

# A Biography or a Hagiography?

## JACOB NEUSNER: AN AMERICAN JEWISH ICONOCLAST

By Aaron W. Hughes

New York: New York University Press, 2016.

Pp. 330. Hardcover, \$35.00.

REVIEWER: *Barry Scott Wimpfheimer*  
*Northwestern University*  
*Evanston, IL 60208*

Jacob Neusner's exceptional productivity and extensive political activity make him a uniquely challenging biographic subject. The productivity constitutes a compound problem. So famously prolific was Neusner that producing a *bibliography* of his written work is a challenge. At the same time, the quantity of the published research speaks to limitations in the inherent quality of the scholarship. Even the staunchest Neusner advocate must concede that Neusner published too much and too quickly, and that the flood of publications diluted the overall quality and creates a challenge even for those who wish to study (virtually) at his feet. If the productivity creates one set of challenges, the politics generate an entirely different set. Neusner was an oppositionist who thrived on umbrage. He threw his weight around and maintained vendettas and grudges for decades; in his later decades some of these characteristics led to paranoid tendencies which exacerbated his inherently irascible personality. Neusner was without question one of the most important voices in Jewish Studies in the second half of the twentieth century. He was also one of the most problematic.

The double problem (productivity and politics) of writing a biography was even more difficult while Neusner was alive. A biographer working during Neusner's lifetime (Neusner passed away on October 8, 2016) could write an unauthorized biography and work from the outside, drawing on the memories of those peers or students who would cooperate with such a project. But with the threat of Neusner's vengeance looming over participation, it is hard to imagine the cooperation of too many of the man's closest students and relatives. If the unauthorized biography has an access problem, the authorized biography has a proximity problem—it risks a closeness to the subject that does not allow for accurate and critical analysis.

*Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast* is a lively and readable account of the life of a fascinating figure who more than deserves a biography. As the book tells it, Jacob Neusner went from the rags of a Jewishly poor

American Reform upbringing to the riches of elite Jewish Studies scholarship. The book takes advantage of hours of personal interviews with the subject to allow access to Neusner's mindset and motivations. From undergraduate training at Harvard, Neusner transitioned to rabbinical school and graduate school at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and Columbia, respectively. After graduating, he moved progressively through positions at Wisconsin–Milwaukee and Dartmouth before landing at Brown, where he built an empire in the study of rabbinic literature and Judaism writ large. After some contretemps at Brown, Neusner left for the University of South Florida (USF); a simultaneous appointment at Bard College turned into an exclusive one from which he eventually retired.

The book's central thesis is that Neusner believed in the need to take Jewish Studies out of the confessional ghetto dominated by rabbinical seminaries and move it into university departments of religion. Neusner thought, according to this thesis, that Jewish Studies would benefit from inclusion within the broader field of religious studies and that opening its doors to both non-Jews and Jews who were not traditionally educated would help immeasurably. This thesis helps to explain how Aaron Hughes, a scholar of medieval Jewish thought, came to write this biography. In an attention-grabbing March 2014 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Hughes asserted that the field of Jewish Studies is too Jewish for its own good and accused the field of latent hostility to non-Jews (Hughes 2014). The thesis was a miniature version of the one Hughes had asserted in *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship* (Hughes 2013). Hughes's critique is that contemporary academic Jewish Studies serves the organized denominational Jewish community and that the obsession with ethnic perpetuation in the Jewish community produces an academic field that is not truly interested in diversity. In *Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast*, Hughes celebrates an earlier scholar who fought against the ghettoization of Jewish Studies. In this biography, Neusner is the prescient figure who implemented interdisciplinarity well before its heyday and was educationally progressive enough to recognize that Jewish historiography was being held back by its commitment to a set of textual skills and methodological assumptions that deserved an American revision. Hughes outlines a fourfold trajectory to Neusner's scholarship (History, Literature, Religion, Theology) that culminates in work that places Neusner at the forefront of Jewish thought.

The book argues for adding Neusner's later works of theology to the canon of modern Jewish thought.

