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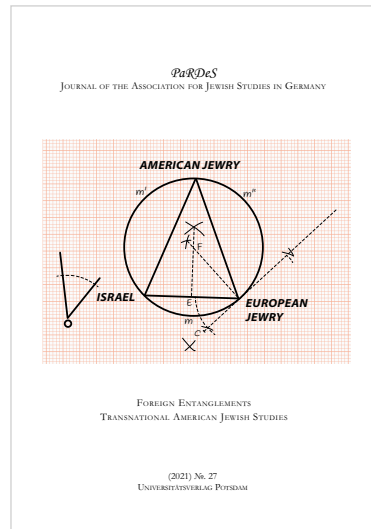
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Instituting Transnational Jewish Learning: The Emergence of Rabbinical Seminaries in the Nineteenth Century

by Mirjam Thulin

Abstract

When the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau opened its doors in 1854, it established a novel form of rabbinical education: the systematic combination of Jewish studies at the seminary in parallel with university studies. The Breslau seminary became the model for most later institutions for rabbinical training in Europe and the United States. The seminaries were the new sites of modern Jewish scholarship, especially the academic study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). Their function and goal were to preserve, (re)organize, and transmit Jewish knowledge in the modern age. As such, they became central nodes in Jewish scholarly networks. This case study highlights the multi-nodal connections between the Conservative seminaries in Breslau, Philadelphia, New York, Budapest, and Vienna. At the same time, it is intended to provide an example of the potential of transnational and transfer studies for the history of the Jewish religious learning in Europe and the United States.

1. Introduction

The call for modern, institutionalized rabbinical training grew stronger over the 19th century. Preceding American interest in this topic by decades, Jewish education and rabbinical training became state affairs in Europe in the early 19th century. While the first modern rabbinical seminary was founded in 1827 in Padua, in northern Italy,¹ it was the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)

¹ On the context of the institutions of rabbinical training, see: Julius Carlebach, ed., *Wissenschaft des Judentums: Anfänge der Judaistik in Europa* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992); Carsten Wilke, *Den Talmud und den Kant: Rabbinerausbildung an der Schwelle zur Moderne* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2003); Guy Miron, ed., *From Breslau to Jerusalem: Rabbinical Seminaries, Past, Present and Future* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jew-

in Breslau, opened in 1854, that launched an entirely new type of modern rabbinical education.² At JTS, each student not only had to complete “Jewish theological” studies at the seminary but in parallel had to attend the university in order to successfully complete his rabbinical training.³ This systematic combination of Jewish and university studies was completely new. Despite the priority given to the Protestant clerical education and, at the same time, the exclusion of Jewish theological studies from the general universities, the teachers and graduates of the seminary followed a self-imposed academic research imperative and claimed the mantle of leadership in the Jewish communities. JTS Breslau inspired reforms at existing seminaries and provided an example for most later institutions, including those founded in opposition to the Breslau model, such as the seminaries in Berlin. From the very beginning, JTS attracted students from all over central and eastern Europe and even the United States, and the short-lived Maimonides College in Philadelphia (founded in 1867), the National Rabbinical School in Budapest (1877), the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (1886), and the Israelite Theological Educational Institute in Vienna (1893) not only followed the Breslau model regarding curriculum, but also in the values and premises of positive-historical or Conservative Judaism.⁴

ish Studies, 2009) (Hebrew); Asaf Yedidya, ed., *Ashkenazi Batei Midrash: Memoirs of Graduates of Rabbinical Seminaries in Germany and Austria* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2010) (Hebrew). The foundation of the first modern rabbinical seminary, in Padua, was the result of the emancipation policy in the crown lands of the Habsburg monarchy. On the Padua seminary, see: Magdalena Cotrozzi Del Bianco, *Il Collegio Rabbinnico di Padova: Un Istituzione Religiosa dell'Ebraismo sulla Via dell'Emancipazione* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1995); Francesca Paolin, *Wissenschaft des Judentums zwischen Norditalien und Deutschland. Transfers, Debatten, Netzwerke im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming).

