

A Historian from the World of Torah: The Historiographical Approach of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy Rabinowitz (1847–1914)

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Abstract

The article examines the work of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy, arguably the most significant Orthodox response to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school of historiography. Halevy himself exemplified the Orthodox struggle against *Wissenschaft*, yet his work expressed a commitment to modern historiographical discipline that suggested an internalization of some of the very same premises adopted by *Wissenschaft*. While criticizing the representatives of *Wissenschaft*, Halevy was, at the same time, fighting for the internalization of its innovative characteristics into Orthodox society. He saw himself as a leader of a movement working towards the development of Orthodox Jewish studies and his application of modern historiographic principles from an Orthodox worldview as creating critical Orthodox historiography. Halevy's approach promotes an understanding of Orthodoxy as a complex phenomenon, of which the struggle against modern secularization is just one of many characteristics.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the complexity of Yitzhak Isaac Halevy Rabinowitz's historiographical approach.¹ On the one hand, Halevy exemplified the Orthodox struggle against the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* School of historiography. On the other hand, his work expressed a newfound commitment to modern historiographical discipline, which meant that he internalized some of the same premises adopted by *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. While striving

¹ His family name was Rabinowitz, but he is known as Halevy and will be referred to as such throughout the article.

against the representatives of *Wissenschaft*, Halevy was, at the same time, fighting for the internalization of its innovative characteristics into Orthodox society and against the segregation of that society. He saw himself as a leader of a movement towards the development of Orthodox Jewish studies. His work constituted a comprehensive effort to apply modern historiographic principles from an Orthodox worldview, thereby creating critical Orthodox historiography.

In the context of the growing interest of academic scholarship in Orthodox Jewish society since the 1980s, historians have begun to examine the literary genre of Orthodox historiography, which began to develop in the nineteenth century. Until the end of the twentieth century, scholars focused on the ideological and polemical nature of this genre, based on the overall perception of Orthodox society as a society on the defensive. The epithet “hagiography with footnotes,” coined by Ada Rappaport-Albert at the end of the 1980s in relation to the writing of history among Chabad Hasidim, can be taken to express a more general assessment among historians of the quality of Orthodox historiography of this period.² Since the twenty-first century, a change in this perception can be discerned, together with a growing tendency to examine Orthodox historical writings more broadly, and not just as an ideological reaction.³ This article follows the second approach and analyses the methodology

² Ada Rappaport-Albert: Hagiography with Footnotes. Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism, in: *History and Theory*, 27 (1988), pp. 119–159. For similar approaches, see Haim Gertner’s bibliography in the YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (Gershon Hundert, ed., New Haven 2008): http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Historiography/Orthodox_Historiography, as well as Jacob Barnai: *Shabta’ut. hebetim hevrativim* [Sabbateanism. Social Perspectives], Jerusalem 2001, pp. 41–120, and Nahum Karlinski: The Dawn of Hasidic-Haredi Historiography, in: *Modern Judaism* 27 (2007), pp. 20–46. Gertner, who examined traditional chronicles, argued that Orthodox historiographical writing dates as early as the first half of the 19th century: Haim Gertner: *Reshitah shel ketivah historit ortodoksit be-mizrah eropah: ha’arakhah me’hudeset* [The Beginning of “Orthodox Historiography” in Eastern Europe; a Reassessment], in: *Zion* 67 (2002), pp. 293–336.

³ David Ellenson: *Jewish Meaning in a World of Choice*, Philadelphia 2014, pp. 249–267; Richard S. Sarason: *Rabbinic Literature, Rabbinic History, and Scholarly Thinking. Wissenschaft and Beyond*, in: Andreas Gotzmann/Christian Wiese (eds.), *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness. Identities, Encounters, Perspectives*, Leiden 2007, pp. 93–109; Asaf Yedidya: *Orthodox Reactions to “Wissenschaft des Judentums,”* in: *Modern Judaism* 30 (2010), pp. 69–94; Asaf Yedidya: *Orthodox Strategies in the Research of the “Wissenschaft des Judentums,”* in: *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 5 (2011), pp. 67–79; Asaf Yedidya: *Biqqoret mevuyqeret. Alternativot ortodoksivot le-‘mada’e ha-yahadut 1873–1956* [Criticised Criticism: Orthodox Alternatives to *Wissenschaft des Judentums, 1873–1956*], Jerusalem 2013; Hanan Gafni: *Peshutah shel Mishna. Iyyunim be-heqer hazal ba-et ha-hahadashah* [The Mishnah’s ‘Plain Sense’: A Study of Modern Talmudic Scholarship], Bnei Brak 2011.

of Halevy, who presented the most comprehensive, profound, and significant Orthodox response to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school of historiography concerning the history of the Oral Torah. To a certain extent, Halevy worked in an intellectual no-man's-land and did not enjoy the honor this might have been expected to earn him. The Orthodox world did not appreciate the religious value of his work, while the scholarly world was alienated by his arcane Hebrew style.⁴

⁴ Exceptions are those who discuss Halevy as part of the fabric of 19th-century Orthodox Jewry and historians of the rabbinic period who regarded him as an early pioneer in the field, see Eliezer Sarel: *Historion bi-reshut ha-torah. Qavvim le-darko ha-historyografit shel ha-rav Yitzhak Isaac Halevy (1847–1914)* [A Historian from the World of Torah. The Historiographic Approach of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy (1847–1914)], in: *Mosheshet Yisra'el* 4 (2007), pp. 33–75. Mordechai Breuer effectively presented the professional element of Halevy's writing, although he did not go into particulars. See Mordechai Breuer: *Modernity Within Tradition. The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, New York 1992, pp. 193–201; Mordechai Breuer: *Ḥokhmat Yisra'el. shalosh gishot ortodoqsiyot* [Three Orthodox Approaches to Wissenschaft], in: Shaul Yisraeli/Norman Lamm/Yitzhak Raphael (eds.), *Sefer yovel li-kevod morenu ha-ga'on Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevy Soloveitchik* [In Honor of Moreinu, Hagaon Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevy Soloveitchik], Jerusalem 1984, pp. 856–865. Asaf Yedidya placed him on the spectrum of Orthodox with stress on Orthodox scholars who dealt with Judaic Studies (Yedidya, *Biqoret mevuyqeret*, pp. 94–147). Yedidya's survey of Halevy's works is encyclopaedic. This article will attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of Halevy's historiographic methodology. For a narrower, more focused analysis of Halevy's methodology in the context of his approach to the works of Josephus see: Eliezer Sarel: *Can't Live with Him, Can't Live without Him. Josephus in the Orthodox Historiography of Isaac Halevy and Ze'ev Ya'avetz*, in: Andrea Schatz (ed.): *The Reception of Josephus in Modern Jewish Culture*, Leiden 2018 (in print). Asher Reichel dedicated his doctoral dissertation, originally published in English, to Halevy. Asher Reichel: *Isaac Halevy, 1847–1914. Spokesman and Historian of Jewish Tradition*, New York 1969. See also Asher Reichel: *Iggerot Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy*, Jerusalem 1972. Reichel does not attempt a comprehensive study and analysis of the contents of Dorot ha-rishonim. Family members and Orthodox admirers published a memorial volume in 1964, written in an elegiac spirit and devoid of any critical dimension. See: Moshe Auerbach (ed.): *Sefer zikaron le-rabbi Yitzhaq Ayzik Halevy* [Anthology in Honor of Rabbi Yitzhak Issac Halevy], Bnei Brak 1964. See also: Mordechai Eliash: *Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy*, in: Shmuel Kalman Mirsky (ed.), *Who's Who in Eastern European Judaic Studies*, Tel Aviv 1959, pp. 65–115. The later historians for whom Halevy is a relevant reference include David M. Goldblatt and David Weiss Halivni, see: David M. Goodblatt: *Y.I. Halevy*, in: Jacob Neusner (ed.), *The Formation of Babylonian Talmud*, Leiden 1970, pp. 26–47. Halivni refers to Halevy throughout his work, notably, in a series of references in his introduction to *Tractate Bava Batra*, see David Halivni: *Meqorot u-masorot massekhet Bava Batra* [Sources and Traditions: A Source Critical Commentary on the Talmud Tractate Bava Batra], Jerusalem, 2008, pp. 6n3, 7n4, 10n18, 25n74, 26n 77, 27n79, 41n107, 67n 45, 70n49, 75n64, 78n77, 105n30, 128n21, 146n21.

2. Personal Background

Born in Lithuania in 1847 into an Orthodox, non-Hasidic milieu, Isaac Halevy received a yeshiva education which included, inter alia, studies in Volozhin, the leading yeshiva of the Orthodox world in the nineteenth century. Halevy never received formal academic training. His historical knowledge and analysis were based on an autodidactic study of Hebrew and German sources, languages he was able to read. However, his lack of academic training contributed to his arcane writing style.⁵ In 1880, while a businessman serving as one of the fundraisers of the Volozhin Yeshiva, he published anonymously a series of articles in the Orthodox journal *Halevanon* in which he attacked the initiative to establish a Russian rabbinic seminar in the spirit of the moderately reformist Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau (Wrocław). At the same time, he encouraged Orthodox rabbis to expand their knowledge beyond Halakhah.⁶ This duality symbolized his life-long approach. He left Lithuania for Pressburg (Bratislava) in 1895, when his business went bankrupt. In 1897, Halevy, who came from a wealthy family, published in Pressburg the first in his series of historical volumes, *Dorot ha-rishonim* [First Generations]. In his books Halevy presented original analysis which he based on a wide range of primary halakhic sources, integrated with secondary sources written in Hebrew or in German. His writing style closely resembled that of the responsa, a genre in Jewish tradition, compiled from the written decisions of rabbinic authorities, in which the adjudicator not only presented his conclusions but also explained them in details and in relation or in opposition to other opinions. Two further volumes followed during his lifetime, and the other volumes were published posthumously from his manuscripts.⁷

⁵ At least in one case he integrated analysis of a Greek source in his historical discussion (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 631).

⁶ Yitzhak Isaac Halevy (anonymously: *Divray Shalom Ve-emet* [Words of Peace and Truth], in: *Halevanon*, 1880, (20.02.1880), pp. 227–229, (09.04.1880), pp. 273–274, (28.05.1880), pp. 329–331. *Yedidya*, *Biqqoret mevuyqeret*, p. 149. “*Divray Shalom Ve-emet*” takes its eponymous title from the early *Maskil Naphtali Herz Wessely*’s text of the same name written a century before.