Any biography of Neusner must contend with the number of works Neusner produced. The Library of Congress counts 655 works in Neusner's name. The catalogue of the JTS library has 677. I've seen claims that there are over 1,000 published works. Even assuming the lowest number (655), over a forty-five year career this computes to a publication rate of 14.5 books a year. Since a highly productive academic might produce one book a year, this quantity needs explanation. Hughes's explanation is that the productivity is a function of Neusner's childhood. Neusner's father was a journalist and Jacob learned both how to touch-type and how to produce copy very quickly.<sup>1</sup> The combination of this writing aptitude with a commitment to a monastic work schedule begins to explain Neusner's productivity. There is more, though. As Neusner became more established as a scholar, the books claims, his entrepreneurial aptitude helped him cut through bureaucratic roadblocks and allowed him to produce his own press and generate published work even more quickly. And this at a time when there was a paucity of substantive Jewish Studies scholarship in English.

A perusal of Neusner's writings, but particularly his reviews, demonstrates Neusner's antagonism toward many of his colleagues in the field of rabbinics. Hughes explains this antagonism as a function of these colleagues' refusal to embrace Neusner the outsider. As Hughes frames it, the field of rabbinics was stuck in the methods and skills of the traditional yeshiva, and Neusner attempted to bring the field into the broader academy and open conversations with scholars of non-rabbinic late antiquity and comparative religion. More pointedly, Hughes suggests that Neusner's nontraditional background practically forced him to approach rabbinic literature and historiography differently, and that his contemporaries could not absorb this radical shift.

At Brown, Neusner mentored more than twenty graduate students who went on to have careers as scholars in the field. *Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast* describes Neusner as a model teacher and supervisor whose style of mentoring relieved anxiety, and who had a surprisingly perfect record in placing students in academic positions. Though Neusner left Brown under a cloud, this biography presents the transitions from institution to institution as part of a larger constructive narrative about Neusner's mission to reform Jewish Studies in the academy.

Because the book goes out of its way to portray Neusner as an educational and academic progressive, Hughes struggles when contending with Neusner's positions in United States politics and his activism within U.S. governmental

bodies. As a member of both the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Neusner took positions that were to the right of Jesse Helms, as the book notes. Hughes understands this behavior to be an exception and not to undermine the otherwise progressive depiction of his subject.

There are significant problems with this framing of Neusner's life story. Let me begin with the question of productivity. As the book makes clear, Neusner was extremely proud of his publication record (likening his writing ability to Mozart's compositional ability), and routinely belittled colleagues and other academics for their (relative) inability to produce. There is no doubt that Neusner would have been a more effective communicator if he had allowed his writings to percolate a bit longer and if he had edited them down to their most crucial points. Much of Neusner's work is very difficult to read and not because it has a high linguistic register or aspires to a certain literary style. The work often reads like a first draft because it went directly from typewriter to press.

It was not always like this. Neusner's early work is more similar to contemporaneous academic work. His two books on Yohanan ben Zakkai and his *History of the Jews in Babylonia* were some of the most important works produced at the time (Neusner 1962, 1965, 1969, 1970, 1966, 1969, 1970). They are the products of thorough and comprehensive research. These works were published by Brill, a distinguished European press that remains one of the fastest at turning submitted drafts into published work. But Brill was apparently not fast enough for Neusner. Using his father-in-law's money, Neusner founded his own press, Brown Judaic Studies, which was only marginally connected (at least originally) to the university from which it took its name. This new press did not honor the processes of peer review and copy editing. Brown Judaic Studies also had little appreciation for the aesthetics of book production; the books feel as though typeset on a home computer and make no attempt at cover art. Given that Hughes has inveighed so strongly in his *Chronicle* article and earlier book against the role of external money (such as from the Tikvah and Posen Foundations) in the academy today, it is surprising that there is little criticism of Neusner's use of external money in similarly problematic ways. Many of the books in the Brown Judaic Studies series were edited volumes with contributions from Neusner's graduate students. Some of them read like the graduate school assignments that they were. Neusner's control of the press and his funneling of student work into publications with the press are both ethically and legally problematic. And Neusner took his students' intellectual property without remuneration. Much is made in the biography of the royalty income, but the book makes no

mention of the fact that Neusner did not, as a rule, share this book royalty income with the students or colleagues who had often produced the translations of individual tractates or had contributed essays and articles as sections of his edited volumes.