² From the large number of publications on the Breslau seminary, the key publication is Guido Kisch, ed., *Das Breslauer Seminar: Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar (Fraenckelscher Stiftung) in Breslau 1854–1938: Gedächtnisschrift* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1963).

³ In the first phase of modern rabbinical training in Europe, violently ended by the Nazis, there were no female rabbinical students or professors at the seminaries, therefore my paper refers exclusively to male actors.

⁴ In the third section of this article, I discuss in more detail the interconnections of positive-historical and Conservative Judaism. The literature, on which my analysis is built, includes: *Protokolle und Aktenstücke der zweiten Rabbiner-Versammlung: Abgehalten zu Frankfurt am Main vom 15. bis 28. Juli 1845* (Frankfurt am Main: E. Ullmann, 1845); Andreas Brämer, “The Dilemmas of Moderate Reform. Some Reflections on the Development of Conservative Judaism in Germany 1840–1880,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10 (2003): 73–87. For the American context, see

These rabbinical seminaries quickly became landmarks of advanced Jewish learning in Europe and the United States. Their stories reveal pathways of intellectual transfer, exchange, and interdependency, and questions of belonging and identity, patronage and protectionism, which are characteristic for scholarly communication in general and intellectual networks and institutions in particular. At the same time, the seminaries were fundamental for the formation and strengthening of modern Jewish denominational movements.⁵ Their histories shed light on the potential for a transnational framework understanding the transfer of knowledge and point to research perspectives for a network history of the rabbinical seminaries.

2. The Seminary Movement in Europe and in the United States

For the history of Jewish education and knowledge, the 19th century was the century of the “seminary movement.”⁶ Since the founding of the first modern institution, in Padua, others emerged in rapid succession, first in Europe and eventually also in the US. While the seminaries differed sometimes considerably in terms of regional context, religious orientation, and social setting, they were united by their commitment to the academic study of Judaism. Since

particularly: Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth Century America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1963); Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955); Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter’s Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁵ So far there have been no transnational studies of the various movements in Judaism. However, Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) looks at various geographical contexts of Reform Judaism.

⁶ On the significance of academic institutions, see Timothy Lenoir, *Instituting Science: The Cultural Production of Scientific Disciplines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); James McClellan, “Scientific Institutions and the Organization of Science,” in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 4: *Eighteenth-Century Science*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87–106. On the relevance of scholarly networks, see Steven J. Harris, “Networks of Travel, Correspondence, and Exchange,” in *The Cambridge History of Science Early Modern Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341–362; for the Jewish context, see Mirjam Thulin, “Jewish Networks,” European History Online (EGO), Leibniz Institute of European History, accessed September 29, 2021, <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-networks/jewish-networks>; Mirjam Thulin, *Kaufmanns Nachrichtendienst: Ein jüdisches Gelehrtennetzwerk im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012), 160–226.

no country deemed Judaism worthy of academic study, for reasons ranging from straightforward anti-Semitism to milder disdain for the topic, the seminaries established close to universities, though they had no formal affiliation. Among the seminaries that were founded over the course of the 19th century, five institutions were largely based on the positive-historical or Conservative model of the Breslau seminary. Because of their close ties to one another, they can illustrate the transnational dynamics of the seminary movement.

The Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau (1854–1938)

Until today, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in Breslau is considered the “mother institution” for at least four more organizations in central Europe and the US. The wealthy merchant and royal commercial councilor Jonas Fraenckel (1776–1846) provided an endowment that made the founding possible. The land on Wallstrasse, where the seminary was built, was also part of the foundation’s capital. In the early 1850s, a board of trustees and an advisory board crafted a statute that articulated the religious and academic requirements of a modern Jewish scholarship.⁷ The statutes paved the way for a new kind of rabbinical education and the academic study of Judaism.

