

Enlisted History: Zeev Jawitz (1847–1924) and the Making of a National Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

by Asaf Yedidya

Abstract

Zeev Jawitz (1847–1924) was active in all spheres of culture: history, language, literature and pedagogy, all the while striving for harmonization with the Orthodox outlook. He understood that a people returning to its homeland needed a national culture, one that was both broad and deep, and that the narrow world of the Halakhah would no longer suffice. His main work was the multi-volume *Toldot Israel* (History of Israel, published 1895–1924) which encompasses Jewish history from its beginning – Patriarchs – until the end of the 19th century. His historical writing, with its emphasis on internal religious Jewish sources, the unity and continuity of Jewish history, and respect of Orthodox principles, comes as an alternative to the historiography of the celebrated historian Heinrich Graetz. The alternative that Jawitz tried to substitute for *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, was influenced not only by Orthodox ideology, which he supported, but also by his nationalist ideology. He saw himself and his disciples as the “priests of memory,” presenting the true and immanent history and character of the Jewish nation as a platform to the Jewish future in the land of Israel.

1. Introduction

In 1886, at the beginning of his research career, Zeev Jawitz (1847–1924) published a long historical essay in the annual *Knesset Israel* edited by S.P. Rabinowitz. This annual was national and traditional. The article “Migdal HaMeah” (The Century Tower) attempted to celebrate two people: Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), whose death centenary was being celebrated at that time, and Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), who was celebrating his hundredth birthday. The article was essentially an overview of the previous hundred years on the following topics: the Enlightenment movement, Reform,

Wissenschaft des Judentums, the Vilna Gaon and his disciples, and Montefiore and Jewish national revival. The article highlighted Jawitz's unique national Orthodox attitude, different both from enlightened writing and from Orthodox historiography.¹

Unlike many Orthodox writers and the national Maskil Peretz Smolenskin (1842–1885), who considered Mendelssohn to be the father of Western European Jewish assimilation,² Jawitz viewed him as the luminary of his generation. He stressed the fact that Mendelssohn maintained an Orthodox lifestyle and, despite his closeness to German intellectuals, never considered foregoing his faith in order to placate them.³ Jawitz effectively appropriated Mendelssohn into the Orthodox camp and considers his disciples to be errant students. In so doing, Jawitz strayed from the writings of other Orthodox thinkers like Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), who, while viewing Mendelssohn positively, still expressed misgivings.⁴ It was an attempt by Jawitz to portray Mendelssohn as a legitimate conveyor of age-old Jewish tradition, rather than as the precursor to modern Jewish streams of thought whose leaders also tried to appropriate Mendelssohn.⁵ By bringing Mendelssohn over to his side, Jawitz implied that the Enlightenment movement does not contradict Orthodoxy. On the contrary, any deviation from Orthodoxy deviated from *true* enlightenment.

In his article, Jawitz addressed the discipline of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* which first developed in the 1820s. He claimed that the real father of this discipline is the Vilna Gaon (Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720–1797), who introduced critical reading to rabbinic literature.⁶ Jawitz distinguished radical and devastating scientific criticism, born in Germany, from genuine and constructive criticism born in Eastern Europe. He also placed his history

¹ On Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see: Asaf Yedidya: Criticized Criticism. Orthodox Alternatives to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1873–1956, Jerusalem 2013, (in Hebrew).

² Meir Hildesheimer: Moses Mendelssohn in Nineteenth-Century Rabbinical Literature, in: Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 55 (1988), pp. 80–133; Shmuel Feiner: *Haskalah and History. The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, Oxford 2002, pp. 317–340.

³ Zeev Jawitz, Migdal HaMeah, in: *Knesset Israel*, 1 (1886), p. 98.

⁴ Mordechai Breuer: *Modernity within Tradition. The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, New York 1992, pp. 70–71, 79–80.

⁵ Michael A. Meyer: *Response to Modernity. A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, New York 1988, pp. 248, 269.

⁶ Jawitz, Migdal HaMeah, p. 131.

as a critique of Heinrich Graetz, who disparaged traditional Polish Jews in his writings.⁷ For Jawitz, who was personally offended by Graetz's portrayal, the alternative was not only Orthodox but also manifestly Eastern European. At the end of the article, he viewed the national movement *Hibbat Zion* (Love of Zion) as the triumph of Judaism over European culture and of nationalism and tradition over imitation and assimilation.⁸ Actually, this early article specifically displayed Jawitz's unique attitude toward *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, an attitude which was national Orthodox and anti-German-centric in nature.

Wissenschaft des Judentums, the scholarly study of the Jewish religion and people which originated in the 1820s, challenged many traditional principles, and in fact threatened conceptions of the traditionally accepted Jewish past.⁹ According to some scholars, *Wissenschaft des Judentums* appeared as an irrevocable fissure in Jewish life that wrought havoc on all elements of Jewish culture, due to the assimilatory motives of its founders. One of those scholars, Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), claimed that German Jewish historians had, at best, an antiquarian's interest in Jewish history.¹⁰ Conversely, other scholars believed that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was the supreme form of German-Jewish self-expression.¹¹ Everybody agreed that *Wissenschaft* was regarded by many traditional Jews as a real threat to traditional Jewish values. At the heart of this threat lay several premises and *Weltanschauungen* in terms of both methodology and content.

The Orthodox movement that was fighting against Reform and for "rabbinism"¹² could not ignore this discipline and was forced to respond ideologically as well as concretely. The anti-rabbinism of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

⁷ Ibid, p. 134.

⁸ Ibid, p. 151.

⁹ Julius Carlebach (ed.): *Wissenschaft des Judentums. Anfänge der Judaistik in Europa*, Darmstadt, 1992; Ismar Schorsch: *From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, Waltham 1994; Michael A. Meyer: *The Emergence of Jewish Historiography. Motives and Motifs*, in: *History and Theory*, 27 (1988): pp. 160–175; 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.

¹⁰ Gershom Scholem: *Reflections on Modern Jewish Studies*, in: idem: *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time, and Other Essays*, Avraham Shapira (ed.), Philadelphia 1997, pp. 51–71.

¹¹ Schorsch, *From Text to Context*, pp. 1–6; Meyer, *Emergence of Jewish Historiography*, p. 175; David Sorkin: *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840*, New York 1987, pp. 134–139.

