

Jewish Studies: *Are They Ethnic?*

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Introduction

The history of Jewish studies has not yet been written. Scholars engaged in this field, however, are beginning to subject it to searching analysis. Pertinent articles have appeared that offer two extreme positions on the development of Jewish studies: one sees the increase in Jewish studies as the result of heightened Jewish self-awareness during the late 1960s because of the Six Day War, growing interest in the Holocaust, and the influence of rising black and ethnic consciousnesses that resulted in the establishment of academic programs. The other, usually a reaction to the first view, argues that the study of Hebraica and Judaica has held an ancient and honorable place in the traditional university curriculum.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history of Jewish studies, by which is meant the critical study of the history, literature, and thought of the Jewish people since the biblical period, and to indicate some of the features that undermine both of the positions mentioned above. Thus it will be demonstrated that the status of Hebraica and Judaica has not always been ancient or honorable and that the field has roots other than the consciousness-raising events of the late 1960s. These observations are offered with the hope that an outline of the development of Jewish studies will suggest interdisciplinary discussion about the origins and development of other fields of study. When suggesting a comparison of different fields it is hoped a level of discourse can be established that transcends the use of comparison as a foil for elaborating the strengths of one's own predilections. It is for this reason that ethnic studies cannot be narrowly defined but must be discussed in the general sense of any field which attempts to study a particular community, often one neglected by the general curriculum. Jewish studies are ethnic, and considering them as such is necessary not only for purpose of obtaining cooperation from administrators and mutual support of colleagues, but also for the creation of academically sound disciplinary and methodological approaches.

History

Although Jewish scholarship can be traced uninterruptedly from the first century to the present, academic interest in the study of Hebrew was motivated by Christian missionary concerns. In 1311-12 the Spanish Dominican Raimon Lull (c. 1235-1315) elicited a declaration from the Council of Vienne calling for instruction in Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, and Greek for purposes of conversion. Hebrew instruction was soon instituted at universities such as Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Salamanca, and Alcalá, and perhaps even earlier in Naples and Salerno. Jews were not involved in these programs of study; Christians or apostate Jews taught Christian students.

It is unlikely that Jews were allowed to attend universities at all until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy, when they became involved in the study¹ or the teaching of medicine.² Information about these early Jewish university students is available because for them to graduate and to practice, special dispensations had to be granted them by the popes.³ Fear of the temptations to which Jewish students at Christian universities were exposed prompted Italian Jews in the fifteenth and again in the sixteenth century to propose a university under Jewish auspices where Jews could study Jewish and secular studies without distraction, pursuing degrees in medicine, law, philosophy, and rabbinics.⁴ Nothing came of these plans at that time.

In Italy there were a few Jews who served as university Hebrew instructors in Ferrara, Pisa, Padua, and Bologna.⁵ At Padua, the Jewish scholar Elijah del Medigo (c. 1460-1497) regularly lectured, although not as an official member of the faculty. As a tribute to his contribution to the humanism of the period, however, his portrait was included among the great scholars of the time in a fresco by Gozzoli in the Palazzo Ricardi in Florence. Most academic instruction in Hebrew was still offered by Christians. These courses were sporadic and not a regular feature of the curriculum. For example, in Bologna, Ionnes Faminius is listed as “Ad Litteras hebraicas et caldaeas” from 1521 till 1526; the position is then listed until 1532 with no incumbent. After that it is dropped from the rolls.⁶ The relationship between the study of Hebrew and medicine was particularly close during the Renaissance because many of the standard Greek and Arabic medical and philosophical texts were being re-introduced to Christian Europe through Latin translations made from Hebrew versions. By the end of the fifteenth century, Christian interest in Hebrew books also turned to kabbalistic works. These proved the truth of Christianity according to some of the leading figures of the Renaissance, such as the humanist Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), who had studied with Elijah del Medigo.

In 1490, after a meeting in Florence with Pico, the German scholar Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) devoted himself to the study of Kabbalah and Hebrew. On his return to Germany, Reuchlin was appointed to the chair of Hebrew at Ingolstadt and then at Tuebingen. He was able to

prevent the Talmud, which was being printed for the first time, from being burned at the instigation of the apostate Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469-c.1512). This controversy and Reuchlin's work in Hebrew stimulated a strong interest in the study of Hebrew literature in Europe, including Poland.⁷ From 1525-1530, rabbinic studies received much Christian attention when they took on practical and political importance. Because of conflicting interpretations of several verses in Leviticus that were relevant to the validity of his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII of England sought rabbinic support in Italy for its annulment. In the wake of this controversy, Henry VIII established Regius chairs of Hebrew at Oxford and Cambridge, and Hebrew became a required subject. As was the case elsewhere, these positions were filled by Christians and apostates—Jews were not even allowed to live in England.

