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Klemen Jelinčič Boeta

Jewish Historiography: An Overview

Judovska historiografija: pregled

Abstract: The article is bringing forth a synthetic overview of Jewish historiography throughout the history, starting already with a brief focus on the Biblical background and Jewish Hellenistic historiography. It presents the reflections of historians of Jewish historiography on the main milestones in the story of writing the Jewish history and the processes they were part of, as well as the ideas and frameworks shaping the writing of such historiography in each of the historical periods, including the main issues and shape of the overall Jewish historiography today. It also includes a short overview of modern historiography on Jews in medieval Inner Austrian lands and in Slovenia.

Keywords: Jewish historiography, Jewish studies, Inner Austria, Slovenia

Izvleček: Članek predstavlja sintetični pregled judovske historiografije skozi zgodovino, začeni že s kratkim fokusom na biblijsko ozadje in judovskim helenističnim zgodovinopisjem. Prinaša refleksije zgodovinarjev judovske historiografije o glavnih mejnikih v zgodbi pisanja judovske zgodovine in procesih, katerih del so bili, pa tudi o idejah in okvirih, ki so oblikovali pisanje takšnega zgodovinopisja v vsakem izmed zgodovinskih obdobj, vključno z glavnimi smernicami in stanjem splošne judovske historiografije danes. Članek vključuje tudi kratek pregled modernega zgodovinopisja o Judih v srednjeveških notranjeavstrijskih deželah in v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: judovska historiografija, judovske študije, Notranja Avstrija, Slovenija

Introduction

Even though modern Jewish historiography starts to form, as almost all other European national historiographies, from the 18th century onward, we can, due to the fact it is hard to distinguish between national and religious elements of Judaism, speak of Jewish historiography much earlier, from the Bible onwards. Thus, the term Jewish historiography can designate several categories of knowledge. The most basic text of Jewish history and of writing the Jewish history is, of course, the Bible, but it was

not written by historians and its purpose was theological, not in recording events from the past for the sake of recording. Therefore, only certain, the so-called historical books of the Bible can be described as Biblical historiography. If by the term Jewish historiography we mean recording history by the people who called themselves historians, then we must first examine Hellenistic Jewish historiography, which was later forgotten among the Jews, and then 1400 years later the Renaissance and Baroque Jewish historiography, which also did not receive a high level of intellectual legitimacy within Judaism. Only then can we examine the modern Jewish historiography. We can also speak of medieval Jewish historiography, even though its creators did not call themselves historians. With Jewish historiography, we have in mind the writing of Jewish history by Jews, which with modern historiography becomes also national, but to which we must add, from the 18th century onwards, also the historiography on Jews that from the beginning of modernity starts to appear in numerous Western countries outside of Jewish intellectual frameworks. But that is no longer Jewish national historiography. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, due to the increasing quantity of writing in both categories and their increasing interconnectedness, we begin to speak only of historiography on Jews, which is still in great majority produced by Jews. And, in addition to that, of course, there is also the history of (Jewish and non-Jewish) writing of Jewish history. The historians have, namely, not always or universally regarded the study of their scholarly predecessors as a noble or worthwhile pursuit and »the unreflexive impulse of historians is particularly evident in the case of Jewish scholars, about whom no comprehensive history was written until 1993« (Myers 1998a, 2).

1 Biblical background

Even though the Greeks with Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius and others, including later Roman historians, are considered to be the beginners of Western history writing, their idea of history in itself, next to recording of past events, did not offer a whole and all-encompassing 'truth', neither on the creation of the world and cosmos and their further path till the 'end' of time nor on the position of human fate in all that is offered in history, as presented in the Bible.



In comparison with his contemporaries and predecessors, the novelty of Herodotus appears to be double. Herodotus, who wrote between the years 445 and 425 BC, was, as it appears, the first who analytically described the war and has, in his explanation of it and its consequences, for the first time also used ethnographic research and research of political organisation (Momigliano 1975a, 10). Thucydides has, though, almost completely excluded the ethnography, which holds true for almost the entire later Greek and Roman historiography, but preserved the strong connectedness of history of wars and political order. Herodotus introduced the rule that historians must explain the facts they are encountering and, at least since Thucydides onwards, the explanation has changed into exploration of causes (11). But, as he says, »the role of the history is not in providing a final meaning to the things or to completely measure the relationship between the gods and the humans« (15), and even in the following centuries gods and metaphysical reasons do not start playing an important role in historical narrative. »Pre-Christian Hellenic historiography did not tend to reveal the human destiny« (36), and the history had in society in comparison to tragedy, comedy, philosophy, and rhetoric only a limited meaning. »History had no truths to offer and therefore had no place in Greek religion and philosophy« (Yerushalmi 1996, 8), which represented a main intellectual framework for an attempt to explain and comprehend the human existence in cosmos and therefore had the status of eternity in the Hellenic field of knowledge production. If the Biblical historian has become subordinated to the prophet and accepted his values and knowledge what was, what is and what shall become – where this relationship paralleled to the relation between the historian and philosopher – among Greeks, since »Plato comprehensively expressed the antithesis between the time and eternity in Greek thought, such cooperation between history and philosophy as in Jewish thought between history and prophecy was no longer possible« (Momigliano 1966, 88).

If Greeks are, therefore, considered as ‘fathers of history’, then »the fathers of the meaning in history were the Jews« (Yerushalmi 1996, 8). It was Ancient Israel that first ascribed a decisive transcendental significance to history and thus created a new world-view whose essential lines were later on adopted by Christianity and Islam. It is only in ancient Judaism and nowhere else that remembering is marked as a religious duty for the whole people and this remark appears through the whole of the Old



Testament (Momigliano 1966, 87; Yerushalmi 1996, 9). »Beware lest thou forget the Lord, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage« (Deut 6:12), is just one example. This new perspective did not appear as a result of philosophical speculations but rather from the nature of the Israelite religion itself, where after the departure from Eden, the time is indeed seen as a real historical time – in a sense of divine challenge and human response, whereby the memory of this time is preserved by remembering historical events. After the expulsion from the paradise, history begins, »historical time becomes real and the way back is closed for ever« (Yerushalmi 1996, 8). Even divine revelations come in the course of history and the importance of history in Ancient Israel cannot be shown clearer than with the fact that God is recognised only if he is revealed 'historically'. Moses does not appear in the name of the Creator of Heaven and Earth but rather in the name of God of the Fathers, and when God introduces himself directly to the entire nation at Sinai, nothing is said of his qualities, except »I am the Lord, your God, who brought thee forth out of the Land of Egypt, out of the land of bondage« (Ex 20:2). Ancient Israel knows what God is according to what God did in the past and it is therefore important to remember. Similar to that, also Christianity is in its essence »a historical religion: meaning a religion, where the most important dogmas are based and are leaning on events« (Bloch 1996 [1993], 61) from a temporally determined past. In this sense, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are religions »whose validity is connected to the authenticity of particular traditions« (Momigliano 1975a, 35). And thus, to the question »Were the books of the Bible to be regarded as books of history?«, Marc Bloch responds »Undoubtedly« (Bloch 1962 [2003], 90). In the Bible we find historiography, but not history as such (Rubin 1987, 8).

However, the Biblical call for remembering has little to do with the curiosity about the past events and even though history in Jewish context has its meaning, it does not mean everything has a meaning and that everything needs to be remembered. Israel foremost needs to remember the divine interventions in the past and human responses to it, whether they are positive or negative, since the real danger lies not in forgetting what happened but rather how it happened. Despite numerous discussions on the role of time in Biblical narrative (Yerushalmi 1996, 119–121, n. 4 and 7; Momigliano 1966; Goldberg 2000), the answer appears almost self-evident. Time belongs to God. Biblical narrative indeed flows linearly



from the beginning of time uninterrupted till approximately 400 BC but the historical time is connected to the mythical time, which repeats itself cyclically. »They were not familiar with the distinction between mythical and historical age.« (Momigliano 1966, 87) »Obedience or disobedience to divine commandments are constants with Jews, which is incomparable with Greek historiography.« (Momigliano 1954, 149) Jews break the commandments and God punishes them, Jews return to the Torah and God rewards them. The Bible does not transmit historical facts to present the facts themselves but rather represents a perception of divine providence in history, where it is not the 'objective' historical event that is important but the message that can be learned from it (Rubin 1987, 8). Festivals that remind us of specific moments of divine intervention with the lives of Jews are simultaneously agricultural holidays that remind us of natural cycles. Jewish collective memory, as expressed in the Bible, is based on yearly repetition of celebrating the memory of events. A religious vision of the history serves primarily the purpose of exposing the divine role through time and memory and is expressed primarily in two ways: through ritual and through ritual recitations at daily and festive religious duties. The best example is certainly the ritualised formula, which had to be pronounced by everyone at the ritual of sacrificing the first fruits, which is found in the Fifth Book of Moses (Deut 25:5-9; Yerushalmi 1996, 12). There, we can locate a summary of the entire historical development, a nucleus of the complete Jewish history till the end of the Torah: the patriarchal origin in Mesopotamia, creation of the Hebrew nation in history and not in the mythical past, slavery in Egypt and liberation with a climax in the conquest of the Land of Israel, and, of course, the recognition of God as the Lord of history. Almost every Jewish religious holiday also contains a dimension of remembering certain historical event of divine intervention. And even though the line of remembrance could be preserved in such ritual manner, and the basic Biblical concepts of history were formed not by the historians but rather by priests and prophets, the need to remember inevitably passed into an actual historical narrative. During this process and within the heterogeneous Hebrew literature that spans over more than a thousand years that we call Bible, the line of anonymous authors created the most remarkable corpus of historical writing in the Ancient Near East.