The JTS consisted of two departments.⁸ The Lower Department (*Untere Abteilung*) was for high school education, and the Upper Department (*Obere Abteilung*) focused on “Jewish theological” training. The Lower Department offered an important service to the Jewish community because at that time there were no Jewish high schools in central Europe. Students who decided to become rabbis, Jewish religious teachers, or cantors entered the Upper Department after receiving their high school diploma. As soon as a student began his rabbinical training, he also enrolled as a student at the University of Breslau. This parallel education was part of the new, unique concept, which would become part of most rabbinical training institutions that emerged in

⁷ On the work of the boards, see particularly: *Programm zur Eröffnung des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars zu Breslau “Fränckel’sche Stiftung:” Den 16. Ab 5614, 10. August 1854* (Breslau: W. G. Korn, 1854); Markus Brann, *Geschichte des jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars (Fraenckel’sche Stiftung) in Breslau: Festschrift zum fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum der Anstalt* (Breslau: Th. Schatzky, [1905]).

⁸ On the structure and curriculum, see *Studien-Ordnung für das jüdisch-theologische Seminar in Breslau, festgestellt im Jahre 1873 und revidirt im Jahre 1885: Nebst einem Anhang: Vorschriften für die Prüfungs-Candidaten* (Breslau: Th. Schatzky, 1885).

Europe and in the US in the following years. Thus, the graduates had two degrees in hand when they finished their training. They were not only ordained as rabbis, but also had a university degree, usually a doctoral degree from a philosophy department. These double degrees distinguished the Breslau model from earlier seminaries in Padua, Amsterdam, and Metz/Paris.

However, the academic orientation of the Breslau institution had its limits. The first faculty members made sure of that, namely the founding director, rabbi Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875), and historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), both of whom had a lasting influence on the course and orientation of the seminary. One guideline was that the curriculum of “Jewish theological” studies in the Upper Department did not include Bible criticism. This characteristic of all Conservative seminaries changed gradually only after World War I. In contrast, Talmud instruction, based on the historical method, occupied almost half of the curriculum. Jewish history and philological subjects like Hebrew and Aramaic were also emphasized. In Breslau, the language of instruction – term papers, lectures, trial sermons, and the seminary’s academic house journal, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Monthly for the History and Scholarship of Judaism) – was German. Until the founding of the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Academy for the Scholarship of Judaism) in 1872 and the Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary in 1873 – on opposite sides of Berlin’s Artilleriestrasse, and therefore jokingly called “light” and “heavy artillery” – the Breslau Seminary shaped the thinking, understanding, and practice of academic Jewish studies and played the leading role among the seminaries.⁹

The Budapest National Rabbinical School (1877–1944, 1945–)

In 1877, the National Rabbinical School (called in the local languages “Országos Rabbiképző,” or “Landes-Rabbinerschule”) opened its doors in Budapest.¹⁰ This seminary would eventually become one of the few institutions of rabbinical training and Jewish scholarship accredited and partially financed by

⁹ Quoted in: Werner Schochow, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichtswissenschaft: Eine Geschichte ihrer Organisationsformen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Fachbibliographie* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1969), 52, n. 140.

¹⁰ On this seminary, see Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, ed., *The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest, 1877–1977: A Centennial Volume* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1986).

the state. Over the course of the almost 150-year existence, it has been closed for only half a year, in 1944–45, during the Nazi period. After 1945, it was the only seminary in the Eastern Bloc which was permitted to train rabbis, and it exists to this day.

The founding documents from the 1860s show that the Rabbinical Seminary Commission (*Rabbinerseminar-Kommission*) had the statutes and study regulations of several seminaries before them when they designed their own institution, namely those from Metz and Paris and the two Berlin seminaries as well as the Breslau statutes.¹¹ As a result of the strong ties between the urban Jews of Budapest and the German Conservative Jews, the Breslau bylaws ultimately became the model for the Budapest statutes.¹² The most visible emulation was the division of the seminary into two departments. In Hungary, a Jewish high school provided an even greater service to the local Jews because they had very limited access to the still few and mostly Christian high schools. In addition to adopting the department structure, some of the Budapest faculty came from Breslau: Wilhelm Bacher (1850–1913) and David Kaufmann (1852–1899), both widely known scholars of Judaism, distinguished doctors of Oriental studies, and themselves graduates of the Breslau Seminary, were familiar with the daily routine of a seminary as well as with the organization and the general requirements of such an institution, a fact that contributed to the professionalization and standardization of rabbinical training.¹³ The curricula of both seminaries also show strong similarities. Like in Breslau, critical biblical studies were anathema in Budapest before World