Jacob Neusner had graphomania. In 2005, when I was completing a dissertation that was strongly interested in the dichotomy of halakhah (law) and aggadah (non-law/literature/law), I received a postcard from University Press of America inviting me to purchase hundreds of Neusner's titles; the card included a note that made it clear that this was not the complete works. Among the titles listed on the card were over ten titles on halakhah and aggadah produced in 2001 alone. As a responsible researcher, I attempted to procure and consult these titles. The library of the Jewish Theological Seminary had nearly all of them and I was able to lay them out next to each other on a large table. Very quickly I could establish that these books were extremely similar to one another in content and even in front matter like acknowledgments and other personal notes. The order of presentation of materials sometimes differed, particularly in the front matter. Examples used to illustrate the arguments might not be the same from book to book. But it was very clear that these books had been assembled by copying and pasting digital text on a word processor. The Neusner catalog is rife with this problem. While he was undoubtedly a gifted typist and a quick writer, much of the volume of Neusner's catalogue comes from habits that could turn a single book into several. A translation would be followed by an outlined translation which could be followed by an analysis of the underlying text that was dwarfed by the paragraphs from the translations used as examples. Hughes's biography allows Neusner's claim that the South Florida period was his most prolific to stand uncriticized. But many of the USF publications are explicit copies of earlier Brown volumes and even the ones that are presented as new are largely derivative of the earlier work. Ashgate has published a three-volume set entitled *Neusner on Judaism* and divided into History, Religion and Literature volumes (Neusner 2004, 2004, 2006). They represent most of Neusner's original contributions to the field and provide a sense of what his reputation might have been if he had not committed to produce books as quickly as he did.

Hughes is not a specialist in Rabbinic Literature, and the biography makes several mistakes in characterizing the field of rabbinic literature and Neusner's place in the field. The field was founded by the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement in 1820s Germany (though a compelling argument could be made for an earlier origin in eighteenth-century *Haskalah*). While many academic rabbinics scholars have been trained in traditional settings

including the yeshiva, there are significant differences between the way that rabbinic literature is studied in the yeshiva and the way it is studied in the academy. The most important differences are the historicizing of rabbinic sources in a variety of ways, textual criticism (both lower and higher), and the de-prioritization of the Babylonian Talmud. Another salient difference is the critical methodological insistence that all sources be read on their own, without the intervention of later interpretation. Critical scholars routinely read the Mishnah against its later interpretation in either or both of the Talmuds. The practice of reading the Mishnah against the Talmud's interpretation, while a staple of critical readers, is well attested among medieval traditional commentaries, particularly the Italian ones. A reader of the Neusner biography could conclude that Neusner was the *first* to read the Mishnah's text independent of its post-mishnaic interpretations.

Some of the biography's most flawed sections are found in its treatment of Neusner's feud with Saul Lieberman. Lieberman was not, as the book claims, an Orthodox individual still reading rabbinic texts as he had been trained in yeshiva. Here Hughes relies too heavily on Marc Shapiro's work on Lieberman which is itself trying to sort through a set of extremely narrow Orthodox political concerns to determine whether Lieberman is or should be kosher-certified (Shapiro 2006).