Interest in Hebrew and Kabbalah also spread to France, another country in Europe that had no Jews. In 1538, Guillaume Postel (1510-1581), a Christian Hebraist, taught Hebrew in Paris. One of the first practicing Jews invited to teach Hebrew at a European University was Elijah Levita (c. 1468-1549), a German Jewish Hebrew scholar and Yiddish writer who lived in Italy and worked for the Hebrew publishers there. Since there were no other Jews in France and it would have been difficult if not impossible for him to continue to live as an observant Jew, he did not accept the position.

With the coming to Europe of the Reformation at the beginning of the sixteenth century, positions in Hebrew and oriental languages flourished at the leading universities such as Jena, Leipzig, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Basle, and Wittenberg. The early Protestant incumbents showed strong interest not only in biblical Hebrew, but also in rabbinic writings in order to advance their arguments against the interpretations and practices of the Catholic Church. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, these Protestant Hebraists devoted themselves to writing Hebrew grammars and translating into Latin sections of the Mishnah, Maimonides' code of Jewish law, or the biblical commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, or Abravanel. During the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation, even after the Catholic Church confirmed its commitment to the Latin canon of the Bible, many Catholic scholars continued to turn to post-biblical rabbinic literature and produced significant bibliographic catalogues, manuscript collections, and philological works.⁸ Hebrew libraries, to which Jews were usually denied access, were developed by nobles, cardinals, bishops, and popes. As late as 1865, the Vatican Library, a major treasure-trove of Hebrew manuscripts, was closed to all Jews, prompting one Jewish scholar to urge the people of Italy to overthrow the Pontifical State for the sake of humanity—and Jewish scholarship.⁹

During the seventeenth century, Protestant scholars in many cities, such as Amsterdam, Utrecht, Leiden, and Altdorf, continued to exhibit

interest in post-biblical Judaism. Typical of this generation of scholars was Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633-1705) of Altdorf, who knew Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Wagenseil defended Jews against the blood libel, translated rabbinic tractates, collected Jewish writings, and prepared polemics that he hoped would help convert the Jews. Another Dutch Hebraist is the woman Anna Maria Schurman (1607-1678), for whom a special loggia was built so that she could attend classes at the University of Utrecht.¹⁰ Between 1603 and 1611 at Oxford and Cambridge, Protestant scholars not only worked on translating the Bible for King James, but also were able to translate post-biblical texts such as the Mishnah and Maimonides' Code, and to correspond in Hebrew with Italian Jews.

Although Christian Hebraists took Jewish literature seriously, maintained friendships with Jewish scholars, and devoted their lives to producing works that continue to be of value for Jewish studies today, their material was often marred by their attempts to cast aspersions on Jewish practices, to justify Christian beliefs, and to win converts to Christianity. By 1700, Christian Hebrew scholars began to produce works that were even more hostile to Judaism. For example, Johannes Eisenmenger (1645-1704), a professor of Oriental languages at Heidelberg who had studied Talmud and Midrash with Jews for nineteen years under the pretense that he wanted to convert, wrote *Entdecktes Judentum*, "Judaism Unmasked," a collection of distorted translations of rabbinic texts designed to stigmatize Judaism. In this work, the professor gave credence to the blood libel and to the accusations that Jews poisoned wells. Nevertheless, Christian scholars continued to produce substantial works in Jewish studies. *The History and Religion of the Jews from the Time of Jesus Christ to the Present*, the first major synoptic history of post-biblical Jewish life was written by Jacques Basnage (1653-1725), a French Protestant who lived in exile in Holland after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Although Basnage's historicism did much for the presentation of Jews in nondogmatic terms, he still felt that the Jews had been rejected because they rejected Jesus.¹¹

During the seventeenth century, Jews and Jewish studies had reached the new colleges in the American colonies. Hebrew was required at Harvard from the university's beginning; many students wrote theses about Hebrew and attempted to prove that it was the original language. Nevertheless, to teach Hebrew at Harvard, Judah Monis (1683-1764), a rabbi from North Africa, had to convert before he could receive his appointment in 1722. In the sermon he preached on the occasion of his public acceptance of Christianity, he used Kabbalah and the Hebrew Scriptures to prove the truth of Christianity.¹² Ezra Stiles (1725-1795), a minister who had studied Hebrew and Kabbalah with an itinerant kabbalist, made Hebrew a required subject when he was president of Yale from 1778-1795.¹³ Chairs in Hebrew were established at Princeton and what would later be called Columbia and the University of

