RM Die Religionen der Menschheit

Michael Tilly/Burton L. Visotzky (Eds.)

Judaism I

History

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Die Religionen der Menschheit

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Judaism, the oldest of the Abrahamic religions, is one of the pillars of modern civilization. A collective of internationally renowned experts cooperated in a singular academic enterprise to portray Judaism from its transformation as a Temple cult to its broad contemporary varieties. In three volumes the long-running book series "Die Religionen der Menschheit" (Religions of Humanity) presents for the first time a complete and compelling view on Jewish life now and then - a fascinating portrait of the Jewish people with its ability to adapt itself to most different cultural settings, always maintaining its strong and unique identity. Volume I provides a global view on Jewish history from antiquity, the middle ages, to contemporary history.

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Editors’ Introduction

Burton L. VisotzkyMichael Tilly

In the beginning, the Hebrew Bible was formed as an anthology of Jewish texts, each shaping an aspect of Jewish identity. As the Israelite community and its various tribes became two parts: a Diaspora and its complement, the community in the Land of Israel—competing interests formed a canon that represented their various concerns. Over time, the communities grew, interacted, and focused on local religious needs, all the while ostensibly proclaiming fealty to the Jerusalem Temple. Even so, some communities rejected the central shrine that the Torah’s book of Deuteronomy proclaimed to be »the place where the Lord chose for His name to dwell« (Deut. 12:5, et passim). Still other Jewish communities had their own competing shrines. Yet for all their dissentions, disagreements, and local politics, there was a common yet unarticulated core of beliefs and practices that unified the early Jewish communities across the ancient world.[1] As the most important prerequisites and foundations of all areas of their lives—and irrespective of all pluriformity or heterogeneity—strict monotheism and the central importance of the Torah, which was considered to be directly inspired by God, shaped the contours of what can be perceived in manifold forms as »Judaism«. As the Second Temple period (516 BCE—70 CE) drew to a close, the biblical canon took its final shape, and a world-wide Jewish community emerged as a moral and spiritual power.[2]

That canon, by definition, excluded certain Jewish texts, even as it codified others. And the political processes of the Persian and Hellenistic empires confined and defined the

polities of their local Jews. From east to west, at the very moment in 70 CE when the centralized Jerusalem cult was reduced to ashes, Judaism, like the mythical phoenix, emerged. Across the oikumene, with each locale finding its own expressions, communities that had formed around the study of the biblical canon produced commentaries, codes, chronicles, commemorations, and compendia about Judaism. Some of these were inscribed on stone, others on parchment and paper, while still others were committed to memory. The devotion to this varied literature helped shape a Jewish culture and history that has persisted for two millennia.

This three-volume compendium, *Judaism: I. History, II. Literature, and III. Culture and Modernity*, considers various aspects of Jewish expressions over these past two millennia. In this introduction we the editors: an American rabbi-professor and an ordained German Protestant university professor, will discuss what is to be found in these three volumes, as well as what is not found here, or what is minimized. Obviously three volumes, even a thousand pages, cannot include consideration of all aspects of a rich and robustly evolving two-thousand-year-old Jewish civilization. And so, we will assay to lay bare our own biases as editors and acknowledge our own shortcomings and those of these volumes, where they are visible to us. To do this we need to have a sense of perspective on the scholarly study of Judaism over the past two centuries.

1 Die Wissenschaft des Judentums

Dr. Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) began the modern study of Judaism by convening his *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (the Society for the Culture and Critical Study of the Jews) exactly two hundred years ago, in late 1819 in

Berlin.[3] Although the *Verein* was small and lasted but five years before disbanding, it included such luminaries as co-founder Eduard Gans, a disciple of Hegel, as well as the poet Heinrich Heine.[4] The scholarly *Verein* failed to gain traction in the larger Jewish community. None-the-less, Zunz and his German Reform colleagues introduced an academic study of Judaism based upon comparative research and use of non-Jewish sources. Their historical-critical approach to Jewish learning allowed for what had previously been confined to the Jewish orthodox Yeshiva world to eventually find an academic foothold in the university.

