

The Gnat in Titus' Nose:
Jews and the Writing of History from Antiquity to the Present

The Rosen Lecture for 2009

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It was an unexpected honour to be invited, in my very first year back at Queen's, to give the Rosen lecture. In my case, it is especially gratifying since my education as a historian began here some 33 years ago, and my career as a teacher also started at Queen's several years after that. So I am very appreciative to the committee for having extended this invitation, and to the Rosen family for their generosity in endowing an event such as this which, judging by past years, has both had some extremely distinguished speakers and encouraged a wide variety of topics. I also appreciate the committee's flexibility as to my topic, and here perhaps I should issue a disclaimer. While I am both a Jew and a historian, I am not by any stretch of the imagination a historian of Judaism, nor do I have the qualifications to become so; heretofore my religious and professional identities have not noticeably crossed. That being said, the central focus of my research for thirty years has been how the past has been studied or understood in past times, and specifically the history of the writing of history. While my initial interest lay in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Britain, in recent years various editorial projects and my latest book, still some distance from the finish line, have been more broadly concerned with the

history of historical writing throughout the world. It has become apparent to me in the course of these studies that Jews have been intimately, but rather unevenly and discontinuously involved in the business of uncovering and writing about the past virtually as long as there has been both history and Jews.

I should like to begin in the relatively recent past, with a story from the Holocaust. In 1941, in Riga, Latvia, the Nazis had just pushed out the Soviet forces, themselves recent and unwelcome guests. Though the Final Solution and its horrors had yet to be launched in full, the persecution of the local Jewish population began almost immediately. In a series of raids, the elderly, children and pregnant women were forced from their houses on to waiting transports and taken to their deaths in the forest during what became over the next several days the Rumbula Massacre. Those who could not move fast enough for their tormentors were simply executed on the spot. Among these was an 81 year old Russian-born historian named Simon Dubnow or Dubnov, who was dragged from his bed, feverish and sick, only to be summarily shot in the back by a Latvian guard. Various accounts of Dubnow's death suggest that he did not go quietly, apparently exhorting his fellow captives to "Write and Record!"

Dubnow had enjoyed a long and distinguished career in history, especially Jewish history, and we will circle back to his contributions towards the end of this lecture. By the time he died, Jewish history had become reasonably well-established as a subject, at least among the Jews, though it was still perhaps a good half century away from becoming a standard subject in North American and Western European university curricula. One might assume that this had always been the case. Jews are well-known for their long tradition of high literacy, and for telling stories, and history is at the end of the day a form

of story. Moreover, our remote ancestors in Israelite and especially Prophetic times are credited with introducing not merely monotheism, but the idea of a linear narrative with progressive rather than strictly cyclical elements, and even a conclusive ending in the form of Messianism.

However, despite these strong temporal bookends in antiquity and modernity, it would be an error to assume that Jews have always been active in historical thought or writing. In fact, quite the opposite is true. As illustrated in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's classic study, *Zakhor*, there is a large gap between Josephus, a Hellenized Jew living among the Romans during the late first century of the Common Era, and what is usually seen as the revival of Jewish historiographical activity in the nineteenth century, a revival that included the martyred Dubnow and some other memorable names which I will come to presently. To be sure, this was not a total vacuum: there was a brief efflorescence of historiographical activity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though its practitioners are memorable to some degree because they were so exceptional for their times. In what remains of this lecture I would like to trace the history of Jews' engagement with the past, and with history, over a period of several millennia. This is rather a tall order, and perhaps presumptuous, so I will concentrate on three moments or phases of this experience: the ancient era, ending with Josephus; the sixteenth and seventeenth-century revival; and the period of the establishment of Jewish history, and the establishment of Jews *in* history as a profession, from the late 18th to the early 20th century.

No other western civilization has proved as difficult to explain,

historiographically, as the Israelites (or Jews as they became in the centuries following their early sixth-century Babylonian exile). Like most Near Eastern cultures, they had no term for “history” or “myth”, nor any strong differentiation between the two. Somewhat exaggerated claims have been made for the uniqueness of the historical sense in the *Tanakh*, often at the expense of the other Near Eastern cultures whose records seem sparse in comparison, to the point of viewing the Hebrews, even more than the Greeks, as the inventors of history, the genre of writing, or at least of History with a capital H, in the sense of a cumulative flow of events towards a divinely-ordained conclusion. All of this has been complicated in various ways, for instance by the modern understanding of the origins and chronology of sections in the *Tanakh*. This is now known to have been the work of several hands, and much of it originates in periods from the Davidic kingship (tenth century) to the Babylonian Exile (late seventh–early sixth centuries).

