

# Disciplining Jewish Knowledge: Cultures of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* at 200

by Mirjam Thulin/Markus Krah

In 2018, we celebrate the bicentennial of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the early Jewish Studies that began in the nineteenth century and introduced critical historical research into Jewish sources, using all academic methods available, including non-Jewish sources or the comparison with them. Today, the academic study of Judaism exists in various national and cultural contexts. Its three centers – Israel, the United States, and Germany – have different labels and forms for it such as “Jewish Studies,” “Jewish Science” (*Madat ha-Yahadut*), “Judaic Studies,” or “Jewish Theology.”<sup>1</sup> Their differences notwithstanding, they all refer to the year 1818 as the founding date of their disciplines. In that year, Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) published his essay *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur* (“Something on Rabbinic Literature”), which unfolded the thematic field of modern Jewish Studies for the first time.<sup>2</sup> As Michael A. Meyer and Ismar Schorsch emphasize in the double interview opening this issue, Zunz’s essay initiated a “Copernican revolution” by marking the turn to history in Jewish scholarship. The new historical consciousness among the Jews dethroned divine revelation as the source of authoritative and meaning-making knowledge, as it gave preference to

<sup>1</sup> The most recent accounts on the contents and theories of Jewish Studies are: Andrew Bush: *Jewish Studies. A Theoretical Introduction*, New Brunswick 2011; Christina von Braun, Micha Brumlik (eds.): *Handbuch Jüdische Studien*, Köln 2018. For a classical introduction, see: Günter Stemberger: *Einführung in die Judaistik*, München 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Leopold Zunz: *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur. Nebst Nachrichten über ein altes bis jetzt ungedrucktes hebräisches Werk* (1818), in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Herausgegeben vom Curatorium der „Zunzstiftung“. 3 Bände in einem Band, vol. 1, Berlin 1818 (reprint Hildesheim 1976), pp. 1–31.

human agency in history. Eventually, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* thereby helped to open the road to the modernization of Judaism.

## 1. “Re-Orientation of our Wissenschaft:” The Centennial of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

One hundred years ago, the centennial of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* took place in a world shaken by war and holding uncertain prospects for the Jews around the globe. By then, Jewish Studies had still not found their way into the university. Instead, rabbinical seminaries in Europe and the US were prospering, as were other institutions of the academic study of Judaism, such as highly regarded professional journals, scholarly societies and associations, large-scale transnational research projects, and publishing houses that printed the findings and works of the Jewish scholars.

In those days, Ismar Elbogen (1874–1943), then professor at the *Hochschule (Lehranstalt) für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) in Berlin, reviewed the first century of Jewish Studies.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, he gave his talk, on a Monday evening at the scholarship fund of the *Hochschule*, in early 1918 under the impression of the ongoing war that should not end until November of the same year. After speculating about the expectable consequences for the Jews after the war, Elbogen turned to his subject: the state of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the plea for a vital re-orientation (“Neuorientierung”) of Jewish Studies after its first one hundred years.

In his short chronological overview, Elbogen pointed to the legacy of the father of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Leopold Zunz, and emphasized that the founder had left him and his colleagues – and Elbogen thought and spoke then only of male scholars, of course – big footsteps to follow. He reminded his audience that modern Jewish scholarship in the shape of *Wissenschaft* was different from traditional Jewish scholarship, and emphasized that the mission of *Wissenschaft* was to utilize all academic tools and methods, namely systematics, classification, and critique as well as the recording and presentation of the (Jewish) reality.

<sup>3</sup> Ismar Elbogen: Neuorientierung unserer Wissenschaft, in: *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 62 (1918) 26, pp. 81–96. On the essay, see Kerstin von der Krone: *Wissenschaft in Öffentlichkeit. Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Zeitschriften*, Berlin 2011, pp. 398–402. On the first hundred years of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Studies from 1818 to 1919*, in: idem, *From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, Hanover, NH 1994, pp. 345–359.

Following Zunz, Elbogen highlighted the necessary close relationship between Jewish and general studies in presenting their research, but also in demonstrating the relevance of the Jewish discipline. This was also why it was only with Zunz that a new epoch of Jewish scholarship as a “critical discipline” had begun, Elbogen stressed.<sup>4</sup> Nothing distinguished *Wissenschaft des Judentums* from other disciplines but its topic; and yet, according to Elbogen, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* lacked a clear-cut definition. For Elbogen, Zunz’s early definition of *Wissenschaft* as a largely Jewish philological subject was too narrow. Historical scholarship had rather revealed new themes and insights, not least in connection to the non-Jewish environment.

