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David Myers



HISTORY AS IDEOLOGY: THE CASE OF BEN ZION DINUR, ZIONIST HISTORIAN “PAR EXCELLENCE”

I

To the reader acquainted with Jewish historical matters, the name Ben Zion Dinur is synonymous with the effort to reveal, through extensive source documentation, the continuous link between the people of Israel and its land. Dinur devoted a lifetime of pedagogy and research to the elaboration of an historical method, and more importantly, of an existential framework which has been called “Palestinocentric”. Within this framework, Dinur aimed to capture the persistent allure of Zion, of Eretz Yisrael, for generations of Jews dispersed throughout the world.

Of course, Dinur was not alone among fellow Jewish historians in his sympathies for the Zionist movement, nor in envisioning a positive function for historical research in relation to the emerging Jewish society in Palestine.¹ However, Dinur’s work does reveal more baldly its underlying ideological motivation than that of his fellow historians. In this paper, I propose to examine the role of that ideological motivation in shaping Dinur’s historiographical method and overall historical vision. In order to do so, I will explore his personal and intellectual evolution from precocious Talmudist to fervent Zionist historian. Over the course of this paper and in concluding, I will examine Dinur’s fusion of history and ideology, searching out its ramifications within the particular context of Jewish historiography, and by consequence, for historical interpretation in general.

Before commencing with these tasks, it is necessary to confront an apparent contradiction which has informed modern Jewish historical research from its inception.² On one hand, we notice a certain reticence among Jewish historians to acknowledge the determinative role of ideology in shaping their historical world-views. In the case of the 19th century *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, this reticence was often shielded by the researchers’ claims to scientific objectivity.³ Here, it can be argued, the desire to secure professional legitimacy and an unquestioning reliance

on critical method partly obscured the formative role of existential and ideological considerations. Interestingly, *Wissenschaft* scholars did not necessarily deny the instrumental role of scholarship—as a means of advancing the political and social agenda of emancipation.⁴ However, what *was* denied was the exclusivist or restrictive tendency of scholarship in the service of that agenda, a tendency which we see, for example, in Heinrich Graetz's ignoring of important developments in the history of Eastern European Jews.⁵ It is quite reasonable to assume that Graetz and other scholars were not perpetually conscious of such tendencies in their work; but even if they were, eradicating them may have been too high a price in existential terms to pay—in fact, counter-productive to the various ideological struggles which historiography helped wage.

From another perspective, however, the very enterprise of modern Jewish historiography appears not as a case of methodological obtuseness or delusion, but rather of unencumbered self-reflection.⁶ We arrive at this conclusion if we consider that the first generation of *Wissenschaft* historians proposed to use critical historical method as an agent of demystification, as a scholarly lever with which to lower the realm of historical causality from the divine to the human. These scholars were, if nothing else, remarkably conscious of their place in history, and especially of the change in perspective which they were suggesting with respect to the traditional Jewish conception of a divinely-ordered historical scheme. Accordingly, it would seem that introspection marked the moment at which this new, decidedly secular historical sensibility took form.

Thus, we are indeed faced with an apparent contradiction in the genesis of modern Jewish historiography: an ingrained obtuseness is coupled with a self-reflective examination of the Jewish past in which historical method is a primary tool. Instead of offering a solution to this contradiction (as it manifests itself in the formative stages of modern Jewish historiography), I would like to consider its recurrence in the case of primary interest to us here, Ben Zion Dinur.⁷

On Dinur's view, Zionism necessarily represented a moment of unparalleled self-awareness in that it stemmed from a critique of the past two millennia of Diaspora Jewish existence. As we shall see, Dinur, in his role as Zionist historian, actively participated in the process of re-assessing and recasting the Jewish past according to a new set of historical criteria. His expectation was that, with the new perspective afforded by Zionism, essential features of Jewish history which had been ignored or concealed would now be recovered.⁸ In this regard, Dinur saw his work and that of his colleagues in Jerusalem as constituting a major methodological and substantive advance over the *Wissenschaft* scholars, whose research was tainted by the lurking agenda of assimilation.