In that era, history was often seen as the stories of great men. Spiritual and political biographies held sway. Zunz accepted the challenge with his groundbreaking biography of the great medieval French exegete, »*Salomon ben Isaac, genannt Raschi*.« The work marked the end of the *Verein* and was published in the short-lived *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums.*[5] The monographic length of the article and its use of what were then cutting-edge methods ironically helped assure the journal's demise. Further, the attempt to write a biography that might assay to peek behind the myth of the towering medieval figure, assured that the orthodox yeshiva scholars who passionately cared about Rashi would find the work anathema. Nevertheless, the study was a programmatic introduction not only to Rashi, but to the philological and comparative methods of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. It would set a curriculum for critical study of Judaism for the next century and a half.

Zunz solidified his methods and his agenda in 1832, when he published *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt* (The Sermons of the Jews in their Historic Development).[6] Here, Zunz surveyed rabbinic exegetical and homiletical literature, and by focusing on this literature, he conspicuously avoided both the study of the

Talmud and Jewish mysticism. Zunz began his survey in the late books of the Hebrew Bible and continued to review the form and content of the genre up to German Reform preaching of his own day. His work was not without bias. Zunz separated what he imagined should be the academic study of Judaism from both the Yeshiva curriculum—primarily Talmud and legal codes—and from the Chassidic world, which had a strong dose of mysticism.

Zunz's acknowledgement of the mystic's yearning for God came in his masterful survey of medieval liturgical poetry, *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*.[7] Indeed, Jewish mysticism only finally came to be acknowledged in academic circles a century later by the efforts of Gershom Gerhard Scholem (1897–1982). Leopold Zunz essentially set the curriculum for the academic study of Judaism until the horrible events of World War II irreparably changed the course of Jewish history and learning. Even so, Zunz's agenda still affects Jewish studies to this day and has influenced the content choices of these volumes.

2 World War II and Vatican II

The world of Jewish academic study had its ups and downs in the century following Zunz. A year after his death, the Jewish Theological Seminary was founded in New York. It continues to be a beacon of Jewish scholarship in the western world. But the shift to America was prescient, as European Jewry as a whole suffered first from the predations of Czarist Russia, then from the decimation of World War I, and finally from the Holocaust of World War II. These moments are described in detail in the following chapters of this work.

The absolute destruction that the Holocaust wrought upon European Jewry cannot be exaggerated. Much of what

is described in these volumes came to an abrupt and tragic end. Yet following World War II, two particular events had a dramatic effect on the future of Judaism. Both have some relationship to the attempted destruction of Jewry in Germany during the war, yet each has its own dynamic that brought it to full flowering. We refer to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 and the declaration of the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* document in 1965. The former has been a continual midwife for the rebirth of Jewish culture and literature both within and outside the Diaspora. Of course, there is an entire chapter of this compendium devoted to Israel. The Vatican II document, which revolutionized the Catholic Church's approach to Jews and Judaism, is reckoned with in the final chapter of this work, describing interreligious dialogue in the past seventy years. There will be a bit more description of these historical monuments in the paragraphs below.

3 Jacob Neusner resets the agenda

A graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary's rabbinical school, Jacob Neusner (1932–2016) earned his doctorate with Prof. Morton Smith, who was a former Anglican cleric and professor of ancient history at Columbia University.[8] Although they broke bitterly in later years, Neusner imbibed Smith's methodology, which served to undermine the very foundations of Zunz's *Wissenschaft* curriculum. Neusner was exceedingly prolific and succeeded in publishing over 900 books before his death.

Among these was his *A Life of Yohanan ben Zakkai: 1–80 CE*.[9] This work was a conventional biography of one of the founding-fathers of rabbinic Judaism, not unlike Zunz's much earlier work on Rashi. Yet eight years after the publication of the Yohanan biography, Neusner recanted this work and

embraced Smith's »hermeneutic of suspicion,« publishing *The Development of a Legend: Studies in the Traditions Concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai.*[10] With this latter work, Neusner upended the notion of Jewish history as the stories of great men and treated those tales instead as ideological-didactic legends which exhibited a strong religious bias. He and his students continued to publish in this vein until they put a virtual end to the writing of positivist Jewish history.