¹¹ See the documents in Magyar Zsidó Levéltár (Hungarian Jewish Archives), Budapest, Box N 8/3 Rabbiképző, A Rabbiképző szervezését Eérvémjéző iratok Sogalmaz vánja 1863–1864, 33788/9568 II, 18/4, 864, 1864/VII – ad 17121.

¹² On the similarities in general, see Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, “The Similarities and Relationship between the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar (Breslau) and the Rabbinical Seminary (Budapest),” *Leo Baeck Institue Year Book* 44 (1999): 3–22; Kinga Frojimovics, “Teachers and Students: The Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest and the Neologic Jewish Legacy in Hungary,” in *From Breslau to Jerusalem*, ed. Miron, 149–164 (Hebrew); Gábor Lengyel, *Moderne Rabbinerausbildung in Deutschland und Ungarn: Ungarische Hörer an Bildungsinstitutionen des deutsch-judentums (1854–1938)* (Berlin: LIT, 2012).

¹³ For example, on Kaufmann’s journey from Breslau to Budapest, see Mirjam Thulin, “Connecting Centers of Wissenschaft des Judentums: David Kaufmann in Budapest, 1877–1899,” in *Modern Jewish Scholarship in Hungary: The “Science of Judaism” between East and West*, ed. Tamás Turán and Carsten Wilke (Oldenburg: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 157–174.

War I. Instead, Talmud classes accounted for nine hours per week in the upper department throughout the course of study.¹⁴

Students from Budapest moved between the seminaries, establishing close connections to the “mother institution” in Breslau. Since the curricula were similar, the seminaries usually accepted courses taken at the other institution for transfer credits. Such exchanges were relatively easy because the language of instruction in Budapest remained largely German until World War I. And in fact, exchanges happened in both directions. For example, Michael Guttmann (1872–1942), a graduate of the Budapest Seminary, taught in Breslau between 1921 and 1938.

Maimonides College in Philadelphia (1867–1873) and the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York (1886–)

In contrast to Europe, rabbinic education did not rank as a priority in the United States until the mid-19th century. By then, however, immigrant rabbis and Jewish scholars, mainly from a German-speaking background, called for a professional educational institution to train rabbis and teachers. Around the time the Hungarian seminary began, modeled after the Breslau blueprint, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) opened its doors in New York.¹⁵ Like earlier institutions, the local committees did not have to come up with a brand-new canon of Conservative Jewish scholarship and rabbinic education. Instead, they considered the curricula of several existing seminaries, including the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, which was affiliated with the Reform movement, as well as their first-hand experience with an earlier, failed project in Philadelphia.

Rabbi Isaac Leeser (1806–1868) had been the guiding spirit in the founding of Maimonides College in Philadelphia, which in 1867 was the first rabbinical seminary in the United States.¹⁶ Leeser, who originally came from the

¹⁴ For the Budapest statutes, see *Statuten der Landes-Rabbinerschule zu Budapest* (Budapest: Schlesinger and Wohlauer, 1877).

¹⁵ For a general overview of the JTS, see the institute’s history: Jack Wertheimer, ed., *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, 2 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

¹⁶ Still the best account of the college is Bertram Wallace Korn, “The First American Jewish Theological Seminary: Maimonides College, 1867–1873,” in *Eventful Years and Experiences: Studies in Nineteenth Century American Jewish History*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954), 151–213.

province of Westphalia, Prussia, served as vice president of the board of the founding committee and taught homiletics and history.¹⁷ The Italian-born rabbi Sabato Morais (1823–1897) lectured in Bible and biblical literature; rabbi Aaron Bettelheim (1830–1890) taught Mishnah, the commentaries, and *Shulchan Arukh*, and rabbi Marcus M. Jastrow (1829–1903) taught Talmud, Hebrew philosophy, Jewish history, and literature.

