrich Graetz was quite different. Not only did he emphasize the world-wide influence of the Jewish spirit, but he has been called the 'first nationally-minded historian of the Jewish people', or even the 'Jewish Treitschke'.¹⁵ His colourful, emotional historiography soon overshadowed that of Jost. Though he did not become the leading light in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, he certainly stimulated the historical interest of the German-Jewish educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*). Significantly, this was at a time of growing German nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Graetz published his *Geschichte der Juden* in twelve volumes between 1853 and 1876. On the one hand, this work is 'a comprehensive intellectual history' (*umfassende Geistesgeschichte*), as he himself calls it, using a term little-used at the time. But to Graetz this was only the inner history, the history of the soul. The other essential factor, the 'physical side' (*leibliche Seite*) is the 'uniform ethnic character' (*einheitliche Volkswesen*), the 'history of an ethnic tribe' (*Geschichte eines Volksstammes*).¹⁶ Graetz could not write this history in the same way as normal national histories, as political or constitutional history. Nor did he write it as social or economic history (though this would have been possible). He wrote it as a history of suffering, a history of persecution, as a resolutely endured martyrdom. This is what pervades the whole atmosphere of his historiography and is responsible for its great popular appeal. The abridged version, published in three volumes in 1888 as *Volkstümliche Geschichte der Juden*, was a popular bar mizvah present right up to the 1920s. In this work, the 'people' was indeed the real subject of history, the heroic people of biblical times and the suffering, but also brave 'tribe' (*Stamm*) that followed.

This work took Graetz into a new upheaval, that of 1871. The German nation-state was now a reality. It was a

new and proud great power, but in terms of its inner cohesion it was still insecure and therefore demanded of its minorities even greater national commitment. In the course of the nineteenth century, German Jews had climbed the social ladder, had become integrated into the affluent and intellectual classes, and had gradually acquired equal rights. This is the period of increasing industrialization and, related to all these developments, the beginnings of modern anti-Semitism. The leading national historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, supported this ideology most effectively. He talked of an 'alien ethnicity' (*fremdes Volkstum*), whose 'tragic fate it was to be a nation without a state'. But, he argued, this did not mean that the Jews could claim dual nationality on German soil. They must become integrated into the German nation. 'We do not want thousands of years of Germanic breeding to be followed by an age of German-Jewish mixed culture'. He attacked Graetz in particular, since he, according to Treitschke, did not regard Germany as his native country and derided Christianity. Graetz had to defend himself and declare explicitly that he had been talking about Judaism as a religion, not as a nation.¹⁷

In the Berlin anti-Semitism dispute, it was virtually only German Jews who published refutations of Treitschke, with the notable exception of Theodor Mommsen. The Rabbi Manuel Joel (who, incidentally, like other Jewish scholars, distanced himself from Graetz) described Judaism as a 'nationality that was destroyed' almost two thousand years before, and 'whose descendents belong to a great variety of nationalities, use the most varied languages and customs, and no longer have anything in common but religion'.¹⁸ The historian Harry Bresslau rejected the pretentious sentence about Germanic breeding and declared: 'Our breeding is by no means even mainly Germanic: what we actually have is a mixed

culture. It is based on three factors: *Germanentum*, Christianity and classical Antiquity. The close connections between the second and most powerful of these and Judaism should be borne in mind when arrogantly rejecting a German-Jewish mixed culture, just as much as the fact that nothing has had a more powerful effect on German culture than the Bible, the Old and New Testament, which is undeniably a product of Judaism'. To this Treitschke replied, rather subdued, but still obstinate: 'But we don't want a new Judaism to be added to these three great cultures as a fourth, because whatever Judaism has to offer the German spirit has already been absorbed through the transmission of Christianity'.¹⁹

This dispute reveals a gap which, as we know, was never to be closed. Even before this there had been very little co-operation between non-Jewish and Jewish German scholars, apart from a few isolated cases. The Jews showed great interest in the achievements of non-Jewish historians, but the reverse was certainly not true. Only Jews were interested in the reconstruction of Jewish history by Zunz, Jost and Graetz. This did not change later on when, along with strictly academic research by scholars in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, concepts of a particular Jewish culture and social organization were articulated, stressing the importance of national identity, and culminating in the concept of Zionism. Non-Jewish historians were mostly attracted to those fields of Jewish history neglected by Jewish historians. This is what I should like to talk about in the final part of my lecture.