This revolution came just as Jewish studies was being established as a discipline on American university campuses. For the past half-century, scholars have been writing instead the history of the ancient literature itself, and carefully limning what could and could not be asserted about the Jewish past. Due to Neusner's polemical nature, there has been a fault line between Israeli scholars and those in the European and American Diasporas regarding the reliability of rabbinic sources as evidence for the history of the ancient period, describing the very foundations of rabbinic Judaism.

4 Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (Judaism and Hellenism)

Even as this monumental shift in the scholarly agenda was taking place, another significant change affected our understanding of Judaism. This transformation followed from the theological shift evinced by Vatican II and was apposite to the ending of what has been characterized as the Church's millennial »teaching of contempt« for Judaism.[11] European-Christian scholarship had, from the time of the separation of Church and synagogue,[12] characterized Christianity as the direct inheritor of Greco-Roman Hellenism while Judaism, often derogated as *Spätjudentum*, was portrayed as primitive or even barbarian. In 1969,

Martin Hengel (1926–2009) wrote a pathbreaking work of heterodox scholarship exploring the Hellenistic background of Judaism and how it was a seedbed for subsequent Christian Hellenism.[13]

Hengel himself was relying in part on Jewish scholars such as Saul Lieberman, who wrote in the decades before him of Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine.[14] Lieberman, however, wrote particularly of influences on the literature of the ancient rabbis and targeted his work to scholars of Talmudic literature. Hengel, a German Protestant scholar, wrote for scholars of New Testament, and achieved a much broader reach and influence. Finally, one hundred fifty years after Zunz gathered his Berlin *Verein*, Hengel granted Jewish studies and Judaism itself a seat at the table of Christian faculties, even as he felt that Jewish theology of the ancient period erred in rejecting Jesus.

5 The New Academy

Since Hengel, there has been a vast expansion of Jewish Studies in universities in North America and throughout the world. Today, there is nary a university without Jewish Studies. In part this waxing of Judaica was due to the theological shifts in the Catholic Church and Protestant academy. In part, especially in the US, the explosion of Jewish studies departments was due to a general move towards identity studies that began with women's studies and African-American studies, expanded to include Jewish studies, and other ethnic and religious departments, majors, or concentrations. In almost every university community in North America, fund-raisers were able to find willing partners in the local Jewish communities to endow a chair of Jewish learning. Thus, Jewish Studies persists even as many

ethnic and religious studies programs wither with the general contraction of the humanities.

But Jewish Studies itself has changed in many profound ways. To wit, Christian scholars have also excelled in the field. At the time of this writing, the president of the Association for Jewish Studies, Prof. Christine Hayes of Yale University, is the first non-Jew to lead the organization in its 51–year history. Similarly, Peter Schäfer served as Perelman professor of Judaic Studies at Princeton University for fifteen years, having previously served as professor for Jewish Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin (1983–2008). Both Schäfer and Hayes specialize in Talmud scholarship. By this focus, we highlight not so much the anomaly of a gentile studying Talmud, as it is a sign of the integration of Jewish Studies into the broader academy. Indeed, as early as 1961, the late Rabbi Samuel Sandmel served as president of the otherwise overwhelmingly Christian membership of the Society for Biblical Literature. Today, the field has been leveled in both directions. Unfortunately, this apex has been reached just as Jewish studies, like the rest of the humanities, is contracting and diminishing not only in the United States, but even in Israel.

6 Kohlhammer's *Die Religionen der Menschheit*

Since 1960, Kohlhammer in Stuttgart has published the prestigious series *Die Religionen der Menschheit* (The Religions of Humanity). While the series was originally conceived of as thirty-six volumes almost 60 years ago, today it extends to fifty plus volumes, covering virtually all aspects of world-religions. That said, a disproportionate number of the volumes (often made up of multi-book publications) are devoted to Christianity. This is

unsurprising, given Kohlhammer's location in a German-Lutheran orbit.

In the earliest round of publication, Kohlhammer brought out a one-volume *Israelitische Religion* (1963, second edition: 1982), which covered Old Testament religion. This also demonstrated Kohlhammer's essentially Christian worldview. By separating Israelite religion from Judaism, it implies that Israelite religion might lead the way to Christianity; viz. that the Old Testament would be replaced by the New. Its author was Christian biblical theologian Helmer Ringgren.