From the beginning, the college had only a few students, and only three of them ever finished their studies and were ordained. Moreover, the college constantly lacked financial support. Although the Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association in New York subsidized the seminary beginning in 1865, it closed after little more than five years. Eventually, former teachers and students of the college helped to establish JTS, in 1886, as a more traditional alternative to the HUC.

The JTS curriculum was not initially based on the model of the Breslau seminary, but the naming clearly reflected a self-image as continuing the tradition in the New World. Moreover, members of the JTS advisory board were Breslau graduates, among them Alexander Kohut (1842–1894), Frederick de Sola Mendes (1850–1924), and Bernhard Drachman (1861–1945). Like its predecessor in Philadelphia, the New York seminary struggled with funding problems for years, and around 1900 JTS found itself in a crisis. The advisory board made efforts to address the issues by reorganizing the institution and modifying the curriculum, and thus attract more students and supporters.¹⁸ In 1902 the board managed to lure Solomon Schechter (1847–1915) from Cambridge to New York to succeed the first director, Sabato Morais. Schechter was a big name in the community of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and his name remains synonymous with the discoveries and editions of the Cairo Genizah.¹⁹ At the same time, Schechter was an advocate for the practice and teaching of a positive-historical approach Judaism. His ties to Breslau were primarily personal; his wife, Mathilde (1859–1924), came from the city. Regular trips took

¹⁷ On Leeser, see Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

¹⁸ On the years until 1902, see Hasia Diner, “Like the Antelope and the Badger: The Founding Years of JTS, 1886–1902,” in *Tradition Renewed*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 1–42.

¹⁹ On Schechter’s expertise, instead of many, see Adina Hoffmann and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Genizah* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

the Schechters to her old home, and the scholarly discourse there certainly shaped his own views.²⁰

Following his relocation to New York, Schechter began to work on adapting and raising JTS's educational criteria to the higher standards of the European rabbinical seminaries.²¹ He created new teaching subjects and elevated the entrance requirements for faculty and students. Similar to the Breslau and Budapest seminaries, JTS rejected historical Bible criticism. Schechter referred to "Higher Criticism" as "Higher Anti-Semitism."²² Unlike the European seminaries, the New York institution never offered high school or college diplomas. In order to begin their studies there, new rabbinical students were required to have a bachelor's degree or equivalent university degree in hand.

The Viennese Israelite Theological Educational Institute (1893–1938)

One last Conservative seminary founded on the Breslau model opened in Vienna in 1893, after decades-long talks.²³ The Austrian Ministry of Culture and Education and the local Jewish community had, since the first third of the century, been negotiating about a "Jewish Theological Institute," a "Jewish Theological Faculty," or a "Rabbinical Institute."²⁴ In Vienna, as in other places where rabbinical seminaries were established, a predecessor institution had existed: the *Bet ha-Midrash zu Wien* (Bet ha-Midrash of Vienna) had been established in 1863. Students, mostly future rabbis and teachers who studied at the University of Vienna, could gain specialized Jewish knowledge there and learn in study groups (*hevrotas*). The rabbis of the Bet ha-Midrash ordained several rabbis, including Schechter, 26 years before he became head of JTS.

²⁰ Mirjam Thulin, "Wissenschaft and Correspondence: Solomon Schechter between Europe and America," *Jewish Historical Studies* 48 (2016): 109–137.

²¹ Mel Scult, "Schechter's Seminary," in *Tradition Renewed*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 43–102; Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "The Schechters' Seminary," in *Text and Context: Essays in Modern Jewish History and Historiography in Honor of Ismar Schorsch*, ed. Eli Lederhendler and Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2005), 487–503.

²² Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism – Higher Anti-Semitism", in *Seminary Addresses and other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Company, 1915), 35–40.