Throughout the nineteenth century topics had been split up amongst historians. Jewish historians preferred to deal with medieval and modern history, while Protestant theologians and historians of Antiquity specialized in the period of the Old and New Testament and attempted to secularize it. Scholars from de Wette to Julius Wellhausen

rearranged the chronological sequence of the biblical books in order to show that (before the theocracy of the period after the return from exile in Babylon) there had been a more or less secular Israelite history, not yet shaped by monotheism. As far as the genesis of Christianity was concerned, scholars debated whether the Hellenistic influence had not, perhaps, been greater than the Jewish. Theodor Mommsen and Eduard Meyer focused their attention on the specific political function of the Jews in ancient Greek and Roman times.

At this point I should like to discuss Mommsen's famous assertion that the Jews had played an important role 'in Caesar's new state'. 'In the ancient world, too, Judaism was an effective seed-bed for cosmopolitanism and national disintegration, and to this extent was given preferential rights in the Caesarian state'.²⁰ Mommsen says 'too', clearly referring to the role of Judaism in his own day. Thus it also becomes clear that the nineteenth century was not only a time of growing national awareness, but also of denationalization. This is apparent if we look at the work of a few German historians. Droysen, for example, was particularly drawn to Alexander the Great and the time of Hellenism, since he saw this era, like his own, as a time when nationalities were breaking up (in this case the Greek and Oriental states), as a time of 'cultural levelling'. Christianity, as a 'denationalizing religion' fitted into this very well. Droysen, Mommsen and others also perceived the path towards the German Reich as displacing the separate nationalities of the individual German states (or tribes). In this instance, Judaism functioned as an agent of disintegration, partly to the advantage of the all-German nation, partly to that of modern international civilization. Generally speaking, nationalists regarded this role played by Judaism as *destructive*. But Mommsen's example shows that it could also be seen

in a different light, as part of a development he felt was necessary, even though he did not necessarily like it.

In the late nineteenth century non-Jewish German historians began to turn their attention to the Jews of medieval and modern times, in particular in a sphere almost universally neglected by Jewish historians: the role of Jews in the economy and trade, usually related to their specific legal and social status. This interest was undoubtedly aroused by the fact that the importance of emancipated Jews for capitalism and industrialization had become increasingly obvious in the course of the nineteenth century. In 1843 Karl Marx had already made the sarcastic remark: 'The illusive Jewish nationality' was that of the merchant, 'in any case that of the money-grubber'.²¹ He was merely repeating what anti-Semites had always said. This phenomenon provoked the question of whether Jewish trade and usury had played a comparable role in the development of trade and financial systems in the European cities of the Middle Ages. In 1875 Wilhelm Roscher answered this in the affirmative.²² The role of the Jews, he said, had been to instruct the young nations in the art of commerce and later, after they had been brutally pushed aside by Christian merchants, to teach them about matters of money and credit. This was a positive assessment which provoked many academic and non-academic debates about the role of the Jews in economic history and especially how it should be evaluated. It became a favourite theme of the anti-Semites. It also became a topic of specialized research in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. But perhaps it is also significant here that Jewish historians now focused on *ancient* economic history. In 1879 Levi Herzfeld wrote the first *Handels-geschichte der Juden des Altertums* (history of Jewish trade in Antiquity), while Werner Sombart took up the theme of Jewish trade in the Middle Ages and the modern period,