Even though the Bible in its core is a representation of the divine deeds, Biblical reports are mostly filled with the deeds of people, Israel and other



nations. Despite the possible expectations that Biblical historians would sacrifice facts and details of a certain age in favour of legendary and mythical presentations and preconceived patterns, most of the Biblical historiography is despite its variety concrete, and instead of telling the story through legends is quite well embedded in historical realities. Events and characteristics of one age are seldom mixed with others, historical personalities do not appear only as types but rather as completely formed individuals, and also the chronology is mostly valid. Much of what is written in the Bible is based on contemporary archival records (Momigliano 1966, 87). The text presents us with a real feeling of a current historical time. Isaac is not presented as observing the laws Moses gave. »That Biblical historiography is not 'factual' in the modern sense is too self-evident to require extensive comment« (Yerushalmi 1996, 13), and therefore the use of term historiography has only a limited use as it relates only to certain books of the Bible. Also, not all chapters of history are presented equally well. Events until the conquest of Canaan are given in a more legendary fashion than the events from the period of both kingdoms, and each passage definitely has its own characteristics. In addition to Torah, in this context, Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles and the books of Ruth, Esther and Daniel certainly are worth mentioning. The period of the Second Temple (536 BC–70 AD) was in its historiography much poorer than the period of the First Temple (1006–586 BC). After the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which, to a certain measure, are already based on research of the archives and public collections of the time, only books of Ecclesiastes from the end of the 3rd century BC and Daniel from the 2nd century BC were included in the Hebrew Bible, and both already show new influences of Hellenistic and apocalyptic thought. Ecclesiastes or Kohelet in a way loses a sense of history or rather a sense for a particular direction of events, wanders among reflections and interpretations to which it »is only too easy to ascribe a label of Epicureanism or Scepticism«¹ (Momigliano 1976, 119). The Book of Daniel, in which also the idea of succession of empires is codified, is also the only of many apocalyptic books that the Pharisees accepted into the Biblical canon. The Book of Sirach from the beginning

1 It is interesting to mention that in the present-day religious Jewish world the name *Apicorus* (being the name of the philosopher Epicure) still serves as a synonym for a 'heretic', since according to the tradition he was the only Greek philosopher, who saw the truth of the Torah. The problem was that he rejected it.



of the 2nd century BC that ponders on Kohelet, for instance, was gone. From the books of Ezra and Nehemiah up to the books of the Maccabees, for almost three hundred years almost nothing historical had been written. Up to the 2nd century BC, the Biblical corpus was finalised and its consequent influence on Judaism was in its totality. Post-Biblical Judaism did not inherit any separate historical sources and documents but rather a holy and organic totality.

2 Jewish Hellenistic historiography

With the arrival of Alexander the Great (336–323 BC), Jews also became exposed to Hellenism. Jewish historiography experienced a new revival towards the end of the Second Temple period with an appearance of important historical literature, most of which was preserved only partially or within other works. And if a national historiography has patriotic prejudice (Momigliano 1975a, 21), then not only Biblical but also Hellenistic Jewish historiography is national. From the times of Herodotus, there were authors from different lands that met the Greeks and afterwards started writing histories of their own homelands in Greek language and according to Greek methods (Momigliano 1960, 98). »The ambition to be seen Hellenised can be hardly separated from an attempt to defend their own ethnical traditions from ever increasing Hellenisation.« (Momigliano 1975a, 30–31) Here, Jews have a special position, since Judea was the only territory where creative literature developed in an indigenous language (Momigliano 1970, 78), and outside India, Jews were »the only people that opposed the value system of Hellenistic civilisation with its own doctrinary and life systems« (90). Hebrew Demetrius the Chronographer from the 3rd century BC and Eupolemos from the 2nd century BC, who wrote in Greek, are such examples (Stern 1994, 293). Examples of creativity in domestic language certainly are the books of Ecclesiastes, Daniel and Sirach. Moreover, we encounter Jewish Hellenistic historiography in Hebrew, more specifically in connection to the Hasmonean revolt against the Seleucids. At the same time, most of the Jews that already lived in Egypt, Asia Minor and elsewhere across the Mediterranean, already adopted Greek as their own language and, consequentially, Bible was translated into Greek. Such circumstances by imitating Greek historiography led to different results, as with Maccabees I and II (Momigliano 1975a,



31), and even III (1st century BC) that is imitating the Second Maccabees (Momigliano 1976, 125), and IV (1st century AD) (126). The author of the First Book of Maccabees, who wrote in Hebrew, was obviously an admirer of the Hasmonean dynasty and probably lived in the period of John Hyrcanus (135–104 BC), when it seemed the independence was finally assured. In the book that was later translated into Greek, we see »a dynastic history of a Biblical type, written in a Biblical language, even though with many details [...] taking example in Greek historiography« (Momigliano 1975a, 31). As a historical source for the research of the Hasmonean revolt, the book is indispensable (Stern 1994, 291). Older than this book is the Second Book of Maccabees, which was originally written in Greek by a Hellenised Jew, Jason from Cyrene (Momigliano 1976, 121). The book in itself, which represents a summary of a five-volume history, is in comparison with Maccabees I written naively and is filled with the description of miracles in which the author obviously believed. Despite the fact that the book uses techniques which strongly remind us of popular Greek historiography techniques, including miracles and pathetic scenes, was composed in Greek and the Jews did not include it into the Biblical canon, the Maccabees II possess »something exclusively Jewish«, where in addition to the 'patriotic prejudice' »the perception of individual martyrdom is tightly connected with the purity of the Jewish cult« (Momigliano 1975b, 142).

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC–50 AD) has, in addition to his philosophical works, also written a historical work, of whose five volumes only two are preserved, and in which, despite the historical writing, theological presentation of divine intervention and revelation in Jewish history is obvious. His contemporary, Nicolaus of Damascus, a personal secretary to Herod the Great (37–4 BC), who was not of Jewish descent, included in his universal history a long description of Herod's rule, the important sections of which are, as it seems, preserved unaltered in later works of Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD). Of the historical works of Justus of Tiberias, Flavius Joseph's contemporary, only a few fragments are preserved (Stern 1994, 292). Certainly, the most important work of Jewish historiography from this period is the work of Flavius Josephus that includes the books *Jewish War* (75–79 AD) and *Jewish Antiquities* (93 or 94 AD) (Yerushalmi 1996, 16). Flavius Josephus or Yoseph ben Matityahu used Biblical and extra-Biblical sources and transferred into his, according to the Greek models constructed



work a good knowledge of Jewish oral tradition (Momigliano 1976, 127). The importance of his achievement lies in the fact that he succeeded in writing a Jewish history based on Bible, which was still comprehensible to Greek and Roman readers for whom it was written in the first place (Momigliano 1966, 88). *Jewish Antiquities* are a history of Jewish people from the beginnings to the Jewish revolt against Rome. The work is extraordinary in its attempt to explain the traditional texts in accordance to the principles of contemporary historiography, inclusion of other works and in searching and quoting materials from public archives. The *Jewish War* begins at the end of *Jewish Antiquities* and is exceptional foremost because, in addition to describing the events of the war and the hostilities, it accurately describes the political background and even the remote events that influenced the beginning of the hostilities leading to the final destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is interesting that, even though the works of Flavius Josephus did not survive in their original form among the Jews, in the 10th century in southern Italy appeared a Hebrew compilation named *Yosippon*, based on a part of the writings of Josephus that became, due to the belief that it was his original work, extremely popular among the medieval Jews and in Elizabethan England (Roth 1948, 60). As in the case of Philo, also the writings of Josephus had greater success among the Christians than among the Jews. It is of interest that Flavius Josephus partly built his *Jewish Antiquities* on *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 60 BC–after 7 AD) and in the story on the beginning of historiography among the barbarian nations, both their works have its own place (Momigliano 1975a, 28). Also Eusebius (ca. 260–340 AD), the author of *Church History*, has in his work adopted an approach from the works of Josephus (Momigliano 1963, 158). Latin texts of *Jewish War* came into existence in the 4th century AD, while the Latin translation of *Jewish Antiquities* appeared only in 570 AD (Momigliano 1978, 122). Flavius Josephus is also the author of *Contra Apionem* which represents not only a relic of then extant Jewish Hellenistic apologetic literature (that defended Judaism) but is also one of the most important essays on historiography that were preserved from all the Antiquity. The work is also »an essay in historiography and historical criticism« and actually »Joseph performed historical criticism in all of his works« (Cohen 1988, 1). In a manner, Flavius Josephus represents an embodiment of Jewish Hellenistic historiography since on the one hand, he uses Hellenic methods of historiography and historical criticism, while on the other, he joins other 'oriental' historians



in their attack on Greek history writing and defence of their own. Also his perception of the history, as an absolute and 'objective' truth, isn't Greek and derives from the Bible (11).

As in Ancient Greece, other historical books existed also in Ancient Israel, such as the Book of the Deeds of Salomon (mentioned in Kings I 11:41), chronicles of Judean kings and other books that are lost to us today (Yerushalmi 1996, 15) and were written by intentions, which did not serve a search for a transcendental meaning, and were therefore not included into the Jewish Biblical canon. Jewish historiography, which appeared in the period of Hellenism or the Second Temple, certainly belongs to this category. The books of Joshua, Samuel, Kings and other historical books of the Bible were preserved because they became a part of the authoritative anthology of holy texts, the final canonisation of which was concluded around 100 AD in the town of Yavneh in Palestine. The disappearance of books like Maccabees II from the Jewish literature is just a specific example of rejecting the history »and the revival of Jewish historical writing in the period between 200 BC until 100 AD is inseparable from the Greek influence« (Momigliano 1975b, 144). With the conclusion of the Biblical canon by the rabbis, Biblical historical books achieved immortality which no later historian could hope for and that was even denied to certain historical works of that time. Jewish historiography of the Hellenistic period, even works such as the first three books of Maccabees and works of Josephus, were pushed aside and despite the fact that some of them were preserved by the Church, all these works were inaccessible to Jews until the modern times. It had been almost fifteen centuries until the Renaissance when another Jew called himself a historian.