Another generalization, beloved of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians and Christian religious historians, runs like this: the monotheistic religion of the Hebrews, and their belief in a covenant with the one God gave them a distinctive and unrivalled sense of past, present and future, and of a linear direction to time that differs sharply from the cyclical vision in other parts of the world, including the classical civilizations.¹ Apart from the fact that one finds both linear and cyclical senses of time in Greek and Roman writers,² this argumentative ship has been well and truly sunk by the unmistakable evidence in Hebrew writings of historical cycles, the most obvious one being that of alternating divine pleasure and displeasure with the chosen people, leading in this world to the repeated experience of slavery and liberation, captivity and freedom. Certainly the use of typology and prefiguration which is an important part of the Jewish

canon is hard to imagine on a strictly linear and eschatological vision of time, though the fulfilment of earlier events by later ones does imply a progression rather than mere repetition.³

All this aside, there is something going on in the *Tanakh* that is harder to find in the more fractured evidence from Mesopotamia or Persia. Biblical scholars of the past century, faced with the fact that a literal reading of the Hebrew Bible is difficult to sustain--and holding to the then widely-held historiographic attitude that judged a history's value almost wholly by its reliability as a source--have sometimes distinguished between oral and ahistorical tales or *Sagen* and the more reliable written *Geschichte* (the terms are German because much of the modern scholarship has been conducted in that language). The most unarguably "historical" section of the *Tanakh*, in that it describes times, persons, and events of whose existence we are reasonably confident because there is evidence for them in external sources, was possibly the work of a single writer, the so-called Deuteronomistic Historian, and stretches from Deuteronomy (the last of the "Five Books of Moses" or Torah) through 2 Kings, but even its reliability has been challenged, particularly as it is not clear how one distinguishes oral from putative (and no longer extant) written sources. Recent study has therefore cast doubt on the *historicity* of the *Tanakh* (that is, its basis in fact), without necessarily throwing out the idea that one can find *historiography* within it, though a historiography never intended to capture literal, as opposed to religious, truth.⁴ In the early genealogies of Genesis and in the more chronological accounts of the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, one finds both an effort to memorialize the past accurately as a written record and a strong sense of the divine destiny of the Israelites as a chosen people, a linear progress through which

oscillates a recurrent cycle of triumph and misery as God first rescues his children from Egyptian slavery and then alternately chastises the erring Israelites for disobedience, sin, or idolatry, and then delivers them, often selectively, from oppressors such as the Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians. In a recent study of *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel*, Tomoo Ishida has highlighted the early attention to cause and effect, staples of history, that run through the recitation of *tôl' dôt*, the generations of Israel, and he sees the earliest beginnings of historical writing in the lists of nations that occur in 27 different Tanakh passages—Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites etc.

This ancient Hebrew achievement, if not “unique”, is striking-- all the more so when one contrasts it with the relative dearth of Jewish secular historical writing during the millennium-and-a-half of Diaspora between Flavius Josephus (c. 37–c.100 AD) and the sixteenth century when Jews, still stateless, began to rediscover the formal study of the past. Of all the ancient Jews, it is Josephus who has given us the closest thing to a history in the classical sense. Though a Jew, Josephus wrote several centuries after the authors of the *Tanakh*, and of his exposure to Greece and Rome there is no doubt; it has made him perhaps the earliest example of a historian from one culture operating comfortably in the milieu and style of another. A transitional late antique figure like St Paul, Josephus became a Roman citizen and adopted the name Flavius from the family name of his patrons, the Emperors Vespasian and Titus. All of this, plus his failure to die with his colleagues in Galilee during the rebellion against Rome, has led to the vilification of his character for two millennia. But of the value of his historical works, surviving versions of which were composed in Greek (though he is known to have

initially written in his native Aramaic), there is no question: his *Antiquities of the Jews* has proved an invaluable source for the social, legal and religious customs of the Jews; and his *Jewish Wars* is useful for the conflicts between the Jews and their enemies from the Seleucid capture of Jerusalem in 164 BCE through to the destruction of the temple in Josephus' own time. Both works make a case for the extreme antiquity of the Jews, and for their capacity to live peaceably within Roman rule, the rebellions having been in Josephus' eyes the misguided folly of zealots.