Elbogen described the relationship between *Wissenschaft* and Judaism as interdependent and most obvious in the name *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In regard to the practitioners of Judaism, probably with a view to Orthodox colleagues in the field, Elbogen was convinced that the Jewish religion or religious positioning could never be shaken by academically critical insights and conclusions. Moreover, the term “Judaism [as] containing both a religious and national category,” as Elbogen explained, was purposefully chosen by Zunz and his circle, precisely because of its ambiguity. Elbogen for his part, however, advocated for the name “Jewish theology.” Following the philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Elbogen understood Jewish theology not as a narrow dogmatic system but as an academic discipline on the basis of a philological historical subject with a critical method.

As sources for *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or Jewish theology, Elbogen kept exclusively Jewish texts in sight. Apparently, he was not overly amenable to other source material than the textual accounts. On the basis of this text orientation, he argued for the necessity of a general systematics of Jewish Studies that defined topics and terms more precisely and would lead to clear interpretations. Moreover, he spoke for the professionalization of Jewish Studies that in its first one hundred years had remained the occupation of usually overworked rabbis, whose scholarship was *volens nolens* superficial. In this context, Elbogen supported the call of a then still a young fellow in the field by the name of Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) who had proposed the establishment of an “Academy of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, such an academy was finally

<sup>4</sup> Elbogen, *Neuorientierung unserer Wissenschaft*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Elbogen, *Neuorientierung unserer Wissenschaft*, p. 96, points to: Franz Rosenzweig: *Zeit ists... Gedanken über das jüdische Bildungsproblem des Augenblicks*; an Hermann Cohen, Berlin 1918.

founded in 1919 in Berlin, and the institution became a meeting point and productive think tank of Jewish scholars at that time.<sup>6</sup> Elbogen's reference to this call for a new institutional home of *Wissenschaft*, by which he concluded his review of the first century of Jewish Studies, indicates the relationship between Ismar Elbogen and Franz Rosenzweig. In his essay in this volume of PaRDeS, Benjamin Sax shows how Rosenzweig used Elbogen's research on liturgy in the *Star of Redemption*, an indication of the critical role *Wissenschaft* played in the formation of Rosenzweig's philosophical methodology.

After the centennial and the foundation of the Academy, nobody anticipated, of course, that Jewish Studies in Europe would come to a brutal end only fourteen years later. The destruction of European Jewry was accompanied by the destruction of Jewish Studies and its personnel. Ismar Elbogen took refuge in the US and taught at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He died in New York in 1943.

Many scholars and institutions that collectively embodied *Wissenschaft des Judentums* attempted to emigrate to the US and Israel/Palestine;<sup>7</sup> however, many institutions and traditions were irretrievably torn off. Still, Israel and the US became the new centers of Jewish Studies. Since the 1960s, Germany also institutionalized the subject of "Judaic Studies" (Judaistik) through political will, and is nowadays the third center of Jewish Studies in the world.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Transnational and Diverse Cultures of Jewish Studies Today: The Bicentennial of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

The development and the history of modern Jewish scholarship more generally have been the subject of great attention in recent years.<sup>9</sup> The networks

<sup>6</sup> David N. Myers: The Fall and Rise of Jewish Historicism. The Evolution of the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1919–1934), in: Hebrew Union College Annual, 63 (1992), pp. 107–144.

<sup>7</sup> Christhardt Hoffmann/Daniel R. Schwartz: Early but Opposed – Supported but Late. Two Berlin Seminaries Which Attempted to Move Abroad, in: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 36 (1991), pp. 267–304; Robert Jütte: Die Emigration der deutschsprachigen „Wissenschaft des Judentums“. Die Auswanderung jüdischer Historiker nach Palästina 1933–1945, Stuttgart 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Andreas Lehnardt (ed.): Judaistik im Wandel. Ein halbes Jahrhundert Forschung und Lehre über das Judentum in Deutschland, Berlin 2017.

<sup>9</sup> *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was the core topic of the academic year 2014/15 fellow group at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia. See: <http://katz.sas.upenn.edu/fellowship-program/programs/2014>. Among the most immediately helpful result of the fellows' research is the annotated bibliography of secondary literature on *Wissenschaft* by

and institutions of Jewish Studies have been further discussed in the scientific community, for instance in the context of the nature of Jewish encyclopedias.<sup>10</sup> With them, the protagonists and agents of early Jewish Studies and the scholarly thematic priorities and attitudes of specific figures, for example Ignac Goldziher's contribution to Islamic Studies, could be presented in detail.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, cohorts of graduates of the institutions of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* have been analyzed more deeply such as those which became field rabbis ("Feldrabbiner") in World War I,<sup>12</sup> and rabbis that were forced to emigrate due to the rise of National Socialism.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, classical biographies and relationship histories between scholars were (and still are) the topic of recent projects and publications, for example of an edited volume on Ludwig August Frankl,<sup>14</sup> and a just finished research project on Italian and German Jewish networks of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, there are still many aspects awaiting research. Biographies of scholars of *Wissenschaft*, especially lesser known ones, second-tier and late scholars in this tradition, are still a desideratum. Moreover, the impact of *Wissenschaft* in different national and cultural settings, especially in previously underexplored contexts such as in the Eastern European lands, their specific intellectual and institutional context of non-Jewish or secular academia