²³ The debates over an Austrian or Viennese rabbinical seminary go back to the time of Joseph II (1741–1790). However, there is still no comprehensive account of the founding history. For a somewhat eclectic study on the subject, see Peter Landesmann, *Rabbiner aus Wien. Ihre Ausbildung, ihre religiösen und nationalen Konflikte* (Vienna, Cologne: Boehlau, 1997).

²⁴ Most of the sources on the founding of the seminary, which have still not been analyzed, can be found in the Austrian State Archives (OeStA) under the call number OeStA, AVA, Kultus NK, Akath. Israelitisch, D 5, box 43 Studien [1849]–1895.

However, the institution could never provide a complete modern rabbinical education and lacked both financial resources and clear support from the local Jewry.

In the 1880s negotiations for the establishment of a regular seminary intensified, not least because the founding of the Hungarian institution created the impression that things were going too slowly in the capital of the Habsburg Monarchy. Again, the organizers of the seminary had various curricula before them, for example the statutes from Padua, Paris, Breslau, the Jews' College in London, the two seminaries in Berlin, Budapest, and New York.²⁵ Ultimately, Breslau again became the dominant model. A closer look at the study regulations of the Viennese institution, however, shows that there were similarities with the reform-oriented *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* as well. These parallels primarily have to do with the central place of academic Jewish studies, in contrast to traditional religious knowledge. In the section on "name and purpose," the Viennese statute makes explicit reference to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which does not appear in the statutes of the Breslau or Budapest seminaries, but does in the statutes of the *Hochschule*.²⁶

The new emphasis in the statutes undoubtedly reflects the growing importance of academic Jewish studies, especially for rabbinical seminaries and their training programs. Like Budapest, Philadelphia, and New York, it was above all the hiring practices in Vienna that demonstrated the strong influence of the Breslau seminary. For example, when the plans for the institution solidified at the end of 1892, the board attempted to recruit David Kaufmann from Budapest to head the new institute in Vienna, but he respectfully declined the offer. Eventually rabbi Adolf Schwarz (1846–1931) from Karlsruhe became the first director of the Viennese seminary. He was a close friend of the chief rabbi of Vienna, Moritz Güdemann (1835–1918), and both had studied together with Wilhelm Bacher and David Kaufmann at the JTS in Breslau.

²⁵ Cf. OeStA, AVA, Kultus NK, Akath. Israelitisch, D 5, box 43 Studien [1849]–1895.

²⁶ On the statutes, see: *Statut der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin: G. Bernstein, 1870), and *Organisations-Statut der Israelitisch-Theologischen Lehranstalt in Wien* (Vienna: F. Brueck und Soehne, 1893?).

3. Wissenschaft and Judaism: The Context of the Seminary Movement

The outline of the stories of the five Conservative rabbinical seminaries exemplifies the transnational aspects of the transfer of (Jewish) knowledge and science, education and religious history, and, not least, the dynamics of the seminary movement in the 19th century. For the Jews in Europe and the United States, the political upheavals at the end of the 18th century were decisive in this process. In the course of the 19th century, the nationalization of all European states, the process of bourgeoisification, and “academic” measurements, which increasingly determined the discourse of knowledge and science of the time, led to demands for the “civic improvement” of the Jews through education, the confessionalization of the Jewish religion, and the abandonment of the national-ethnic component within Judaism. In the 1830s, the term “emancipation” was applied to this kind of political-legal claim and the subsequent educational discourse.²⁷

The desire for emancipation and the different views on how to carry on the Jewish religion and tradition in modern times generated more and more conflicts among the Jews in Europe. The debates were particularly elaborate in the German lands, and especially in tone-setting Prussia, due, to the fact that Prussia was one of the most significant centers of the European Enlightenment and later bourgeoisification. An elite of political, social, and cultural leaders promoted ideas of education (*Bildung*), history, and progress in a distinctive way and endorsed them politically and financially.