The Renaissance and Seventeenth Century

Josephus had, however, no followers, and we must now leap ahead many centuries to find a resumption of Jewish historiography. Various explanations have been supplied for its near total absence during the first fourteen or fifteen centuries of the Diaspora. One of these, derived from an old Talmudic story, is helpful in that it addresses the paradox of a people with a very strong collective memory nevertheless ignoring or discarding elements of the past. The story compares Israel to a man who meets a wolf and survives; on his journey he narrates to those he meets his encounter with the wolf, but soon he meets a lion; he escapes again, but now the lion displaces the wolf in his story; and eventually a snake displaces the lion. Later troubles, in short, cause Israel to forget earlier ones.

In fact rather the opposite seems to have been the case during the Middle Ages. Troubles there certainly were during the Diaspora, and we know of them through Christian and Muslim sources, but there is little evidence of a concerted effort by Jews themselves to chronicle their recent or even more remote past, while at the same time solidarity and identity were maintained through ritual and tradition, through annual

recitation of earliest history in the Torah, and through the transmission and study of the Talmud and Mishnah. The outstanding Jewish intellectual figures of the Middle Ages are usually thought of in other capacities than historical. Moses Maimonides has some reflections on the early history of Israel and its role in the world in his Epistle to Yemen c. 1172, but it is as a philosopher and sage that he is best known; and while he paid close attention to Muslim learning, he regarded Islam's very highly developed historiography as a waste of time as Yerushalmi notes. Biography, especially the recitation of martyrdoms, also provided a kind of exception, even if it was more a portrait gallery than a linear narrative. An example of this is provided by the series of biographical pieces called the *Seder Mekablé H'Torah Ve'Lomdeha* ("Order of the Recipients of the Torah and its Teachers") by Rabbi Jacob bar Samson, a pupil of the great sage Rashi. Many of these works significantly originate in Islamic Jewry and show the clear influence of *hadith*, the Muslim science of prophetic transmission. However, few could really be called histories in any sense that we would understand the term.

The most celebrated exception to the general dearth is an anonymous chronicle, written in mid-tenth century Italy, and known to us by the name Josippon. This work, composed in Hebrew, more or less parallels Josephus a millennium earlier, commencing with the Noachic establishment of Nations and ending with the destruction of the Second Temple; much of it is concerned with the rebellion against the Romans, and of later Jewish history Josippon says nothing. There are similar exceptions that testify to the interest in the post-Biblical, but not recent, past, such as an eleventh-century work, the *Chronicle of Ahimaaz*, which actually does discuss the remnants of Babylonian Judaism as they existed up to its author's time. All told, this is not a large number for fourteen or

fifteen centuries, and it should be noted that they are, without exception, of Sephardic origin. In Ashkenazic Jewry the picture is even bleaker, though, Michael Meyer has noted, some semblance of historical consciousness appears to have been awakened by the disaster of the Crusades and their ensuing persecutions in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. More recent records were kept in so-called *Memorbücher*, or books of recollection, by late medieval German Jewish communities.

When we arrive in the period of the Renaissance, however, there are signs of a more significant historical interest awakening. Once again we must look principally to Sephardic Jewry, and especially to two Iberian exiles Solomon ibn Verga (1460–1554) of Seville and Samuel Usque (fl. 1540–1555), and to the messianic world historian Joseph ha-Kohen, who triumphantly boasted that “the chroniclers ceased, they ceased till I arose”. R. Solomon Ibn Verga (fl. Late 15th-early 16th c) began to see Jewish history in a wider context, and to start using non-Jewish sources as a supplement to Jewish ones. Ibn Verga was a refugee from Spain via Portugal who ended up in Italy, where he may have become familiar with Florentine historiography, then the most advanced in Europe. His version of an older work, the *Shevet Yehuda*, narrates Jewish persecutions from the end of the 2nd Temple to his own day. Ibn Verga’s *Shevet Yehuda*, literally “The Staff of Judah” was written in the 1520s and first published in 1554. He wrote the work, he tells us, so that Jews would be conscious of their persecution and turn to God with increased fervour to petition Him for their deliverance. The work is less Midrash than Mishmash, with very little interest in chronology, but it is notable for its interest in identifying the causes of hatred toward the Jews, and for its frequent reference to non-Jewish chronicles.