3 Rabbinical foundations

As we focus on the classical rabbinical literature of Mishnah and both Talmuds, we move, in relation to history and historiography in comparison to the Bible, to a totally different ground. In contrast to Biblical writers, in the eyes of Talmudic scholars, time, present and past, have a completely different role. Historical specificities, which are so exposed in the Biblical narration, are turned into seemingly unconscious anachronisms. Ancient Middle-Eastern mythological motifs, which are mentioned in the Bible only



superfluously, are shown here more elaborated than ever, and even the history of the Biblical period is here, even though anachronistic and unconnected, treated more thoroughly than in the Bible itself (Yerushalmi 1996, 16). The triumph of rabbinical Judaism means a practical disappearance of that sense of providential direction from the most remote past to present and beyond, a sense so characteristic of the Biblical history. As opposed to Kohelet, the Pharisees transformed this sense by focusing solely on yearly repetition of chosen events from the past, a tradition always typical of Judaism. The history of the Biblical period is present in the Bible. But, even though reconstruction of this history through modern critical research, connected with archaeology and discovery of Ancient Middle-Eastern languages and literatures, is nowadays offering a more contextual understanding, which sometimes differs quite strongly from the remarks and explanations of the Biblical writers, Bible can still serve modern academics as a permanent reference point for their research. As opposed to that, history of the Talmudic period from all this vast body of aggadic literature cannot be deciphered. Historical events are not even mentioned or are mentioned in such a rudimentary or legendary form that any conclusion of their course is impossible.

Despite that, though, from all this literature we can still decipher a sense of history (Neusner 1988, 12–39). Even though the Talmudic literature does not bring chronological and systematic presentation of events, it is, in spite of the widespread opinion, all but ahistorical. In this literature, we will not be able to find either stories on big events or uninterrupted narrative of events which occurred, even though Jews at that period do represent a *natio* and do possess an intensive political life. »But if *manifest* history scarcely passes before us, a rich and complex world of *latent* history – the long-term trends and issues of a society and its life in imagination and emotion – does lie ready at hand.« (14) What appears in front of our eyes are »the philosophical processes behind political and social and religious policy, class struggle and popular contention« (14). The uniqueness of the Talmudic canon is in that it presents to us in detail the thought processes that fathered the decisions shaping the entire Jewish world-view until the 19th century processes of modernisation and up to this day represent a basis for the thought pattern of the actively religious Jewish world. The mentioned directions become strongly expressed also in the daily life in what we call Halachah or rules and laws of life. Here,



we can speak of an example of forming a collective doctrine of rabbinical Judaism, which was shaped by a limited class of intellectuals but was accepted by all Jews, except the Karaites, and was in an unchanged form transmitted with explanations from Late Antiquity until the modern day. »In terms of Brian Stock, what we have is the inner history of a textual community.« (18) Treating of history by the designers of Mishnah clearly shows that these creators were very well aware of the historical events and their meaning for the daily life, but confronted with the tragedy of events, which at this stage of the Jewish history were not few (for instance the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD), they incorporated them into the already existing or rather ideologically-religiously artificially formed patterns of disaster. In such a way, the uniqueness of events was reduced and thus »the power of taxonomy in imposing order upon chaos once more does its healing work« (26). And when the uniqueness of events fades away, also history loses its importance as a didactic intellectual construct. The world becomes composed of nature and supernature (29), which is strongly reminiscent of the space-time construction of early medieval Christianity, and what really matters are the same repetitious laws that are discovered in Heaven. Here the category of salvation, including the ideology of messiah that is hardly present in Mishnah, loses its function that is now gained by the sanctification of daily life. »If what is important in Israel's existence is sanctification, an ongoing process, and not salvation, understood as a one-time event at the end, then no one will find reason to narrate history.« (30) This direction of Mishnah was in complete opposition to the emphasis of more than a thousand years of Israelite history. The events from wars with Rome were still very vivid in the memory and the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud is »taking these events seriously and treats them as unique and remarkable« (31). In Mishnah, there is talk of 'this world' and 'the world to come', while the Jerusalem Talmud distinguishes between 'this period' and 'the period when the Temple was still standing'. »History and doctrine merge, with history made to yield to doctrine.« (33) The entire world and all its events are set into a meaningful framework that was determined by the Torah. »It was the story of the suffering of Israel, the remembrance of that suffering, on the one side, and the effort to explain events of that tragic kind, on the other.« (34) In the Palestinian Talmud, we can witness a »reversion to Biblical convictions about the centrality of history in the definition of Israel's reality« (ibid., 36). Salvation and messiah regain their importance. In Talmud, we encounter a connection



of observing all the laws of Torah (sanctification) with reaching the end of time and the arrival of the messiah. More than that, the 'whole of Israel' becomes a social category in a historical time and for instance »if Israel would keep a single Shabbat in the proper way, forthwith the son of David will come« (yTa'anit 1:1; Neusner 1988, 38). Therefore, histories of other nations become only a mere reflection on the deeds of Israel (Neusner 1988, 33), and thus we see that while historical laws and even logic may exist, they are derived from a framework of moral virtue or culpability, wherein destroyers are punished and builders rewarded (Gafni 1996, 27).

For the rabbis, it was clear that history has its significance, which is the foundation of Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and that Jews play a central role in the process. For the rabbis, Torah was not only a depository of the past history but rather a revealed pattern of the entire history (Yerushalmi 1996, 21). From the Bible, they learned that the real rhythm of the history beats often enough under the revealed acts and that the invisible history can be recognised and is more real than what the world, blinded with the rhythms of power, can recognise. Assyria was a tool of divine wrath over Israel, even though Israel did not know that at the time. In accordance with that, there was no need to create a new concept of history to adjust the appearance of Rome and in fact any other world empire, which would follow later on. And, since even this empire will crumble, then there is no need to follow its developments and the usual historical knowledge is unnecessary. In these intervals between the destruction and salvation, the main Jewish task was to completely and finally respond to the Biblical challenge of becoming a holy people, which meant, most of all, studying and fulfilling the written and oral law and creating a Jewish society on its basis. Biblical past was known, messianic future assured and the time in between became unimportant. The dynastic stories of Roman emperors, arrivals and departures of Roman procurators and wars of the Parthians and the Sassanids did not offer any new understanding. Thus, also the events of Hasmonean and Herodian dynasties, which were Jewish history, did not present novel revelations and were therefore neglected (24). Only the messianic activities still had the ability to redirect the attention to momentary historical events and lead into direct action, but after the unsuccessful revolt of 132–135 AD, a tendency began to stop and even repress such activities, which signified a responsible rabbinic leadership of the community in many generations to come. Sages and rabbis



preserved what was relevant for them or rather for the continuation of religious and communal and therefore also 'national' life of the Jewish people, so from the Jewish literature of the period we learn something on the current events only by chance and in service of another purpose. They did not preserve the political history of the Hasmoneans but they noticed the conflict between the Pharisees and Alexander Yannai (103–76 BC). They did not include the course of events of the Second Temple history but they carefully recorded every single detail of the Temple ritual. They showed almost no interest in the Roman history but they did not forget the persecutions under the emperor Hadrian (117–138 AD). They also neglected the battles of the Maccabees and yet preserved the memory of miraculous rededication of the Temple, which is celebrated up to this day and is at the same time the only post-Biblical holiday, accepted because it presented the continuation of divine intervention in Jewish history. »The centrepiece of rehistorisation of Judaism accomplished by the framers of the Talmud of the Land of Israel and related writing, of course, is the reversion to Scripture« (Neusner 1988, 39), where daily events possess a meaning solely within the framework of sanctification for the sake of as-soon-as-possible arriving salvation.

Usually two works are mentioned, which should point to the opposite, even though one of these (*Megilat Taanith* or *The Scroll of Fasts*) is not historiography but rather a calendar of 35 semi-holidays and fasts, which derive from the Hasmonean period and mostly signify events from the Maccabean wars. Only the second work (*Seder Olam* or *The Order of the World*), which is ascribed to a rabbi Jose ben Halafta from the 2nd century AD, can serve as a basis for historical recording but even here we only find a dry chronology of persons and events from Adam to Alexander the Great (Yerushalmi 1996, 20).

4 The Middle Ages

Jewish historical writing after Talmud, which is in its narrowest categorisation limited to chronicles, recorded predominately specific and individual events, where the records are limited to one location or area and mostly focused on individual communities. The wide dispersion of the Jews over such a large geographical area could not enable a growth of historical



conscience that would include all of the settlement areas of the entire nation, even though centres of such settlement did exist (like Babylon and the Iberian Peninsula), which in certain periods possessed and executed their authority, like, for instance, in the areas of liturgy. »The life of an individual was recognised only in accordance to the collective fate that interconnects the complete life in the Land of Israel in the past with the messianic future, which promises salvation with returning to the Holy Land. From this perspective, concerning Jews, we can really talk about the 'Middle Ages'.« (Michael 1993, 11)

But Israel in exile did not lack a sense of history. As emphasized by Yitzchak Baer in his historical work on Jewish exile: »This old system of thought is by no means unhistorical, for it has history as its foundation; the decisive historical events of ancient and recent times retained their fixed place in Jewish thought, more than in other religious systems.« (Baer 1947, 110) The changes of time the Jews were always aware of were in their eyes only a change of scenery of one single vision deeply rooted in the tradition of their prophets and seen as sanctified. On such a basis, critical historiography could not develop (Michael 1993, 11).