This tense atmosphere affected the Jewish debates. The rabbinical conferences in Braunschweig (1844), Frankfurt am Main (1845), and Breslau (1846) eventually became important landmarks in the debates over a modern Judaism. Almost the entire elite of the German-speaking rabbinate attended the meetings or sent letters and rabbinical responsa to the assemblies. Jewish newspapers reported on the events and the minutes and records of the meetings inspired polemical writings, pitting the rabbis against each

²⁷ Andreas Gotzmann vividly traces the development on the territory of the later German Empire in *Eigenheit und Einheit: Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). An additional internal perspective on Jewish academic discourses is provided in Kerstin von der Krone, *Wissenschaft in Öffentlichkeit: Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und ihre Zeitschriften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

other.²⁸ Among others, rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), who was to become the key figure of the Reform movement, and rabbi Zacharias Frankel, at that time chief rabbi of Dresden and supporter of more moderate reforms, attended the second rabbinical meeting in Frankfurt, in 1845. Contrary to all hopes and plans, this gathering deepened the disagreements among the different camps and cleared the way for the pluralization of Judaism as we know it today. A Jewish Reform movement emerged, following Abraham Geiger's ideas, while a more moderate Reform or Conservative Judaism appeared around Zacharias Frankel. Moreover, a Neo- or Modern Orthodoxy began to constitute itself around rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), and, finally, in eastern Europe, ultra-Orthodoxy, with its many sub-branches, took root.²⁹

The emergence of the academic study of Judaism, mainly under the label *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, is closely connected with the religious developments within Judaism. In the debates about modern Judaism, all the key participants engaged in discussions about the future structure of Jewish knowledge. By the time that Frankel and Geiger were debating the nature of halakhah and reforms, there was still no firmly established program of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Nevertheless, the sacredness of traditional Jewish texts, the basis of Judaism, was at the center of all debates. The approach to these texts as well as the use of the historical methods became the dividing point in modern Jewish scholarship, with the Reform movement, embodied by Abraham Geiger and the chief rabbi of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860), on one side, and Neo-Orthodoxy on the other. Frankfurt rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820–1899), who had first been active in Eisenstadt, Burgenland, and since 1869 in Berlin, led Neo-Orthodoxy, which accused reformers such as Holdheim of going after the Jewish tradition heedlessly.³⁰ The same perception

²⁸ The minutes of Frankfurt meeting in particular contain many transcripts of newspaper articles, counter-pamphlets, and letters. See *Protokolle und Aktenstücke*.

²⁹ As a classic on Neo-Orthodoxy, see: Mordechai Breuer, *Jüdische Orthodoxie im Deutschen Reich 1871–1918: Sozialgeschichte einer religiösen Minderheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1986). On ultra-Orthodoxy, see Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 23–84.

³⁰ For insight into the history and orientations of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see: Kerstin von der Krone and Mirjam Thulin, "Wissenschaft in Context: A Research Essay on the Wissen-

led the Breslau historian Heinrich Graetz to his conclusion that “Holdheim beats Judaism to death with the Talmud.”³¹ In contrast, Graetz and Frankel understood *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a “scholarship of faith” (*Glaubenswissenschaft*).³²

These debates about the reorganization of Jewish knowledge and its academization certainly also had its critics. Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), one of the founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, witnessed these developments during his long life and lamented the fact that ultimately rabbis claimed and shaped not only Judaism but also academic Jewish studies.³³ His good friend, the Hebrew bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907), shared this attitude. Both were extremely skeptical of the rabbinical seminaries which emerged everywhere and claimed Jewish studies as their own. Zunz and Steinschneider perceived them as places of “systematic hypocrisy and academic immaturity.”³⁴

4. Conclusion

Over time, all Jewish denominations institutionalized their ideals and interpretations of religion and academic knowledge in rabbinical seminaries. For the denominations, it was clear that the rabbis would be the promoters of the new knowledge order. Like no other Jewish intellectuals, rabbis could have a great impact in the communities, and so from the first half of the 19th century

schaft des Judentums,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58 (2013): 249–280. On the Orthodox positions, see Asaf Yedidya, *Criticized Criticism: Orthodox Alternatives to Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2013) (Hebrew).

³¹ Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden: Vom Beginn der Mendelssohnschen Zeit (1750) bis in die neueste Zeit (1848)*, vol. 11 (originally 1870; Second edition Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1900), 533.