Pennsylvania. These classes were taught primarily for Christian divinity students by Christian instructors. Despite these efforts, the study of Hebrew began to wane. As colleges shifted from training clergy to providing general education for the young men of the new nation, they had become more practical and less classical. In 1787, Hebrew became an optional subject at Harvard and the professor of Oriental Languages switched to teaching English. The swan song for Colonial Semitics study was the last Hebrew oration delivered at the Harvard commencement of 1817.¹⁴

In the early nineteenth century, Jews first began to attend German universities in large numbers. For a few years (1812-1822), when Prussian authorities allowed Jews to hold academic posts, Jewish intellectuals in Europe turned to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, “the Science of Judaism,” calling for the modern, objective, critical study of Jewish history, Bible, rabbinics, literature, theology, law, and even contemporary statistics. This was a movement that attracted young Jewish intellectuals, primarily students at the University of Berlin, whose feelings towards their own people had been awakened by contemporary criticism, popular anti-Jewish movements, and the indifference, estrangement, or apostasy of many young Jews. Noting the positive contributions made by Christians to the study of Judaism, they hoped that the “purely scholarly” study of the Jewish past, especially as embodied in Hebrew literature, would awaken in Jews a sense of pride, produce educational, communal, and religious reform, help foster Jewish survival, and cause non-Jews to have a more favorable opinion of Jews.¹⁵ The pioneers of *Wissenschaft* included Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), Eduard Gans (1798-1839), and Hayyim (later Heinrich) Heine (1797-1856). By 1824, however, having published only three numbers of their *Zeitschrift*, their organization had disbanded and, ironically, soon afterwards Gans, Heine, and some of the others converted to Christianity. Heine noted later in life that *kugel* (noodlepudding) had done more to preserve Judaism than all three numbers of the *Zeitschrift fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Nevertheless, Zunz as a private scholar continued to pursue research that changed the nature of Jewish studies and influenced, among others, Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), a leader of Reform Judaism; Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875), a leader of what would become Conservative Judaism; and Solomon Rapoport (1790-1867) and Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), who were traditionally religious scholars.¹⁶

These scholars hoped that *Wissenschaft* would be accepted as part of the curriculum of at least one European university, but this did not happen.¹⁷ Instead *Wissenschaft* was fostered by Jewish scholars who served as rabbis, Jewish teachers, or businessmen. They communicated with each other in letters and made their findings known through articles which appeared in Jewish journals. In 1854 the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, headed by Zacharias Frankel, became

the first institution devoted to *Wissenschaft*. Other seminaries that followed this pattern soon opened in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London, Budapest, and Italy. The rabbis who led these schools usually held doctorates in Semitics from the leading universities in Europe. Soon monographs, critical editions, multivolumed histories, and scholarly journals devoted to *Wissenschaft* began to appear.

It was in America that the first Jewish scholar with modern training was appointed to a university position in Semitics. Around 1835, Isaac Nordheimer (1809-1842), the first avowedly Jewish professor in the United States,¹⁸ taught, for no salary, at New York University. Soon, however, he moved to Union Theological Seminary, inaugurating a long tradition of Semitic study there. It has been suggested that he flirted with Christianity,¹⁹ but this cannot be demonstrated even in the tendentious reminiscences of a Christian colleague used for proof of such an assertion,²⁰ nor in accounts of his life written by other Christian contemporaries.²¹ Finally, several Jews received appointments in Hebrew, Semitics, or rabbinics at European universities, beginning, appropriately, with Julius Fuerst (1805-1873). Fuerst was a Polish Jew who had studied at the University of Berlin with Hegel, and at the Universities of Breslau and Halle with the prominent Semitic philologist Gesenius. Fuerst taught Hebrew, Syriac, and Aramaic grammar and literature at the University of Leipzig and by 1864, he was appointed a full professor. Other Jews received positions teaching Talmud and rabbinics in Paris, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, Berlin, Oxford, and Cambridge, soon after Jewish students were admitted there.

For the most part, Christian Hebraists of the nineteenth century tended to concentrate more on the Hebrew Scriptures than post-biblical literature. Nevertheless, some Christians continued to teach Jewish subjects at major universities. Even the most committed scholars at this time, such as Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890), who wrote the first history of Hebrew poetry, and Hermann Strack (1848-1922), a prolific scholar of rabbinic literature, also engaged in missionary work among the Jews. These were the philosemites. There were also antisemitic orientalists such as Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891), a professor at Goettingen, who considered the Jews “a repulsive burden with no historical use.”