In 1994, though, Kohlhammer began to address the appearance of bias with its publication of a one-volume (526 pp) work *Das Judentum*, Judaism. Although it was edited by German Christian scholar Günter Mayer, (who specialized in rabbinic literature), and had contributions by Hermann Greive, who was also a non-Jew; the work featured contributions by three notable rabbis: Jacob Petuchowski, Phillip Sigal, and especially Leo Trepp. German born, Rabbi Trepp was renown as the last surviving rabbi to lead a congregation in Germany. Trepp was arrested on Kristallnacht (Nov. 9, 1938) and sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Post-World War II, Rabbi Trepp was a leader in restoring Jewish life in Germany.[15] Thus, his participation in the *Judentum* volume made clear Kohlhammer's bona fides in publishing the volume.

In its current iteration, twenty-five years later, this edition of *Judaism* is a three-volume, 1000-page compendium with contributions by thirty experts in all areas of Judaism, from the destruction of the Second Temple and the advent of rabbinic Judaism, until today. We, the co-editors, are Dr. Burton L. Visotzky, Ph.D., a rabbi who serves as the Appleman Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies at New York's Jewish Theological Seminary. The other co-editor is Dr. Michael Tilly, a Protestant minister,

Professor of New Testament and head of the Institute of Ancient Judaism and Hellenistic Religions at Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen.

Further, the individual chapter authors are a mix, albeit uneven, of men and women (our initial invitations were to the same number of women as men, but as will be apparent, the final number favors men over women). And there are more Jews than Christians writing for these three volumes, although we confess to not actually knowing the religion of each individual participant. Scholars from seven countries make up the mix, with a preponderance of North-Americans; there are also many Germans, Israelis and then, scholars from England, France, Austria, and Poland. We are not entirely sure what this distribution means, except perhaps that the publisher and one of the editors is German, the other editor is American, and the largest number of Jewish studies scholars are located in America and Israel. The relative paucity of Europeans indicates the slow recovery from World War II, even as we celebrate the reinvigoration of Jewish Studies in Europe.

7 What is not featured in these volumes

Even given the diversity and number of exceptional scholars writing for this three-volume compendium—we will detail their contributions below—there are areas of Judaism that are less thoroughly covered than we might have wished, had we neither time nor word limits. An example would be a section on modern Jews of Color, who are gaining significance in both the U. S. and Israel. We recognize the rise in awareness and importance of non-white Jewish communities and look forward to there being a significant body of scholarship on their social and historical experiences as »a minority of a minority« in the years

ahead, enough that it will become recognized as an academic specialization.

Half a century after the advent of feminist scholarship in Jewish studies, we still struggle to chart women's normative experiences in every era. While our chapters, particularly those devoted to history, are no longer the stories of great men, there remains an insufficiency of both primary evidence and current history writing to address this lack. The abundance of feminist scholarship is addressed in a chapter by Prof. Gwynn Kessler that focusses on the literature on Jewish women, feminism, and gender studies in the past half-century. But the absence of women throughout these volumes remains a problem in addressing the entirety of Judaism while still ignoring half the Jewish population, even if less so than before. We do not wish to commit the error of what is archly called, »add women and stir,« as though by simply dedicating one chapter out of thirty, the issue is then addressed. But we recognize that even with the wonderful scholarly works that Kessler records, there is yet much work to be done to have adequately redressed this problem.

The worldview of the editors has also skewed these volumes towards what is today labeled »Ashkenormativity.« That is to say that while there certainly is in these volumes some consideration of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry—viz. the recognition of Jews from Arab or Muslim majority countries—the work as a whole tends to be Eurocentric. This perhaps is to be expected in a work published in Germany post-Holocaust. But given the concomitant exodus of modern Jewry from Muslim majority countries following World War II and given their political power (albeit exercised as a minority in coalition governments) in modern Israel, our lack of scholar-authors from and explicit chapters on those communities only exacerbates the lacuna. We hope this »*nostra culpa*« is accepted as a step in recognizing our

omission, on the way to repairing it in any subsequent editions.