¹² Mordechai Breuer: *Modernity within Tradition*; Adam Ferziger: *Exclusion and Hierarchy. Orthodoxy, Non-Observance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*, Philadelphia 2005.

researchers employed a critical method of research that was irreconcilable with the old Jewish methods of learning. The first reaction was to categorically negate it. The second reaction was fundamentally similar to the first, but more nuanced in that it criticized only those studies carried out in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that specifically impinged upon Orthodox values. These criticisms included polemics aimed at the “problematic” deductions, in an attempt to negate the legitimacy of the way in which the authors reached their conclusions, sometimes by blatantly demeaning them. The third reaction was to create an Orthodox alternative to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Orthodox scholars competed with the basic values and methods of research which challenged traditional concepts of the past, such as objectivity and historicism, and developed research strategies that allowed them to hold on to both their objectives at the same time, i. e. scientific research methods *and* traditional values.¹³

Such an Orthodox alternative began forming in the 1870s. The first group of Orthodox researchers emerged in Berlin’s rabbinical seminary headed by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820–1899). This seminary produced a significant body of literature on *Wissenschaft*, including critical editions of ancient manuscripts, studies on Jews in Germany and elsewhere, bibliographic studies, and contributions to Bible studies, Talmudic studies, and Near Eastern languages.¹⁴ However, since the language of their writing was German, the seminary’s researchers found it difficult to break out of the world of German Orthodoxy. The Jews of Eastern Europe were therefore influenced by non-Orthodox researchers who wrote in Hebrew.

Two methodological historic works from the end of the nineteenth century are considered to be the most influential products of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: the books of Heinrich (Zvi) Graetz (1817–1891) and Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905). The five volumes of Weiss’ book *Dor Dor Ve’Dorshav*, published between 1871 and 1891, were extremely popular. By 1907 four editions were printed, and six by 1911. Graetz’s *Geschichte der Juden*, which already existed in the libraries of enlightened Jews in the original German, was translated into Hebrew by Saul Pinhas Rabinowitz between 1888 and 1899. These books

¹³ Asaf Yedidya: Orthodox Reactions to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: *Modern Judaism*, 30 (2010), pp. 69–94.

¹⁴ Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, pp. 181–193.

were not confined to the homes of students and laymen, but even entered Lithuanian yeshivot.¹⁵

In addition, the Hildesheimer school's reaction to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was also influenced by the pro-emancipation German context. It generally neglected Jewish national aspects, specifically the history of East-European Jews. Most of them did not support *Hibbat Zion* or the Zionist movement. Therefore, national Maskilim in Russia preferred adopting the positive-historical Breslau school's attitude toward *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which seemed to them more national in scope.¹⁶ In this context, Jawitz began his historiographical project.

2. History Serves the Future

Ze'ev Jawitz was born on September 26, 1847 in the town of Kolno in north-eastern Poland. His father was a well-to-do merchant, religiously observant and well-known for his strong opposition to Hasidism. In 1860, the family moved to Łomża and five years later to Warsaw. Jawitz's father ensured that his son studied the Bible and Hebrew, and even engaged tutors to teach him European languages: French, Polish, and German. Outside the scope of his scheduled studies, Jawitz read voraciously about geography and history and was particularly influenced by the books of Josephus Flavius. He married at the age of eighteen and, after his wife died at an early age, he married Golda, the sister of Yehiel Michael Pines (1843–1913), an Orthodox author and the representative of *Hibbat Zion* in Eretz Israel in the 1880s. In 1882, he began to publish short essays on Jewish history in the Hebrew periodicals *Ha-Shachar* (The Dawn), *Knesset Yisrael* (Israel's Assembly), *Ha-Magid* (The Informant), *Ha-Melitz* (The Advocate), and *Ha-Boker Or* (The Morning Light). In 1887, he emigrated to Palestine, living in Yehud, near Petach Tikvah. Two years later, he was appointed rabbi and teacher in Zichron Ya'akov, but after a year and a half of conflict with Baron Edmond James de Rothschild's agents he was dismissed from his teaching position and moved to Jerusalem, where he lived

¹⁵ Immanuel Etkes/Shlomo Tikochinski (eds.): *Memoirs of the Lithuanian Yeshiva*, Jerusalem 2004 (in Hebrew): 31–44. On the Lithuanian yeshivot, see also Shaul Stampfer: *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century. Creating a Tradition of Learning*, Oxford 2012.

¹⁶ Asaf Yedidya: "Out of Breslau Shall Come Forth Torah, and the Word of the Lord from Frankfurt am Main." *Religious Impact of German Judaism on Russian Judaism during the Last Three Decades of the 19th Century*, in: *Modern Judaism*, 36 (2016), pp. 1–11.

for seven years. Finding it difficult to make a living, he left Jerusalem and Palestine in 1897 and moved to Vilna, where he stayed for eight years. While in Vilna, he joined the Zionist Organization, was one of the founders of the Mizrahi movement, and became editor of its journal *Ha-Mizrach* (The East). He left Lithuania for Germany in 1905, living first in Berlin and then in Bad Homburg near Frankfurt am Main. On the death of his wife in 1912, he went to live with his children in Antwerp in Belgium, but with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 he escaped with his family to England, settling first in Leeds and later in London.¹⁷

Jawitz's literary and communal activities were highly varied. They encompassed virtually all areas of culture and he left his stamp on them all. He realized that he was living in an age of transition from one way of life in the diaspora to a different one in the national homeland, one that presented complex problems together with occasional opportunities. He strove to harmonize Orthodoxy with life as it was developing in the land of Israel, in part by blending it with nascent Jewish nationalism. He was active in all spheres of culture: history, language, literature, and pedagogy, all the while striving for harmonization with the Orthodox outlook. He understood that a people returning to their homeland needed a national culture, one that was both broad and deep, and that the narrow world of Halakhah would no longer suffice. Writing in a positive spirit rather than a subversive one, he therefore strove to construct a traditional picture of the past, with a view to creating a new program for religious education that would meet the needs of the time without causing a rift with the past.¹⁸

In 1895, Jawitz began working on his magnum opus, *Toldot Israel* (History of Israel) series, encompassing Jewish history from the forefathers to the pogroms of 1881. The book is divided into two central eras of Jewish history: "the age of Israel in its land" and "the age of Israel among the nations." He mentioned a third era, which he also called "the age of Israel in its land," but did not write about it; since he was writing in the 1920s he claimed to not yet have the needed historical perspective.¹⁹

¹⁷ Asaf Yedidya: "To Cultivate a Hebrew Culture." *The Life and Thought of Zeev Jawitz*, Jerusalem 2016 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–190.