In Europe *Wissenschaft* did not fulfill its goals. Indeed, its goals made it impossible for it to succeed. The attempt to use Jewish scholarship to create a sense of pride for Jews opened the door for some to use Jewish scholarship for other purposes. Not only were Jewish studies open to antisemites and missionaries, but much of the material produced by Jewish scholars was marked by ideological tendentiousness²² and denominational biases.²³ *Wissenschaft* also attracted “. . . younger rabbis . . . who find their consolation in deciphering manuscripts and publishing books, when it is impossible to decipher the faith and convictions of their people. . . . they work among the libraries rather than among the ignorant and superstitious.”²⁴ By the end of the century, one

of *Wissenschaft's* last and most famous practitioners, Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), said "We have only one task left: to give the remains of Judaism decent burial."²⁵

The Growth of Jewish Studies

In the United States, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of institutional consolidation and rapid expansion for the American Jewish community. This was also a period of growth for American universities, for the involvement of Jews—and others—²⁶ in university life, for renewed interest in Semitics, and for the creation of the first graduate schools.²⁷ In 1871 Rabbi Abram Isaacs, an alumnus of New York University who had received further training in Breslau, was appointed to teach at his alma mater, rising to the professorship of Semitics in 1889. Ironically, by this time the library of the above-mentioned Paul de Lagarde had become the main corpus of the New York University semitics collection. In 1874, the newly opened Cornell University hired Felix Adler (1851-1933), the son of a prominent New York Reform rabbi, as a professor of Hebrew and Oriental languages. At the time, this arrangement, financed by members of his father's synagogue, was unique for an American college. When, a few years later, Adler left academics to become the founder of the Ethical Culture Society, Jewish studies would remain divided between Christian Hebraists (usually clergymen) at the universities and European-trained Jewish scholars at community institutions. In 1875, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) founded Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati to train Reform rabbis and in 1885, Sabato Morais (1823-1897) opened the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York to train more traditional rabbis. These seminaries would attract many European Jewish scholars and rabbis to the United States.

At the end of the nineteenth century some American Jews who had earned doctorates in Europe, who for the most part came from the Reform movement, and who were often the sons of the leading pulpit rabbis, had begun to teach Semitics and Rabbinics at major American universities.²⁸ These men, who sometimes taught for no pay or for a subsidy provided by the Jewish community, attracted both Jewish and Christian students, but they did not produce any widespread dissemination of Jewish studies on American campuses.

The important work in Jewish studies was done at institutions developed by the Jewish community. In 1888, the Jewish Publication Society was founded to help publish basic Hebrew texts, English translations of important works, and new scholarship. In 1892, the American Jewish Historical Society was established to promote research in American Jewish History. From 1901-1905, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, the first systematic presentation of Jewish scholarship, was published in the United States by Dr. Isaac Funk, a distinguished Christian.

In 1902, three men who would do much to promote Jewish studies in America received appointments at important institutions. As president

of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Solomon Schechter (1847-1915) gathered some of the finest Jewish scholars in America and Europe. Similarly, as president of Hebrew Union College, Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926) assembled a very distinguished faculty. George Foot Moore (1851-1931), as professor of Religion at Harvard, developed the academic study of religion by combining German scientific standards with an American openness for Jews and the study of Judaism.²⁹

During this period of expansion of the field, Dropsie College, an institution devoted exclusively to post-graduate study of Hebrew, Semitics, and rabbinics, opened in Philadelphia in 1907. Moses Dropsie (1821-1905), a child of a mixed marriage who accepted Judaism at the age of fourteen, made provisions in his will for this institution, and required that there would be “no distinction on account of creed, colour or sex in the admission of students.” Significantly omitted from most accounts of his largesse is the fact that members of the faculty and the board had to be Jewish.³⁰ In 1906, the year between Dropsie’s death and the year the college opened, the executors of his estate solicited opinions from the leading figures in higher education concerning how the school should be run. The replies provide wide-ranging views about the nature and purpose of graduate education in general and Jewish higher education in particular.³¹ The considerations ranged from the “ethnic” to the employment prospects of the graduates—positions as heads of orphan asylums with enough time for research. Also under discussion during that period was whether the college would include a center for Jewish education or whether this would not be in the nonsectarian spirit of Dropsie’s will.³² The mantle of Jewish scholarship unofficially passed from the old world to the new in 1910 when the *Jewish Quarterly Review* was removed from England to Dropsie College.

