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Revisiting the History of Modern Jewish Scholarship: A  
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## Revisiting the History of Modern Jewish Scholarship: A Bicentennial Perspective

THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY of the founding programmatic statement of modern Jewish studies, Leopold Zunz's "Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur" from 1818, is an invitation to reflect on the extraordinary growth and evolution of the field. It is hard not to be impressed by the scope of Zunz's manifesto or by his boldness in envisaging a new scholarly undertaking that would satisfy the high professional standards of *Wissenschaft*. With preternatural confidence, the young twenty-three-year-old Zunz drew a sweeping map of the field, imagining a vast range of disciplinary and thematic approaches to the study of Jewish literature, culture, and history in the postbiblical period.

The unstable political conditions of Zunz's day, punctuated by a rising tide of anti-Jewish expression and violence, and the absence of any enduring institutional framework to support Jewish studies, make his foresight all the more impressive. There is indeed something of the clairvoyant in the 1818 essay, and yet his prognosticating talents did abandon him in at least one regard. Zunz famously predicted that there would be fewer Hebrew books a century later than in his day. The rise of Zionism and the modern Hebrew movement guaranteed the failure of that prediction. The State of Israel would go on to develop the densest concentration of scholarly talent and institutional support in the world.

In another regard, Zunz could not have imagined, for all his precocious vision, how far and wide Jewish studies would have developed. He could not have imagined the acceptance of the field in hundreds of colleges and universities in North America nor less its arrival to China. Nor could he have predicted the sheer number of scholars or range of topics represented at a meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies or World Congress of Jewish Studies. And for all the expansiveness of his manifesto, he could not have imagined the diverse array of men and women, Jews and increasingly non-Jews, engaged in Jewish studies today.

It is in recognition of Zunz, the scholarly movement that he helped

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spawn, and the immense growth of the field over the past two hundred years that we devote this issue of *JQR* to a retrospective on modern Jewish historical scholarship. The importance of the topic lies not only in the scholarly results generated. Modern Jewish scholarship is also a telling mirror onto the societies in which it is rooted. It is this dual allure that has made the topic such a rich and popular one in recent decades. The current moment offers us an opportunity to revisit old themes and explore new ones.

The first part of the issue is devoted to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the German-based project of critical Jewish studies that counted Zunz among its founders. The issue opens with George Kohler's "Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (1840–1865)." It is a commonplace assumption that *Wissenschaft* scholars, as part of their own quest to gain acceptance in Germany, deeply venerated the rationalist tradition associated with Maimonides in the twelfth century. In fact, Kohler argues, *Wissenschaft* scholars evinced a surprising amount of sympathy for Maimonides' theological foil, the early twelfth-century Yehuda Halevi. Even more surprisingly, this sympathy for Halevi crossed known denominational boundary lines, extending from Liberal to Orthodox.

Among those who rediscovered and identified with the protoromanticist tendencies of Halevi was Heinrich Graetz, the most prominent of nineteenth-century Jewish historians, who merits two essays in this issue. The first, by Alexandra Zirkle, explores Graetz's effort to liberate Jewish historical scholarship from the clutches of Christian supersessionism. Zirkle shows how Graetz blended voices and genres in his work, using exegesis to make key historical points. Recent scholarship has tended to ignore the importance of Graetz's exegesis, but Zirkle suggests that it was key to his historical effort, contra Christian scholarship, to assert a deep connection between pre-exilic Israel and post-exilic Jewish culture.

As a companion to Zirkle, Ismar Schorsch offers a detailed examination of Graetz's biblical scholarship, to which he devoted much of his energies in the last two decades of his life. Schorsch suggests that, alongside his unceasing impulse to emend the received text in search of the plain meaning, Graetz was motivated by two key aims. First, he sought to approach the Bible with the critical tools of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* rather than consign its study to Protestant scholars who, he believed, were intent on chronicling Judaism's decline. And second, he attempted to restore pride of place to the Bible in modern Jewish scholarship, thereby rebalancing Leopold Zunz's focus on the wide body of *postbiblical* Jewish literature.

The final essay in this section shifts our focus from the formative generations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*—indeed, from the towering

nineteenth-century German Jewish historian of record to the erudite and iconoclastic twentieth-century scholar of Baghdadi origin, Abraham S. Yahuda. Allyson Gonzalez begins her essay by noting that Yahuda received a chair in rabbinics at the Central University of Madrid in 1915, ten years before Harry Wolfson was offered the Littauer Chair at Harvard and fifteen years before Salo Baron assumed the Miller Chair at Columbia. Gonzales depicts Yahuda as a “scholar-*abtadlan*,” an intellectual entrepreneur game to establish university positions in his field (and for himself) across Europe, particularly in Spain and Germany, where he hoped to exert his influence in the wider political and cultural spheres beyond the academy. Yahuda’s tenure in Madrid was short-lived, launching him into a fascinating and peripatetic career that traversed continents, languages, political agendas, and scholarly interests.

To gain deeper traction on Yahuda’s intriguing personality and wide-ranging scholarly interests, *JQR* here presents a forum devoted to him. Michal Friedman and Allyson Gonzalez conceived the forum, gathered the essays, and worked with us to shape the pieces and give the collective its broad scope. If the earlier part of this issue provided an opportunity to revisit a well-known subject (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), the second permits us to shed more light on a lesser-known though highly revealing subject in the history of modern Jewish scholarship. The forum opens with an essay by Friedman on Yahuda the political operator; it highlights his efforts to gain and exert influence in Spain, Britain, and Palestine. The remainder of the essays showcase Yahuda’s vast reach as a researcher, especially in discovering and drawing on sources of Middle East provenance. Stefan Schorch examines Yahuda’s pioneering work in bringing the tools of critical scholarship to bear on the ancient Samaritans. Almog Behar and Yuval Evri chart Yahuda’s intellectual and cultural identification with a fellow Jew of Middle Eastern origin, the great medieval philosopher Saadia Gaon. The forum concludes with Mostafa Hussein’s inquiry into Yahuda’s research on pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, reflecting a double move to identify with the distant past as a means of distinguishing himself from contemporary Arabs.

Mixing biographical and intellectual historical approaches, the essays in this forum not only yield a rich portrait of a major, if under-researched, figure in the history of modern Jewish scholarship. They also reveal the benefits of studying the history of scholarship, through which we learn about the key ideas that animate academic researchers and, in the process, unsettle fixed narratives of the discipline’s origins.