Saul Lieberman was a text-critical exegete with a conservative approach to scholarly production. His passion for, and commitment to, the Palestinian Talmud help to frame both Lieberman's own scholarly achievements and his uncharacteristically hostile review of Neusner's translation of that work. In 1929, Lieberman penned a methodological essay outlining the hermeneutic challenges that critics face when trying to recover the historically original meaning of the Palestinian Talmud (PT) (Lieberman 1929). These include a unique set of lower critical challenges (there is only one very flawed manuscript for some sections and there is strong evidence of various large-scale scribal errors). At some point Lieberman realized that the Tosefta was crucial to understanding the original meaning of PT so he shifted to mine the references to the Tosefta found in medieval commentaries (Lieberman 1937–1939). From there Lieberman went on to a long-term project writing a definitive text-critical commentary to Tosefta (Lieberman 1955–1982). Along the way, Lieberman very cautiously and carefully produced some important initial studies of the PT, but he never finished his preliminary work on the Tosefta. Every page of Lieberman's magnum opus, *Tosefta Kifshutah*, is replete with readings of passages of rabbinic literature that explore a host of nontraditional interpretations of these passages; Lieberman was not bound by tradition and could creatively read the text

for an original meaning that often diverged significantly from its later traditional interpretation. The most obvious nontraditional feature of Lieberman's commentary is the regular references to Greek and Latin classical literature. Lieberman's breadth in classical and early Christian literature puts to rest any assertion that he read like a yeshiva *bochur*. *Greek in Jewish Palestine* and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* testify to Lieberman's fundamental role in expanding the study of rabbinic literature into non-Jewish terrain in a productive way (Lieberman 1942, 1950).

In 1984, Saul Lieberman published a critical review of a volume of Neusner's translation of the Palestinian Talmud (Lieberman 1984). The review's title "A Tragedy or a Comedy?" telegraphs a sharply critical intention. The bulk of the review consists of pedantic corrections to basic errors in the critical handling of a rabbinic text. On the final page Lieberman concludes, "The right place for our English translation is a waste paper basket." Amidst his harsh critique, Lieberman manages a few words of praise: "In fairness to the translator I must add that his various essays on Jewish topics are meritorious. They abound in brilliant insights and intelligent questions." An astute reader will note, though, that this praise only sets up a final rhetorical scolding of student by teacher. The review was magnified by its posthumous publication—Lieberman had passed away in 1983 and this piece was one of the final ones he authored. To further dramatize matters, Morton Smith, Neusner's Columbia University mentor, loudly distributed boxes of the review at a plenary discussion of Neusner's work at a large conference in December 1984.

One cannot completely deny the political component inherent in Lieberman's (and Smith's) actions. Publishing and distributing a negative review are political acts in the sense that they act in the interest of preserving the status quo within the academic field and its various institutions (publications, departments, conferences). But a biographer of Neusner might also recognize that Lieberman's review and Smith's distribution of the review were also motivated by intellectual substance. Neusner was out of his element in producing editions of rabbinic literature, particularly with respect to a work as challenging as the PT. In failing to interrogate the substance of the review, Hughes allows the reader to conclude that the matter was simply a political issue fueled by personal animosities and grievances. Lieberman was a lifelong student of the PT who spent considerable scholarly energy attempting to educate the field about the historical meaning of this important work. Is it inconceivable that he was motivated at least in part by the scholarly limitations of Neusner's translation?

Neusner, Hughes's biography tells us, arrived at JTS with a limited Jewish textual background; this position, the book claims, produced both the methodological

revolution and the antagonisms with colleagues we associate with him. It is worth pointing out that Shamma Friedman matriculated at JTS a year behind Neusner and was also not yeshiva-trained. Friedman not only has revolutionized the study of the Talmud and other works of rabbinic literature, he has done so with the support of scholarly colleagues in rabbinics. Daniel Boyarin matriculated at the seminary several years after Neusner. He too has revolutionized the field of rabbinics, and drawn this literature into deep conversations with both classics and early Christianity. Boyarin has done so without sacrificing a commitment to philology, text criticism, and close textual analysis.