¹⁹ Yafah Berlovitz: *Historiosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ze'ev Yavetz*, in: *Cathedra*, 20 (1981), pp. 165–166.

He ended the work in 1922, two years prior to his death, but saw the publication of just nine volumes. The first two volumes were published in Jerusalem in 1895 and 1897; the third, fourth, and fifth were published in Vilna in 1898, 1900, and 1902; the following three volumes appeared in Germany in 1907, 1909, and 1912, and the ninth volume was published in London in 1922. The remaining five volumes were published in Tel Aviv in 1930. At the end of every volume, Jawitz published an appendix containing various historical clarifications and disagreements with other scholars.²⁰ At the start of his work, Jawitz turned to Ze'ev Wissotzky (1824–1904), a rich merchant and Zionist from Moscow, asking for financial support. Wissotzky agreed and allocated 500 rubles for the book, praising Jawitz's previous achievements.²¹

The first two volumes, published in Jerusalem, dealt with the biblical era from the forefathers to the kingdom of Hezekiah, and were primarily based on the biblical narrative, and less so on sources from the Aggadah. The first volume began by describing the Land of Israel before delving into the ancient genealogy of the Israelites. The message was contemporary: just as the land awaited the first “age of Israel in its land” with the arrival of Abraham, so too does the land now await the return of the Jews. In the middle of the volume, Jawitz paused the historical overview and dedicated an entire chapter to the “Torah of Moses.” The chapter was essentially a summary of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Torah, with an emphasis on the commandments and the values stemming from them: the value of human life and dignity, the sanctity of family, the rights of the widow and orphan, and the right of an individual to private property and a share in common assets.²² Jawitz popularized the Torah's philosophy and his understanding of the commandments using modern concepts. He depicted the Torah as humane, moral and rationalistic, surpassing all other ancient laws, and preceding modern European states by thousands of years in its progressive attitudes towards women and slaves, the poor and foreigners, orphans and widows, laws of wartime and animal rights.

A significant portion of the second volume dealt with the kingdom of David. Jawitz described it as idyllic in all aspects: militarily, politically, socially, and

²⁰ Reuven Michael: *Jewish Historiography from the Renaissance to the Modern Time*, Jerusalem 1993 (in Hebrew), pp. 424–465.

²¹ Letter from Zeev Wissotzky to Zeev Jawitz, November 13, 1894, New York Public Library Archives, Jawitz Collection, item 49.

²² Zeev Jawitz: *Toldot Israel*, Tel Aviv 1955–1963 (in Hebrew), vol. 1, p. 54.

religiously. He described King David as an enlightened monarch who established a modern bureaucratic system, opposed giving too much power to the military, and oversaw the separation of power and independence of the courts while remaining attuned to the needs of the people.²³

Despite this idyllic portrayal, Jawitz remained loyal to the biblical text which describes David's sin with Bathsheba, preferring it to the more forgiving commentaries of the sages.²⁴ He viewed David's repentance – as well as his ability to hear harsh (prophetic) criticism – as a testimony to his greatness.²⁵ Jawitz also described the daily life of the Israelites at the time, their agriculture and craftsmanship, their clothes, home utensils and food, their aesthetics and hygiene, their love of freedom and hospitality, their heroism, their love of the nation and tribal loyalty, their holidays and mourning days, and their respect for the Torah, the prophets and the priests.²⁶ Clearly, he saw this as an ideal model for the future Jewish state.

3. The Uniqueness of his Project

For most of his life, Jawitz studied Jewish history, which he did not view as an apologetic imperative, but rather as a value akin to the study of Torah. He effectively tried to create a comprehensive Orthodox alternative to the historical writing of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* experts. The structure and chronology of Jawitz's book is similar to that of Heinrich Graetz, and was written as something of an alternative to it. Jawitz complains that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* researchers were influenced by their non-Jewish teachers, and therefore absorbed some of their biases and misconceptions.

In Jawitz's opinion, Jewish history is distinct from world history. While other nations are shaped by the external influences of surrounding cultures, Jewish culture is internal, inspired by divine revelation to the Jews.²⁷ Therefore, Jawitz argued, the historicist method which searches for external influences is inapplicable to Jewish history.²⁸ Even moderate *Wissenschaft* scholars, he

²³ Ibid, vol. 2, pp. 20–23.

²⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 56a.

²⁵ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 2, p. 23.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 34–58.

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 220.

²⁸ Ibid, vol. 1, p. III.

complained, use methods from the non-Jewish historical discipline.²⁹ Moreover, only researchers deeply connected to the Jewish people and their culture can properly comprehend Jewish history, Jawitz claimed.³⁰ This attitude stemmed from Jawitz's belief that Jewish culture was a self-contained, closed system, different from open cultures which require external help to develop. Therefore, the study of Jewish culture required a different methodology.

In addition to Jawitz's attempt to write Jewish history from a distinctly Jewish perspective, he had another motive, which he explained to his friend Benjamin Menasheh Levin in 1910: He believed that the study of history was the best way to explain Jewish philosophy and thought.³¹

Like other Orthodox scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Jawitz preferred traditional sources to other ones.³² In a private letter to another historian, he wrote:

"I have distinguished myself from other authors in this thing, that my eyes and heart are focused only inward, to use only our literature as the source of our history; and the writings of foreign authors, ancient and contemporary, did not serve me – except for addenda."³³

He also believed them to be more credible.

However, in certain cases he preferred external sources over rabbinical sources. In these cases, he justified his decision by quoting other rabbinical sources that supported his conclusions. For example, he adopted conclusions from modern research according to which the period of the Persian Kingdom extended for more than two hundred years, as opposed to the Midrash Tannaim "Seder Olam," which states that "the Persian Kingdom (existed) during the time of the Temple thirty-four years," for a total fifty-four years. However, by rejecting the words of the Midrash "Seder Olam Rabbah" (The Great Order of the World) as cited in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Avodah Zarah [Idolatry]), he was not only supported by the external sources "Josephus and Philo and colleagues who were authorities on this subject," but mainly by the rabbinic sages themselves, most of whom, by his understanding,

²⁹ Ibid, p.IV.