Amos Bitzan: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0157.xml> Moreover, the fellows produced an online exhibition, entitled "Doing Wissenschaft: The Active Study of Judaism as Practice, 1818–2018," with special attention to the objects and material cultures of *Wissenschaft* (<http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/cajs/fellows15/>). Parallel to the online presentation, the Leo Baeck Institute in New York created an exhibition on "Wissenschaft des Judentums: Jewish Studies and the Shaping of Jewish Identity." The exhibition topics can be viewed at <https://www.lbi.org/2015/02/wissenschaft-judentum-jewish-studies-jewish-identity-exhibition/>.

<sup>10</sup> Arndt Engelhardt: *Arsenale jüdischen Wissens. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Göttingen 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Otfried Fraisse: *Ignac Goldziher's monotheistische Wissenschaft. Zur Historisierung des Islam*, Göttingen 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Sabine Hank / Uwe Hank / Hermann Simon: *Feldrabbiner in den deutschen Streitkräften des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Berlin 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the project of Cornelia Wilhelm on "German Refugee Rabbis in the United States, 1933–1989," see [http://www.jgk-geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/jgk\\_neuzeit/personen/professoren/wilhelm\\_cornelia/research/index.html](http://www.jgk-geschichte.uni-muenchen.de/jgk_neuzeit/personen/professoren/wilhelm_cornelia/research/index.html).

<sup>14</sup> Louise Hecht (ed.): *Ludwig August Frankl (1810–1894). Eine jüdische Biographie zwischen Okzident und Orient*, Köln 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See the finished dissertation project of Francesca Paolin, at the Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany, entitled: "Die deutsche und italienische Wissenschaft des Judentums im 19. Jahrhundert im Spiegel im deutsch-jüdischen und italienisch-jüdischen Publizistik." For a project summary, see [http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/46071640/70\\_prom\\_paolin](http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/46071640/70_prom_paolin).

would still need much more attention. Moreover, criticism of *Wissenschaft* as well as the influence of *Wissenschaft* on contemporary religious Judaism are still underexplored. As a research essay on the history of *Wissenschaft* suggested in 2013, the study of individual protagonists, the consideration of the ideologies of *Wissenschaft* and its fields like philology, Bible studies, Jewish history, and philosophy, and the history of the institutions and networks of Jewish Studies may be themes along which the broad corpus of research literature could be systematized.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Cultures of *Wissenschaft* at 200: New Perspectives in this Issue

On the occasion of the bicentennial of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, this issue of PaRDeS aims to look at various cultures of *Wissenschaft* that developed in different places and in connection to diverse branches of Judaism. Most contributions are devoted to nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft*. Then, Jewish Studies had become a domain of rabbinical scholars, divided along the three main denominations of modern Judaism – Reform, positive-historical or Conservative Judaism, and Orthodoxy – which also defined the prevalent cultures of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the time. Eventually, by the end of the nineteenth century, also specific local and traditional academic cultures shaped the discipline in addition to the denominational diversification. Various scholars involved in these developments are subjects of the contributions in this issue. Almost every article shows, implicitly or explicitly, that, in the absence of academic institutions of *Wissenschaft*, its culture was the culture that individual scholars, all men in our case, created and spread by way of their networks.

A few of these scholars have recently been portrayed in biographies and studies.<sup>17</sup> Most prominently, 130 years after this death also the father of the

<sup>16</sup> Kerstin von der Krone/Mirjam Thulin: *Wissenschaft in Context. A Research Essay on the Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, 58 (2013), pp. 249–280. Another survey is: Andreas Kilcher/Thomas Meyer (eds.): *Die "Wissenschaft des Judentums". Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, Paderborn 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Some of these works were occasioned by anniversaries, such as the hundredth anniversary of the death of Solomon Schechter and the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Buber's death. Among the publications are Theodor Dunkelgrün: *Solomon Schechter. A Jewish Scholar in Victorian England (1882–1902)*, in: *Jewish Historical Studies*, 48 (2016), pp. 1–8; Ismar Schorsch: *Schechter's Indebtedness to Zunz*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 9–16; Mirjam Thulin: *Wissenschaft and*

*Wissenschaft des Judentums* himself, Leopold Zunz, became the subject of a comprehensive biographical study by Ismar Schorsch, reviewed in this issue.<sup>18</sup> Also in this issue, Mirjam Thulin turns to Zunz by analyzing his correspondence with David Kaufmann, professor at the rabbinical seminary in Budapest.