The biography celebrates Neusner as a doctoral supervisor. Perhaps the best way to evaluate Jacob Neusner's graduate mentorship would be to compare the Neusner program at Brown with the graduate program at Harvard run by Neusner's contemporary, Isadore Twersky. Twersky, like Neusner, was an alumnus of Harvard College who had trained as an undergraduate with Harry Austryn Wolfson. But Twersky was not only yeshiva-trained; he was the scion of a Hasidic dynasty and the son-in-law of the leading American theologian Joseph Dov Solovetchik. Twersky's graduate program was text-centered and attracted an almost exclusively male cadre of yeshiva alumni. Many of the students in this program never finished their degrees, never published and were never hired into academic positions. The ones who became publishing academics often published works that were still primarily animated by the exegetical concerns of traditional learners though often rearticulated as historiography. With this comparison in mind, Hughes is correct to credit Neusner for graduating his students, training them to engage with scholars beyond the Jewish bubble, and placing his students in academic positions. But there was also a dark side to the Neusner graduate program. Neusner had few boundaries. He invaded his graduate students' personal lives, he pushed them to publish much too early (sometimes in their first year of graduate school), and he made them work on topics of his choosing. While this may have alleviated anxiety, it also denied students the space to produce truly original work. And this feature of the mentoring was perhaps most responsible for the fact that so many of Neusner's graduates were not tenured in the positions into which he helped place them. While the book has a statistic of perfect placement in jobs, there is no statistic for how many of Neusner's doctoral students were out of academia a decade after they had started.

Jacob Neusner was an iconoclast, but he is not fairly characterized as progressive. The opening of the field of rabbinics to outsiders was as much an outgrowth of his inability to get along with insiders as it was to methodological conviction. At Brown, Neusner set up a shadow field of rabbinics with its own press and its own

conferences. His openness to women and non-Jews was a byproduct of his intellectual decision to connect the study of ancient Judaism with religious studies. If Neusner was a progressive on matters of female or non-Jewish scholars, why did he never write about these goals? Consider Neusner's well known critique of Christine Hayes. Hayes wrote a 1993 doctoral dissertation at the University of California Berkeley (under Daniel Boyarin) which challenged a reductionist historical approach that attributes all differences between the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds to social circumstance (Hayes 1993). Before Hayes was able to revise her dissertation into a monograph, Neusner published a book-length rejoinder subtitled "Christine Hayes' Blunder" (Hayes 1997; Neusner 1995). Neusner's social politics were retrograde and those who knew him attest to his old-school ideas about gender roles. These views are entirely consistent with the right-wing political behavior Neusner manifested at the NEA and NEH. Hughes struggles with this aspect of Neusner's legacy because Hughes is a progressive whereas Neusner was not. In a book entitled *Conservative, American and Jewish: I Wouldn't Have It Any Other Way*, Neusner (1993) says the following about himself: "Although I am a humanities professor and Jewish, I am by nature conservative, and by politics, conservative and Republican. I started writing for the *National Review* in the 1960s; in the seventies, my then-sister-in-law called me 'Archie Bunker.' She meant it as an insult, but I took it as a compliment."

Jacob Neusner was a difficult person who could turn on a friend without remorse at the first hint of betrayal. One scholarly contemporary who credits Neusner with much of the success of Jewish Studies in the American Academy of Religion related that Neusner achieved through terror. Other scholars were afraid of his tendency to keep score and exact retribution both through the pen and through his political activity.

A fascinating outgrowth of the biography's access to Neusner is that it appears that Neusner retained a narrative of station-to-station advancement as if every institutional transition was a point of linear progress. Readers of this biography can read between the lines and come to different conclusions, but should they have to? While the move from Dartmouth to Brown was arguably an upgrade in position, the move from Brown to USF was not and USF's relative inferiority helps explain the ultimate transition to Bard. When Hughes simply parrots certain parts of Neusner's life narrative, he becomes a mouthpiece and an unreliable critical guide to Neusner's life story.