⁷ Listed below are the various volumes of Halevy’s oeuvre and the somewhat complex order in which they were published: Yitzhak Isaac Halevy: *Dorot ha-rishonim III: Mi-ḥatimat ha-talmud ‘ad sof yeme ha-ge’onim* [Vom Abschluss des Talmuds bis zum Ende der Geonim], Pressburg, 1897. Despite being the third volume, it was published first. Yitzhak Isaac Halevy: *Dorot ha-rishonim Iia-Iib: Min sof yeme ha-Mishna ‘ad aḥar ḥatimat ha-talmud* [Von der Beendigung der Mishna bis zum Abschluss des Talmuds], Frankfurt a. M., 1901. Yitzhak Isaac Halevy: *Dorot ha-rishonim Ic: Mi-sof yeme ha-ḥashmona’im ‘ad yeme netzive Roma* [Umfasst den Zeitraum vom Ende der Hasmonäerzeit bis zur Einsetzung der römischen Landpfleger (Encompasses the period from the destruction of the Temple to the completion of the Mishnah)], Frankfurt a. M.,

After several years of wandering in Europe, he settled in Germany in 1902, where he was appointed a supervisor of adult study in the Hamburg *Beis Medrash (Kloiz)*, a position he held until his death in 1914.⁸ During this period he was exposed directly to the acculturated Jewish community in Germany and continued his historical writings, primarily on the rabbinic period. Halevy was one of the most important figures in the *Jüdisch-Literarische Gesellschaft* (Jewish Literary Society), established in Frankfurt am Main in 1902, whose members included Rabbi Dr. Jonas Bondi (1862–1929), Rabbi Dr. Heymann Kottke (1860–1913), Rabbi Salomon Menachem Bamberger (1869–1920), and Gerson Lange (1868–1923). The *Jüdisch-Literarische Gesellschaft* became a separate school within the Orthodox community in Germany.⁹ On the one hand, they agreed with the approach of Rabbi Dr. Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), the founder of modern Orthodoxy, and supported Orthodox segregation and opposed collaboration with the non-Orthodox. On the other hand, they encouraged scientific inquiry into the Jewish tradition as did the Neo-Orthodox school in Berlin led by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Hildesheimer (1820–1899). Using his East-European background and his familiarity with Central-European Orthodox Jewry, Halevy played an important role in the negotiations and cooperation between the Eastern and Central European Orthodox communities in order to create a united Orthodox non-Zionist political movement.¹⁰ It was he who coined the moniker “Agudas Yisroel.”¹¹ This wide and varied range of experiences helped shape Halevy’s oeuvre which will be discussed in the following section, beginning with its conservative-Orthodox elements and moving on to its modernist elements.

1901. Yitzhak Isaac Halevy: Dorot ha-rishonim Ie. Me-aḥar ha-ḥurban ‘ad ḥatimat ha-Mishna [Umfasst den Zeitraum von der Zerstörung des Tempels bis zum Abschluss der Mishnah (Encompasses the period from the destruction of the Temple to the completion of the Mishnah)], Frankfurt a. M., 1906. This volume was published posthumously by Salomon Bamberger. Yitzhak Issac Halevy: Dorot ha-rishonim. Tequfat ha-miqra, Jerusalem 1939. This volume, which included Halevy’s notes on Isaac Hirsch Weiss’ Dor ve-dorshav, was published posthumously by Baruch M. Levin. Yitzhak Issac Halevy: Notes on Isaac Hirsch Weiss’ Dor ve-dorshav, in: Baruch M. Levin (ed.): Tequfat ha-miqra, Jerusalem 1939, pp. 261–292. Yitzhak Isaac Halevy: Dorot ha-rishonim Id, in: Moshe Auerbach (ed.): Sefer zikaron le-rabbi Yitzḥaq Ayzik Halevy, Bnei Brak, 1964, pp. 5–184. Volumes Ia–Ib were never published. Volumes Ic, Ie, II and III of Dorot ha-rishonim offer two systems of pagination: (Hebrew) folio numbers on the left, and page numbers on the right. In this article, citations referring to Dorot ha-rishonim refer to the page numbers.

⁸ Sources on his activities before coming to Hamburg are sparse.

⁹ Yedidya, Biqqoret mevuyqeret, pp. 182–94. Nils H. Roemer: Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany. Between History and Faith, Madison 2005, pp. 127–128.

¹⁰ Reichel, Iggerot, pp. 55–67.

¹¹ Reichel, Iggerot, p. 177.

3. Orthodox Tendencies in *Dorot ha-rishonim*

Halevy saw himself as an integral part of Orthodox Judaism and was accepted as such by supporters and detractors alike.¹² The article will seek to demonstrate how his Orthodox viewpoint is reflected in the various aspects of his historical studies: historiographic conservatism, apologetics, negative attitude towards non-Orthodox historians, and his notion of divine intervention in the direction of the history of Israel.

3.1 No New Torah and No New Judaism: Halevy's Conservative View of the History of the Oral Law

Throughout the nineteenth century, the field of Jewish history was considered the uncontested terrain of the Maskilim and the *Wissenschaft* school historians. Not infrequently, historical inquiry was used as leverage to advance reforms in Jewish lifestyle.¹³ The proponents of change argued that the examination of the course of Jewish history revealed far-reaching, man-made transformations which could be seen as lending legitimacy to contemporary changes.¹⁴ Orthodox society was also called upon to contend with the advocates of change in the field of history. Halevy devoted himself to this challenge and cast his historiographic net from the First Temple period to the end of the period of the *Rishonim*, the rabbinic authorities of the high and late middle ages. For him, in diametrical opposition to reformist views, the study of history led to the conclusion that there were no man-made changes.

“The Jews, however, have no new Torah and no new Judaism. What was from the earliest times is what we see in the latest times, and what is found in Scripture is what is found in later homiletics, and the behavior of Elkana, Samuel and David was no different from the behavior of all Israel, until the end of the Second Temple period and is identical with what we have inherited in the tradition and what was recorded in the Mishnah.”¹⁵

¹² Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, pp. 193–201; Yedidya, *Biqqoret mevuyqeret*, pp. 182–192.

¹³ Michael A. Meyer (ed.): *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, [vol; 12], New York 1997, pp. 129–138. Ismar Schorsch: *From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, Hanover NH 1994, pp. 149–367.

¹⁴ Michael A. Meyer: *Abraham Geiger's Historical Judaism*, in: Jakob Josef Petuchowski (ed.), *New Perspectives on Abraham Geiger. An HUC-JIR Symposium*, New York 1975, pp. 1–3.

¹⁵ Halevy, *Tequmat ha-miqra*, p. 168.

In *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Halevy devoted considerable effort and detailed discussion to justify this position. In his view, it can be inferred from Scripture that throughout the First Temple period the Israelites strictly observed the laws of the Torah, the study of Torah and prayer.¹⁶ In several places he emphasized that this devotion to the laws of the Torah was in accord with the statements of the sages and the rabbinic authorities both during the time of the Mishnah (the *Tanaim*) and during the time of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud (*Amoraim*), while in other places he compared the observance of the commandments in the First Temple period with that of his own times.¹⁷ Moreover, he strove to demonstrate that the words of the prophets, depicting manifold deviations from the laws of the Torah, were directed towards a small minority whose guilt lay in the inappropriate worship of God rather than outright abandonment of that worship.¹⁸

Halevy directed the majority of his efforts to prove the conservatism and constancy of the Oral Law in the Second Temple subsequent *tanaitic* periods. In his view, the contents of the Oral Law were already in place at the time of the Sanhedrin (Great Assembly, a group of leaders representing all the sages). In his opinion, the Mishnah in general presented earlier materials, or alternatively, the argumentation of the *Tanaim* which was based on the Mishnah which had been set down long before.¹⁹

In his view, the disputes among the *Tanaim* touch on the fundamental material of the Mishnah.²⁰ He characterized the Oral Law as unified and constant from the third to the eleventh centuries of rabbinic scholarship, the *amoraitic*,

¹⁶ *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 332, 333n98; Ie, pp. 155–157, 168–171; *Tequmat ha-miqra*: pp. 3, 34, 37, 38, 39, 75, 80, 84–85n1, 104, 108, 116, 127, 130–131. Notes on Weiss' *Dor dor ve-dorshav* p. 274.

¹⁷ *Tanaim and Amoraim*: *Tequmat ha-miqra*, pp. 120, 124. Comparison of the observance of the mitzvot in the First Temple period with Halevy's own times: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 168; *Tequmat ha-miqra*, pp. 58, 60, 101.

¹⁸ See Halevy, *Tequmat ha-miqra*, 6, 11, 18 Notes on Weiss' *Dor dor ve-dorshav* p. 274 and Halevy, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 316, and Halevy: *Tequmat ha-miqra*, pp. 21, 24–25, 30–32, 38–39, 48, respectively. The same approach to the sin of the Golden Calf is to be found in the *Kuzari*. See Rabbi Yehuda Halevy: *The Kuzari*, Northvale 1998, pp. 38–42.

¹⁹ For the earlier mishnaic materials see Halevy, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 80n43, 205, 213, 294, 296; Ie, pp. 147, 151–152, 232, 250, 309n33, 442, 443n9, 469, 482, 867, 870, 872–873, 877; Notes on Weiss's *Dor dor ve-dorshav*: 291, 292; Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, pp. 141–142, 151, 162. For more on the argumentation of the *Tanaim* see *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 202, 204, 303–304, 350, 357, 435, 584.