Institutions devoted to Jewish studies continued to emerge in the United States. Local Hebrew colleges in many major cities offered preparatory programs for high school students and courses for college credit. Important Judaica and Hebraica collections were developed at the Library of Congress, Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, Yale, and the New York Public Library. In 1915, the Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation was established to support the publication of Jewish scholarship. In 1916, Bernard Revel, a Dropsie graduate and head of the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary (later Yeshiva University), tried to establish a Society of Jewish Academicians of America with the published provision that “. . . scientific truth will have to be sacrificed to tradition.”³³ Revel’s plan was opposed by the leading scholars and it came to naught. Shortly afterwards, in 1920, the American Academy of Jewish Research was established to promote Jewish scholarship in the United States. Drafts of the articles of its incorporation show that Revel’s name was crossed out, perhaps indicating continued tensions over the nature of Jewish scholarship.

Despite the slow acceptance of Jews into the ranks of American

faculties,³⁴ Jewish studies continued to emerge at secular colleges, and prominent scholars in areas of Jewish studies received appointments. In 1924, David Blondheim, a pioneer in the study of the French glosses in Rashi's medieval Hebrew Bible commentaries and in understanding Judeo-Romance dialects, began to teach Romance languages at Johns Hopkins. In 1925, a chair in Jewish studies at Harvard was established by a member of the Jewish community of New York; for many decades this position was occupied by Harry Wolfson.³⁵ In 1930, a chair in Jewish history was endowed at Columbia; it was held for many decades by Salo Baron. Wolfson and Baron produced graduate students who would determine the contours of the field for a long time. A major boon to the furtherance of Jewish life on college campuses in general and the teaching of Jewish studies was the establishment of the Hillel movement between 1923 and 1925.

Jewish studies continued to develop abroad. When the Hebrew University in Jerusalem opened in 1925, a secular setting had been established that would support many departments for specialization in Jewish studies and encourage the development of Hebrew as a living language for Jewish scholarship. In Europe, Jewish academicians found positions not only at seminaries in Germany, England, Poland, Italy, Hungary, and France, but also at universities such as Warsaw, Frankfurt, and Padua.

In the United States, influenced by movements in Eastern Europe and Palestine, there was a renaissance during the 1930s in the study of Hebrew. Some themes in Hebrew literature unique to the United States were Native American motifs and descriptions of the plight of the blacks.³⁶ As a result, during the early 1930s, Hebrew was introduced in the New York City public high schools. This movement soon reached the colleges, and, in 1934, New York University (the institution which had the largest Jewish student body in the world but not a single Jewish instructor until 1930³⁷) began to offer modern Hebrew in the Division of General Education. Similarly, although there had been a course in Jewish history since the 1930s, Hebrew was not introduced at City College until 1948. By the late 1940s, about a dozen colleges offered modern Hebrew, in addition to the 77 colleges and 47 seminaries that taught biblical Hebrew. Some of the schools that introduced modern Hebrew included standard bastions of Semitics such as Pennsylvania, Hopkins, Chicago, Harvard, Columbia, and Yeshiva as well as large universities often with sizable Jewish enrollments such as Buffalo, Boston, Brooklyn, Colorado, Missouri, Wayne State, and Houston.

Courses in modern Hebrew and Jewish studies were also offered during the 1930s and 1940s at Smith, a small but prominent women's liberal arts college with few Jews. Old Smith catalogues show that beginning in 1938 Margaret Breckenbury Crook taught a Hebrew course in the Department of Religion and Biblical Literature that included "readings from Modern Hebrew schoolbooks." For a year or two this

course was taught by a young Jewish visiting lecturer in the department, Cyrus Gordon (b. 1908), who was at Smith to study its collection of cuneiform tablets. Beginning in academic year 1940-1941 there was also a course called "Contemporary Judaism," described as "An analysis of Judaism, its religion and social background, dispersion, the Jew in Europe and in America, Judaism's contribution to Christianity and to democracy. Present forces influencing Jewish Christian relations." The instructor was S. Ralph Harlow, a Christian scholar and social activist who travelled regularly in Palestine, lectured at synagogues, protested the persecution of Jews, and invited rabbis to speak to his class. Harlow also organized regular field trips to New York City each year, and the itineraries included going to Harlem to listen to "negro music," touring the Lower East Side, visiting at the Spanish Portuguese synagogue, and attending Sunday morning services at Riverside Church to hear Harry Emerson Fosdick preach.³⁸ The work of Harlow, following the pattern established by Moore at Harvard, shows clearly how Jewish studies began to enter some colleges in the United States. Believing that religion is a major force in the world that has to be understood in its own terms, Harlow and his department hoped that by teaching about all religions, greater understanding between all peoples would be fostered.³⁹ As he and his colleagues began to teach about eastern religions, it was only natural that attention would be given to developments in Judaism after the Bible. In recognition of his accomplishments, Harlow was awarded an honorary degree from Hebrew Union College, bringing the relationship between secular colleges and Jewish institutions full circle.