³⁰ Ibid, p.VI.

³¹ Zeev Jawitz: Nefesh Hayah, in: Tachkemoni, 1 (1910), p. 42.

³² Jawitz, Toldot Israel, vol.6, p.IX.

³³ Ibid, vol. 14, pp. 191–192.

disagreed with the *Tana* (*mishnaic* sage) Rabbi Yossi, who held the minority's opinion. According to him, Rabbi Yossi's calculation "counting to Persia only thirty-four years [...] because the Talmud brings many simplifications in Israel," was in truth only one opinion. In Jawitz's view, the majority disagreed with Rabbi Yossi, as mentioned elsewhere in the Midrash "Seder Olam," as a general *baraita* (teaching not incorporated in the Mishnah) without the *Tana's* name, "the totality of the Mede and Persian Kingdom two hundred and fifty years." Furthermore, he claimed "in order to support the Sages' words" that there may have occurred a switching of the letters Beth (second letter of the alphabet) and Lamed (twelfth letter of the alphabet) in the words of Rabbi Yossi, and the correct phrase was: "the Persian Kingdom (existed) before the Temple thirty-four years."³⁴

Jawitz saw his uniqueness in choosing sources, especially biblical ones. He viewed the Bible as an especially credible source, praising the Book of Chronicles as a unique repository of ancient material.³⁵ He also scoffed at researchers who doubted the historicity of the Book of Esther, using it himself as a historical source.³⁶ However, Jawitz rejected the studies of Christian Bible scholars, even those supporting his positions. When Jawitz was criticized for ignoring archaeological findings from the Near East, some of which supported the biblical narrative, he added an appendix to his third volume called "the results of digs and studies." Jawitz's method was an alternative to the discipline of biblical criticism, whose adherents doubted the credibility of biblical sources.³⁷ In an article published in 1910, Jawitz insisted on the veracity of the biblical sources in opposition to all other external sources.³⁸

Jawitz did not present his position on the superiority of biblical sources as an axiom, like the Hildesheimer school did. According to Jawitz, every nation recognized the veracity of its own sources, and Jews should be no different. However, he may have exaggerated the mistreatment of Jewish sources, since

³⁴ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 31.

³⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 20.

³⁶ Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 9–13.

³⁷ On the discipline of biblical criticism and its criticism in the 19th century, see: Yaacov Shavit/Mordechai Eran: *The War of the Tablets. The Defence of the Bible in the 19th Century and the Babel-Bible Controversy*, Tel Aviv 2003 (in Hebrew); Ran HaCohen: *Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible. German-Jewish Reception of Biblical Criticism*, New York 2010.

³⁸ Zeev Jawitz, *HaBikoret She'Hee Mevukeret*, in: *Tachkemoni*, 1 (1910), pp. 14–15.

non-Jewish researchers did not spare other sources their criticism either, including canonical Christian sources.

In his study of the Second Temple period and the periods that followed, Jawitz relied heavily on rabbinic Aggadah sources and Midrash, unlike many non-religious researchers who doubted their historic veracity. He did not, however, accept the legends at face value, but rather established research methods to examine them. According to him, Aggadah sources should be classified according to their content and style.³⁹ By doing this, he diverged from many Orthodox writers who relied on historical Aggadah material as-is, following rabbis from the Middle Ages who used such sources to explain the history of the oral Torah.

In his rejection of historicist approaches to Judaism, Jawitz praised historian Salomon Steinheim, who moved from supporting the Reform movement to identifying with Orthodoxy.⁴⁰ True to his approach of historical continuity, Jawitz consistently referred to the Jewish people as “Israel” rather than “Jews.” He claimed that non-Jewish writers used the term “Jew” to argue that the Jewish people were not an authentic continuation of the ancient people, but rather “a diluted, mistreated tribe.”⁴¹ He also criticized Heinrich Graetz for using both terms, first “Israelites” and then “Jews.” In the appendix to his third volume, Jawitz argued with the father of biblical criticism, Julius Wellhausen, relying on the findings from archaeological digs in the Near East. In an article titled “Their criticism,” Jawitz argued that Bible critics come with an ulterior motive: German chauvinism and envy of the Jews had caused German researchers to attribute their significant values to neighboring cultures.⁴²

The continual Jewish reliance on their own internal resources lasted, according to Jawitz, into the Second Temple period and beyond.⁴³ His aim in the volumes covering the period subsequent to the Babylonian exile, for example, was “to demonstrate that all the deeds of our Rabbis from the days of the men of the Great Assembly up until the time of Rav Hai Gaon were in fact

³⁹ Esther Segal: *The Historical Thought of Ze'ev Jawitz* (unpublished MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University), Ramat Gan 1992 (in Hebrew), pp. 123–135.

⁴⁰ Jawitz, *HaBikoret*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 14, pp. 216–220.

⁴² Jawitz, *HaBikoret*, pp. 12.

⁴³ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 6, p. IX.

a fulfillment of the spirit of the Torah.⁴⁴ In this connection, he referred his reader to Eisik Halevy's book *Dorot ha-rishonim* (First Generations), observing that

"R. Eisik Halevy proved conclusively that none of the *Tannaim* nor the sages of the House of Shammai or the House of Hillel, including Hillel and Shammai themselves, innovated anything at all in the Mishnah [...] due to constraints of space we cannot bring here all his cast-iron proofs that the Mishnah in essence originates with the men of the Great Assembly, and we therefore counsel all who wish to delve into this matter to read R. Eisik Halevy's book [...]."⁴⁵

Thus, he said regarding Rabbi Akiva, for example, that "he preserved the Law of Moses, expanding its boundaries from within and expounding it in all its detail."⁴⁶ He emphasized that the 'expansion' that Rabbi Akiva propounded was solely 'from within,' meaning that he did not invent new laws, in contrast with Graetz's approach which emphasized the innovative nature of Rabbi Akiva's method.⁴⁷

In accordance with a method that negated real cultural absorption from other cultures, Jawitz saw fit to criticize Moses Maimonides (1135/38–1204) for adopting the principals of Aristotelian philosophy as the basis of his intellectual method. When it came to evaluating Maimonides, he had divided opinions about his two main works: *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Torah) and *Moreh Nevuchim* (The Guide for the Perplexed). The first followed the traditional Jewish method, while the second was "an external method borrowed from their neighbors the gentile." Nevertheless, he also defended him, claiming that the intention of his writing was pure – to save from heresy Jews who had been attracted by philosophy.⁴⁸ On the other hand, he extolled Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon (882–942), who, in his *Ha'Emunot VeHade'ot* (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) contended with the prevailing philosophy without adopting its principles as the basis of his thought, apart from its logic. The content itself was taken from Jewish sources.⁴⁹ His attitude towards Kabbal-

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. VIII.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 212–213n3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁷ Heinrich Graetz: *Geschichte der Juden. Vom Untergang des jüdischen Staates bis zum Abschluss des Talmud*, vol. 4, Leipzig 1908, p. 51.