Samuel Usque, a Portuguese Marrano—that is a Jew forcibly converted to Christianity--was similarly motivated principally by religious impulses to study the past. Once settled in Ferrara, he composed a series of dialogues in Portuguese that recount the history of Jewish sufferings; most interesting from a historiographic point of view are its later sections, in which he finally departs from his sources and attempts to give a record of more recent times, and especially of the persecution by the Spanish Inquisition.

A few other names require mention. Eliyahu Capsali (d c 1555) in his *Seder Olam Zuta* (“The Minor Order of Elijah”) contributed a history of the Ottoman Turks combined with a chronicle of Venice. His work was continued by David Gans, a German; by the Spaniard Abraham Zacuto, author of a “Book of Genealogies” first published at Constantinople in 1566; and by another Spaniard, Gedaliah Ibn Yahya (1515-78). Each was unwilling to take tradition without scrutiny, or to ignore non-Jewish sources. Ibn Yahya’s work was a history of the Kabbalah known as the ‘Chain of Tradition’, again using not just Jewish sources but “the most reliable chroniclers” of the Christian world.

David Gans, the German, published a chronicle in 1592 entitled *Zemach David*. This was written in part to promote congenial relations with the Christian world and it is very favourable to certain current centres of civilization and Enlightenment like Prague, where he had studied. Very much a product of the enlightened intellectual environment at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, Gans noted the absence of chronological writing in previous eras, in particular of works that would follow the year-by-year format that was a standard feature of Christian annals for the previous thousand years. Gans is modest, and disclaims any competition with the Rabbis; rather, he says, he has written his chronology, not for scholars “who are filled with Torah like a pomegranate, but only for

average people, young and insignificant students like myself'. Both his devotion to the annalistic format and his positive attitude to righteous Christian rulers such as Rudolf who (unlike their populations) had protected the Jews, can be illustrated in this passage.

5334 [1574]. A time of trouble for the Jews of Moravia. A number of them died as martyrs in sanctification of God's name, until the Emperor Maximilian, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing, took pity upon them out of the abundance of his righteousness and compassion, and he saved them.

Gans's work is impressive, not least in its defence of the use of non-Jewish sources and its advocacy of placing Jewish history into a wider world history. It does tend to be rather uncritical of its sources. So, too, is that of the French-born Italian physician, Joseph Ha'Kohen (1496-1575), author of two historical works. The first, *Dibre ha-Yamim le-Malke Zarfat we-'Otoman* (Chronicles of the Kings of France and Turkey), is a history of the world, again in the form of annals, recounting the struggles of Christianity and Islam, represented respectively by France and the Ottoman empire. It is an ambitious attempt at writing a unified European history since the fall of Rome, and from it Joseph extracted a second work, a more traditional set of annals recounting the persecution of the Jews.

It fell to the Mantuan-born Azariah de' Rossi (c. 1511–1578) to take an approach that more clearly resembled the great Christian antiquaries of his own day in his attention to the sources of ancient Jewish history, and especially a critical and common-sense attitude to contradictions and seeming falsehoods. Azariah's *Me'or 'Einayim* ("Enlightenment of the Eyes") was roundly rejected by contemporary rabbinical scholars, but it pointed ahead to the more lasting revival of Jewish secular historiography in the

early nineteenth century. And unlike the works of Ibn Verga and others, which were treated as lightweight pastimes, that of Azariah was taken seriously by Jewish readers. *Me'or Eynayim* introduces Renaissance philological source criticism for the first time to Jewish historiography. The third section of this has some rather shapeless essays on various aspects of the past like the calendar—Rossi was a bit of an antiquarian in the tradition of the ancient Roman Varro or, more recently, the Huguenot Joseph Scaliger. The difference between Rossi's use of Gentile sources and that of earlier authors like Zacuto or Gans is that they tended to mine those sources to confirm Jewish tradition; Rossi would actually use them on occasion to correct Jewish sources. He was also unafraid to sort traditions into those from Mosaic or prophetic sources, which were unimpeachable, and those from particular sages who might have been mistaken; he is known to have read the great Roman historian Livy and praised him as a model of historiography. Rossi's attention to chronology and detail is evident in his contribution to a seemingly arcane but much controverted question, namely the truth of the story that the future Emperor Titus, enemy of the Jews and destroyer in the year 70 of the 2nd Temple, was killed providentially for his blasphemy. This occurred by a gnat entering Titus' nose (or in some versions his ear) and then pecking away at his brain for seven years, till he died, mad and repentant. A brief passage is worth quoting to illustrate Azariah's historical approach:

The question of time presents a severe problem. If you will look in any of the chronicles of the emperors, or even the Book of Tradition of R. Abraham ibn Daud, you will find that the destruction of the Temple occurred in the second year of Vespasian's reign. Vespasian ruled for about ten years and his son Titus after

him for less than three years. Thus, at the end of the seven years, when according to the Rabbis, Titus died, he in fact mounted throne. In some of my leisure moments, I looked through all the important historical works.

Azariah was a pious Jew, scarcely a secularist, but his willingness to question tradition got him into a lot of trouble with rabbinic authorities, even though he had an obvious out: he insisted that Torah trumped history, and that Talmudic exaggeration, even the story of the gnat and the emperor, was justified for high moral reasons. He was especially attacked on logical grounds by Rabbi Judah Loew (1525-1609), the famous Maharal of Prague, known in popular lore for his creation of the famous Golem but in reality a formidable sage and scholar, highly regarded by Christians as well as Jews, and the teacher of the aforementioned David Gans.

With Azariah the stream of Renaissance Jewish historical thinkers more or less ends. The seventeenth century is rather a desert historiographically, though intellectually interesting in other respects since it saw both the great philosophical achievements of Spinoza and a resurgent messianism best illustrated in the strange episode of the false Messiah Shabbatai Sevi. By now we are veering into the age of Enlightenment. The eighteenth was the century of universalism, cosmopolitanism, embodied in Voltaire, Kant, Gibbon, the Scottish philosophes, and above all of the modern idea of progress. It also saw the philosophical foundations laid for nineteenth-century language-based nationalism in writers like Vico and Herder. The mood was predominantly rationalist, opposed to antiquarianism and sometimes antagonistic to erudite history, though not to generalization based on the study of the past. The Jews followed the general pattern: an

initially rationalist and Cartesian, antihistorical position was taken by Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1826). “What do I know of history? I always yawn when I must read something historical”, who sounds here like Jane Austen’s Catherine Morland, complaining of the boredom of the past. In fact, Mendelssohn was far more ambivalent toward history than this throwaway remark suggests. For instance he and some colleagues planned a translated edition of the protestant Jacques Basnage’s early 18th c publication, *l’Histoire et la religion des Juifs*. The project never succeeded but one does see in the later eighteenth century recognition among some Jews that knowledge of Jewish secular history would be valuable. That and the establishment of new nations in the early nineteenth century, fracturing the universalist Jewish bond—as Jews became assimilated into modern states—may have made a Jewish historiography more necessary as a counterweight to restore unity, or so suggests Lionel Kochan. Perhaps most significant, there arose a group of young German Jews centred at the University of Berlin—soon to be the home of the great founder of professional historiography, Leopold von Ranke. This group developed, in the tradition of F.A. Wolf, August Bökh, and B.G. Niebuhr, a *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, that is, a “science of judaica” mirroring the more or less contemporary *Alttertumswissenschaft*. They sought to treat Judaism’s history ‘scientifically’. Its outstanding representative was Leopold Zunz, who drew some sharp reaction from the Jewish community for his apparent suggestion that Hesiod and Moses were literary authors on the same level.

Modern Jewish historical writing emerges in the nineteenth century from this context. Among the early nineteenth-century figures, Isaac Marcus Jost (1793 or 1798-1860) was a schoolmaster, born at Bernburg in Germany and educated in the traditional