Modern Developments

Although by 1945 some schools had let their Semitics programs lapse,⁴⁰ there were about a dozen full time positions around the country in Jewish studies. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish studies, especially courses on Israel and Hebrew, were introduced at schools with both large and small Jewish enrollments. Also at this time, Brandeis opened, as a secular university supported by the American Jewish community. One of the first departments opened by Brandeis was Near Eastern and Judaic Studies chaired by Simon Rawidowicz. Brandeis soon began granting doctoral degrees to people who would hold some of the growing number of positions in Jewish studies. Courses in Jewish studies were still mostly taught by Hillel directors, leaders of Jewish educational agencies, and special appointees.⁴¹ By 1956, 48 colleges and universities offered modern Hebrew, and 133 colleges and 112 seminaries taught biblical Hebrew, an interesting increase since the language of the Bible had not changed much in a decade. In 1958 the National Defense Education Act gave added impetus to the study of foreign languages, including Modern Hebrew. Continuing to reflect the changing status of Jewish studies on the national level, in 1963 Smith College hired Jochanan Wijnhoven, a

specialist in Kabbalah and medieval Jewish religious philosophy who had degrees from Hebrew University and Brandeis, to teach in the Religion Department. The course in contemporary Judaism became a year-long survey of Jewish thought. An introductory course in biblical Hebrew led to a sequence of courses in post-biblical Hebrew religious texts. By 1966, throughout the country, there were 54 professors and 34 Hillel directors who offered Jewish studies at 92 colleges and universities.⁴²

In 1966, observers of the Jewish scene were aware of the growth of Jewish studies. They explained that the phenomenon was due, in part, to pride in the State of Israel and growing concern over the losses of the Holocaust. They saw the Jewish studies programs as a sign of the new acceptance of Jews and Judaism in the colleges and universities of the U.S. after World War II. Part of the reason for the expansion of Jewish studies during the 1940s and 1950s was attributed to basic changes in the curriculum of higher education, which allowed for interdisciplinary studies, more flexibility, and a broader range of courses. Finally, the Jewish community often backed Jewish studies programs and supported what was considered to be one of the few opportunities for serious study in modern Jewish life. Jewish students, however, were not turning out in large numbers for the courses and non-Jewish participation was dismissed as “negligible.” Because there were more positions than trained candidates, questions were raised about the qualifications of many people who were hired to teach during this period of expansion. It is interesting to note that at this time on the undergraduate level the number of women students equalled or exceeded that of men, but at the graduate level, most of the students were men and faculty members were routinely referred to as men.

Thus, before the Six Day War and the public recognition of black and ethnic studies, Jewish studies had already developed as a field that enjoyed some success but also suffered from many problems. Of course, these later events did inspire many Jews on the faculties, in the student bodies, in alumni organizations, and in the community to turn to Jewish studies and the numbers of programs continued to rise. In 1969, the year that the Association for Jewish Studies was established, there were 80 full-time positions and another 200 part-time appointments. According to some estimates, at least 600 students were majoring in Jewish studies in 1969. During the 1970s, interest in the study of Modern Hebrew continued to grow while national trends indicated decreased participation in language courses.⁴³ Now twenty years after the boom in Jewish studies and after a period of recession in university growth, most schools in the country have some offerings in Jewish studies and it is easy to find programs in modern Hebrew. New chairs in Jewish studies are still being established.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis of Jewish studies reveals several