⁴⁸ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 12, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Ibid, vol. 10, pp. 70–71.

ah was more complex. On the one hand, he acknowledged its inner Jewish sources and the fact that it constituted an alternative to Greek philosophy. But, on the other hand, he was aware of the danger that it could be abused by unscrupulous people like the “false messiahs” Shabtai Zvi (1626–1676) and Jacob Franck (1726–1791).⁵⁰

Nevertheless, he respected the Hasidism of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (Baal Shem Tov, 1698–1760) despite its kabbalistic aspects. He esteemed the founder of *Hasidut* as one who adhered to Halakhah and emphasized its central innovation – serving God with joy and love – as a return to the Jewish roots of biblical times, long marginalized under the influence of Indian philosophy that infused religious worship with sadness and fear.⁵¹ This perception guided Jawitz in his religious Zionist philosophy. He understood that, apart from political, practical, and spiritual initiatives, the national rebirth would also need a mental transformation. He was much preoccupied with the idea that natural rejoicing in life was an essential ingredient in the return of the Jewish people to their land. In a letter written in 1892 to his son, Yehudah Leib, he had already highlighted the idea of the “joy of life” (Heb. *messos ha-hayim*), arguing that it in no way conflicted with tradition.⁵²

In his positive attitude toward Hasidism, he was like the Maskil Eliezer Zweifel (1815–1888), who changed the appreciation of Hasidism among those of the Russian Haskalah movement,⁵³ although Jawitz never delved into it as deeply. Jawitz, like Zweifel, adopted the theory of the “three shepherds,” referring to the three religious-ideological Jewish movements of the 18th century – Hasidism (Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov), *Hitnagdut* (the opposition, i. e. the Vilna Gaon), and Haskalah (Moses Mendelssohn) – which, despite seeming to be at odds, actually harmoniously complement each other.⁵⁴ And, like Zweifel, he also pointed to manifestations of moral corruption in the movement in later years, though in a more moderate way.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Michael, *Jewish Historiography*, pp. 456–458.

⁵¹ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 13, pp. 141–144.

⁵² Letter from Zeev Jawitz to his son Yehudah Leib, November 4, 1892, New York Public Library Archives, Jawitz Collection, item 95.

⁵³ Feiner, *Haskalah and History*, pp. 306–317.

⁵⁴ Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 13, pp. 150–151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–161.

Jawitz's tone was pro-rabbinic. His writings about certain rabbis were full of praise for their piousness and righteousness,⁵⁶ like the *tanaitic* group *Bnei Beteira* (*Bathyra*), who he calls "pure" and "modest."⁵⁷ He viewed the rabbis as disciples of the prophets, highlighting their unshakable integrity. This pro-rabbinic stance continued into his survey of the Middle Ages and even the modern era.

Beyond defending rabbis from attack, Jawitz set out to defend Halakhah itself. He harshly criticized Jewish sects that opposed the rabbinic law throughout the ages. Thus, he accused the Sadducees of Hellenism and of acting out of egotistical and hedonistic motives.⁵⁸ He was no less critical of the Karaites. He portrayed the founder of the sect, Anan Ben David, as a fraud and a manipulator, and compared his disciples to Christians.⁵⁹ In the appendix to his tenth volume, he tried to prove the inconsistencies in Karaite doctrine. He used irony and harsh expressions to refute the Karaite grievances with rabbinic law. It seems, however, that his criticism was directed at the enlightened Jews who were sympathetic of the Karaite struggle against the rabbis.

The final group targeted by Jawitz was the enlightened of Berlin who followed Mendelssohn and the first religious reformers, excluding Mendelssohn himself. Jawitz ascribed problematic immoral behavior to them, in addition to wrong motives.⁶⁰

Like other Orthodox historians, Jawitz also brought divine providence into his historical depictions. Thus, he described God's proactive role in rescuing Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai from the Romans during the destruction of the Second Temple, which enabled the continuity of Judaism.⁶¹

4. In the Grip of Criticism and Acceptance

The first to critique Jawitz's "History of Israel" books, which appeared in Hebrew, were naturally *Wissenschaft des Judentums* experts writing in Hebrew in Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. One year after the appearance of Jawitz's first volume, the *Maskil Moshe*

⁵⁶ Ibid, vol. 3, pp. 30–40, 161–170.

⁵⁷ Ibid, vol. 5, p. 35.

⁵⁸ Ibid, vol. 4, pp. 157, 160.

⁵⁹ Ibid, vol. 9, pp. 191–192.

⁶⁰ Ibid, vol. 13, p. 201.

⁶¹ Ibid, vol. 6, p. 3.

Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910) penned a critique in the newly issued *HaShiloah* (The Messenger) periodical. While praising the book for its “charm and love for Israel and its Torah,” the article attacked its lack of criticism toward traditional sources. He believed that Jawitz was not critical enough of rabbinic sources.⁶² Asher Ginzberg (Ahad HaAm, 1856–1927) also bemoaned the existence of history books written “in a Jewish spirit.”⁶³ A harsher critique came a few years later from the historian Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), who argued that Jawitz’s Orthodoxy prevented him from being a critical historian.⁶⁴

From the Orthodox side, Rabbi Joshua Joseph Preil (1857–1896), the rabbi of Kroki in Lithuania, praised Jawitz for standing up to secularized historians, and for writing in Hebrew rather than German. However, he criticized some of Jawitz’s writings for not being Orthodox enough, such as the omission of the sun standing still in the skies during the time of Joshua. “Is this the sacrifice Jawitz is wishing to make for the love of the rationalists?” Preil wondered.⁶⁵