Jewish way before going to university first at Göttingen and then Berlin, respectively the two great intellectual centres of 18th century *Aufklärung* and 19th century *Wissenschaft*. With Jost we get something we have not seen before: a multivolume work written as a coherent narrative history, devoted entirely to the Jews. Quite prolific, Jost authored a 12 volume *History of the Israelites* from the Maccabees to his own time, a history of Judaism and its sects, and a two volume *General History of the Israelite People*. Jost certainly saw historical studies as a way to put the Jews back into world history and diminish separatism, while at the same time regarding Jewish history as unique in the sense that the Israelites had survived as a people, scattered through the world, without temple, land or state. His introduction is a clarion call for further work on history and an indictment of the failures of previous centuries, less for lack of interest than for a lack of care and professionalism. In his view, everyone had an opinion on history, however badly informed. “The historiography of no people is so beset with the pretentious and condemnatory views of dilettantes as is that of the Israelites, which everyone fancies to know from the relevant sources. ...Just as the Israelite people is scattered, subjugated to all, and freely esteemed by few, so too its history has been reduced to bondage. It seldom finds a friend or loving care.” In his defence of history’s autonomy from theology, Jost was entirely in tune with contemporary trends. “We take our stand solely and resolutely within the bounds of history. Those of theology remain foreign to us...Theology solves questions which history does not pose or must leave unanswered...History...limits itself to representing what has occurred in accordance with the causes which disclose themselves to the observant eye and with the consequences that develop from them according to the law of nature”.

Jost was a popular writer and despite his training rather an amateur, without university position. With Heinrich Graetz (1817-91) we have arrived in the age of the Jewish historian as professor and critical scholar. A former rabbinical student turned classicist; Graetz' vast eleven volume *Geschichte der Juden* appeared from 1853 to 1876, its final tome occasioning a public debate with the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic historian Heinrich von Treitschke in 1879-80 who accused Graetz of impeding Jewish assimilation and of being unpatriotic. Graetz wrote in the full flush of nineteenth-century nationalism. He was a proto-Zionist, arguing Jews needed a land and state and could not simply be identified by religious connection. His work was widely translated, unlike Jost's, and is still widely read today. Like Jost, Graetz identified a continuity in Jewish history that transcends the vicissitudes of the world. Whereas the world as a whole in the 18 centuries of Diaspora has gone through 3 phases, from late Rome through medieval barbarism and into "the phoenix of civilized international relations", the Jews in contrast remain unaltered, preserved by the twin "angels" of the Law and of messianic hope.

If Graetz was methodologically the Leopold von Ranke of Jewish historiography, then the part of its Kant was perhaps taken by a slightly earlier figure, Nahman Krochmal (1785-1840). Krochmal was a Jewish thinker especially influenced by Herder and by Kant himself. Krochmal spent his entire life in my own remote ancestral home, Galicia in Austria-Hungary. He is perhaps the first thinker to advance a systematic philosophy of Jewish history, that is a non-theological meta-narrative underpinning events, rather like Hegel's but without Hegel's insistence that world history has been made by a succession of civilizations. Krochmal, who identified the Jewish God with Kant's "Absolute Spirit", evinced a theory of cycles, not unlike the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico's

corso e ricorso, with each cycle subdivided into periods. The major cycles down to the seventeenth century began with Abraham; the first peaked with the Davidic monarchy, and ended in the destruction of the First Temple; the second ran from the Babylonian Exile to the end of final resistance to the Romans in 135 CE; the final cycle, which interestingly peaked during the time of Islamic expansion, ended with the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland in 1648.

From Graetz and Krochmal we come, at long last, back to Simon Dubnow, who in some ways marries the spiritualism and philosophy of the latter with the critical empiricism of the former. Dubnow represents for the modern historiographer Lionel Kochan “the apotheosis of history”—meaning the recognition that history is not only essential to the Jew, it is when all is said and done virtually “all he has left”, given the absence of both state and nation prior to 1948, and the marked decline of rabbinic authority over Jewish life. Dubnow was a liberal, a complete secularist and even at one point an atheist, though he returned to the faith in mid-life. He was much more influenced by the rationalist French and British enlightenments than the more theological German one that had influenced Krochmal. With the exception of his history of Hassidism, which was written in Hebrew, Dubnow wrote all his work in Russian, including his enormous ten volume *History of the Jews*, completed in the 1920s. He retained a profound love of Russia even after he fled it for nearby Latvia. He was a Jewish nationalist in a very different sense than Graetz since he saw the nation as existing on the basis of birth, independent of religious affirmation. He was especially influenced by August Comte’s sociological view of progress through 3 stages of thought; and by Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill. No Zionist, Dubnow was among those who was resigned to the