paradoxes. On the one hand, the field has had a long history; on the other, Jewish studies surely has had an erratic pattern of growth and, even after their establishment, these courses have been dispensable. The appearance of Jewish studies seems to correlate more with the needs of the practitioners, Christian or Jewish, than with what schools have considered to be their essential curricular needs. Although making substantial academic contributions, medieval and colonial Christian pioneers in Hebraica, Judaica, and rabbinica pursued their work for the furtherance of Christianity, often at the expense of Judaism. The early pioneers of “the Science of Judaism” had an agenda that would now be categorized as ethnic Jewish survival and pride. The failure of Jewish studies to find acceptance at universities until the twentieth century is as much an indication of the nature of the field as it is of the universities themselves. Having developed in other contexts (most notably rabbinical seminaries and Jewish communal institutions) Jewish studies has acquired contours that still make it difficult for it to fit into the secular collegiate curriculum. The burden of adjustment, however, does not fall exclusively on Jewish studies. One of the essential aspects of Jewish studies is a challenge to the nature and structure of western higher education. One of the reasons for interest in Jewish studies and other ethnic fields is that the basic university curriculum not only excludes materials relevant to the lives of many students but there is, according to many, little room conceptually for anything but “an unselfconscious, western, white, Christian, male view of the world” which is often considered “universalistic.” One of the unstated tensions present as new fields emerge is whether they or the traditional curriculum are in fact ethnic. Is it the regular departments or the new programs that really represent parochial concerns? Practitioners of Jewish studies and other ethnic fields need not feel any shame that students are motivated to take their courses out of a sense of personal interest, that they themselves entered the field because of specific communal concerns, that growth in their field correlates with the arrival of large numbers of their group on a given campus, that their group is using the university to recognize its concerns and validate its position, and that their field does not conform to the standard curricular rubrics. Ironically, writers on Jewish studies want to distance their field from the label of “ethnic,” which often evokes partisan associations, while at the same time they list all the benefits which the Jewish community derives from the academic study of Judaism. They argue that Jewish studies should not be a partisan enterprise, but overlook the fact that the academic process has always been committed to fostering particular values whether they are nationalistic, religious, sexual, or racial. The ultimate defense against ideological forays into the classroom is the academic process itself, which is based on rigorous disciplinary and methodological questioning of all data, assumptions, and conclusions. If such tests are not applied—and, even before the development of ethnic

studies, they have not always been—the fault does not lie with a particular field but with the academic process itself. The task before Jewish studies and ethnic studies, therefore, is, on the one hand, not the repression of identity, community, and social concerns, but the creation of a methodology that will help these matters find expression among many disciplines and departments on campus. On the other hand, ethnic courses cannot and must not replace traditional courses. Nor can traditional courses, offering what they do in terms of content, method, depth, and coverage, try to accommodate all that the ethnic perspective brings to academic study. To be sure, the experience of the minority, any minority, can only be understood in light of the influence on it by the majority and its culture, just as the dominant culture must be seen as rooted in many different traditions. The key to success therefore is the integration of ethnic studies and traditional disciplines.

The articulation of Jewish or ethnic considerations in the curriculum is an opportunity not only for those involved in academics, but also for those committed to the ethnic community. Indeed the academic study of the Jewish people is the only opportunity to challenge tendentious, polemical, and self-serving interpretations of the Jewish experience. Thus Jewish studies is a valuable way to invigorate a sense of cultural creativity and to develop critical thinking in the Jewish community. Jewish and ethnic studies will succeed not because they serve the needs of a particular constituency, but because they offer a methodologically sound perspective for all students, they contribute to the advancement of larger disciplines, and they aid the overall intellectual development of each student.

Notes

¹Emilia Veronese Ceseracciu. “Ebrei laureati a Padova nel Cinquecento.” *Quaderni per la storia dell’Università di Padova*. Vol. 13 (1980) 151-168.

²Felice Momigliano. “Un ebreo professore di medicina all’Università di Perugia nelle seconde meta del secolo xiv.” *Il Vessillo Israelitico*. Vol. 66 (1918) 384-7.

³Cecil Roth. “The Medieval University and the Jew.” *The Menorah Journal*. Vol. 19 (1930-1) 128-141; Vittore Colorni. “Sull’ammissibilità degli ebrei alla laurea anteriormente al secolo xix.” *Rassegne Mensile di Israel*. Vol. 16 (1950) 202-216.

⁴Jacob Marcus. *The Jew in the Medieval World*. (Cincinnati: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1938), 381-388.

⁵F. Servi. "Studi orientali in Italia." *Il Vessillo Israelitico*. Vol. 24 (1876) 408-410.

⁶Umberto Dallari. *I rotuli dei lettori legisti e artisti dello studio bolognese dal 1384 al 1799*. (Bologna, 1889) 32-69.

⁷Witold Tyloch. "Hebrew Studies in Poland—Warsaw University." *Hebrew Studies*. Vol. 26 (1985) 131-135.

⁸Giuliano Tamani. "Gli studi ebraici a Padova nei secoli xvii-xx." *Quaderni per la storia dell'Università di Padova*. Vols. 9-10 (1976-7) 215-228.

⁹Nahum Glatzer. "The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies." *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*. A. Altmann, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 31.

¹⁰I am indebted to Jochanan Wijnhoven for this information.

