RM Die Religionen der Menschheit

Michael Tilly/Burton L. Visotzky (Eds.)

Judaism II

Literature

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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 II presents Jewish literature and thinking: the Jewish Bible; Hellenistic, Tannaitic, Amoraic and Gaonic literature to medieval and modern genres. Chapters on mysticism, Piyyut, Liturgy and Prayer complete the volume.

Prof. Dr. Michael Tilly is head of the Institute for Ancient Judaism and Hellenistic Religions at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Tübingen University.

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Carol Bakhos

Rabbinic-Gaonic and Karaite Literatures

Burton L. Visotzky and Marzena ZawanowskaIn memory of our dear colleague and friend Ilana Sasson. Burton L. Visotzky wrote the section on Rabbinic-Gaonic literatures. Marzena Zawanowska wrote on Karaite literature.

Medieval Commentary, Responsa, and Codes Literature

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Foreword

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 Second Temple period (516 BCE–70 CE) drew to a close, the biblical canon took its final shape, and a world-wide *Jewish* community—no longer Israelite—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*, considers various aspects of Jewish expressions over these past two millennia. In this Foreward, we the editors: an American rabbi-professor and an ordained German Protestant university professor, will discuss what led us to choose the chapters in this compendium. Obviously three volumes, even totaling 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. Nonetheless, 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 Judentums*.[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.

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.

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 Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: Ca. 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 Yoḥanan biography, Neusner recanted this work and embraced Smith's »hermeneutic of suspicion,« publishing *The Development of a Legend: Studies in the Traditions Concerning Yoḥanan 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 seed-bed 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. 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.

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.

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.

In this volume devoted to Literature, we survey the written production of the Jews over the past two millennia. This includes works that were transmitted orally, such as the earliest rabbinic compendia: the Mishnah and the Talmud, which were later inscribed in the Middle Ages (post 900 CE). The authors of each of these chapters are experts in their individual field and offer to the reader a basic introduction to the various works and the scholarly issues related to their study.

It is not our intention to declare a canon of Jewish literature. Rather, we are attempting to survey the major books and the influence each has had upon the Jewish people. Some of the literature we survey represents distinct minorities within the broader Jewish world. Others are actually heterodox. But all told, they represent the broad range of Jewish thought and writing throughout the centuries.

The Jewish Bible: Traditions and Translations

Emanuel Tov

1 The Transmission of Hebrew Scripture in Jewish Channels

What are Jewish and non-Jewish sources? TeNaKh = ***T****orah* (Pentateuch) + ***N****evi'im* (Prophets) + ***K****etuvim* (Writings) is the Jewish Scripture that has come down to us from antiquity in a complex way. Like other ancient compositions, it was first put into writing in antiquity on papyrus or skins of leather and subsequently copied, generation after generation, until the invention of printing. The process of the development between the stage of the first writing of the text until the stage of the printed text is named the transmission of the text, and that stage was very complex. There were many reasons for this complexity. The first stage of writing was preceded by a stage of oral transmission that often created several versions of the same event that were eventually committed to writing. The transmission was also complex because early scribes allowed themselves the freedom of changing the text in many large and small details. All these complications created slightly different copies of the same scriptural book.

The traditional Jewish »Bible« as we know it today from Hebrew texts and modern translations represents one of the early text traditions to be described below. Textual criticism is the discipline that deals with the textual history of the Bible, but it sometimes also pertains to the history of the literary forms.

There is no such thing as the »main text« of the Bible, since all the texts to be described below may be named »the Bible.« For practical purposes we may consider the traditional or Masoretic Text (MT, see § 2) the central text, since that is the sacred or authoritative text accepted by all streams of Judaism from the first century CE onwards (see below). It also has become the authoritative text of the Bible in its Hebrew form for the Protestant world, and it is the central text for the scholarly world. But the Septuagint (LXX, see § 4) is equally as much »the Bible« as the MT. That text, originally a Jewish translation of Hebrew Scripture, served subsequently as the sacred text of Christianity; until at a certain point it was replaced by the Latin Vulgate translation. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not have an authoritative status in the modern world, but for the Qumran community they were authoritative between the first century BCE until the end of their existence in 73 CE. The Samaritan Scripture (Samaritan Pentateuch, henceforth SP), based on ancient scrolls, is another Scripture text in Hebrew, limited to the Torah. In short, all forms of the Hebrew and translated Bible that were accepted as authoritative by a given community should be considered »Bible,« as each community accepted a different form of that Bible as authoritative.

What then is the »Jewish Bible«? Before the first century CE, all forms of Hebrew and translated Scripture may be considered the »Jewish Bible,« but after that period the situation was changed due to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE causing major changes in the use of the Scripture texts (see § 2.1.c below). From that time onwards, only a single text form was considered to be the Jewish Bible. This was the Masoretic Text, accepted by all streams of Judaism as the authoritative Jewish Bible. The Hebrew manuscripts of this tradition were augmented with a layer of vocalization and musical notes (*teʿamim*) between the eighth and eleventh century.

The variety of the different forms of the Jewish Bible before the 1st century of the Common Era created a special situation. At that time the Jewish people, to some extent organized in different groups, mainly the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, held on to manifold forms of the Scripture books, but all of them were considered to be a Jewish Bible. Below we will describe the early proto-Masoretic scrolls from the Judean Desert as well as many other Judean Desert scrolls, mainly the Qumran scrolls. Initially also the Septuagint was considered a Jewish Bible in translation, produced in Greek, around 285 BCE for the Torah, and most of the other early Greek versions were Jewish as well. The Aramaic Targumim were Jewish par excellence. Even the source of the Samaritan Pentateuch originally served as a Jewish Bible until the Samaritans distanced themselves from the other Jews. We turn now to sort out this history of various biblical texts.

2 The Traditional Hebrew Text of the Bible: The Masoretic Text

The Masoretic Text (MT), whether in its consonantal form or its fuller, later form, is the commonly used version of the Hebrew Bible, considered authoritative by Jews for almost two millennia. In modern times, the MT is found all over. Even if one thinks that one does not know what MT is or where to find it, one cannot miss it, so to speak, because MT is found in multiple sources.

All the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible and most of its modern translations present a form of MT. From the invention of the printing press, all editions of the Hebrew Bible have been based on a form of MT, with the exception of publications of the Samaritan Pentateuch or eclectic editions.[1]