Jawitz’s brother-in-law Yechiel Michel Pines encouraged his writing and used his books to teach history in the teachers’ seminary in Jerusalem, but believed that, like non-Orthodox historians, Jawitz too “overused unfounded hypotheses.”⁶⁶

At the end of 1905, Jawitz left Lithuania and moved to Germany. In Berlin, he received a warm welcome from the Orthodox rabbinical seminary leaders. Abraham Berliner (1833–1915) and Hirsch Hildesheimer (1855–1910) underwrote the printing and distribution costs for volumes six to eight of *Toldot Yisrael*, and helped Jawitz gain acceptance among the German Orthodox. In addition, the reviews of Jawitz’s books written by members of the rabbinical seminary were quite favorable. In David Hoffmann’s critical review of volume seven of *Toldot Yisrael*, he wrote: “This section is a fitting companion to its predecessors. Like them, it is notable for its great inner strength and its pleasing outward appearance.” In the same article, Hoffmann (1843–1921) lauded Jawitz for his educational goals. What was seen by others as a drawback – his Orthodox ideology – Hoffmann regarded as an advantage:

⁶² Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Reshit Toldot Israel. Bikoret, in: *HaShiloah*, 1 (1896), pp. 81–93.

⁶³ Yedidya, Cultivate a Hebrew Culture, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Joseph Klausner, Zeev Jawitz, in: *HaShiloah*, 21 (1909), p. 382.

⁶⁵ Yehoshua Yosef Preil: *Ketavim Nivharim*, New York 1924 (in Hebrew), p. 278.

⁶⁶ Letter of Yechiel Michel Pines to Zeev Jawitz, January 13, 1905, Central Zionist Archives, A9/129.

“The reader will be particularly pleased by the great esteem in which the author holds the rabbis, at whose feet he respectfully sits and whose every word he eagerly imbibes. He pores over the hidden secrets of the Talmud and the Midrash, extracting their pearls and stringing them into a beautiful chain. This is not merely a history book. It also succeeds, to a great extent, in inspiring both young and old with love for our holy religion, elevating their hearts and illuminating their eyes for that which we venerate and hold most dear – our Oral and Written Law. The clarity of the Hebrew prose is a source of pleasure to the reader. We therefore recommend *Toldot Yisrael* by Jawitz to all Hebrew readers.”⁶⁷

Due to his wife Golda’s sickness, she and Jawitz would frequent German health resorts such as Bad Soden and Wiesbaden. In the fall of 1906, they visited Bad Homburg, near Frankfurt. There, Jawitz met Orthodox German Jews such as Rabbis Markus Horowitz (1844–1910) and Salomon Breuer (1850–1926), Rabbi Heymann Kottek (1860–1913) from Bad Homburg, bibliographer Aron Freimann (1871–1948), and Orthodox scholar Yitzhak Isaac Halevy (1847–1914). Halevy was born in Ivanitz, near Vilna. As a youth, he thoroughly studied Talmud, and when he reached thirteen began studying at the Volozhin yeshiva, where he met Lithuania’s rabbinic elite. He then moved to Vilna and married his cousin when he was eighteen years old. He came from a wealthy family, a fact that allowed him to study Torah alongside his business pursuits. Even though Halevy did not wish to serve as a rabbi, he was appointed Gabbai at the Volozhin Yeshiva and was involved in a number of struggles involving the ultra-Orthodox of Lithuania. In 1895, his business collapsed and he was forced to leave Russia. Meanwhile, he was in the midst of preparing an extensive historical enterprise, the *Dorot ha-rishonim* series, as an alternative to the secularized historical books of his time.⁶⁸

In 1897, when living in Bratislava, he published the first volume dealing with the *gaonic* period. Four years later, upon arriving in Germany, he published the second volume dealing with the *Amoraim*, the rabbinic authorities of the time of the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud. In 1902, at the age of fifty-five, Halevy was appointed as the rabbi of the Hamburg *Kloiz* synagogue, a position which allowed him to continue his historiographical endeavor and participate in other ventures, too. He published the third volume in 1906, and

⁶⁷ David Zvi Hoffmann: Bibliography, in: Tachkemoni, 1 (1910), pp. 68–69.

⁶⁸ On him, see Asher Reichel: Isaac Halevy, New York 1969.

the fourth was published posthumously in 1918. The fifth volume in the series was published by his student Moshe Auerbach in 1964.

Halevy's writing was filled with polemics, apologetics, and personal attacks on *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars. Using blunt language against his predecessors, Halevy created a literary amalgam, combining polemic Orthodox rhetoric and the methodology of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

The alternative that Halevy tried to establish was not limited to his historiographical undertaking, but also included an attempt to found a scientific school to follow his research method. The establishment of the Jewish Literary Society (*Jüdisch-Literarische Gesellschaft*) by a number of Orthodox scholars whom he influenced marked the emergence of the school he had hoped for. They created a separate school which did not collaborate at all with non-Orthodox researchers, though it did cooperate with the rabbinic seminary of Berlin. Their research activity was centered around the Society's yearbook, which Halevy edited from 1903–1914.⁶⁹

Unlike his relations with the Hildesheimer school, Jawitz's ties with Halevy were more complex. Jawitz found Halevy's method closer to his, emphasizing the intra-Jewish sources as foundations for the historical narrative, unlike the non-Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums* researchers. In a letter to Halevy from March 1905, Jawitz clarified his feelings regarding the similarity of their methods:

“Ever since I first began analyzing the history of our fathers, I was aware of this shortcoming. For this reason, I deliberately turned away from the modern scholars until the first section of my book was completed. Then I could see how far my words deviated from theirs. However, now I have seen that his book opens a new door, and I have found what I have been seeking for the past thirty-three years. This is the work of an important scholar who studies deeply and which encompasses a vast range, based mainly on the Hebrew sources. He is a genius. His extensive researches into the sea of Talmud have helped him with his historiography. It gladdens my heart to see that my method is very similar to his. Its excellence is evident in the five volumes which have already been published [...].”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Yedidya, *Criticized Criticism*, pp. 182–192.

⁷⁰ Asher Reichel: *Iggrot Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Halevy*, Jerusalem, 1972 (in Hebrew), pp. 85–86.