²⁰ With the notable exception of a dispute between the School of Hillel and the School of Shamai over the case of the rival of a forbidden relative. See *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 213n30, 605n2).

sevoratic, and *geonite* eras.²¹ In addition to addressing specific periods, he presented a general picture of continuity without change from the third century to the late Middle Age (from the *Amoraim* through the times of the *Geonim* and the *Rishonim*): “From everything we have explained with regard to the yeshivot, it is clear that from their beginnings in Babylon to the end of the days of the Geonim everything was characterized by constancy and consistency.”²²

Considering Halevy’s conservative approach, it is not surprising that he adopted the position which asserts that no new rabbinic rules were innovated and no discrepancies settled as the result of the rabbinic Midrash (exegesis), rather these rules were transmitted from teacher to disciple over the generations and halakhic Midrash served merely to ground the extant teachings, not to innovate teachings.²³

At this point, it should be noted that there exists an internal contradiction in Halevy’s approach, which negates the possibility of halakhically innovative or determinative Midrash. Halevy emphasized the conservative aspect of the importance of the tradition, whereas the Talmud is, in fact, full of passages in which the Halakhah is clearly presented as emerging from the Midrash rather than as a tradition merely supported by the Midrash. In other words, Halevy’s claim, that the sages of the Talmud did not innovate Halakhot or settle disputes on the basis of scriptural Midrash is inconsistent with the plain sense of the talmudic text and the position of some of the *Rishonim* who understood it in that sense.²⁴ Halevy himself admitted that this position was somewhat

²¹ For the amoraic era see Halevy, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp.20–21, 48, 117; II, p.404. Ie, pp.874–875. For the sevoratic era see, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp.145–146; II, p.482. For the geonite era see Halevy, era: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp.32, 164, 215, 232.

²² Halevy, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III 225. Similarly, in *Dorot ha-rishonim* III: 217, 294.

²³ Halevy, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, p.155; Ie, p.307; Iie, pp.251n18, 487, 489, 492, 492n34, 500, 507–508, 545, 558; Notes on Weiss’ *Dor ve-dorshav*, p.279. Harris noted that rejecting the possibility of generative Midrash by the sages is characteristic of German Orthodoxy, as opposed to Eastern European Orthodoxy, and attributes this difference to the differing character of Orthodox life in those differing regions. Whereas in Lithuania the ideal of the brilliant scholar capable of creating novellas flourished, in Germany the ideal of working people committed to the tradition held sway. (See Jay M. Harris: *How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism*, Albany 1995, pp.249–250).

²⁴ Harris, *How do We Know?* pp.256–257. Harris notes the double-edged sword of the rejection of generative Midrash, but in my view, it is appropriate to more strongly emphasize the problematic position of Orthodoxy finding itself between the hammer of a conservative ideal and the anvil of the plain meaning of the Talmud and the interpretation of the *Rishonim*.

innovative.²⁵ In summary, it may be said that on the one hand, Halevy represented an extremely conservative position, but on the other hand, his position, in itself, was very innovative and diverged from the traditional pre-modern mainstream view of Ashkenazic rabbinical scholarship.²⁶

3.2 The History of Israel Going Out with a High Hand: Apologetics and Uncritical Approach to the Sages and to Israel

In his study of modern Orthodoxy in imperial Germany, Mordechai Breuer argues that apologetics held pride of place in the approach of Orthodox scholars in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century.²⁷ Similar to other apologists, Halevy did not reject, in principle, the use of the historical discipline for political purpose but he averred that his purpose was not advocacy, but rather an unvarnished inquiry into the truth on the basis of sources and facts rather than suppositions.²⁸ However, he also lent historiographic legitimacy to the laudatory depiction of the sages, serving as a counterweight to the scholars of the *Wissenschaft* school, whom he viewed as seeking to denigrate the Torah Sages.²⁹ In fact, the topics of *Dorot ha-rishonim* were not limited to responses to the statements of particular historians from the *Wissenschaft* school and were replete with complimentary depictions of the Sages and the Jewish people, often extending to attempts

²⁵ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 492n34.

²⁶ From the tenth to the 13th centuries, there was a view among Rishonim in Moslem countries that rejected the possibility of generative exegesis. (Harris, *How do We Know*, pp. 74–86, 253).

²⁷ Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, pp. 203–214. In the list of studies appearing in note 2 above is an expanded comment on the central role of apologetics in Orthodox historiography.

²⁸ This acceptance of the use of the historical discipline for political purposes is implied by his criticism of Josephus: “At a time when the nation was in dire straits, trampled upon by the Romans, it was incumbent upon the author of a history of Israel for the Romans and for the eyes of the Emperor to make an effort to mitigate the extent of their iniquity and depict Israel so as to win sympathy in the eyes of their conquerors, but Agrippas and Josephus conspired to depict all matters in a way that flattered Agrippas...” (Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 373). Halevy declared his purpose was not advocacy: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 37, 276; II, pp. 280–281; Ie, p. 373. Halevy declared his purpose was inquiry into the truth, see: Halevy, Dorot ha-rishonim III, pp. 4, 107, 145, 231, 269. Dorot ha-rishonim, II, Introduction, p. 170. Ic, pp. 84, 429, 669. Halevy declared his purpose to be inquiry based on sources and facts, see: Halevy, Dorot ha-rishonim III: Introduction, pp. 13, 64, 135, 210, 251; II, pp. 52, 215n17; Ic, pp. 70n35, 375, 511. This matter will be discussed broadly in the section on Halevy as a modern historian.

²⁹ Halevy believed such a depiction was consistent with historical veracity, see Dorot ha-rishonim II, p. 276. Ie, p. 373.

to blur criticism implied by the plain meaning of the statements of the sages themselves.³⁰

From Halevy's point of view, this was not a departure from the criteria he set for himself, but part of his worldview in which his historiographic oeuvre is a response to the *Wissenschaft* school. His intention in *Dorot ha-rishonim* was to uncover the truth that had been obscured by the *Wissenschaft* historians.³¹ It was therefore legitimate, in his view, to occasionally emphasize what he viewed as the obvious truth regarding the excellence of the sages and the Jewish people, without viewing himself as an apologist.

Halevy's tendency to minimize the existence of disputes regarding the history of the Oral Law is evidence of his apologetic approach, an example of which can be seen in his exposition of the disputes between the rabbinic scholars of the *geonite* period:

"We have not found *any instance* of dispute among the *Geonim* [...] if over the entire course of four hundred and fifty years a few instances can be found where the authorities' choice [for the post of Head of the Yeshiva] did not completely hit the target and there were those who murmured to themselves that they had been passed over unjustly, this is natural and inevitable as humans are not divine and do not know each other's thoughts, *but where can such a one be found who transgressed against* the generally approved and chosen determination, disputed it and created a faction to follow his path and create discord in Israel? Where can be found a dispute in the academy itself [...] as we are well aware from the writings of Rav Sherira Gaon himself that even though he took upon himself extra stringencies in his own home, God forbid, they did not create disputes."³²

³⁰ For laudatory depictions of the sages see: *Dorot ha-rishonim* III, pp. 169, 220, 229; II, pp. 19, 190, 260, 280, 288–289, 333, 335–336, 362, 429, 447; Ic, pp. 73, 91–93, 120, 430, 526–527, 534–536, 542–543, 547, 640–641, 644, 648, 672; Ie, pp. 3, 43, 47, 61, 119, 144, 291n28, 302, 317–318, 328, 330–331, 375, 385, 575, 625, 767; Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, pp. 21, 25, 52, 127, 132, 161; Notes on Weiss' *Dor dor ve-dorshav*, p. 288. For laudatory depictions of the Jewish people see: *Dorot ha-rishonim* II: 208, 252, 289, 603; Ic, pp. 25, 39n22, 328n92, 356, 480, 483–484, 486; Ie, pp. 638, 666; *Tequfat ha-miqra*, p. 77; Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, pp. 25, 126, 129, 157. For blurring criticism of sages see: *Dorot ha-rishonim* III, pp. 232, 263; II, p. 334; Ie, pp. 315, 768.

³¹ *Dorot ha-rishonim* II, pp. 514–515; Reichel, *Iggerot*, pp. 81, 84.

³² *Dorot ha-rishonim* III, p. 269, emphasis in the original. Halevy devoted an entire chapter to supporting his argument that there were no disputes among the sages in the *geonite* period (III, pp. 269–279). He claimed that if there were disagreements during the last centuries of the early Middle Ages they emerged in the context of the institution of the Exilarch.

Armed with the talmudic rule that “anything that enables us to reduce disputation is preferable,” Halevy devoted much effort to minimize the extent and significance of disputes and contradictions among Torah sages, of discrepancies among diverse rabbinic sources, and of divergent versions of the same story.³³ Similarly, he sought to depict an idyllic picture of harmony among all the Jewish groups in the acceptance of the authority of the Oral Law.³⁴ In his view, after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE), except for unusual periods, a single universal academy was maintained, which partly continued the institution of the Great Bet Din which was maintained throughout the Second Temple period.³⁵

An implicit apologetic strain can also be detected in his position that the methods characterizing the Oral Law as used by generations of Torah sages, can contribute to modern historical methodology. He argued that from the second century BCE to the late Middle Age, the sages took great care in formulating their words out of a meticulous devotion to the search for truth.³⁶ In his view, evidence of this devotion could be found in previously unexamined

³³ The rule “anything that enables us to reduce disputation is preferable” is quoted by Halevy in *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 550. On minimizing the extent of disputes see: *Dorot ha-rishonim* III, p. 201. II, pp. 111–112, 422, 429. Ie, pp. 109, 229, 254, 281–282, 374, 504–508. On minimizing discrepancies among diverse rabbinic sources see: *Dorot ha-rishonim* Ie, p. 135. For Halevy’s attempt to unify the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 7–8, 61n27, 75n39, 98, 111, 140–141n68, 201, 263; Ic, pp. 476, 587, 595, 598–599, 602. Ie, pp. 101–102, 742, 746n36, 756n42, 761, 767n47. He also claimed there was compatibility between the yeshivot in Israel and Babylonia. See: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 472, 482, 484, 488. On minimizing discrepancies between divergent versions of the same story see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, pp. 2n2, 26, 43, 77n5.

³⁴ *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 162, 197, 210, 496, 602; Ic, p. 127n60; Ie, p. 3.

³⁵ In Halevy’s opinion, the redundant existence of parallel, central Torah academies, under Rav and Shmuel respectively, during the amoraic period, was an exception (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, p. 416), and that while, for over 130 years of the geonite period, there were two central Torah academies, Sura and Pumbedita, during the remainder of the geonite period there was only a one universal Torah academy, Pumbedita (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 159). On the single universal academy that was maintained see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 46, 155–159, 192–193, 21635, 165–167, 298, 409, 411–417, 480–482, 490–491, 494–496; Ie, pp. 119, 311, 425, 433, 738–740, 744, 805–806. On the institution of the Great Bet Din, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 664–667. At the time of the Great Bet Din, an exceptional situation existed where two academies operated simultaneously during the joint tenure of Hillel and Shamai (Ic, p. 602).