and wrote his famous synthesis *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* of 1911. It was an ambivalent and consequently hotly-debated book. Walther Rathenau, who himself had very ambivalent views on the Jews, stated: 'With a sort of grudging admiration he attributes the modern period to capitalism, and capitalism to the Jews. In other words, he now seriously thinks of crediting a small tribe, to which the world owes more than half of what it owns in terms of religious transcendence, with its entire material system.'²³ In his biography of Sombart, Friedrich Lenger says that Max Weber's essay on the Protestant ethic inspired Sombart to try and reconcile the Jewish invention of capitalism with the Jewish religion.²⁴ No one really knew whether this book was philo-Semitic or anti-Semitic. But what was clear was that Sombart considered modern capitalism a bad thing, and that he was talking in terms of a collective Jewish soul which he considered so alien and strange that he opposed any assimilation with the 'German soul'.

So, let me come to a conclusion. I hope I have been able to demonstrate that this extract from the history of historiography says much about the significance and dubiousness of national history, about the reality and fictionality of nationalism, and, what is more, about historiographical selection and the motives behind it. It makes a difference whether national history focuses on intellectual or on economic developments. That nationalist thinking is, to a large degree, an act of will is obvious if we compare, for example, the following two statements. In 1848 Gabriel Rießler described himself in the Frankfurt Parliament as a member 'of a class [not a people] that has been oppressed for thousands of years, a class that wants nothing of a nationality imposed upon it by its enemies, that thinks and feels as Germans'.²⁵ On the other hand, Moses Heß wrote in 1862, under the influence of Graetz's

historiography: 'The Holy Spirit, the creative genius from which Jewish life and Jewish teaching sprang, has parted company with Israel ever since it started to be ashamed of its nationality'.²⁶ He wanted to 're-establish the Jewish nationality', and is therefore now considered as a forerunner of Zionism. Ultimately, the extraordinarily high esteem in which historical thinking was held in the nineteenth century seems to me to be encapsulated in the fact that, when it started, the historicization of Judaism was simply called *Wissenschaft*, and that, by the end, history was constantly described as the 'palladium of the Jews', or, as Dubnow put it, historical consciousness was the central pillar of their national unity.²⁷

This historical consciousness was created in the nineteenth century. As we have seen, an intellectual and political upheaval inspired Jewish scholars in Germany to reconstruct a long national history according to new scholarly methods. At the same time, as a minority, they belonged to, and wanted to belong to, another nation. This other nation had certain traditional connections with the history of the minority. But the minority still did not manage to interest the majority in the particular features of its long history, and so it did not succeed in achieving its own full recognition. The more the two histories – that of the majority and that of the minority – became nationalized, the more alien they became to one another.

Today we are confronted with the very different changes of the twentieth century. The founding of the state of Israel has become a new point of reference for Jewish history; it has given Jewish history a new inner meaning (some would say, has given it back its old inner meaning – and recently, when Itzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, was killed, we saw the terrible force of such an old inner meaning). For many Jews the founding of the new state was like redemption after a period of indescrib-

able suffering. Jewish national history could be written anew, in a positive way, not wholly unlike German history after 1871. Certainly there is a similar danger of oversimplification and nationalist exaggeration, as if all its earlier history were nothing more than the pre-history of present-day Israel.

The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* started in Germany and its practitioners then had to emigrate, to England, to the United States, or to Palestine. Its objectives were often criticized and despised, especially in Israel, with the new inner meaning accorded to Jewish history. Gershom Scholem, for example, complained about the ambivalent effect of its purely antiquarian activity devoid of any future national perspective, its willingness to integrate into other states.²⁸ But its scholarly achievements live on, and form the basis of new research. It is good and necessary that this is now carried out jointly by Jewish and non-Jewish historians from Israel, England, America, Germany and other countries – good and necessary for historical knowledge, for the collective memory, and for our common future.

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