¹¹Glatzer, "The Beginnings," 33.

¹²On the conversionary aspects of Christian Kabbalah, see my "Rabbi Leon Modena and the Christian Kabbalists," *Renaissance Rereadings: Intertext and Context*, M. Horowitz, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988) 271-286.

¹³Eisig Silberschlag. "The Primacy of Hebrew in Early America." *Hebrew Studies*. Vol. 26 (1985) 123-130; Robert Pfeiffer. "The Teaching of Hebrew in Colonial America." *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vols. 45-6 (1954-6) 363-373.

¹⁴William Rosenau. "Semitic Studies in American Colleges." *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*. Vol. 6 (1896) 99-113.

¹⁵Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz. *The Jew in the Modern World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 182-213.

¹⁶Jacob Haberman. "Some Changing Aspects of Jewish Scholarship." *Judiasm*. Vol. 35 (1986) 186-187.

¹⁷Salo Baron. "Jewish Studies at Universities: An Early Project." *Hebrew Union College Annual*. Vol. 46 (1975) 357-376.

¹⁸Lewis S. Feuer. "Stages in the Social History of Jewish Professors in American Colleges and Universities." *American Jewish History*. Vol. 81 (1982) 432-465.

¹⁹Harold Wechsler and Paul Ritterband. "Jewish Learning in American Universities: The Literature of a Field." *Modern Judaism*. Vol. 3 (1983) 260.

²⁰H. Neil. "Reminiscences of I. Nordheimer." *New Englander and Yale Review*. Vol. 33 (1874) 506-512.

²¹Edward Robinson. "Biographical Notices of Gesenius and Nordheimer." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. (1843) 379-390.

²²Gershom Scholem. "The Science of Judaism—Then and Now." *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) 304-317.

²³Michael Meyer. "Jewish Religious Reform and Wissenschaft des Judentums: The Positions of Zunz, Geiger, and Frankel." *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*. Vol. 16 (1971) 19-41.

²⁴A. S. Isaacs, 1882, cited by Harold S. Wechsler. "Pulpit of Professoriate: The Case of Morris Jastrow." *American Jewish History*. Vol. 74 (1985) 338.

²⁵Scholem, "The Science of Judaism," 307.

²⁶For information about one of the first blacks to attend the University of Pennsylvania in 1879, see Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941) 30-31.

²⁷Feuer, "The Stages," 433, suggests that apart from a few appointments in Jewish or Semitic studies, Jews usually entered new academic fields. I believe that Jewish and Semitic studies were also new fields.

²⁸Wechsler, "Pulpit of Professoriate," 338-355.

²⁹Solomon Zeitlin. "Jewish Learning in America." *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vols. 45-46 (1954-6) 582-616.

³⁰Adler, *I Have Considered the Days*, 274.

³¹Meir Ben-Horin. "Scholars' Opinions: Documents in the History of Dropsie University." *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume*. (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1974) 167-208.

³²Herbert Parzen. "New Data on the Foundation of Dropsie College." *Jewish Social Studies*. Vol. 28 (1966) 131-147.

³³Ira Robinson. "Cyrus Adler, Bernard Revel and the Prehistory of Organized Jewish Scholarship in America." *American Jewish History*. Vol. 69 (1979) 502.

³⁴Feuer, "The Stages," estimates that there were fewer than one hundred Jewish liberal arts faculty members by the mid-twenties.

³⁵Ismar Elbogen. "American Jewish Scholarship: A Survey." *The American Jewish Year Book*. Vol. 45 (1943-1944) 47-65.

³⁶Eisig Silberschlag. "Hebrew Literature in America." *Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vols. 45-6 (1954-6) 413-433.

³⁷Feuer, "The Stages," 455-6.

³⁸Based in materials on Harlow in the Smith College Archives.

³⁹Based on a telephone discussion with Virginia Corwin Brautigam.

⁴⁰Abraham Katsh. "The Status of Hebrew in American Colleges and Universities." *Jewish Education*. Vol. 13 (1941) 108-9, 142.

⁴¹Abraham Katsh. "The Teaching of Hebrew in American Universities." *The Modern Language Journal*. Vol. 30 (1946) 575-586; "Growth of Hebrew in American Colleges and Universities." *Jewish Education*. Vol. 21 (1950) 11-16.

⁴²Arnold Band. "Jewish Studies in American Colleges and Universities." *American Jewish Year Book*. Vol. 67 (1967) 3-30.

⁴³David Rudavsky. "Hebraic and Judaic Studies in American Higher Education." *Congress Bi-Weekly*. Vol. 41 (1974) 8-10.