³⁶ For Halevy’s arguments on this point as they relate to the various periods see: Hasmoneans: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 623n36. Tannaim: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 90, 500; Ic, p. 634; Ie, p. 514. Amoraim: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 201, 325, 500; Ic, p. 634; Ie, p. 101. Geonim: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 2, 155, 163, 170. Rishonim: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 206.

redactions of the talmudic text.³⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that in his view the literary sources of the Oral Law are of primary importance for any historian wishing to write about Jewish history and that the legitimacy of other sources is contingent on their not contradicting the Oral Law literature.³⁸

At the same time, Halevy attacked the subjects of his inquiries who didn't follow the values of Orthodoxy. He had harsh words for those who opposed the Halakhah of the Pharisees, including specific factions and individuals. This includes the Hellenizers, aristocratic Jews in the late Second Temple period, apostates and Sadducees.³⁹ In his view, the opposition of the Sadducees to the Pharisees stemmed from the fact that they

“denied all of the foundations of religion, saying Israel is like any other nation, their desire being to completely abandon all the ways of the Torah and pursue the ways of the nations, but when this desire did not go well, they looked to the path of Judaism in the most minimal possible way, i. e. only to that which is explicitly stated in the Torah.”⁴⁰

Halevy also directs his barbs towards historical figures, including Herod, Agrippas II, and Salman ben Yeruham.⁴¹

³⁷ Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 144, 208.

³⁸ On the importance of Jewish Oral Law for any historian see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 178, 372. On the legitimacy of the various sources of the Oral Law see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 341n47. According to Halevy, within the Oral Law there exists an internal hierarchy in terms of the quality of the sources. For example, in Halevy's view, the most important sources in the amoraic period are the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmudim and the use of other sources is conditioned upon their not contradicting these (Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 250n43). On the question of the internal relationship between them see: Isaiah Gafni: Skirah al ha-mechkar ha-history shel bavel ha-talmudit Ba-dorot ha-achronim [A Review of the Historical Research on Bavel in the Talmud and 'Later Generations' Periods], in: Yedion ha-irgun ha-olami le-mada-ey yahadut 5 (1983).

³⁹ For Halevy's criticism of Hellenizers see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 379. For his criticism of aristocratic Jews see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 4, 9, 21, 25, 29, 39, 50–51; Auerbach (ed.), Sefer zikaron: 35–36, 79, 157. For Halevy's criticism of the apostates see: Auerbach (ed.), Sefer zikaron, p. 37. For Halevy's criticism of the Sadducees see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 358, 362, 412–413, 416, 418, 540; Ie, pp. 13; Auerbach (ed.), Sefer zikaron, pp. 35–36, 49, 55, 157, 161.

⁴⁰ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 370.

⁴¹ For Halevy's criticism of Herod see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 9–13; Reichel, Iggerot, p. 123; Auerbach (ed.), Sefer zikaron, pp. 17–18. For Halevy's criticism of Agrippas II see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 25, 31, 39; Auerbach (ed.), Sefer zikaron, pp. 34, 8, 44, 56–57, 60–61, 72–74, 77, 83, 85–86, 88. For Halevy's criticism of Salman ben Yeruham see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 107, 111.

Finally, Halevy completed his veritable wall of apologetics with his claim that the history of the people of Israel proved that the people, as well as the sages, were opposed to revolt against the nations and that when such revolts occurred they stemmed from circumstances which led the people to revolt against their will.⁴² His attitude was in line with the traditional Jewish approach of both the Middle Ages and the early modern period: an unwillingness to challenge the mandate of the non-Jewish authorities.⁴³ An example of this is his depiction of the second-century Bar Kokhba revolt in which he presented the planned rebellion as being coincidental and unintentional: “This revolt, from its inception, had neither instigator nor bringer to birth, rather it emerged of itself and moved forward of its own accord as happened previously in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.”⁴⁴ This is consistent with his opposition to Zionism in preference to the approach of “acting with submission and humility in the lands of our exile.”⁴⁵

3.3 In Graetz’s Books Thou Shalt not Peek:⁴⁶

Rejection of Anyone Not Identified with Orthodoxy

One of the main characteristics of the Orthodox camp was the shared consciousness of contention with other Jewish factions and a negative attitude to any outsider.⁴⁷ The volumes of *Dorot ha-rishonim* place great emphasis on the author’s scathing critique of historians whose worldviews are inconsistent with Orthodox principles. Halevy wrote critically of a long line of Jewish scholars associated with the Enlightenment and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. In his view, their hostility to, and misunderstanding of, Jewish tradition impaired their judgment and compromised the conclusions of their research. As

⁴² *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 43, 60–61. *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 76, 336–337, 337n45; *Ie*, pp. 4, 10, 16–20, 28, 39, 397, 410, 413, 574, 622–623, 626–628. For notes on Isaac Hirsch see: Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, pp. 67, 77, 91, 115–116. Notes on Weiss’ *Dor dor ve-dorshav* p. 284.

⁴³ Aviezer Ravitzky: *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago 1996, pp. 21–23.

⁴⁴ *Dorot ha-rishonim*, *Ie*, p. 620.

⁴⁵ See: Moshe H. E. Bloch: *Mi natan le-meshisa ya-akov ve-israel le-bozezim* [Who Handed Jacob Over to Become Loot, and Israel to the Plunderers], New York 1957, pp. 163–172. See also: Sarel, *Can’t Live with Him*.

⁴⁶ This is not a quote from Halevy but the author’s paraphrase of the objections of the Hatam Sofer (Moses Sofer/Schreiber, 1762–1839) to the works of Moses Mendelssohn.

⁴⁷ Jacob Katz: *Divine Law in Human Hands. Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility*, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 191–402.

Halevy's criticisms extend to several hundred references and are too numerous to examine in detail, the focus in this research will be on his critique of the two historians most heavily criticized in *Dorot ha-rishonim*: Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), the author of the eleven-volume *The History of the Jews: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* which became the standard for future works in the field of Jewish history, and Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905), scholar of rabbinic literature and the author of the five-volume *Dor ve-Dorshav*. For the sake of comparison, the article will also examine his critique of the non-Jewish German historian Emil Schürer (1844–1910).

The common thread in Halevy's critiques of Graetz and Weiss was his view that both used historiographic writing to advance their ideological agenda.⁴⁸ According to his opinion, in both cases the antipathy towards the people of Israel and the sages and the sympathy for groups not associated with loyalty to the Pharisaic Halakhah – the origin of the rabbinic Halakhah – distorted their work and impaired the credibility of their historical research:⁴⁹

“In fact, the scholar Graetz wrote a history of the people of Israel in accordance with his own wishes rather than on the basis of the sources even though he mentioned them [...] and the scholar Weiss who followed in his footsteps...”⁵⁰

In addition, Halevy accused these two scholars of impaired professionalism as historians. In his opinion, they both lacked the knowledge necessary to accomplish what they had set out to do.⁵¹ They were frequently content with su-

⁴⁸ For Halevy on Graetz see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, p. 201; Ic, p. 657. Ie, pp. 279, 315. For Halevy on Weiss see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 59, 231; *Dorot ha-rishonim* II, pp. 30, 34, 118, 118, 170, 527; Ic p. 322. Notes on Weiss' *Dor dor ve-dorshav*, p. 279.

⁴⁹ On the connection between Pharisaic Halakhah and Rabbinic Halakah see: Alexei M. Sivertsev: *Households, sects, and the origins of rabbinic Judaism*, Leiden 2005, pp. 272–274. For Halevy on Graetz's antipathy towards the people of Israel see, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 88, 368, 454, 457, 484–486, 496, 512–513, 517, 674n48, 680, 682, 685; Ie, pp. 106, 393, 694–695, 714, 796. For Halevy on Weiss' antipathy, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 163, 172, 280, 451; Ic, pp. 100–101, 130, 141; Ie, pp. 158–160, 319, 374–375, 377–378, 382, 386, 392, 740; Notes on Weiss' *Dor dor ve-dorshav* p. 283. For Halevy on Graetz's antipathy to the sages, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 151, 232; II p. 369; Ic, pp. 85, 484, 486, 486n46, 495, 515–516, 674n48; Ie: 693 695, 796, 817. For Halevy on Weiss' antipathy to the sages, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III pp. 269–270; II, pp. 103, 118, 280–281, 359, 511–512; Ic, p. 84; Ie, pp. 380, 392. For Halevy's claim that Weiss displayed animosity towards the Torah itself see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 428–429. For the argument that their sympathy and admiration for the Sadducees influenced Graetz's and Weiss' work, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic: 454, 484. *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 373. He further accused Graetz of admiring Herod, see *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 674n48. and Agrippas II and his faction, see Ie. pp. 15, 51.

⁵⁰ *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 30.

⁵¹ For Halevy on the impaired professionalism of Graetz, see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 394, 445, 468; Ic, pp. 80n43, 156, 408–409, 458–460; Ie, pp. 333, 372, 674. For Halevy on the impaired

perfunctory research and relied on secondary references, in particular references from *Seder ha-dorot*, a chronological work by the East European Rabbi Jehiel Heilprin (1660–1746), or on uncritical adoption of the conclusions of previous scholars without examining them in their contexts.⁵² He accused both of them of misinterpreting the sources and of inventing historical axioms.⁵³ In his opinion, the various shortcomings in their methodologies directly impaired the validity of their historical arguments. According to Halevy's opinion, in many cases, Graetz and Weiss relied on speculation rather than facts and failed to reference sources to back up their claims.⁵⁴ Moreover, they confused one matter with the other, contradicted themselves, and failed to notice that their conclusions were not in accord with the natural order of the world, as in the following direct criticism of Graetz and Weiss:⁵⁵