³² On Frankel’s understanding, see Andreas Brämer, *Rabbiner Zacharias Frankel: Wissenschaft des Judentums und konservative Reform im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000), 255–275.

³³ In a seminal essay of 1818, Zunz described academic Jewish studies as a broad and utterly anti-clerical undertaking. See Leopold Zunz, “Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur. Nebst Nachrichten über ein altes bis jetzt ungedrucktes hebräisches Werk (1818),” in *Gesammelte Schriften: Herausgegeben vom Curatorium der “Zunzstiftung:” 3 Bände in einem Band*, ed. Leopold Zunz, vol. 1 (Reprint Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976), 1–31.

³⁴ Moritz Steinschneider to rabbi Moritz Meyer Kayserling (Budapest), Berlin, October 1, 1876, Archives of the National Library of Israel (NLI), Arc. Var. 894/274. Steinschneider’s position can also be found in Isidore Singer, “Eine Vogelschau über die Entwicklung der amerikanischen Judenheit in den letzten 250 Jahren,” *Ost und West* 10–11 (1905): 665–676, here 668.

onward, rabbis became the forces who shaped both the academic study of Judaism and the Jewish denominations.³⁵

Only after the Shoah did universities in central Europe accept Jewish studies as an academic field. Before that, the discipline and its scholars took refuge in the seminaries. Nevertheless, the emergence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* coincided with general professionalization and standardization processes in the Western industrial states. The educational requirements of the states were essential for the development of both modern Jewish scholarship and religion in 19th-century Europe and led to the rapid academization of the rabbinate.³⁶ This caused much greater disputes and status definitions among European Jews than in the United States, where the state was in no way interested in the content and form of rabbinical studies. Instead, the position of the lay boards was much stronger, simply because, until the middle of the 19th century, there was still a lack of trained rabbis. Before the 1880s, America did not see the formation of distinct strands within Judaism. This came mainly with the arrival of intellectuals and, mostly seminary-trained, rabbis who transferred their European experiences into the debates in the American context. However, the question of the degree to which the Jewish European movements caused or affected the branches in American Judaism is still a matter of dispute today.³⁷ In recent years, researchers have emphasized the distinct context of the United States and the achievements and impact of individual intellectuals such as Solomon Schechter.³⁸ The extent to which European elements shaped Jewish scholarship and religion in the United States and vice versa still needs to be clarified.³⁹

³⁵ For instance, on the impact of academically trained German rabbis in eastern Europe, see: Tobias Grill, *Der Westen im Osten: Deutsches Judentum und jüdische Bildungsreform in Osteuropa (1783–1939)* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013).

³⁶ Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, ed. Ismar Schorsch (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 9–50; Carsten L. Wilke, “Modern Rabbinical Training: Intercultural Invention and Political Reconfiguration,” in *Rabbi – Pastor – Priest. Their Roles and Profiles Through the Ages*, ed. Walter Homolka and Heinz-Günther Schöttler (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 83–110.

³⁷ This can be seen in the example of so-called “Conservative” Judaism. See Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, 311–326.

³⁸ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*.

³⁹ On this perspective in general, see Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Ian Tyrrell, “Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 453–474.

The rabbinical seminaries were the most visible landmarks of the Jewish scholarly and denominational movements and mapped their far-reaching, transnational networks. The briefly outlined histories of five Conservative institutions have shown that the conditions under which Jewish knowledge was produced and further refined were geographically varied. Moreover, it shows that the research on the study of the history and significance of the seminaries, especially in a comparative and transnational perspective, is still in its early stages. This history of knowledge, science, education, and religion cannot be told without its many transnational aspects, entanglements, networks, and circles.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Christophe Charle and Jürgen Schriewer, ed., *Transnational Intellectual Networks: Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2004); Anna Nagurney, "Networks," in *Encyclopedia of Science, Technology and Ethics*, ed. Carl Mitcham, vol. 3 (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 1307–1310; Harris, "Networks of Travel, Correspondence, and Exchange."