In almost all areas of Jewish writing in the Middle Ages, we indeed find a great deal of thought dedicated to the position of Jews in history, the idea of Jewish history and the meaning of exile and salvation, but very little about the momentary Jewish historical experience. Interpretations of history, explicit or implicit, can be encountered in philosophical works, homiletics, Biblical exegesis, legal and mystical texts, but almost always without any reference to an actual historical event or a specific historical personality. After the tradition of writing history was interrupted in the Talmudic period, it has not reappeared. Historical works, which after all were written, appeared occasionally and after long periods of silence. And even though there is no doubt on the scarcity of medieval Jewish historical writing, there are serious reasons that should prevent us from seeing this as an exclusive characteristic of Jewish literary production, as if there were certain essential differences between the Jewish and Christian medieval practices of historical writing, since Christian medieval historical writing was scarce as well (Bonfil 1997, 8).



Only in one area, completely in accordance with the Talmudic thought, we can talk about a historical genre in the framework of the so-called 'chain of tradition' (*Shalsholet Ha-Kabbalah*) literature of the oral law, the intention of which was through chronological recording of the sequence of sages, most of all, the presentation of the uninterrupted tradition of teaching and authority of the Bible through Talmud and halachic literature, in many instances up to the author himself (Yerushalmi 1996, 31). The first document of the type is certainly the first chapter of a part of Mishnah called *Masechet Avot* written already in the 2nd century AD and represents a chronology of the transmission of tradition from Moses up to the author of the chapter. The first text that confronted the question of counting the years and of time chronology of the events was the mentioned *Seder Olam Raba* by Yose Ben Halafta. In the Talmudic times, the date of the creation of the world was calculated according to this text, writers of rare Jewish medieval chronicles learned from it and even Azariah de Rossi (ca. 1511–1578) and David Gans (1541–1613) consulted it (Michael 1993, 12). The earliest medieval work of such methodology is an anonymous *Seder Tannaim ve-Amoraim*, which, in all probability, was composed in the year 885, and the period of its appearance coincides with the appearance of the Karaites that opposed the authority of Talmud (Jacobs 1988, 67). This 'chain of tradition' is also mentioned in the introductory part of the most influential medieval halachic text, called *Mishnah Torah*, written by Maimonides (1135/38–1204) (Chazan 1988, 41). From this tradition, we receive the famous *Letter of Sherira* which hints at the fact that medieval Jews knew their history more than we think (Michael 1993, 12). It was composed by the leader of the famous Babylonian academy in Pumbedita in 986/987, who responds to a question from Kairouan in Tunisia on how the entire Talmudic literature came into being. *The Epistle of Rabbi Sherira Gaon* still serves as an important primary source for the history of this, i.e., geonic period, and is even more interesting due to the fact that we are in possession of this most influential work of Talmudic chronology in two variations (Jacobs 1988, 68–69). An additional example that the Jews did know some of their history after all can be seen in the *Letter to Yemen* by Maimonides that includes a brief history of four messianic movements. If at that time no messianic movement would have appeared in Yemen and the question was not addressed to Rambam, we would not even know that such kind of historical information was even available to him (Yerushalmi 1996, 32). »Within a Jewish context, critical comments by Biblical exegetes, debates



about the antiquity of kabbalistic works, historical reasons proposed for the commandments, and halakhic approaches to changing conditions have sharpened our awareness of medieval sensitivity to textual, theological, and social change. Jewish polemic against Christianity is a particularly promising field for the purpose of this inquiry« (Berger 1998, 25) as »historical context could help determine the plausibility of a scriptural argument; historical analysis could shed light on Talmudic references to Jesus and to Gentiles; the history of the Jewish people in exile demanded explanation – often theological but sometimes naturalistic; the larger pattern of history might reveal the character of the age in which medieval Jews and Christians lived.« »From late antiquity through the early seventeenth century, this quest moved from hostile legends to unsystematic criticism, both naïve and penetrating, and finally produced flashes of genuine historical reconstruction.« (26)

In medieval Judaism, only this type of historical material achieved legitimacy and even though a lot of historical material can be found within it, the reason for its writing does not derive from the need to record the past events, but from rejection of the internal heretics and external enemies who denied the legitimacy of the Oral law, meaning Talmud, and from serving to the practical need of understanding the development of legal norms in relation to the previous rabbinical authorities. In this context, we should certainly mention the abundant literature of *responsa*, which has been appearing across the entire Jewish world from the medieval to present times, and in case of Rabbi Israel Isserlein from the 15th century also represents a precious source of information on the contemporary Jewish life of Southeastern Alps. Here, in the function of letters that include legal questions and answers of important rabbis, through an explanation of specific aspects of religious Jewish law and its daily applications, we find a series of historical data, which, of course, are subordinated to the primary legal intention of such texts (Soloveitchik 1990, 12). Thus, Maimonides in the 12th century can »calmly say of works of general history that they are of no practical consequence so that to read them is a sheer waste of time« (Jacobs 1988, 66). From exactly the same reasons we can find apologies to the readers on even dealing with the subject of secular history by writers of historical texts even up to the 19th century. It is necessary to emphasise that there was also no need to find novelties in the events of the time. Rather the opposite. Through the entire Middle



Ages, it is possible to find inclinations to reduce the momentary events to familiar archetypes from the past. In accordance to that, every new oppressor becomes Haman and every court Jew who tried to prevent a catastrophe became Mordechai. Christianity became *Edom* or *Esau* and Islam *Ishmael*. Geographical names from the Bible received a new meaning and Spain therefore became *Sfarad*, France *Tzarfat* and Germany *Ashkenaz*. Thus, also the relations between Jews and Gentiles were already formed in their basic outlines within the rabbinic Aggadah and therefore no specific interest in the history of contemporary non-Jewish nations developed. The idea of four successive world-empires that appeared in the Book of Daniel and was elaborated in Midrashic literature reappeared whenever Jews experienced apocalyptic moods. In this style, they simply switched the name of the last empire or joined the two together regarding them as one. A similar function was served by the idea of a final confrontation between Gog and Magog. These roles were in turn played by the Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Mongols, and even in the 19th century some Hassidic circles of Eastern Europe viewed the Napoleonic wars in such a manner (Yerushalmi 1996, 37). Also in the case of medieval Christian Europe, in basic pattern, the things were not that much different, since even here we can speak of a theological function of historiography even outside of the frameworks of Church History. Also among the Christians, the medieval writers were even with events that seemed as mundane as they could possibly be, from the creation of the world onwards until their own age, searching for the signs of divine intervention that leads and directs human activities (Mlinar 2000, 3–4), which as any other thought had their roots in Biblical examples and were modelled after the Church teachings and beliefs.

Evidence for the uninterrupted interest of Jewish readers in their already understood past until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem is certainly the above-mentioned book *Yosippon* from the 10th century Southern Italy that has remained popular until the appearance of print. The book was printed for the first time in 1480 in Mantua and then in 1510 in Constantinople (Michael 1993, 13). In this long period between the conclusion of Talmud and the end of the 15th century, when printing arrived, though, not many books survived that could testify to historical writing among Jews.



Despite the medieval Jewish idea of continuity in representing the events, »from time to time, circumstances forced a reconsideration of the notion of an unbroken continuum of Jewish experience«, as said by Robert Chazan (1988, 47), who on the questions of medieval Jewish historiography points us to the book of Yosef Yerushalmi, where »the most useful observations on the topic are available to us« (40). Yerushalmi says (1996, 31) that only in two cases a complete conscience that something really new happened can be distinguished in the medieval Jewish historical writing. One case are certainly the four Hebrew Crusader chronicles from the 12th century, where we do not only see a clear feeling that a sharp change occurred in the relations between Judaism and Christianity, when entire Jewish communities of northern Rhineland were wiped out, but also an expression of bewilderment and awe with this first case of Jewish mass martyrdom on European soil. The chronicle that was composed by Shlomo Bar Shimshon on the city of Mainz is certainly such an example (38). The other case is the *Book of Tradition* or the *Order of Tradition* (*Sefer Ha-Kabbalah* or *Seder Ha-Kabbalah*), a historical work of the Spanish philosopher Abraham Ibn-Daud (ca. 1100–1180), where we can locate a completely clearly expressed awareness of the move of Jewish spiritual and cultural centres from Babylon to Egypt, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula and in his time from Muslim to Christian Spain. The chronicle which came into existence in Toledo in years 1160–1161 and was printed in 1514 is the first Jewish chronicle that came to us preserved in full. Besides using the text of *Yosippon*, this chronicle was based on the chronology of transmitting the Biblical tradition from the *Letter of Sherira* and on calculations of time by the book *Seder Olam Raba*. In addition to that, the author presents a transmission of rabbinical authority from Babylon to Spain and thus also important data on Jewish life of his age. The third part is dedicated to the history of Spanish Jewry (Michael 1993, 15). With all these works in these six hundred or more years, historiography never served as a primary framework for the Jewish memory in the Middle Ages, which also holds true for the non-Jewish peoples of the time, a fact that is scarcely mentioned in research for reasons of a lack of medieval Jewish historiography. This is clearly shown by the fact that through the entire 16th century, in at that period already well-established Hebrew press, besides permanently popular *Yosippon*, only four other historical works, written before 1500, appeared: the longer *Seder Olam Raba*, the shorter *Seder Olam Zuta*, *Leter of Sherira*, and *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* (Yerushalmi 1996,



40). As concluded by Chazan (1988, 55), in the medieval Jewish grasp and representation of current happenings, there is no doubt on a tendency to see these events through a prism of Biblical patterns, but by evaluating the medieval perception of historical circumstances it is needed to avoid oversimplifications since these specific circumstances led to descriptions that are rooted in »full awareness of the inevitable complexity of everyday human experience« (55).