- professionalism of Weiss, see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 103; Ic, pp. 314, 415, 733–734; Ie, pp. 148, 160, 182, 293, 307, 317, 377, 383, 389, 391, 741; Notes on Weiss' Dor dor ve-dorshav, p. 272.
- ⁵² On Graetz's superficial research see: Dorot ha-rishonim: II, pp. 5, 16–17, 31, 436–446, 445, 445n104; Ic, pp. 6, 80, 180, 455, 495, 691n56, 694n57, 659n59, 711; Ie, pp. 16–17, 128, 280, 323, 333, 707, 711, 714, 817n62. On Weiss' superficial research see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 47, 212, 296, 298. Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp; I33, 197, 262, 282, 339, 345, 364, 379n67, 412, 422, 538n152; Ic, pp. 175, 230n35,404, 554, 710; Ie, pp. 63, 263n21, 293, 378, 740; Notes on Weiss' Dor dor ve-dorshav: 271, 275–276, 290. On Graetz's reliance on secondary sources see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 314; Ic, p. 694n57. On Weiss' reliance on secondary sources see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 118, 280; Ic, pp. 422, 595; Ie, pp. 377–379. On Graetz's reliance on *Seder ha-dorot* see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 51–52; Ie, p. 695. On Weiss reliance on *Seder ha-dorot* see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 71, 86, 156; II, p. 20. On uncritical adoption by Graetz, see Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 369; Ie, p. 588. Graetz and Weiss were also accused of incorrect interpretation of other historians (Graetz, see: II, pp. 3–4, 12; Weiss, see Ic, p. 644). On Graetz's failure to examine his sources see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 14, 51, 223, 248, 594n182; Ic, pp. 156, 452; Ie, p. 625. On Weiss' failure see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 118–119.
- ⁵³ On Graetz's misinterpretation of sources see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 215, 220, 251, 254, 262, 273, 287, 301; Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 50–51, 300, 435, 445, 448–449, 479n124; Ic, pp. 54, 56, 177–178, 409, 520, 659n42; Ie, pp. 416, 422. On Weiss' misinterpretation see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II: 30, 197, 254, 260, 282, 325, 452–453, 513; Ic, pp. 359, 374. Notes on Weiss's Dor dor ve-dorshav: 272, 277, 279, 280, 291. On Graetz inventing historical axioms see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 264, 272; II, pp. 10, 12, 37, 49, 402, 434, 442; Ic, pp. 56, 71, 440, 458, 460, 658, 659, 684–685, 687n52, 688, 707, 711; Ie, pp. 2, 362, 396, 402, 424, 427, 694. On Weiss inventing historical axioms see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 270, 296; II, pp. 196–197, 262, 279–280, 412, 413n86, 428, 576; Ic, pp. 203, 230, 314, 553; Ie, p. 822.
- ⁵⁴ On Graetz's reliance on speculation see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 28, 164–165, 168; II, p. 12n6. Ie, p. 394. On Weiss' reliance see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 115–116, 141, 186; Ic, p. 79; Ie, p. 148. For Graetz's and Weiss' failure to reference sources, see Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 153, 265; II, p. 11 (Graetz), Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 269; Ie, p. 375 (Weiss).
- ⁵⁵ For Halevy's comments on the confusion evident in Graetz's work, see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 84, 369, 448; Ic, pp. 497n47, 683. In Weiss' work see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 87; Ic, pp. 98, 169n6, 340. For self-contradiction in Graetz's work, see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 18, 107, 115,

“All of this could be written and set out only when recounting the history of Israel, where, apart from their lack of critical, diligent research they failed to pay attention to the true nature and ways of the world, thus resulting in anachronistic historical accounts which were incongruous with the actual order of events.”⁵⁶

Alongside the similarity of Halevy’s criticisms of Graetz and Weiss, he also saw some differences between them. Graetz was accused of sloppy proofreading of texts, of faulty citations of sources, and of sacrificing historical accuracy for popularity.⁵⁷ Weiss, on the other hand, whom he called “the rear guard of all the divisions” (cf. Numbers 10:25) was accused of Reform sympathies, anti-nationalism, and errors any schoolboy should be expected to avoid.⁵⁸ Halevy also accused Weiss of deliberately misleading the public.⁵⁹ In general, it may be said Halevy had harsher words for Weiss than for Graetz.⁶⁰

Numerous elements of Halevy’s criticism of Graetz and Weiss are also to be found, albeit to a more moderate degree, in his critique of the German historian Emil Schürer. Halevy applied the sobriquet “the rear guard of all the divisions” to Schürer as well and accused him of a negative attitude towards Israel and the sages.⁶¹ He also accused Schürer of faulty professionalism in his

273, 280, 285, 287, 299–300. Drot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 4, 341, 436; Ic, pp. 361, 711; Ie, p. 16. In Weiss’ work, see: Drot ha-rishonim, III, p. 213.

⁵⁶ Drot ha-rishonim, II, p. 359. Similar, but separate criticisms of each of them can be found as follows: Graetz: II: 7, 15. Weiss: Drot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 319, Notes on Weiss’ Dor dor ve-dorshav, p. 276.

⁵⁷ On sloppy proofreading of texts see: Drot ha-rishonim, III, p. 168; II, p. 52; Ic, p. 594n27. On faulty citations of sources: Drot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 43, 255; II, p. 435; Ic, pp. 661–662n43. Ie, pp. 74, 280. On sacrificing historical accuracy for popularity, see: Drot ha-rishonim, III, p. 255; Drot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 197, 201n14, 337n45.

⁵⁸ On the pejorative “the rear guard of all the divisions” see: Drot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 359, 368; Ie, p. 147; Tequmat ha-miqra, p. 262. On Reform sympathies see: Drot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 387; Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, p. 140. For Halevy on Weiss’ anti-nationalism see: Notes on Weiss’ Dor dor ve-dorshav, p. 284. On Weiss’ errors see: Drot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 279, 326, 425, 514; Ic, pp. 405, 594; Notes on Weiss’ Dor dor ve-dorshav, p. 276.

⁵⁹ Drot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 276–277, 279, 281, 324, 360, 425, 511–512; Ic, pp. 100, 320, 368–369, 371–372, 422–423, 736; Ie, pp. 158, 378–380, 388, 390, 392, 471n30, 622; Notes on Weiss’ Dor dor ve-dorshav: 275, 280, 283, 284, 290. While a similar claim is implied in his criticism of Graetz, accusing him of knowing that his interpretation was incorrect (Ic, pp. 513, 516), it cannot be compared with the scope and intensity of his criticism of Weiss, whom he accuses of willful distortion.

⁶⁰ Drot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 392.

⁶¹ For the pejorative “the rear guard of all the divisions”, see: Drot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 609. On Schürer’s negative attitude towards Israel see: Drot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 620; Ie, p. 429. On Schürer’s negative attitude towards sages see: Drot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 424n67.

historiographic work. In his opinion, Schürer lacked the knowledge necessary to realize his aims, as a historian, to aspire to historical truth.⁶² His scholarship was frequently superficial; he relied on other historians uncritically, did not access the source materials in their original contexts, and occasionally fabricated historical facts.⁶³ The quality of Schürer's historical claims, like those of Graetz and Weiss, was compromised by his faulty scholarship. He relied on speculation rather than facts and contradicted himself at times attempting to distract from his faulty scholarship by being deliberately misleading.⁶⁴

In short, Halevy argued that both non-Jewish historians and Jewish historians of the *Wissenschaft* school were not free of ideological agendas; moreover, their contempt for the sources of the Oral Law stems from lack of knowledge and understanding and that their conclusions were therefore faulty. While the content and intensity of Halevy's criticisms are not consistent, there are significant common themes. He had clear reservations about a long list of historians which were consistent with the tendency of Orthodox society to strive against all whom it perceived as challenging its values.

3.4 The Exclusivity of the History of the Jewish Nation

Another brick in the wall of Orthodoxy in *Dorot ha-rishonim* had to do with the uniqueness of the history of Israel. Halevy based his work in the belief that the divine imprint may be seen in the history of Israel and that the connection between the Jewish people, God and the influence of the Torah on them lent a unique nature to the history of Israel.⁶⁵ In Halevy's view, the *Wissenschaft* historians viewed the history of Israel through the lens of the history of the other nations.⁶⁶ He, in contrast, viewed his life's work as revealing the elements which reflect the history of "our wondrous chronicles."⁶⁷

⁶² Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 57, 642; Ie, pp. 339, 344.

⁶³ On superficial scholarship see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 9n5, 32, 87–88, 620, 635–637; Ie 130, 430, 609; Auerbach (ed.), *Sefer zikaron*, p. 11. On uncritical reliance see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 642. On the lack of original context see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 498. On the fabrication of historical facts see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 58; Ie, p. 611.

⁶⁴ On reliance on speculation see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 618–619. On self-contradiction see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 641; Ie, p. 639. On being deliberately misleading see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 619.

⁶⁵ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 336–337; III, pp. 27, 126, 214; II, pp. 298, 399, 481, 600. For two examples, among many, see: *Teqfat ha-miqra*, pp. 105, 110–112.

⁶⁶ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 197.

⁶⁷ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 112.

In summary, it can be said that Halevy, who was raised and lived in an Orthodox society, integrated his Orthodox values into his historiography which unequivocally reflected several fundamental elements of the Orthodox worldview, including historical conservatism, apologetics, an uncritical attitude towards earlier Jewish Law authorities, discomfort with persons and viewpoints contradicting Orthodox values, and the effort to advance religious values.

4. Discarding the Old to Make Room for the New: Trends in *Dorot ha-rishonim* Inconsistent with Orthodox Values

Up to now, we have seen how Halevy's historiography reflects fundamental values of an Orthodox worldview. The following section will show how Halevy adopts, whether openly or covertly, historical insights inconsistent with Orthodox values.