Diaspora; he was optimistic about a Jewish future within different national states so long as some measure of cultural autonomy was afforded them, a confidence that must have seemed misplaced on that terrible night in Riga in 1941. Dubnow opposed the resituating of the Jews in a specific national state in Palestine—a reminder to us that in earlier times the question of a Jewish homeland was as deeply controverted within Judaism as outside.⁵

Dubnow is one of a number of prominent Jewish intellectuals who fell to the Nazis, along with the much better known Marc Bloch, historian turned resistance fighter, the historian Emmanuel Ringelblum (executed along with the non-Jewish hosts who had given him refuge) and the sociologist of memory Maurice Halbwachs, who perished at Buchenwald. With Dubnow we come to a natural end of this narrative, not least because postwar Jewish historiography has, not surprisingly, been preoccupied with the Shoah and questions of memory that were more the domain of Halbwachs than Dubnow: the Nazi snake has displaced the lions and wolves of earlier pogroms and martyrdoms.

This has been a whirlwind tour through many centuries. I have had to omit much, and stop before the great historians of mid-twentieth century Jewry, in particular Dubnow's most obvious intellectual heir, Salo Wittmayer Baron who shared with Dubnow a rejection of the traditional "lachrymose" interpretation of Jewish history as a series of unadulterated miseries. Born in 1895 in my own great-grandfather's home town of Tarnow (I do wonder whether his parents might well have known my great-grandparents), Baron's long life ended some 96 years later in New York city in 1989, the year the Berlin wall fell; he thus spans the gap between Dubnow's generation and our

own. Having escaped Dubnow's fate and that of so many others, Baron thrived in America, living to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. The story of Baron's emigration and appointment to an endowed chair would be a lecture in its own right, so complex and knotty were the academic politics surrounding it, but that must await another occasion. Nor can I say anything about an entirely separate subject—the involvement of Jews throughout the historical profession as professors, popular writers, and in recent years most famously as students of and defenders of historical truth in debate with Holocaust deniers. That particular reconvergence of Jewish memory and Jewish history runs counter to Yerushalmi's view that since the 19th century they have gone inevitably in divergent directions.

In summing up, I hope tonight to have demonstrated both that there is a long history to Jewish relations with history, and also that it is a complicated one, filled with ups and downs, as well as very long silences. If Krochmal and Dubnow were correct in asserting the durability and continuity of the Jews as a people and as a religion over the ages, they would, I suspect, be the first to agree that Jewish historiography, and Jewish interest in the past, show a very different pattern indeed. Thank you very much for listening as I have sketched the outlines of this tonight.

Books needed

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¹ The literature on ancient notions of time is too vast and complex to deter us here, but for discussions repudiating the old orthodoxy of Old Testament linear and Greek cyclical views, see Brettler 1995 48; Momigliano 1977 179-204. Ideas of recurrence that involve a literal repetition of events and people are in fact rather rare in the West (Trompf 1979 passim), though as we will see they do occur in Asian and pre-Columbian American cultures, and recurring personality types were identified by writers such as the Greek biographer Plutarch and the Chinese historian Sima Qian (for whom see below).

² See however de Romilly 1977 9-10 for a denial of cyclical views of history among the Greeks that in my judgment goes too far in the opposite direction. She is correct that it is impossible to ascribe an overall "cyclic view" to Greek authors as a commonly held idea, but the rather strange assertion that "there is not one single instance of a Greek author having developed a cyclic view of history", unless taken to mean an endless repetition of the same events (which indeed is a non-existent view in the West) flies in the face of at least Polybius's idea of the *anakuklosis*.

³ I owe this point to Dr Matthew Neufeld.

⁴ The “Chronicler”, the unknown author of the books 1 and 2 Chronicles, has been subject to a great deal of focused scholarship in recent years. On his claim to be a “historian” see especially the essays in Graham, Hoglund and McKenzie (eds) 1997.

⁵ Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), like Dubnow resigned to diaspora and an antizionist, but completely unlike Dubnow in other regards—antihistorical, metaphysical. Wrote phd on Hegel and the state, and clearly influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey; existentialist in some ways he admired Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and the young Heidegger.

According to him, Jewish history, unlike everyone else’s, could not neatly be divided into epochs or periods (for instance the traditional division at the year 70 CE). Talmud and Law transcended history, providing a bridge across such secular caesuras as the destruction of the 2nd Temple.