The ideology of *Wissenschaft* and the cultures of Orthodox Jewish Studies have received more attention in recent years. Religious scholars of Jewish Studies in particular have filled that void and devoted their works to specific aspects connected to Orthodox modern scholarship as well as to several, lesser known proponents in the field that until then were mostly remembered through hagiographic accounts. Often, this research is accompanied by a look at the reactions to and reception of *Wissenschaft* in Eastern European lands such as in Hungary<sup>19</sup> and Poland.<sup>20</sup> In this issue, Dimitri Bratkin takes a look at the development of Jewish and Oriental Studies, respectively, in Russia by presenting new archival material from St. Petersburg about Daniel Abramovich Chwolson.

In regard to Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Asaf Yedidya's study of 2013 gave a first overview from 1873, when the Orthodox rabbinical seminary in Berlin was founded by Esriel Hildesheimer, to 1956 when Bar-Ilan University opened its doors.<sup>21</sup> In this issue, Yedidya presents the scholar and writer Zeev Jawitz and his national Orthodox concept of Jewish studies. Besides Yedidya, three younger scholars have contributed to this issue from the perspective of religious Jewish Studies scholars. They take a look at traditional scholars who were critical of or even refused to accept the academic tools and methods in modern Jewish scholarship. Eliezer Brodt introduces the scholar and book collector Mattityahu Strashun from Vilna and his perception

Correspondence. Solomon Schechter between Europe and America, in: *ibid.*, 109–137. The proceedings were prepared at two conferences in Philadelphia and Oxford in 2015, see <https://schechterconf.wordpress.com>. The most recent biography of Buber by Dominique Bourel was first published in French: Dominique Bourel: Martin Buber. Sentinelle de l'humanité, Paris 2015. The German translation is Martin Buber. Was es heißt, ein Mensch zu sein. Biografie, Gütersloh 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Ismar Schorsch: *Leopold Zunz. Creativity in Adversity*, Philadelphia 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Tamás Turán / Carsten Wilke (eds.): *Modern Jewish Scholarship in Hungary. The 'Science of Judaism' between East and West*, Oldenburg 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Natalia Aleksion: *Ammunition in the Struggle for National Rights. Jewish Historians in Poland between the Two World Wars*, New York University 2010 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>21</sup> Asaf Yedidya: *Criticized Criticism. Orthodox Alternatives to Wissenschaft des Judentums, 1873–1956*, Jerusalem 2013 (Hebrew).

of and connections to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*; Eliezer Sariel explores the thought and historiography of Yitzchak Isaac Halevy Rabinovitz, founder of the Ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael (“Union of Israel”), and Esther Solomon presents the thought of the Talmud scholar and philosopher Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler and his view on secular studies and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Another still recent aspect of the history of Jewish Studies is the genesis of Kabbalah research in connection to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Gershom Scholem often claimed that he invented this field *ex nihilo*. However, recent studies have shown that scholars of early Jewish Studies had tilled the field before him, among them Adolf Jellinek, about whose study of Spanish Kabbalism Samuel J. Kessler writes in this issue. It becomes clear that Jellinek’s studies must have shaped and defined Scholem’s research. In this issue, Rose Stair turns to Scholem’s critical view of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and asks about the fiction of historical objectivity. Two recently published biographies on Gershom Scholem, both reviewed in this issue, analyze the most dazzling star of Kabbalah research.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the Potsdam School of Jewish Theology for its support of this issue. It is also made possible by the funding of the German Association for Jewish Studies (Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien, vjs). The type setting office, the *Universitätsverlag Potsdam*, and our copy editor, Dr. Anne Popiel, made its production a smooth and pleasant process. Moreover, we wish to thank the peer reviewers from Israel, the U. S., and Germany who gave their time, scholarly expertise, and professional commitment. Steven M. Glazer, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Beth Emeth in Herndon/Virginia, kindly provided the cover image. The license plate of his “Zunz Mobile” testifies to his creative fascination with the father of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Last but not least, we would also like to thank the authors and reviewers of this issues for their inspiring and rich contributions and their cooperation.

<sup>22</sup> Amir Engel: Gershom Scholem. An Intellectual Biography, Chicago 2017; Noam Zadoff: Gershom Scholem. From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back, Waltham 2018.