4.1 And Yet It Moves: Halevy Recognizes Development and Change in Torah Matters

The previous section noted the ambiguity inherent in Halevy's approach which rejects the possibility of Midrash generating and determining Halakhah. His efforts to fortify the status of the halakhic tradition became a double-edged sword leading to conclusions directly contradicting the claims of the tradition itself which did recognize generative Midrash. His conservative view of the history of the Halakhah was also undermined by his readiness to recognize the existence of historical layers within the Book of Esther and the insertion of later additions into the text of the Mishnah.⁶⁸ Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook (Rav Kook, 1865–1935), one of the most influential rabbis of the twentieth century, noted the internal contradiction in Halevy's approach; Halevy raised the banner of conservatism while he himself blazed new trails. In a response Kook wrote to Halevy:

“Your Illustrious Honor cautions against new directions, but I am certain your Honor would admit that you have achieved more for the situation of Judaism in your historical works than all those other historians, who presented inductions and

⁶⁸ For Halevy on the Book of Esther see: *Tequfat ha-miqra*, pp.263–265. For Halevy on the Mishnah see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, pp. 207n22, 210n28, 235n40, 239n46, 240n47, 300n80.

deductions in the traditional manner, even though you have pioneered directions which no other historians devoted wholeheartedly to the Torah have done.”⁶⁹

4.2 **“Things so Utterly Without Foundation that the Ear Cannot Abide:”⁷⁰ Halevy’s Criticism of Torah Scholars**

Halevy’s innovative spirit was most apparent in his occasional willingness to abandon Orthodox apologetics. The image of Halevy the apologist was the mirror image of Halevy the academic scholar who was sometimes alert to the problematic nature of the rabbinic sources as historical sources and did not hesitate to criticize earlier rabbinic authorities and dispute their derivation of historical information.⁷¹ The authority of earlier generations of adjudicators of Halakhah became a foundational element in the ideology which Orthodoxy developed in its defining conflict with other Jewish religious movements in the nineteenth century. Orthodox rabbis emphasized the obligation to the decision-making tradition. Halevy, whose historical inquiries sometimes led him to the conclusion that the sages of the Oral Law were not strictly accurate in relating historical details, found himself torn between his commitment to those rabbinic authorities who had passed the divine word from generation to generation and his commitment to historical accuracy. He justified his preference for the commitment to historical accuracy by the argument that the scholars devoted their primary efforts to seeking halakhic truth and therefore it was possible that they made errors regarding historical accuracy.⁷² Armed with this justification, he took the liberty of disputing with a long list of sages, collectively and individually.⁷³

⁶⁹ Tzvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook (ed.): *Igrot HaReayah Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook* [The Letters of Avraham Issac HaCohen Kook], vol. 1, Jerusalem 1992, p. 185.

⁷⁰ Citation from Halevy’s critique of the author of *Tosephot Yom Tov*, *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ic, p. 252.

⁷¹ *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 225; *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 201, 285, 317; Ic, pp. 21n13, 311, 643. Ie, pp. 133, 431n5, 459n20, 460n22, 738n33; Notes on Weiss’ *Dor dor ve-dorshav*, p. 273.

⁷² *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 56; *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 117, 216, 228, 241, 264n5, 318, 448n105, 476, 476n120; Ic, pp. 74, 223, 446, 595; Ie, pp. 52, 101, 132, 184, 187, 221, 467–468, 522, 524n44, 629.

⁷³ Halevy relates to several groups: *Rishonim* (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 54. *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, pp. 81, 116–117; E5: 242, 555, 587, 851), the disciples of *Rabbenu Yonah* (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 145), the commentators on *Maimonides* (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 525), and *Aharonim* (*Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 532).

Halevy generally used more moderate language in disputing with medieval and early modern Torah scholars, using expressions such as, “his meaning is obscure” or “with all due respect.” At times, however, he used language almost as harsh as that directed against *Wissenschaft* historians. For example, he accused medieval rabbinic scholars of fabrication; arguing that they “explained nothing” and “made up new homilies which have no basis.”⁷⁴ Finally, in at least one instance Halevy disputed the medieval rabbinic authorities on a historical matter which had clear halakhic implications.⁷⁵

These numerous examples show the kind of snare awaiting the Orthodox historian; a snare inherent in the innovation which lies at the heart of Orthodoxy as a modern phenomenon.⁷⁶ Halevy aspired to advance Orthodox values by defending the honor of Talmud sages, which, in his opinion, medieval rabbinic scholars had sometimes offended. This in itself, undermined the very values he was trying to advance as in doing so he placed himself in opposition to great rabbinic scholars such as Moses Maimonides (1135/38–1204) and the medieval commentators on the Talmud (*Tosaphot*) who viewed criticism of talmudic sages as legitimate. In other words, the Orthodox values Halevy sought to advance were not necessarily consistent with the traditional worldview of Maimonides, the *Tosaphot*, and others.⁷⁷

Halevy’s use of severe language in criticising medieval rabbinic scholars can be seen as demonstrating that Halevy’s determinations did not emerge

⁷⁴ Halevy criticized the innovative homilies used by the medieval rabbinic authorities to explain why the authority of the Sanhedrin to exercise capital punishment was contingent upon its being established on the temple mount while he himself presented a more conservative rationale. See: Dorot ha-rishonim Ie, p. 112, 112n53. For additional criticism on the *Tosaphot* see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 318; Ie, p. 851, 873. For additional criticism of specific sages by Halevy see: Maimonides (1138–1204), Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 95–97; Rashi (1040–1105), Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 95; Asher ben Yehiel (the Rosh, 1250–1328), Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 284; Ie, p. 572. Gershon Shaul Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654) wrote a commentary on the Mishnah called “*Tosphot Yom-Tov*,” Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 95, 252; the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797), Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 95; Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761–1837), Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 245.

⁷⁵ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 532.

⁷⁶ Michael K. Silber: *The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy. The Invention of a Tradition*, in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *The Uses of Tradition. Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, New York 1992, pp. 23–84.

⁷⁷ Additional examples of Halevy disputing earlier sages, on the one hand, and proposing explanations more consistent with Orthodox values on the other, may be found in: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 294; Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic: 217, 530n58, 600–601; Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 123–124, 186, 242.

from the preference for one Orthodox value over another, but from the aspiration to seek the truth. While Halevy frequently found himself at a dead end, obliged to choose between two contradictory Orthodox values, his use of harsh language against earlier rabbinic authorities was avoidable. He could, for example, have criticised the famous rabbinic figures without accusing them of saying “such horrible things about one of the leading lights of Israel.”⁷⁸

The depth of the contradiction between Halevy’s approach and certain Orthodox values can be seen from the fact that Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (1878–1953), known by the title of his book “Hazon Ish” and, the most influential leader of Israeli ultra-Orthodox society, objected to the reprinting of *Dorot ha-rishonim*, which was out of print. Among his reasons was that Halevy “contradicts *Rishonim* in several instances.”⁷⁹

4.3 From the New Testament to Azariah De Rossi:

The Array of Historical Sources Upon Which Halevy Relied

The previous section described how Halevy’s historiographic oeuvre acted as a brick in the Orthodox wall against alien values by strongly opposing historians and historical figures whose words or deeds contradicted Orthodox values. The article will now try to show how far Halevy was prepared to go to adopt historical information from non-Orthodox sources.

Firstly, throughout his writings, Halevy complimented, either directly or indirectly, persons whom he attacked harshly in other places.⁸⁰ For example,

⁷⁸ There are several instances where Halevy indirectly disputed the views of *Rishonim* by claiming that the text was written by an erring disciple or by copyists: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, p. 212; II, p. 615; Ic, pp. 330n93, 557–558n2; In another instance Halevy claimed that he was, indeed, disputing the views of Rashi and Maimonides in favor of those held by their teachers: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Ie, p. 525.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Avraham Horowitz: *Orot Rabbenu*, vol. 3, Bnei Brak 1996, p. 119. Rabbi Hayyim Kanievsky (b. 1928), who participated in a meeting between Halevy’s son, Shmuel, and the *Hazon Ish*, reported that Shmuel asked the *Hazon Ish* whether to reprint *Dorot ha-rishonim*, to which the *Hazon Ish* responded in the negative. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky has been cited as having similar reservations. See: N. Kamenetsky: *Making of a Godol. A Study of Episodes in the Lives of Great Torah Personalities*, Jerusalem 2002, p. 14. These reservations, together with Kanievsky reasoning “because *Dorot ha-rishonim* cites others’ incorrect views,” testify to the emergence of another intensely defensive central branch of Orthodoxy, in whose eyes even Halevy himself became a threat. Breuer noted a similar thread of criticism emanating from the followers of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 201.

⁸⁰ I. Gafni noted the fact that Halevy’s knowledge of general history was taken “primarily from Graetz, Schürer, Weiss and others, i. e. specifically those historians he criticizes throughout his work.” (Isaiah Gafni: *Skirah al ha-mechkar*, p. 8.)

the following praise for Rabbi Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875), the founder of positive-historical Judaism, which was the progenitor of Conservative Judaism, and Solomon Judah Löb HaKohen Rapoport (1786–1867), an East European rabbi and *Maskil*.⁸¹ Included among those on whose work he relied, despite their adherence to values alien to Orthodoxy, were Graetz, Weiss, Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), one of the greatest classicists of the nineteenth century, Schürer, and Friedrich Münter (1761–1830), church historian, archaeologist, professor at the University of Copenhagen, and Danish bishop.⁸² These examples show that Halevy did not categorically reject persons who did not fit in with his Orthodox worldview, and even cited them by name when he thought their words were historically accurate. Moreover, it should be also noted that a close examination of Halevy's criticisms of historians such as Graetz and Weiss indicates that his sometimes harsh language, which was not uncommon at that time, expressed primarily professional criticism of their methodologies and conclusions.

Halevy relied on a variety of sources whose content was inconsistent with Orthodox values. In two instances he sought to support his arguments by using New Testament sources, in one of which he showed a considerable familiarity with the New Testament by using citations from a variety of New Testament books to contest the claims of the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891) that Jesus was sentenced by the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews.⁸³ Moreover, in several instances, he relied on the testimonies

⁸¹ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 185. For other cases where Halevy relies upon Frankel see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 280; Ie, p. 591. Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 76n34. For other cases where Halevy relies upon Rapoport see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 101, 124; Ic, p. 425.

⁸² For Halevy's reliance on Graetz see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 62–63; Ic: 180n8, 424, 443n27. Reliance on Weiss. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 236–237n23; Ic 19n12. Reliance on Mommsen. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie: 359, 419, 427, 585, 633, 810. For examples of Halevy's confirming Schürer findings see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie: 406, 424. For Halevy's reliance on Schürer's analysis see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic: 7n4, 180n8, 228, 367, 384, 443n27, 453; Ie: 400, 633. For Halevy's use of the term Bishop Münter see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 396. Elsewhere he refers to him as "first and foremost of the historians of the nations." See Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 708. A similar description may be found in: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 584. Halevy regards him as a historian of high quality. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 730. For Halevy's justification of Münter see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 396, 412. For Halevy's reliance on Münter see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 584, 608, 636–637, 637n90, 708; Tequfat ha-miqra, p. 112. For examples of Halevy's reliance on non-Jewish scholars in general see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 366–367.