Yerushalmi in his »landmark book« (Myers 1998a, 3) designates as carriers of Jewish historical memory in the Middle Ages four characteristic literary and cultural complexes (Yerushalmi 1996, 45–46). These were, firstly, forgiveness prayers or *slichot*, of which a great part includes names of places, course of events and the dates of tragic events. Secondly, memorial books appeared mostly among the Ashkenazim and included lists of rabbis, important members of the community, events and martyrs, who had to be remembered in religious rituals. The famous *Memorbuch* of Nürnberg commences in 1296 and records events until 1392. Thirdly, second Purims were appearing throughout the entire Jewish diaspora until the modern times, where they wanted to remember cases of rescue from persecution or some danger. Such 'second Purim' existed, for instance, also in Sarajevo from 1820 onwards. As a balance, fourthly, also throughout the diaspora, minor fasts appeared, which remembered more bitter experiences, when there was no salvation. One of the earliest minor fasts is certainly the one introduced in memory of 32 Jews that were burnt at stake in the French town of Blois in 1171. Indeed, all this shows us the importance of remembering but also a resistance to novelty in history and the precedence that was given to liturgy and ritual over historical narrative, where historical memory was being preserved without historical details, a characteristic typical of all four complexes.

5 Renaissance and Baroque

In the course of the 16th century, eight Jewish authors wrote no less than ten important historical works and this cultural phenomenon can be recognised with »little hesitation as genuinely historiographical« (58). Five authors were either exiles from Spain or Portugal or their children. In 1553, in Ferrara, the book by Samuel Usque (ca. 1500 – after 1555) was printed



in Portuguese, encompassing the whole of Jewish history (Michael 1993, 43). In 1554, in Adrianopolis, a book by Solomon ibn Verga (after 1460–ca. 1530) appears in Hebrew about a history of persecutions in general and the expulsion from Spain in particular. By the 19th century, the book was translated into Yiddish, Latin, Spanish and Ladino. In the same year, the book by Joseph ha-Kohen (1496–ca. 1575), *The History of Kings of France and Kings of the House of Osman* was published in Hebrew in 1554 in Sabbioneta. He also wrote the book *Valley of Tears*, a history since the fall of the Second Temple. The *Book of Genealogies* with chronology of events in Jewish and general history by Abraham Zacuto (1452–ca. 1515) was printed in Hebrew in Constantinople in 1566 and in Cracow in 1580 (Yerushalmi 1996, 57, 132–133). *The Chain of Tradition*, describing also historical events in Italy and elsewhere, written by Gedaliah ibn Yahia (1526–1587), was printed in Hebrew in Venice in 1587 and in Cracow in 1596 (57, 134). In the years before his death in 1550, Eliya Capsali (ca. 1485–1550/1555) from Crete, who was under a strong cultural influence of the Sephardi arrivals to the island, wrote a history of Ottoman Turks with a history of Turkish and Spanish Jews, and between 1508–1515, also in Hebrew, he wrote *The Stories of Venice*, which is a chronicle of Venice (57). Only two of these authors do not belong to the Sephardi cultural circle. One was David Gans from Prague who in 1592 published a general history *Tzemach David* or *The Plant of David* (58, 135), while the other one was Azariah de Rossi from Mantua who in 1575 in Ferrara published his famous *Light to the Eyes* (57, 134).

Despite the opinions of Yerushalmi (1996, 59) and Reuven Michael (1993, 17) that the shock of the expulsions from Spain in 1492 and in 1496 from Portugal represented, through the awoken existential questions and awareness of historical break, the strongest reasons causing this appearance of historical literature, Robert Bonfil (1988, 78–102) adds another dimension. He turns our attention to a general tendency of Jewish historiography (and of any national historiography for that matter) of seeing Jewish history as somehow ‘separated’ from the histories of other nations. This holds true especially for the Middle Ages, where up to a recent period we could witness domination of a dichotomous thought and explanation »in terms of external-non-Jewish-challenge/internal-Jewish-response, this in itself being no more than a particular variation of the general scheme that almost totally opposes Jewish to non-Jewish« (82, n. 17). This could



certainly be said also of historiographies of other 'historically subordinate' or 'smaller' and 'younger' nations, as in case of Slovenians, Latvians or the Irish, to name a few. A break with this vision is certainly shown also by the book *Two Nations in Your Womb*, concerning the issue of mutual imagery of Christians and Jews in Middle-Ages in Europe, published in 2000 by Israel Jacob Yuval, or by the book of Ariel Toaff, *Love, Work and Death: Jewish life in Medieval Umbria*, published in 1996, where he reminds us that in most part money-lending and anti-Semitism were almost the only aspects of Jewish presence of interest to medievalists (Toaff 1998, 1). Accordingly, Bonfil emphasises that the appearance of this quantity of historical works cannot be explained solely by the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula but it would be necessary to take into consideration Renaissance and Baroque historiography outside of Jewish frameworks that emerged in that period and, among others, rediscovered the Antiquity's approach to writing history with an emphasis on politics and wars.

These works, though, do bring several extremely important novelties into the Jewish historiography. They possess a chronological and a geographical width that surpasses everything written by that period. They do not focus solely on specific instances of persecution or a series of events, but are attempting, as much as the data was available to them, to present a complete and uninterrupted overview of many centuries. During the Renaissance, these Jewish writers became increasingly interested in the people among whom they lived and began to use increased historical realism in their historical works, in which they began to explain history more in terms of natural than divine causes (Kohn 1979, viii-ix). A new element is certainly also the importance the authors ascribe to the Jewish history after the Bible, and for the first time we can really feel author's interest in the entire Jewish history up to the period. Even though the writers see the exile and diaspora in the spirit of a punishment for the sins of their fathers, it seems that they recognise the relevance of the events in the diaspora for the present and also for the future, which cannot be perceived only by focusing on remote past. This in itself represents a new approach. Simultaneously appears the novelty of interest in the histories of other nations, especially the contemporary ones, even though only for the comprehension of their own history. Thus, in this period, we do not receive only a complete Jewish history in Hebrew and Portuguese, but also a Jewish history in the context of a general history, a world history, a history of the



Ottoman Empire, a chronicle of Venice, kings of France and Turkey and even a Hebrew translation by Joseph ha-Kohen of the history of Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru.

Despite claims that »the resurgence of Jewish historical writing in the sixteenth century was without parallel earlier in the Middle Ages« (Yerushalmi 1996, 57), the break with Middle Ages is not that dramatic. The writers couldn't really free themselves from the concepts and ways of thinking which were rooted so deeply, such as messianic thoughts, concepts of pre-messianic war of Gog and Magog or a divine intervention behind the events. Of all the works, only with the book by Azaria de Rossi can we seriously talk of the beginning of historical criticism. De Rossi tried to critically examine the rabbinical legends and stories in comparison with the general history and even included the research of non-Jewish sources (Michael 1993, 17–71). He wrote a pioneering series of historical essays, in which, among others, Hellenistic Jewish literature, such as Philo and the *Letter of Aristaeus* (3rd–2nd century BC), was first brought back to the attention of Jews, and »both classical rabbinical Aggadah and the Jewish calendar were first subjected to historical scrutiny and criticism« (Yerushalmi 1996, 58). But even de Rossi did not write his history in contemporary manner of Renaissance and Baroque historiography in the sense of focusing on political and military events, which, though, can be said of the works of Capsali, Kohen and Gans (Bonfil 1988, 84–85).

De Rossi's method did not have heirs among the Jews not because the book caused such a scandal but because »sheer erudition can never take the place of history and the time had not yet come for a 'New History' among both Jews and non-Jews« (101). Specifically, the Jewish reading public did not recognise the historiography as a legitimate reading material and has seen the historical work only as something pleasant and relaxing for spare time. In relation to the works that coped with other nations and were called 'books of war', there are even conflicting contemporary opinions whether it is permitted to read them, and if so, in what language. Part of this reading public that was still seeking a meaning to the Jewish historical suffering and the length of exile found this meaning in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria (1534–1572) and his disciples, which quickly spread from the Galilean town of Safed through the entire Jewish world – »a mythical representation of history which lies beneath the present history and provides



the individual with power to actively participate in hastening of its messianic liquidation« (Yerushalmi 1996, 74). Thus, Renaissance and Baroque Jewish historical writing does not signify some independent phenomenon that suddenly emerges after the silence of Middle Ages, but is its continuation and appears as an epilogue of medieval Jewish historiography. »For Jewish historiography, radical change could indeed be achieved only in one of two ways: by transforming the Jews into actors of political and military history, or by radically changing the very conception of history. But while the first alternative was obviously ruled out [...] the time had not yet come for the second, for instance cultural history.« (Bonfil 1988, 101)

Instead, works continuing with the old approach kept appearing all the way to mid-18th century. There were numerous reprints of popular works such as *Yosippon* and different versions of the *Chain of Tradition*. *Sefer Ha-Yashar* as another version of the *Chain of Tradition* was printed in Venice in 1625 (Bonfil 1988, 87), where in 1653 appeared *Yeven Metzula* by Nathan Hannover (1610–1683) (Michael 1993, 83), who in medieval terms described the history of Jews in Poland until the massacres of 1648 (Kohn 1979, 188). Another book, *Divrei Yosef*, begins with creation of the world and ends in 1672 (Bonfil 1988, 86), and in 1743 in Amsterdam, the *History of Jews* by Menahem Man Amilander already appears. At that time, with the appearance of the European Enlightenment, also among Jews first forms of modern historiography started to be shaped.