In the interest of doing justice to Neusner's scholarly persona, I present an overview of the field and try to capture Neusner's specific and lasting contributions. The field of rabbinics is peopled by two types of scholars—literary

scholars and historians. Literary scholars produce scholarship on small quantities of text read very closely and squeezed with various methodologies to maximize the potential meanings of each word, sentence or section. Historians produce scholarship on large quantities of text read from a distance but with an eye toward the big questions of social, political, and intellectual life. The dichotomy is necessarily heuristic; literary scholars often must examine large quantities of text and are increasingly drawn to higher stakes questions while today's rabbinic historians are often fully trained in the entire literary toolbox and read their primary texts quite closely. Despite these limitations, the dichotomy is a helpful one when describing Neusner's contributions and their critiques.

Neusner was a rabbinic historian. He can be credited with reinventing rabbinic historiography in the modern period. Prior rabbinic historians were either completely naïve in accepting traditional histories or, if they were critically oriented, prioritized the production of a coherent story over the messy contradictions that emerge from the data of primary sources. Neusner taught the field to be skeptical, to require contemporaneous evidence for a historical claim, and to distrust the internal historiography within the rabbinic texts themselves (i.e., the attributions to named rabbis). Neusner's skepticism was a major force in the reimagining of rabbinic literature as a literary rather than as an historical project. Well into the 1980s, it was common among Israeli scholars and American seminarians to write biographies of rabbinic figures based on the data mined from all of the sources of rabbinic literature. Neusner ended this practice by highlighting the gaps in age, culture, and authorial provenance in the diverse works of classical rabbinic literature. Attempts to produce such biographies today transpire under an explicitly literary rather than historical banner.

One of Neusner's core interventions was his insistence on the use of external materials as a check on the claims of rabbinic sources. While prior scholars had used such materials in their comparative work, Neusner prioritized the import of cross-cultural and archeological information to the point of distrusting rabbinic sources unless they were buttressed by external data. Neusner's *History of the Jews in Babylonia* was an ambitious attempt to both mine the Babylonian Talmud and search everywhere for sources of information about the Jewish experience in the Babylonian diaspora.

Neusner did not invent the idea of studying the Mishnah independent of the Talmud. His intervention is important if subtle. Neusner's major innovation *vis-à-vis* the Mishnah inhered in his decision to treat the Mishnah less as a legal and more as a philosophical text. It is difficult to read the Mishnah—a minutely detailed legal code—as a

philosophical tract; this is precisely what Neusner does. This hermeneutic strategy demands that readers pan backwards to deliberately lose the trees for the forest. Once at a distance, the reader can abstract a sense of the underlying content of the tractate—the tractate’s overarching lesson masked by the legal details that *appear* to be its subject. This approach, with its belief in literary archeology to uncover deeper meanings, has much in common with the structuralism that was regnant in literary theory in the 1970s. Neusner employed this method to make claims about the entire Mishnah and about individual tractates. Neusner titled his initial work on the Mishnah “Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah.” The title signals the intent to evaluate the Mishnah as a lone data point to produce a total and independent ideology. Neusner’s work is a thought experiment determined to construct an entire iteration of Judaism (social structure, philosophy, institutional life, etc.) out of this rabbinic work read independent not only of later interpretations but also of parallel contemporaneous work.

In my opinion, many of Neusner’s specific claims about the philosophy of the Mishnah are not compelling. There is a point at which his abstractions of the Mishnah no longer resemble the Mishnah as read closely. But the field has productively followed Neusner’s example. A new generation of Mishnah scholars (Rosen-Zvi, Berkowitz, Balberg, Cohn, Simon-Shoshan, Halberstam, and others) has followed Neusner’s instinct by looking for deeper meaning in the Mishnah even if they find that meaning through hermeneutic techniques that begin with close analysis of the Mishnah’s text. Today’s *avant garde* Mishnah work does not build on Neusner’s earlier readings by relying on his readings, but it builds on his instinct of seeking something more conceptual from this work.