⁸³ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 630–631. For Halevy's reliance on the New Testament, see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 48n26, in which Halevy displayed his pretensions to deep familiarity with it.

of the Church Father Eusebius (260/265–340).⁸⁴ Halevy was also willing to rely on the work *Meor Eynayim*, written by the Jewish Italian physician Azariah de Rossi (1511–1578), who had published a critical analysis of the history of the Jewish nation based on various Roman and Christian sources. Important rabbis in the traditional community, among them Joseph Caro (1488–1575), Moshe ben Avraham Provençal (1503–1576), Judah Loew ben Bezalel (d. 1609), Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen (1521–1597), had denounced and even banned this work, considering its content inconsistent with the values of traditional Jewish society.⁸⁵

Finally, Halevy did not hesitate to grant preference to non-Jewish historians over rabbinic authorities when called for, as in his interpretation of a remark of Rabbi Sherira Gaon (10th century), one of the most prominent *Geonim* and the head of the yeshivah at Pumbedita, who wrote that the city of Pumbedita had been conquered by the Caliph Ali. Influenced by the Jewish-German orientalist and historian Gustav Weil (1808–1889), Halevy concluded that the city had been conquered by the earlier Caliph Umar. To harmonize Rabbi Sherira Gaon's remark with Weil's, Halevy offered a farfetched interpretation of the word "conquered", claiming, "This is not to say that he conquered her by warlike means for there was no war involved there at all [...] but he [Sherira Gaon] means that they submitted to him and showed him tokens of affection and accepted him as their king."⁸⁶

In summary, it can be argued that Halevy's adherence to the three central pillars of his Orthodox position – a conservative view of the development of the Oral Law, an apologetic rejection of criticism of the great figures of Jewish wisdom, and the rejection of those who threaten Orthodox values – was often ambiguous or inconsistent. In several cases, Halevy directly or indirectly legitimized the view that there were, in fact, developments in the Oral Law.

⁸⁴ Based on Eusebius: Dorot ha-rishonim, I, pp. 75, 77, 130, 332, 344, 354, 395, 405, 420–421, 595–599, 611, 634, 638–639 (including criticism on Eusebius), 664–665, 709.

⁸⁵ Azariah De' Rossi: *The Light of the Eyes*, Joanna Weinberg (ed.), New Haven 2001, pp. xiii–xlv. Reichel, Iggerot, p. 179. Additional references to *Maor Eynayim* [*The Light of the Eyes*] may be found in Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 586, 594.

⁸⁶ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 178. Further down on the same page Halevy proposes a textual variant of Abraham ibn Daud (1110–1180) in *Sefer HaKabbalah* in which the calculation of the years coordinates with Weil, but he allows that this is not an absolute necessity because, as Weil himself notes, the Arab historical sources are not necessarily accurate. Nevertheless, the implication is that Weil is to be relied upon. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 637n90.

Throughout the volumes of *Dorot ha-rishonim* are instances where Halevy disputed earlier rabbinic authorities, at times in harsh terms, and adopted historical information from historians who were far from Jewish Orthodox values.

5. **Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen:**⁸⁷ **Halevy as a Modern Historian**

In the previous section, the article discussed the extent to which the volumes of *Dorot ha-rishonim* reflected insights inconsistent with Orthodox values. The common thread running through all those insights is an approach central to modern critical historiography: the assumption that historical sources should not be taken at face value but must be examined critically in accordance with scholarly criteria. The following section will examine the extent to which Halevy's approach is consistent with modern historiographic methodology, as developed in Germany in the nineteenth century.⁸⁸

In Ismar Schorsch's view, the *Wissenschaft* school of Jewish historiography was based upon two major foundations. The first was the demand for objectivity, intended to present reality as it was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) by employing the full range of conventional academic tools: referencing a variety of sources, including non-Jewish sources; a focus on data and facts; using critical analysis extending to the previously sacred sources of tradition; and employing philology as an important critical tool.⁸⁹ The second foundation was the use of history as a means for the advancement of ideological interests.⁹⁰ *Wissenschaft* provided an alternative to the study of Judaism by non-Jews whose scholarship had supported, at least partially, anti-Jewish tendencies and trends that sought to isolate Jews.⁹¹ Adherents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, however, sought to utilize scholarship to justify emancipation and

⁸⁷ Statement of the prominent German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), quoted in Fritz Stern: *The Varieties of History. From Voltaire to the Present*, New York 1956, p. 57.

⁸⁸ Breuer noted in a general way that Halevy largely identified with modern scientific historical scholarship. (Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 200).

⁸⁹ Ismar Schorsch: *From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, Hanover NH 1994, pp. 168–170.

⁹⁰ Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, pp. 162–166, 180–187, 303–333.

⁹¹ Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, pp. 163. According to Schorsch these included the German classicist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), the French scholar and author of the *Histoire des Juifs*, Jacques Basnage, (1653–1723), and the German Orientalist and author of the rabidly anti-Jewish work *Entdecktes Judentum* (Judaism Unmasked) Johann Andreas Eisenmenger (1654–1704).

the acculturation of the Jews into the wider society and in so doing implied criticism of the stand of the supporters of Orthodoxy.

Halevy's approach was clearly and substantially consistent with both of the founding principles of *Wissenschaft*: the demand for objectivity and the use of history as a means for the advancement of ideological interests. He programmatically stated that "we must investigate thoroughly to be sure we have established what really happened."⁹² In the introduction to volume II of *Dorot ha-rishonim*, Halevy set forth his vision for achieving quality historical inquiry:

"The time has come to freely investigate the wisdom and history of Israel without straying from the actual events and their order. The time has come to work together to set the wisdom of Israel on the same foundation all the sciences rest upon, that the desires and wishes of the writer are of no consequence and that only the evidence and the investigation of the actual events are of consequence."⁹³

It is worth noting that Halevy emphasized here the common denominator between history and other sciences. In another case he emphasized his commitment to science devoid of any religious agenda:

"And I am not stating this on the basis of faith in God's Torah and the laws He set forth for Israel, rather, this is based entirely upon the spirit of inquiry which is inherent to Jewish wisdom, an open inquiry which takes into account nothing but the inquiry itself."⁹⁴

Moreover, like any modern historian, Halevy emphasized the importance of thorough investigation of the primary sources: "And because it is our way to view the sources face to face without leaning to any pole but to try to see and to understand what was really there."⁹⁵

The previous section showed how deeply he assimilated the requirement to investigate the widest possible variety of sources and research, even if the content or the tendencies of the author were inconsistent with Orthodox values. The similarities with modern historiography did not end there but

⁹² Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 34. This principle reappears in several other places: Dorot ha-rishonim, pp. 107, 145, 231; II p. 170, Ic, pp. 84, 558.

⁹³ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, introduction.

⁹⁴ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 429. Halevy wrote in a similar vein in private letter (Reichel, Iggerot, p. 175).

⁹⁵ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 269.

also included the critical use of sources.⁹⁶ Halevy tried to access the most primary sources available and therefore argued that where *Geonim* and *Rishonim* expressed an opinion about history based on discussions in the Talmud these opinions were not to be taken at face value, but the talmudic texts themselves must be examined based on additional different sources.⁹⁷ Halevy also demonstrated considerable philological skills in the analysis of primary sources, rabbinic and non-rabbinic: These skills included making distinctions between the original text and insertions by copyists, identifying transmission of a text from one talmudic discussion into another, analyzing superfluous emendations, addressing redacting issues, and presenting the text in the original language with an awareness of the necessity of accurate translation.⁹⁸ Similarly, he did not hesitate to question the reliability of several sources from the Oral Law literature.⁹⁹

It must be emphasized that one central point of Halevy's philological analysis is fundamentally different from that of modern historiography. Whereas Halevy asserted that he objects to textual emendations based solely on reasoning, there are in fact numerous instances where he emended texts without having sufficient textual basis, a basis that he might have achieved by comparing manuscripts.¹⁰⁰

Finally, Halevy presented his readers with a system of historiographic rules setting out what is required of a historian seeking to extract reliable historical information from sources. According to Halevy, in the most straightforward case, the examination of the sources may lead us to the conclusion that in this

⁹⁶ In addition to the sources and historians mentioned in the previous chapter, Halevy relied on other works and authors who, in his view, did not offend against Orthodox values. These included: the Roman historian Dio Cassius (155–235), see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 73, 129, 275, 280, 283, 349, 402–403, 411, 415, 418–419, 421–423, 578, 585, 593, 594, 599–600, 603, 610, 612, 617, 618, 620, 621, 627, 631, 632n85, 635, 638, 777, 810, 814; and the Spanish historian De Castro (died 1898), see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 303. Halevy also displayed a familiarity with contemporary historical inquiry. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 41; Ie, pp. 398–399.

⁹⁷ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 181, 267, 594n2; Ie, p. 503.

⁹⁸ On insertions by copyists see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 41, 198, 200, 227; II, p. 114n59. On transmission of a text: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 114n59, 582n73. For Halevy's skills in analyzing emendations see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 475; Ic, p. 274; Ie, pp. 164n80. For Halevy's skills in redacting issues see: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, pp. 183–184, 445. On Halevy's awareness of the importance of original language and the importance of accurate translation see: Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 594n2; Ic, p. 519; Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 86, 383n10, 400–401n18.

⁹⁹ Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 250; Ic, pp. 180n8, 195n17.

¹⁰⁰ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 78, 245. Rabbi Raphael Nathan Rabinowitz (1835–1888) was an Orthodox scholar whose 15-volume magnum opus *Dikdukei Soferim* presented different versions of the Talmud, based on manuscripts, yet is not referenced in any of the volumes of Dorot ha-rishonim. Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 196.

particular case “the source from which all this [information] is derived is completely reliable.”¹⁰¹

Halevy claimed that more complex cases, where the source before us is discovered to be problematic, required a more complex research process. Not everything found in such a source is to be automatically rejected, even if the source is found to be faulty. Halevy wrote that the historian is charged with the obligation:

“to diligently separate the wheat from the chaff, not based on whatever suits us best but to seek out the external as well as the internal evidence in order to reconstruct the events as they were, as clearly as though the sun itself shone on them.”¹⁰²

This may be done by noticing whatever the source reveals unintentionally, as Halevy explained:

“For, in any event, much may be learned, from the style of the narration, from the way the writer refers to times past. Even from that which is mentioned only in passing, from that which is described in great length and even from that which is mentioned only briefly.”¹⁰³

When the historical information appearing in the source is in contradiction to the author’s proclivities, the concern that the information was influenced by ideological biases is negated, thus reinforcing its historical reliability.¹⁰⁴

In Halevy’s depiction, when faced with a scarcity of explicit sources the historian must follow a long and arduous process of constructing a historical mosaic: “find now this and now that, items which, when strung together, can fill in the blanks and clarify the matter.”¹⁰⁵ In any event, one must try to avoid evidence from absence, as it is very difficult to know what considerations led the writer to omit a particular detail.¹⁰⁶ The historian’s ear must be attuned to the reality of the world, because “the nature and practice of the world is substantial evidence.”¹⁰⁷ At times Halevy provided his readers with specific rules to assist in the formulation of the historical information. One example was his

¹⁰¹ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, p. 507.