6 Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah

The singularity of the Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah lays in its emergence against the background of social and cultural integration of the Jews into their surroundings, where in most cases we find a small Jewish community composed of a few privileged individuals or families (Ettinger 1994, 782), the so-called 'court Jews', Jewish merchant financiers that so visibly served the Central-European courts of the 17th and the 18th centuries (Dubin 1999, 19). From the Inner Austrian, northeast Italian or Slovenian perspective, is of special interest the position of Jewish communities in Habsburg Gorizia, Gradisca and Trieste, where already in the 17th century there were several privileged individuals in the service of the Empire, 'hofbefreiten Juden' or 'Jews, liberated by the court', antecedents of the



so-called 'court Jews', such as families Pincherle of Gorizia and the descendants of Jews from Maribor, more specifically of Aram the Rich, the family Morpurgo of Gradisca in 1624 (Roth 1946, 337), as well as Ventura Parente of Trieste in the same year (Dubin 1999, 18), who was also a descendant of Aram from Maribor. In these communities, and especially in Trieste, which was declared a free imperial port in 1719, conditions developed that enabled several Jews of Trieste, in connection between the absolute rule and the enlightenment culture, to importantly participate in this movement of Jewish Enlightenment (118–137). Among them was also Samuel David Luzzato (1800–1865), who was closely connected to the *Collegio Rabbinico* in Padua, established in 1829, which is known to be the first modern rabbinical seminary. The unpaid rabbi of Gorizia, Isaac Samuel (or Isacco Samuele) Reggio (1784–1855), received a nickname 'Italian Mendelssohn'. The first modern Hebrew poetess, Rachele Luzzatto Morpurgo (1790–1871), also came from Trieste (Roth 1946, 496–498).

Haskalah has, of course, come into being under the influence and in connection to the appearance of general European Enlightenment and, also among the Jews, the carriers of these ideas worked for the 'enlightenment' of the society on the basis of 'a reasonable understanding of things', through which they desired to 'liberate' themselves from historically conditioned social and religious frameworks. A great quantity of academic literature was written on the subject already from the 19th century onwards (see bibliography in Ben Sasson 1994 and Dubin 1999). The appearance of the conditions that enabled the birth of Haskalah movement is connected to specific conditions in which the 18th and early 19th century Jewish communities of the Netherlands, Paris, North Italy, Austria, Bohemia and Germany lived. Here are of special importance not only Königsberg, Wrocław and Berlin, but also Paris, Prague, Trieste and Vienna. For the year 1800, in a book *A History of the Jewish People* (Ben Sasson 1994, 785), Trieste is marked as one of the most important centres of this movement in Europe. As shown by Lois Dubin (1999, 6), »for understanding the changing situation and self-understanding of Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we need a tale not of two cities, Berlin and Paris, but one that includes a third city, Trieste, or perhaps a third and fourth city in tandem: Trieste and Vienna«. The Jews within the mentioned communities started to search for new ways to improve the situation within the Jewish communities, while simultaneously new socio-economic



conditions enabled a creation of new kind of relations with the non-Jewish environment. Until the movement of Jewish Enlightenment, the Jews are not occupied by their own historiography and the first real attempt to write a comprehensive Jewish history in modern times was performed not by a Jew, but rather by a French Huguenot pastor and diplomat Jacques Basnage (1653–1723), who, exiled in the Netherlands in the years 1706–1711, published a seven-part *History of the Jewish people* in Rotterdam. Also the first Jewish history of the Jews, which is partly based on the history by Basnage, appeared in the Netherlands and was published in 1743 in Yiddish by Amilander (died in 1767?) (Yerushalmi 1996, 82).

The modernisation of European Jewry was a gradual process that spread from individuals to communities and from one social class to the other. The process moved from larger to smaller cities and from Central and Western Europe to Eastern Europe. Among its characteristics, there are certainly economic redistribution, acculturation, secular education, receipt of civil rights and religious reform. A part of this process is of course also the appearance of a new historical awareness. Thus, for instance, in historiographical sense, one of the earliest modern Jewish historians, Marcus Fischer, in his history of North African Jewry from 1817 not only quotes a non-Jewish historian, but it seems as if »this would be the first instance when a Jew realized that his own writing constitutes a part of a wider historiography« (Meyer 1988, 163). Not only did the Jews start to absorb the cultural values of educated Europeans but here, for the first time it is possible to notice that the Jewish authors are taking their basic understandings from cultural and social achievements of the neighbouring culture. The movement became an expression of ‘universal’ spiritual aims, in which there was no space for the traditionalistic world-view. With all the complexity of the Haskalah movement, which we can follow from the mid-18th to mid-19th century, it was not simply about the relaxation of traditional Jewish more or less orthodox religious and related social and cultural frameworks, but about Jews starting to absorb the languages, clothes, habits and customs and the outlook of their non-Jewish surrounding, meaning assimilation. It was also about an attempt to bring the Judaism on the basis of ‘universal’ values closer to the new generations of Jews from these numerically small communities, which not only started to lose their interest in Judaism but in this ‘enlightened age’ saw in it no further relevance for



their own lives, a thing that also led to a particular psychological moment of these individuals, sometimes even in a conversion to Christianity.

Even though already in 1744, in his request for admittance to the Royal Academy of Berlin, Aaron Samuel Gumpertz (1723–1761) described the basic outlines of the Haskalah movement (Michael 1993, 97), it is Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) who is considered as the ‘spiritual father’ of the movement. After his arrival to Berlin, he met Ephraim Lessing (1729–1786) and was drawn into the German Enlightenment circles (Ettinger 1994, 782). In 1778, Mendelssohn started to publish his German translation of the Torah with Hebrew commentary. In the same year, the first school for boys, based on the ideas of Haskalah, was opened in Berlin and there they started to teach non-Jewish subjects as well. Mendelssohn was involved in the preparation of a schoolbook that was printed on this occasion. The printing house that was founded near the school in the following years published a great number of Hebrew books (Michael 1993, 97).

Mendelssohn, his disciples and close colleagues, Naphtali Herz Weisel, also known as Hartwig Wessely (1725–1805), David Friedländer (1750–1834) and Naphtali Herz Homberg (1749–1841) desired an as-soon-as-possible reform and adaptation of the Jewish society to the environment, especially in the field of education (Ettinger 1994, 783). Weisel in his *Words of Peace and Truth* from 1782 indeed includes a call for the study of Jewish and general history (Yerushalmi 1996, 82), but among these intellectuals, the maskilim, we cannot detect a strong inclination to study the history (Michael 1993, 101) until 1788, when in the fourth number of the first Hebrew magazine, called *Measef*, we find an exhaustive biographical article on the already deceased Mendelssohn. Even though in the following volumes, we can detect contributions on the history of Persia, Assyria and other areas of the Ancient Near East, we still cannot find a single article dealing with the Jewish history after Bible. In the year 1806, Josef Wolf and David Frankel, who already represented a new type of a Jewish teacher, founded a magazine *Schulamit*, where, slowly, first historical articles started to appear (126), which were mostly written by maskilim from Prague (133). Among these, certainly the most visible is Peter Beer (1758–1838), who between 1822 and 1823 published a *History of Jewish Sects*, which is considered as the first comprehensive historical study of the Jewish religion by a modern Jew (Brenner 1998, 390).



7 Wissenschaft des Judentums

If Haskalah in reading the Biblical text continued to rely on medieval Jewish exegetical method, as Mendelssohn did, *Wissenschaft* already tried to reconstruct the Biblical text on the basis of modern hermeneutical principles deriving from Protestant tradition of Biblical criticism, especially the critical philology of Friedrich August Wolf, where not only non-Jewish techniques but also non-Jewish interpretations of the text were used (Simon-Nahum 2003, 40–41). Even though the first generation of maskilim, which did not include more than 200 active individuals (Feiner 2002, 9), did not father the appearance of modern Jewish historiography, it has with its secularisation of certain aspects of Jewish society and worldview thoroughly prepared the ground for its appearance some forty years or one generation later. It is a fact that maskilim in 1794 republished De Rossi's book. This is already the period of beginnings of modern critical historiography, especially in Germany. *Historisches Journal* was already being published for two decades, Barthold Niebuhr was 18 years old and Leopold Von Ranke will be born a year later. A modern Jewish historian is not an heir of Azaria de Rossi, but of modern secular historians such as these (Yerushalmi 1996, 75). Examination of different sources from 1782 until 1881 shows not only that maskilim showed great interest in history but that their relation towards the history was significant for the ideology of Haskalah, as well as for the development of modern Jewish historical conscience (Feiner 2002, 5–6).

In 1817, Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) writes an article *Something on Rabbinical Literature*, in which he sketches a programme for historical research of the entire Jewish civilisation (Michael 1993, 190), and already in 1819 Zunz and a group of other German Jews, which at that time included still unbaptized Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), establishes a *Verein für Kultur and Wissenschaft der Juden* (An Association for the Culture and Science of the Jews). In 1822, in the magazine of the association, *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft der Juden*, a famous manifest *On the Idea of Jewish Science*, written by Immanuel Wolf (1799–1847), appears. Between the years 1820–1828 appeared *A History of the Israelites* by Isaac Marcus Jost (1793–1860), which was the first history of Jews written by a Jew in modern times. Thus also in France in 1828, we witness a first general post-Biblical history of Jews written by a French Jew, *Résumé de l'histoire des Juifs*



modernes by Léon Halévy (1802–1883), which as a book from before the period of *Wissenschaft* represents a »historical vision that emerged out of the crucible of the French revolution and emancipation, and prefigures and indeed formulates for the very first time some of the fundamental themes of what was to become the standard Franco-Jewish historiography in the second half of the nineteenth century« (Rodrigue 1998, 413).