Neusner was relatively disinterested in the skills and hermeneutic exercises that were constitutive for his literary colleagues in the academic study of rabbinics. Because *Wissenschaft* emerged from the field of classics and understood itself as a corrective to traditional rabbinics study, the field of rabbinics has been highly philological, invested in linguistics, textual history, and original contextual meaning. Lower critical techniques like constructing a stemmatic tree of textual witnesses or a footnoted critical edition are highly valued. Higher critical techniques like inter-work comparison or chronological source criticism also facilitate a deep interrogation of a passage’s local meaning. Neusner was familiar with these techniques and even took advantage of the tools or the work of others who utilized these tools. But his project was about larger questions of cultural meaning and the narrow philological focus distracted from this project.

The war over the PT translation was a result of a collision between Neusner’s project and the field’s long-

established literary practices. Neusner’s attempt to put ancient Judaism in conversation with ancient Christianity in the American academy was limited by the fact that certain central rabbinic texts were not available to scholars of religion without the requisite training in language and technique to study this material. The PT translation was particularly complicated because PT presents the greatest challenge to rabbinic philologists. In the interests of popularization, Neusner bypassed philological questions and produced a translation based on a mediocre set of modern commentaries. While it is not uncommon for rabbinic literary readers (particularly philologists) to find fault with mistaken readings assumed by rabbinic historiographers who generally argue on the basis of a larger quantity of texts, here was Neusner attempting to own the literary canon by producing a translation of every work, including the works whose philological juries were still out. Neusner signaled his awareness of the challenges of PT by labeling the PT translation a “preliminary” translation. This did not satisfy Lieberman, who had emerged from a traditional non-philological form of reading in the yeshiva of his youth and was unwilling to return to that mode of scholarship. Ironically, it is Neusner who reads like a *yeshiva bohur* when he relies on PT commentaries! Artscroll’s Schottenstein Talmud Yerushalmi, the work of today’s *yeshiva bohrim*, relies on those same commentaries.

As both a scholar and an academic politician, Neusner moved the study of Judaism from Near Eastern Language or History departments into Religious Studies. This move allowed for the study of Judaism as a religious ideology rather than as a precursor for Christianity or a metonym for the modern state of Israel. It created space to speak about Judaism in conceptual and philosophical ways that were familiar to the largely Protestant field. This shift was essential to the popularization of rabbinics as a field within American universities. By playing ancient Judaism in a Protestant key, Neusner made rabbinics necessary to the study of ancient Christianity and a staple of every major Religious Studies program in the country. And since he trained his students to work in universities in this field, he could place his students in these newly created positions.

Aaron Hughes’s biography of Jacob Neusner is a first attempt to come to terms with a complicated man and his legacy. Perhaps Neusner’s passing will open up the space for subsequent projects that will be more critical in assessing Neusner’s scholarly corpus and his political behavior.

#### NOTE

1. The typing observation might have lent itself to a gender analysis. Nearly all Neusner’s contemporaries wrote their work in longhand and were aided by female typists.

## REFERENCES

### Hayes, Christine

- 1993 Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah (Dissertation, University of California Berkeley).
- 1997 *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### Hughes, Aaron W.

- 2013 *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 2014 "Jewish Studies is Too Jewish." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 24.

### Lieberman, Saul

- 1929 "Al Ha-Yerushalmi." Jerusalem.
- 1937–39 *Tosefet Rishonim*. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook.
- 1942 *Greek in Jewish Palestine*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary.
- 1950 *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary.

1955–82 *Tosefta Qifshuta*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary.

1984 "Review: A Tragedy or a Comedy?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, 315–19.

### Neusner, Jacob

- 1962 *A Life of Yohanan Ben Zakkai*. Leiden: Brill.
- 1965, 1969, 1970 *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*. Leiden: Brill.
- 1970 *A Life of Yohanan Ben Zakkai: Second Edition, Completely Revised*. Leiden: Brill.
- 1993 *Conservative, American and Jewish: I Wouldn't Have It Any Other Way*. Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House.
- 1995 *Are the Talmuds Interchangeable? Christine Hayes' Blunder*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- 2004 *Neusner on Judaism: History*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- 2004 *Neusner on Judaism: Literature*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- 2006 *Neusner on Judaism: Religion and Theology*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.