¹⁰² Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 251. Halevy further reinforces this methodological approach. See: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 237n23, 256, 276; Ie, p. 393.

¹⁰³ Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 166. For further reinforcement by Halevy of this methodological approach see: Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 253, 256.

¹⁰⁴ See: Dorot ha-rishonim, Ic, pp. 507, 537.

¹⁰⁵ Dorot ha-rishonim, Ie, p. 570.

¹⁰⁶ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, pp. 225n27, 330.

¹⁰⁷ Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 480.

claim, that the later the version of the source, the greater its chances of being widely accepted. Another was his statement, not necessarily conforming to a critical historical approach, that agreement among the *Rishonim* could be seen as evidence of acceptance by the community of Israel.¹⁰⁸

6. Summary: “The Way of Truth is Not in the Center, But at the Ends: Both Ends at Once.”¹⁰⁹

Rabbi Isaac Yitzhak Halevy was a man of internal contradictions, who seemed to join disparate poles. At one pole, his historical works represented unequivocal Orthodox values: historical conservatism, apologetics, an uncritical approach to earlier rabbinic authorities, antipathy towards persons and views opposed to Orthodox values, and the effort to advance religious values. At the other pole, his works revealed tendencies inconsistent with the values of Orthodoxy: in several instances, he directly or indirectly legitimized the recognition of development in the Oral Law tradition. Throughout *Dorot ha-rishonim* there are instances of Halevy disputing the earlier rabbinic authorities, occasionally in harsh terms. Ultimately, Halevy assimilated historical information from historians who were far from Jewish Orthodox values. While the above tendencies could be widely interpreted as being anti-Orthodox, on closer examination they can be seen more accurately as an expression of Halevy’s devotion to modern historiographic methodology.¹¹⁰

Convention in the Orthodox society in which Halevy lived posited a substantial contradiction: The Orthodox aspiration to preserve the tradition contradicted with the tradition itself which had undergone significant change over the course of history. Thus Orthodoxy considered itself threatened by historical positivism which sought to uncover the imprints of history on the halakhic tradition. Those Orthodox who became aware of the historiographic threat during the second half of the nineteenth century and remained steadfast in their Orthodox faith generally adopted one of two historiographic responses. Yaakov Lifschitz (1838–1921), who wrote a three-volume memoir

¹⁰⁸ The later the source: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, III, pp. 204, 241. On agreement among the *Rishonim* see: *Dorot ha-rishonim*, II, p. 589.

¹⁰⁹ Hillel Zeitlin: *Al gvul shnei olamot* [On the Border of Two Worlds], Tel Aviv, 1965, p. 161.

¹¹⁰ Halevy’s double loyalty to the world of Orthodoxy and the historical discipline is evident, for example, his historiographic approach to Flavius Josephus (37–100), see: Sariel, *Can’t Live with Him*.

and history of nineteenth-century non-Hasidic Haredi society called *Zikhron Ya'akov*, was an example of a writer who chose to write history in opposition to the conclusions of both historical research and modern historiographic methodology.¹¹¹ Halevy, in contrast, sought to integrate Orthodox faith and modern historical research by dint of their common interest in seeking the truth. In his opinion, Orthodoxy liberated the historian from false prejudices, whereas the science of modern historiography afforded the Orthodox instruments for anchoring their religious faith in the past: "because the basis of Orthodoxy lies at the foundation of true *Wissenschaft des Judentums*."¹¹² Halevy's critical Orthodox historiography reflected a trend in Orthodox society whose focus was not only on the fear of the ramifications of the modernization process, but also on the internalization of its values.

One could fault Halevy for not noticing the contradiction between Orthodox conservatism and the shifts within the development of Halakhah and for trying "to hobble between two opinions."¹¹³ The historian could criticize him for ignoring talmudic manuscripts or for apologetic naiveté, while the Orthodox could criticize him for daring to dispute rabbinic authorities and legitimizing enemies of rabbinic tradition and Orthodox position by using them as historical sources.

To understand Halevy's historiographic oeuvre, however, it must be considered from his integrative point of view. While Orthodoxy developed as a modern movement reacting to other movements within Jewry, Halevy's modernity also expressed itself in his partial internalization of scientific historical methodology. In other words, his Orthodoxy was a modern phenomenon as evidenced by both those elements of modernity with which he struggled *and those* which he internalized and assimilated. The difficulties and inconsistencies in his work and conclusions can be seen as evidence of the dual loyalty and self-contradiction inherent. His loyalty to the Orthodox world led him to believe that in the period of the *Geonim* there were no disputes among the *Geonim*, while his loyalty to historical inquiry led him, on occasion, to dispute the *Rishonim*. Halevy's willingness to live with this dissonance can be seen to indicate the authenticity and deliberate nature of his position. However, his readiness to

¹¹¹ Israel Bartal: *Ha-yediah ve-hachochma ha-amitit*. Guideline for the Understanding of Orthodox Historiography, in: *Zmanim* 64 (1998), pp. 6–8, 11.

¹¹² Reichel, *Iggerot*, p. 188.

¹¹³ *Kings* I, 18:21.

stray from normative historiographic practice must be differentiated from his readiness to stray from normative Orthodoxy. Whereas the divergence from normative modern historiography, which led him to “Orthodox” conclusions, sprang from his deep belief in the correlation between methodological principle and Orthodox conclusions, his divergence from normative Orthodoxy sprang from a conscious decision. In other words, while Halevy was fully aware of the price he paid in terms of Orthodoxy, for his insistence on modern historical methodology, he was unaware of the price his insistence on devotion to Orthodox values extracted from his historical research. This may also explain why his “Orthodox” image is more prominent than his *Wissenschaft* image.

This indicates that, aside from the elements of contending against the historiography of *Wissenschaft* and the internalization of modern methodology, Halevy’s historiographical methodology reflected complexity within Orthodoxy. Like the Berlin branch of neo-Orthodoxy, Halevy supported an academic approach that would engage with *Wissenschaft*.¹¹⁴ Halevy’s conclusion that Orthodoxy must brace itself to assimilate modern values more significantly would seem to explain several actions he took which were anomalous in the normative Orthodoxy of his day. Firstly, he devoted the majority of his effort to writing history rather than to pure Torah study, as was expected of a religious leader in his position in the Lithuanian tradition. Secondly, he discussed with Rav Kook the claim that rabbinical training must be changed to include “external knowledge.”¹¹⁵ Halevy expressed satisfaction at Rabbi Yitzhak Yaacov Reines’ (1839–1915) request to include *Dorot ha-rishonim* in the curriculum of the Lidda Yeshivah and his emphasis on the importance of the work for high-level Torah scholars. As a work dealing with history it would traditionally have been considered outside the rabbinic point of view (*hitzoni*): “I am full of satisfaction, for if my work will begin to be taught in the yeshivot this will fulfill my primary

¹¹⁴ Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, pp. 181–193. In fact, Halevy broke with the Berliner School over the harsh language Halevy employed and the importance he placed on non-Jewish sources and historiography. See: Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, pp. 196–200; Yedidya, *Biqqoret mevuyqeret*, pp. 180–181, 192–193. For additional references see: David Ellenson: *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy*, London 1990.

¹¹⁵ Reichel, *Iggerot*, pp. 150–152. Halevy disagreed with Rabbi Kook on the need to rejuvenate the approach to Torah study by devoting time to the spiritual study of Aggadah, Midrashim, and Kabbalah. In Halevy’s view “the spirituality of the Torah is to be found only in the Torah itself” (Reichel, *Iggerot*, p. 151). This was in keeping with the Lithuanian heritage in which he was raised.

desideratum and God will grant me the privilege of having contributed to the repair of the ways of Torah in Israel.¹¹⁶

It is in this context that I propose understanding Halevy's high self-esteem, which enabled him to see himself as a leader of a movement towards the development of Orthodox Jewish studies.¹¹⁷ In addition, and as a mirror image of the "ultra-Orthodox" faction which sought to intensify the tendency of Orthodox isolationism, he reflects an attempt to advance the internalization of modern values into Orthodoxy.¹¹⁸

The relationship between Orthodoxy and modernity expressed itself in Halevy's historiographic approach in at least three ways: the struggle against the conclusions of modern historical inquiry, the internalization of the methods of modern historical inquiry, and the internal struggle within Orthodoxy against the academic segregation. Thus, Halevy's approach offers a new lens by which to understand Orthodoxy as a complex phenomenon, of which the struggle against modern secularization is only one characteristic.

¹¹⁶ Reichel, *Iggerot*, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ Halevy was convinced of the high quality of his own methodology. (Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 422; *Ie*, p. 486; *Tequfat ha-miqra*, p. 142; Reichel, *Iggerot*, p. 111) He saw this as leading to accurate conclusions. (Dorot ha-rishonim, III, p. 13; II, p. 241) These conclusions were, in his opinion, irrefutable. (Dorot ha-rishonim, II, p. 125; *Ic*, p. 97) He also considered them as unnoticed by previous historians. (Dorot ha-rishonim, III, pp. 7, 17, 80, 138, 160, 168, 202; II, pp. 3, 24, 58, 127, 145, 212, 261, 265; *Ic*, pp. 49, 62, 65, 74, 387, 399; *Ie*, pp. 70, 77; Reichel, *Iggerot*, p. 203) On Halevy as the leader of a movement see: Reichel, *Iggerot*, pp. 108–109.

¹¹⁸ On the ultra-Orthodox faction see: Jacob Katz: *A House Divided. Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Central European Jewry*, Hanover NH 1998, pp. 56–85. Halevy's dream of establishing an Orthodox pro-science movement in the spirit of Dorot ha-rishonim was not realized. See: Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 198; Yedidya, *Biqqoret mevuyqeret*, p. 194.