Here, suddenly, there is no apologetics. History offered by maskilim differed from the traditional feeling of history and offered an alternative to the 'traditional history' (Feiner 2002, 17–30). Thus, in the picture of history presented by maskilim we also encounter the modern period (36–50). For the first time we reach a moment when the history has no need to prove its usefulness to Judaism but it is the Judaism that must prove its historical validity. As Wolf constantly mentions the term 'science' through the entire text, he is talking about the new critical historical spirit and historical methodology, which was conquering Germany and soon afterwards became one of the characteristics of Europe in the 19th century. Wolf's explicit plan for the Jewish science was threefold: textual research of Judaism, history of Judaism and the philosophy of Judaism (Yerushalmi 1996, 84).

When the Jewish writers at the end of the 18th century show pride in an increased number of Jews that are physicians and scientists, they do not simply emphasise the apologetic nature of this claim but are also showing to the world that Jews recognise the salvatory role of non-theological knowledge (Meyer 1998, 372). In accordance with the ideologies of liberation, some radical German maskilim thought that studying the history will liberate the Jews, especially the unenlightened ones in Poland, from the chains of tradition which they never approached critically (Meyer 1988, 164). This new spirit of Jewish historiography was not a fruit of years-long gradual development as was the case with general historiography, which was slowly advancing since the Renaissance, but is rather a result of inner Jewish needs in relation to the tradition and the receiving of civil rights or emancipation. Almost all the present ideological and cultural movements in Judaism were formed, if not as an answer to, definitely under the influence of the emancipation of the Jews, which gradually follows the French bourgeois revolution. »Modern Jewish historiography did not develop from scholarly curiosity but as an ideology, as one of many answers to the crisis of Jewish emancipation.« (Yerushalmi 1996, 85) Modern



attempts to reconstruct the Jewish past begin in time when we witness a sharp cut in the continuity of the Jewish way of life and therefore increasingly greater decline of the collective Jewish memory. »In this sense history becomes what it had never been before – the faith of fallen Jews.« (86) And, of course, 'history' enabled those appealing to it very different conclusions (86).

Though, whereas German or French historiography started with political and institutional history and only later on focused on intellectual history, *Wissenschaft* first and almost exclusively focused on the intellectual one, since it seemed that Jews do not have their own political history. They reconstructed Jewish history, where the national element was suppressed and a hope for national restoration was seen as anachronism. In order for the Jewish historiography to become modern, it had not only to give up the ideas that served as a basis for all Jewish concepts of history in the past, but even had to stand against the basic nucleus of Judaism, against faith that the divine intervention is not only ultimate, but also an active factor in the Jewish history, and against faith in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself (Yerushalmi 1996, 89). Even though the Haskalah movement explicitly opposed seeing the Jews as one of the 'objective' European nations, as many of its German maskilim identified with the German national movement, it was this Haskalah that has with writing in Hebrew strongly contributed to the formation of a modern Jewish national movement at the end of the 19th century. In general, it could even be said that for centuries, the Jews saw themselves as a 'nation' but it was this 'nation' that in Western Europe in the course of the 19th century 'dissolved' itself. If the Jews of Western and Central Europe agreed to appear on the national censuses solely in terms of religious and not national terms as a price to be paid for the 'emancipation', in the 1890s it was already possible to feel the Jewish national movement, i.e., Zionism, even in the western part of the continent. Despite that, we can still say that »the prevailing tendency of European Jewish history in 19th century Europe was the tendency of national 'self-destruction'« (McCagg 1989, 4). If the modern historiography is a child of the 19th century, constructed as a tool of European nationalism (Geary 2005 [2002], 19), its Jewish version that starts to develop in northern German lands simultaneously with German nationalism, in contrast with German nationalism, does not invent first the nation and then with the assistance of texts and philological analysis its, i.e., German



history (35), but first writes the history of Jews as a religion that slowly, in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, cautiously becomes also the history of Jews as a nation.

The climax of the Wissenschaft movement and its success is certainly between the years 1853 and 1870 published first modern general history of the Jews in a synthesis that would have been fifty years before considered impossible. It was written by Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891). He saw Judaism as a specific political-religious organism and has despite the ideological approach to the narrative in his work (where divine providence still plays a certain role), with all the lack of available archival materials, used a great number of up to that day neglected sources in many languages. Despite the fact that, in addition to several other things, he also neglected several social and economic aspects of history, his work counts as a standard Jewish history of the 19th century. His contribution is especially important in presenting the Jewish position in medieval Europe.

8 Modern Jewish Historiography

In the 20th century, all the complexity of the mentioned aspects is overtaken and expanded by post-Wissenschaft Jewish historians, especially Simon Dubnov (1860–1941) in Eastern Europe and Salo Wittmayer Baron (1895–1989) in USA, who tried to include in their work the entire course of Jewish history, but also by those historians that were operating within the national renaissance of the Jewish people in their own land in the so-called Jerusalem school, among which Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) had the most revolutionary effect. In the period up to the First World War and even more up to the Second World War, we witness a beginning in writing local Jewish histories in different countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Dubnov, the author of the *History of the Hasidic Movement* and the *History of Jews of Poland and Russia*, also wrote the *World History of Jewish People* (1925–1929). Salo W. Baron was with his *Social and Religious History of the Jews* the last author who in his monumental work included the entire Jewish history. In the years 1952–1983, 27 parts were published and his work after his death in 1989 remained unfinished. Graetz, Dubnov and Baron are considered as three great narrators of Jewish history in modern times.



All three also mentioned the Inner Austrian and Slovenian lands on several occasions, as did Haim Hillel Ben Sasson, even though, of course, not in a very detailed manner. More detailed Wissenschaft treatment of the area, though, appears already in *History of Jews in Austria* by Josef von Wertheimer, who in 1842, 1853 and 1858, in German, published three books on the topic, which was done also by Johann E. Scherer in 1901. The first one to treat responsa of Rabbi Isserlein was Moritz Güdemann in 1888 in his history of medieval German Jews, followed by Abraham Berliner in *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 18 from 1896. First essay with a more local focus, in this case Styria, appears by Emanuel Baumgarten in 1903, which was followed by a more detailed book by Artur Rosenberg in 1914. Rabbi of Djakovo, Hinko Schulsinger was with his three papers (1925, 1928 and 1929), written in Serbo-Croatian, the first one in the area of ex-Yugoslavia to examine the responsa of Rabbi Isserlein and of his pupil Leket Yosher. This is the period when we also see first texts written by historians in the context of Italian, Austrian and Slovenian national historiographies appear, such as by the Slovenian Austro-Hungarian historian Josip Gruden (1910–1916), who provided a few pages of a general overview on Jewish history of Slovenian lands, by the Slovenian historian Franc Kos who between 1919 and 1925 published five papers concerning the medieval cities of Gorizia, Ljubljana, Slovenj Gradec, Ptuj and Maribor, in which he also mentioned the local Jews, or, for instance, by the Austrian historian Fritz Popelka, who in his treatment of history of Graz in German also wrote about Jews in Graz (1919) or about the medieval Jewish villages in Carinthia (1935). In the Italian language, the Jews of Friuli, Gorizia, Gradisca and Trieste are discussed already in 1844 by Giuseppe Bianchi and in 1862 by Abraham Vita Morpurgo, to give just the two early examples. At the end of the 19th century, the Wissenschaft movement commenced an attempt in German to cover the entire area of the Holy Roman Empire under the title *Germania Judaica*. The first part covering the period until the year 1238 was published in 1934. They continued with the second part (1238–1350) and then with the third part (1350–1519), of which the second volume was published in 1995 in cooperation with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Here, the entries for the region of Inner Austria were written by Marcus Wenninger. In 1936, in issue 80 of the *MGWJ*, Jewish tombstones of Carinthia are covered by the Carinthian rabbi Joseph Babad, who published another paper in English in 1945, while Styrian Jewish tombstones were treated by the