Halevy respected Jawitz's writing style and his religious outlook. He placed many hopes in him, hoping that Jawitz would become the Orthodox historian to write a history based on his own methods. At first, the two merely corresponded, but following Jawitz's arrival in Germany, Halevy invited Jawitz to live near him in Hamburg and take part in the Society. He also secured financial assistance for Jawitz from the Society while he wrote the sixth volume of his history book. Before the volume was published, Halevy tried to influence Jawitz's writing. For instance, in April 1907 he wrote to Jawitz asking him to attack the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars in his preface for writing about the *mishnaic* era in a non-Orthodox way.⁷¹

This appeal exposed one of the differences between Jawitz and Halevy. While Halevy bluntly attacked his opponents and those opposing Orthodoxy, refusing to share a literary podium with them, Jawitz acted differently and did not hesitate to publish his articles in secular publications. These differences found expression in the different ideological streams to which each of them belonged. In 1912, Halevy would become one of the founders of *Agudat Israel* (*Agudas Yisroel*, Union of Israel), a movement rejecting any cooperation with secular Jews. *HaMizrahi*, of which Jawitz was a founding member, advocated Jewish solidarity and cooperation with Jews who abandoned tradition for the benefit of common goals, such as settling the land of Israel. Therefore, Jawitz's attitude toward *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars was one of honor and appreciation, even though he often disagreed with them, trying to create alternatives to their historical writings.

After reading Jawitz's sixth volume, Halevy's hopes in him were dashed. He discovered a number of "flaws" in the book, which he believed were evidence of significant differences in their methods. According to Halevy, Jawitz proved that he was in fact closer to the non-Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums* people he attacked. But, first and foremost, Halevy was angry with Jawitz for not giving him credit for the scientific innovations incorporated in Jawitz's book.⁷² Halevy accuses Jawitz of accepting the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*' claim that the Oral Torah was founded following the destruction of the Second Temple. Halevy argued that the rabbis of the Second Temple

⁷¹ Letter from Yitzhak Isaac Halevy to Ze'ev Jawitz, Nissan 1907, National Library of Israel (NLI) Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

⁷² Letter from Yitzhak Isaac Halevy to Ze'ev Jawitz, June 24, 1907, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

period were much greater than their followers.⁷³ He also blasted Jawitz for focusing on the biographies of the *mishnaic* rabbis, blurring the uniformity and continuity of the Oral Torah. Halevy accused Jawitz of essentially writing the same things as non-Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) and Heinrich Graetz.⁷⁴

It would seem, however, that Halevy's arguments were exaggerated even according to his own methods, and stemmed from his uncompromising personality and his adamancy that Jawitz write according to his guidelines. After all, Jawitz agreed with Halevy about the original form of the Mishnah, and even cited his book *Dorot ha-rishonim* on the matter. Jawitz certainly did not mean to say that the Oral Torah began after the destruction of the Second Temple, or to belittle the rabbis of that period. He merely sought to stress Jewish vitality, which did not disappear with the loss of its place of worship, therefore highlighting the greatness of post-destruction rabbis. Unlike Halevy, who constructed his arguments based on hard logical frameworks, Jawitz emphasized descriptive and didactic aspects. He therefore chose to describe the rabbis' personalities in a literary fashion, in order to evoke the readers' identification. Naturally, he highlighted the unique aspects of each Sage based on the sources at hand, but this did not mean that he totally accepted the historicist method of researching the Oral Law.⁷⁵ Yet, according to Halevy, the biographical form, even if employed for the purest of motives, paves the way for manipulative historical writing. He therefore cautioned Jawitz in a letter written in the fall of 1907:

“This manner of writing as the spirit moves you is what has ruined *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. For whereas you are doing it for good, any treacherous person can do likewise, casting a shadow that will mislead the readers. Only if we firmly establish the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a distinct discipline in itself, based on clear and explicit evidence, can we save the Torah from the hands of those who would marginalize it.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Letter from Yitzhak Isaac Halevy to Ze'ev Jawitz, September 3, 1907, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

⁷⁴ Letter from Yitzhak Isaac Halevy to Samuel Kottek, 1908, in: Reichel, Iggrot, p. 137.

⁷⁵ Moses Auerbach: Wolf Jawitz, in: Jeschurun (1924), p. 93.

⁷⁶ Letter from Yitzhak Isaac Halevy to Ze'ev Jawitz, September 3, 1907, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

Halevy was cautious of all literary and biographical descriptions of Talmudic rabbis, even if made by a loyal Orthodox Jew like Jawitz, concerned that they would be used to discredit them. According to Halevy, the final conclusions were the ones essential for establishing an Orthodox position. Jawitz, on the other hand, held literary style in high regard and believed it played an important role in clarifying ideology.

5. An Encouraging Young Orthodox Scholar

At the same time, Jawitz strengthened his ties with the young scholar Benjamin Menashe Levin (1879–1944).⁷⁷ Levin was born in Belarus and studied in a number of yeshivot, including the Telz Yeshiva headed by Rabbi Eliezer Gordon (1841–1910), and with Rabbi Shmuel Alexandrov of Bobruysk (1865–1941), who initiated him into the world of literature and history. Levine’s acquaintance with Jawitz began during his Vilna days, when Jawitz edited *HaMizrah* and Levin published short studies in it. Jawitz was captured by the enthusiasm and talent of the young researcher and took him under his wing. He oversaw his research and put much time into critiquing his fledgling studies. On Jawitz’s advice, Levine traveled to Berlin in 1905 to study at the rabbinic seminary there. A few months later, when Jawitz arrived in Berlin, the two began working on *Corpus Tanaiticum*, arranging all *baraitas* according to the order of the Mishnah. The project was commissioned by the Union of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Breslau, but was cut short.⁷⁸ Following one year of study at the Berlin seminary, Levin decided to study at the University of Bern, completing a PhD within four years with a dissertation that was a scientific edition of the Letter of Rav Sherira Gaon, including a biography of this tenth-century scholar.

In 1910–1911, he edited the *Tachkemoni* journal of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where a number of Jawitz’s articles were published. In 1913, Jawitz wrote of Levin that he was his “prize student.”⁷⁹ Ever since that time, Levin maintained close ties with Jawitz and received part of his archive just months

⁷⁷ On him, see Asaf Yedidya, Benjamin Menashe Levin and Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: *Cathedra*, 130 (2008), pp. 103–128.