Other areas where scholarship is beginning to have sufficient depth to merit inclusion in any subsequent iteration of this work, while not yet being sufficiently mainstream for entire chapters now, might be: studies of the various Jewish disability communities, the recognition of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) Jews, the phenomenon of intermarriage (which, while much studied statistically, has no consensus of opinion across either Jewish scholarship or in Jewish communities at large).

As a final issue in our study of Judaism, we have neglected the persistence of poverty in the global Jewish community. This latter issue is dispiriting, for one might have hoped that as the Jewish community recovered from the depredations of the Second World War and that as there was substantial regrowth of the Jewish communities in America and Israel, poverty might have receded. But as the Bible itself prophesies, »the poor will never cease from the land« (Deuteronomy 15:11). Sadly, the disparity between rich and poor in the modern State of Israel is disturbingly high. But the poor are further disenfranchised by the fact that it is the wealthy and the well-educated who write the histories and the sociological studies. Thus, the poor remain largely invisible within the broader world of Jews and Judaism.

8 What is in these volumes

We turn now to examine what is in these three volumes, briefly epitomizing each chapter in its author’s words. This overview will show the groupings of essays into Jewish history, literature, and culture. Here it is helpful to note that for this three-volume compendium, »Judaism« is essentially

Rabbinic Judaism. This will include Rabbinic Judaism’s immediate forebears, opponents, and even modern cultural manifestations. Thus we begin with »Judaism, Hellenism, and the Maccabees.«

8.1 Judaism I: History

1 Judaism, Hellenism, and the Maccabees

In this chapter Dr. Hermann Lichtenberger of the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, covers many aspects of the history of the period from the onset of Hellenism in the fourth century BCE and continues up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. He begins by invoking the landmark research of Martin Hengel, already fifty years ago, which proved that Palestinian Judaism of the ancient period is, in fact, Hellenistic Judaism. Dr. Lichtenberger then surveys Greek language usage and education within the Jewish community, along with an overview of Greek philosophy and literature in Jewish Palestine.

The chapter considers Greek translations of Jewish works, such as the Bible, with particular attention to traditions regarding the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Torah into Greek. Lichtenberger then turns to the history of the Maccabean revolt, and how historiography of the period has changed in the half-century since the work of Elias Bickermann. The events of Hasmonean history are reexamined in detail. The debate regarding the internecine conflict over Hellenization is considered. Finally, there is a section of this part of the discussion dedicated to the various narratives of the »mother and her seven martyred sons.«

Lichtenberger reviews the place of the Samaritans during this period and their relations with the Jewish community. He then turns to the place of the Jerusalem Temple in Jewish life and contrasts it with those Jewish communities—among

them the Samaritans—that did not share the Jerusalem cult as constitutive of their Jewish identity. This sets the stage not only for the Dead Sea Scroll community of Qumran, but also for post-70 CE (rabbinic) Judaism. The community of Qumran and its leadership is discussed along with the role of the biblical and non-biblical writings discovered there.

Lichtenberger then turns to the early synagogue and its various roles in Jewish practice. He concludes with an overview of Sacred Writings in Judaism of the Hellenistic-Roman Period, and the emergence of the biblical canon as an anchor of Judaism.

2 Jews in the West: From Herod to Constantine the Great

The story of the Jews from the Herodian kings until the advent of Constantine is explored by Dr. Natalie Dohrmann of the University of Pennsylvania. She looks at the rise of Judea as a Roman client kingdom under Herod the Great and the loss of Jewish political autonomy under the procurators, culminating in two devastating wars against Rome. She traces Jewish responses to the loss of the Jerusalem Temple, the priestly aristocracy, and the cult.

The chapter also examines the Jewish diaspora, parts of which fared poorly in this era. The Jewish community of Alexandria was destroyed in the early 2nd century—along with several other diaspora communities—when a wave of revolts in Jewish Mediterranean communities failed to defeat Trajan’s forces. Yet Jews continue to live and fare well in Rome, Antioch, and elsewhere. In Palestine, scholars are divided about the nature of the relationship between rabbinic Judaism and the Roman world. For the remainder of events described in this chapter, we do not have access to any Jewish source comparable to Josephus. Dohrmann reconstructs events from other people’s history, fragmentary material remains, documents, polemical