Rabbi of Graz, David Herzog, in 1931, who in 1934 in German published *The Sources for the History of Jews in Styria*. The British Jewish historian Cecil Roth touches the region in his books *History of Jews of Venice* (1930), *Jews of Italy* (1948) and *Jews in the Renaissance* (1964). In these books, of course, most attention is given to Trieste, bibliographically most covered in the entire area, as from of all the regions of Carinthia, Styria, Carniola and the Austro-Hungarian *Küstenland*, i.e., Coastal Region (Istria, Trieste, Gradisca and Gorizia), in the period of 1515 to 1867, Jews only lived in the Coastal Region, basically in the three cities of Trieste, Gradisca and Gorizia. American Jewish historians provided three books focusing on the study of medieval responsa, which discuss these lands as well. In 1959 comes the book by Solomon Freehof, *The Responsa Literature*, in 1962, *Jewish Life in Austria in the 15th Century* by Shlomo Eidelberg, and in 1970, *Harmony and Discord* by Erich Zimmer. In 1971, *The History of Jews of Yugoslavia* by Yakir Eventov appears in Hebrew, where a few chapters are dedicated to Slovenian lands in the Middle Ages. Since mid-1960s and especially since 1980, in addition to the growing number of texts on Jews of the area in decades prior to and during Holocaust, discussions on other periods occasionally started to appear in journals or short monographies also in general Italian, Austrian and Slovenian historiography, for instance on various localities, such as Piran, Trieste, Gorizia, Cividale, Villach, Friesach, Ljubljana, Maribor, Graz, Radkersburg, and on various topics, such as Jewish villages, money lending activities, banking and commerce, immigration and demography, legal position and civil emancipation, expulsions from Carinthia and Styria in 1496 and from Carniola in 1515, Jews of Aquileia, relations with Christian surroundings, cultural activities or medieval inscriptions. Some of these papers were published together in special issues, resulting from symposiums or other forms of cooperation between Slovenian, Austrian, Italian, and other historiography. In 1971, 1972 and 1974, new general histories of Austrian Jews were published, and in 1981, a comprehensive *History of Jews in Carinthia* in German with data on all of the Inner Austrian lands was published by Wilhelm Wadl. Within the Slovenian historiography, in 1992 Vlado Valenčič published a short book on Jews of Ljubljana, in 1996 Jože Mlinarič on Jews of medieval Maribor, in 1997 Mirjana Gašper and Beata Lazar on Jews in Lendava and in 1999 Janez Peršič on Jews in Piran. In 1991, in Italian, appears the collection of papers *The Hebrew World*, dedicated to medieval north-eastern Italy and edited by Giacomo Todeschini and Pier Cesare Ioly



Zorattini. This book, as well as monographies by Shlomo Spitzer from 1997 on Jewish medieval Austria in German, the comprehensive *History of Austrian Jews* from 2006, written by Eveline Brugger, Martha Keil, Albert Lichtblau, Christoph Lind and Barbara Staudinger, also in German, and the comprehensive *Jews in Slovenian Lands in the Middle Ages* and *The Jews in Slovenia*, both by Klemen Jelinčič Boeta from 2009 in Slovenian, already include conclusions of all national historiographies, including the medieval responsa (see a detailed study in Jelinčič Boeta 2009, 57–123). After 2009, monography on modern Jews of Gorizia, written by Renato Podbersič, appeared as did some essays or books on other specific topics, such as Holocaust or anti-Semitism or specific localities, for instance the first comprehensive article in English on the medieval Jewish community of Maribor (Jelinčič Boeta 2020).

When in December 1924, in the British Mandate of Palestine, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was established, the expectations for a revolutionary progress in Jewish sciences were certainly very high. Even though the new Institute for Jewish Studies, to which most of the researchers of the so-called Jerusalem school belonged, was conceived as a secular institute, the language at its foundation was full of religious symbolism, where, perhaps unconsciously, appeared equation of Torah with science, which expressed double tendencies and desires of the present. On the one hand, they wanted to establish a new connection with the ancient national tradition and homeland, while on the other, they aspired to the highest standards of objective research (Myers 1998b, 93). The expressed goal of the new national educational institution was seen as an opposition to the previously dominant model of modern Jewish studies of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. With this, the new Jewish university rose with a change in paradigm from religion into nation as a lens for recording the Jewish past. Most of these experts originated from the Central and Eastern Europe and were professionally educated in modern rabbinical seminaries, which represented the institutional home of the *Wissenschaft*. Thus, these historians represent a new generation (Wasserstein 2002, 5).

Accordingly, the historians started to focus mostly on the mechanisms and activities of pre-modern Jewish community and on the Land of Israel as a primary locus of Jewish national activity, because of which also Land of Israel studies appeared. For the experts in Jerusalem, the Land of Israel



not only represented a momentary geographical and social space but also an end to a long temporal process – a *telos* of long path of Jewish people through dispersion and exile (Myers 1998b, 96), where, for which praise goes primarily to Yitzhak Baer, medieval Jewish community represents an idealised proto-state (97). Diaspora among these experts, despite clear national-historical purposes, was represented as a period when desired national values were preserved, and it occupied an important place in the historical flow which brought the Jews to the Land of Israel. As with the experts of the Jerusalem school, so was Zionism a movement which constantly needed to adjust its birthplace in Europe with the place of their activities in Palestine, West with the East. G. Scholem, Y. Baer, Ben-Tzion Dinur, Joseph Klausner and their other colleagues from the Jerusalem school belonged to a generation of transition between Europe and Palestine, between the standards of *Wissenschaft* and attachment to Zionism and of course between the impulse to retain the standards of critical historical research and the desire to create new boundaries of collective memory (99). Among these researchers from this period, Sholem's opus directed the attention to the vast amount of forgotten and of course unresearched mystical texts and extracted from them things not seen before. Sholem and members of the so-called 'historical-critical school' from 1939 onwards did not see the Jewish mysticism just as a literature of the elite, but since the 16th century onwards also as an important force that shaped the Jewish history (Idel 1998, 39–42). The fundamental *History of the Second Temple* from 1958 by Klausner also represents a watershed in Jewish historiography that influenced all later research of the period, as well as of earlier Biblical periods. A few years later, in 1969, appears the new wholesome *The History of Jewish people*, edited by Ben-Sasson, which was translated into English in 1976 and since then revised and updated, for instance, for the edition of 1994.

The academic historiography on Jewish national movement and the building of a nation is much younger than the Zionist movement and even the state of Israel. While the texts on Jewish national thought and the Zionist movement in diaspora were written in many lands, especially in USA and Great Britain, the historiography of Yishuv and the State of Israel is written almost exclusively in Israel, where it represents an area of sharp political and social conflicts and has also a strong generational undertone on five universities (Penslar 1998, 105). Mid-1960s and 1970s meant a beginning



of Zionist historiography as an academic discipline with first doctoral theses on the history of Yishuv, academic magazines such as *Tzionut* (1970) and *Cathedra* (1976), but also with the Weitzman Institute at the University of Tel Aviv. In diaspora, especially in Great Britain and USA, the emphasis remained on synthesis, and in the 1970s, two books appeared that are still widely used today: Walter Laqueur and his *History of Zionism* and Howard Sachar and his *History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time. The Modern History of Israel*, which was published in 1975 by Noah Lucas, had already foretold the appearance of 'new Israeli history' of the 1980s. In the same year, also *Beginnings of Zionism* were published by David Vital.

When the so-called 'new history' appeared for the first time, it was mostly identified with the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 but has since spread to other topics. In this historiography, suddenly the differences between the external and internal affairs, between politics and society, experts from Israel and diaspora are not as clear as they used to be. Of special importance here is the attempt to alter the entire framework of Jewish national history, so well-known from the dominating historiography (Volkov 1996, 91). Today, we could speak of the 'new history' in more general terms and could say that it became the main direction of Israeli and general Jewish historiography as well as other historiography on Jews, produced also at numerous departments of Jewish studies across the Western World and published in various journals in several languages. Instead of a 'new history', some rather speak of postmodern approaches to historical research, where deconstruction, contextualisation, and recognition of several layers of meanings appear, as well as does the research of up to then less studied aspects of history, such as the role of women, history of daily life or other issues. In accordance with the development within the general historiography grew the importance of research of social history, partially started by Baron in his fundamental work, where the historian within the Jewish context pays attention to the roles of institutions such as family, school, synagogue, voluntary organisations and so on, but not without taking into account political history, not only in the sense of a secular non-Jewish authority, but also in the sense of exploring the institutions of Jewish political and legal autonomy (Katz 1993, 91). From early 1980s, certain Jewish historians, for instance Bonfil and Elliott Horowitz, started to examine how the models and constructs from cultural anthropology would be leading to new questions and styles of research of the premodern Jewish culture



and society (Marcus 1990, 123). In recent period, such books with new perspective appeared in all fields of the contemporary Jewish studies: Biblical studies, Talmudic studies, studies of the Land of Israel, and Jewish history, as well as all the other related fields: oriental studies, cultural studies, and, of course, sociology and anthropology.

Also the history of historiography is quite a new direction and in the case of Jews even more so. Extremely important milestone is the appearance of a book called *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, which was published by Yerushalmi first in 1982, when a new period of introspection into history and practice of Jewish historians begins (Myers 1998a, 2–3). Bonfil (1988, 83) even sees Yerushalmi as someone who »has significantly altered the terms of reference which now define the field«. Another such book is the first history of Jewish historians published by Michael in 1993 in Hebrew under the title *Jewish Historical Writing since the Renaissance until the Modern Times*. Of no less importance are also the unique 27 Beiheft of *History and Theory: Essays in Jewish Historiography* from 1988, the book *The State of Jewish Studies*, edited by Shaye Cohen and Edward Greenstein in 1990, or the book *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, published in 1998 and edited by David Myers and David Ruderman. In 1998, also *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, edited by Elishiva Carlebach, John M. Efron and David N. Myers, appeared. Additional texts had been written after 2000 with some new fundamental works appearing since 2018. In 2018, in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Volume 6, edited by Robert Chazan, chapter 30, written by Eva Haverkamp, is dedicated to historiography. In 2019, as volume 102 of *Studia Judaica*, *Jewish Historiography Between Past and Future: 200 Years of Wissenschaft des Judentums* appeared, and in 2020, *The Routledge Companion to Jewish History and Historiography* was published. The debate on Jewish historiography is, as shown, very much alive. This internally directed shift of the Jewish historians is not only a product of internal self-contextual decision, but also a result of the time. Present-day students of Jewish history »inhabit the same postmodern world as other historians, a world in which fixed meaning – literary, historical or otherwise – is assumed *not* to exist« (Myers 1998a, 4). It is this scepticism of the postmodern moment about the possibility of historical truthfulness that has, among other things, led to this new critical self-awareness among the historians.



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