⁷⁸ Simon Federbush (ed.): *Hochmath Israel. Science of Judaism in Western Europe*, vol. 2, Jerusalem 1963 (in Hebrew), pp. 162–169.

⁷⁹ Letter from Zeev Jawitz to Abraham Samuel Hirschberg, February 7, 1913, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

before his death, including the remaining volumes of *Toldot Israel* and various articles which he set upon to print.

Another Orthodox scholar who grew close to Jawitz at that period was Rabbi Chaim Heller (1879–1960). Heller was born in Bialystok in 1879, studying independently and becoming a broad scholar. Alongside the study of Torah, Halakhah and Aggadah, Heller studied ancient languages: Greek, Latin, Syrian Aramaic, Arabic, and more, investing much time into studying ancient translations of the Bible.

After marrying, he relocated to Lodz in Poland, and in 1910 became the rabbi of Lomzha for a short while. In 1911, his study on the *Peshitta*, the Syrian translation of the Bible, was published in German in Berlin. The work accorded him a PhD from the University of Würzburg. In this study Heller tried to prove, contrary to the opinion of some Bible critics, that the differences in versions did not stem from different sources. The Bible was the source of the *Peshitta*, as well as the most correct version. Heller saw his study as key in refuting the scientific system of Biblical criticism. That same year, Jawitz wrote a glowing review of Heller's study in *Tachkemoni*, hoping that the author would continue his struggle against Bible critics.⁸⁰

Jawitz contacted Heller and encouraged him to continue researching the Bible. On Jawitz's initiative, in 1911 Heller turned to Yechiel Michel Pines, Jawitz's brother-in-law, asking him for help in his research.⁸¹ The ties between Jawitz and Heller continued until Jawitz's death. Jawitz hoped that his studies and those of Rabbis Halevy, Heller and Levin would come together to form an Orthodox school of research and challenge the existing *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which he believed was influenced by Christian scholars and their preconceptions:

"I am not the only one to follow this path, thank God, because the author of *Dorot HaRishonim* does likewise. Although we do not agree with each other as we did before, I hereby declare that he has done exceedingly well, and has shown to what extent research into our history has become bogged down. The brilliant Heller in his German essay on the *Peshitta* has satisfactorily proved how flimsy and mediocre are the Biblical knowledge and translations of arrogant Bible critics. Now Dr. B.M. Levin has published a new and revised edition of *Igeret Rav Sherira* [The Epistle of

⁸⁰ Zeev Jawitz, Bikoret HaPeshitta U'Mevakreah, in: Tachkemoni, 2 (1911), pp. 43–47.

⁸¹ Eliezer Rafael Malachi: Michtav meR' Haim Heller z'l, in: Or HaMiarach, 8 (1961) p. 8.

Rav Sherira Gaon], with addenda and comments, which points up the difference between one who supports our literature from within, and the gentile sages who merely gnaw upon its outer rind. We four are not gentile sages but sages of Israel.”⁸²

During that time, Jawitz wrote a long article in Yiddish titled “The Great Confession,” in which he debated his critics who argued that he was biased and not critical enough of his sources.⁸³ Jawitz structured his article like a Yom Kippur confession, or *Vidui*, rebuffing some of the arguments and admitting to others. Jawitz had great expectations as to the article’s affect, but no one agreed to publish it. “The Great Confession” developed ideas which he had begun addressing twenty years earlier. First, Jawitz admitted that his writing was biased, arguing that “a book without bias is like a body without a soul” and that “when one writes history, his historic outlook should burn in his bones like fire. Only then can one write history, especially Jewish history.”⁸⁴

Jawitz claimed that all historians, especially those writing Jewish history, were biased. But, unlike others who were influenced by their Christian teachers in university and modern Western ideologies, his research was the result of fifty years of an authentic *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Jawitz says he takes *Wissenschaft des Judentums* seriously, but only the quality research, not the “fake, hollow, frivolous” criticism he claimed stems from antisemitism. According to him, worthy criticism is not a product of the nineteenth century, but appeared in rabbinic literature throughout the generations.

Finally, Jawitz refuted an argument raised against him, whereby he regards rabbinic Aggadah as historical fact. He repeated his view on the value of Aggadah in providing insight into the attitudes of Jews toward important historical events and the lessons drawn from them.

In his article, Jawitz claimed that the research of Halevy and Levin was properly scientific, combining far-reaching knowledge of traditional Jewish sources and true criticism. These were alternatives to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that emerged in Germany during the previous century.

⁸² Letter from Zeev Jawitz to A. S. Hirschberg, February 7, 1913, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602.

⁸³ Zeev Jawitz: The Great Confession, NLI Archives, Jawitz Collection, Arc 4° 1602. A Hebrew translation was published in Yedidya, To Cultivate a Hebrew Culture, pp. 191–203.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

6. Conclusion

Jawitz was fortunate enough to complete the manuscript of his magnum opus, *Toldot Israel*. It was in the Summer of 1922, on the same day the League of Nations granted Britain the mandate over Palestine. He saw poetic symbolism in the fact that his life's work ended on this historic day, starting a new era of "the people of Israel on their land."⁸⁵ Indeed, his historiographical project served the new era in the land of Israel.

The alternative that Jawitz tried to substitute for the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* associated with Heinrich Graetz and others, was influenced not only by Orthodox ideology, which he supported, but also by his nationalist ideology. He regarded Jewish history, as well as the Hebrew language, as a national asset that expressed the Jewish national character. In his opinion, a true understanding of Jewish history was only possible for someone intimately connected with the Jewish nation and its ancient culture. This point of view was derived from his philosophical perception of the Jewish nation as the chosen people, with a vast abyss separating it from all other nations, both nationally and culturally. In fact, he perceived Judaism as a closed culture that was sufficient unto itself, with all that that implies. In his research, he tried to produce not only a comprehensive historiography, but also an original Jewish historical philosophy based on his nationalist Orthodox orientation.⁸⁶ He saw himself and his disciples as the "priests of memory," presenting the true and immanent history and character of the Jewish nation as a platform to the Jewish future in the land of Israel.

⁸⁵ Zeev Jawitz, *Toldot Israel*, vol. 10, p. III; Michael Brenner: *Prophets of the Past. Interpreters of Jewish History*, Princeton/Oxford 2010, p. 159.

⁸⁶ Yedidya, *Criticized Criticism*, pp. 197–221.