At the same time, Dinur seems to have adopted the glorified view of

historical method found in his 19th century predecessors. According to this view, history was an objective undertaking with rigorous rules and standards of empirical verification. In his own methodology, Dinur favored an approach to historical research which utilized the collection of primary sources. By anthologizing primary sources, Dinur hoped to assemble actual literary fragments which related the course of Jewish historical development; implicit in this method was the desire to avoid the possible subjective pitfalls even of such an accepted historiographical genre as narrative.⁹ This linear approach, which Dinur designated as “compilation” or “collection”, seems today incomplete and at times primitive. It nonetheless has provided the contemporary student of Jewish history with easy reference to a wide array of subjects, especially those related to the Jewish connection to and presence in the land of Israel. Even more importantly for our purposes, Dinur’s method of “collection” brings to the surface the tension between a pair of sensibilities—personal/existential and scholarly/intellectual—which may be common to all historians, yet are especially pronounced in him.

II

Ben Zion Dinur (Dinaburg) was born in 1884 in a small town in the Poltava region of the Ukraine called Horol. He came from a long line of rabbis—a family tree of his uncle’s records twelve generations of rabbis up to the seventeenth century alone.¹⁰ The later generations of Dinur’s ancestors fell under the influence of the Hasidic movement, as did the town, Horol, in which he was raised. Dinur’s great-grandfather, a follower of Rebbe Mendel of Lubavitch, was first the rabbi of Poltava and then of the smaller Horol. It also seems that this great-grandfather was something of a “Maskil”, in that he knew Russian and German and was a regular reader of the Hebrew press in Russia.¹¹

The example of his great-grandfather may have been important in stimulating Ben Zion’s curiosity for subjects beyond the normal educational purview of a young Hasid. For, in addition to his achievements as a precocious Talmudist, Dinur exhibited from an early age a keen interest in distinctly historical matters. Already at eight, he had read both *The Jewish War* of Josephus (in the Hebrew translation of Kalman Schulman) and *Sefer Yosifon*.¹² Moreover, Dinur was exposed through the libraries of various family members to a range of “secular” literature—mainly works of Jewish history in Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as the Hebrew language periodicals—which could have been found in any Maskil’s home. He relates in his memoirs a number of occasions on which he came across books of great interest, which were forbidden him by his teachers or family. In these instances, Dinur burned midnight oil

to read the books, hoping to avoid the inevitable condemnation which came with discovery.

For the most part, Dinur's formative upbringing was one of careful regimentation and long hours of study. The measure of his worth, from early childhood, was determined by the number of Talmudic tractates he could learn by the age of thirteen.¹³ Yet, somewhere within this seemingly insular milieu a spark of rebellion was released which ignited Dinur's curiosity (though surely not his alone). Whence it emanated, whether from the individual's psychological and intellectual constitution or from some submerged social tension, is a question which unfortunately can not be fully answered here.

What can be traced, however, is the path of Dinur's development from yeshivot in Telz and Kovno—where his Zionist sensibilities seem first to have become manifest¹⁴—to Vilna where Dinur ventured alone at the age of sixteen in pursuit of a life devoted to “Torah, Faith, and Haskalah”.¹⁵ Having decided to abandon the institutional confines of the yeshivah and yet continue his talmudic studies, Dinur soon fell under the sway of the historian Ze'ev Yavetz, who had recently returned to Vilna from Palestine. To the impressionable Dinur, Yavetz's life and scholarly efforts served as an inspiring model.¹⁶ The latter was raised in a pious Jewish household (not Hasidic, though one in which the study of foreign languages and secular studies was also encouraged. As Dinur would later do, Yavetz chose historical research over Talmudic studies; at the same time, he never abandoned his observance of the commandments or his love for Torah and traditional Jewish culture. Ultimately, what lay at the core of Yavetz's Jewish world-view was a belief in the unity and continuity of the people of Israel, based upon the bond of traditional religious identification. Yavetz's piety is discernible throughout his writings, including the multi-volume history, *Toldot Yisrael*.

The convergence is Yavetz of Torah, Haskalah, and a Zionist orientation marked a course which Dinur himself hoped to follow.¹⁷ For a time, Yavetz became Dinur's mentor, encouraging the latter's poetic and literary endeavors, and introducing him to other Maskilim in the Vilna area. The two, however, parted ways over Dinur's more insistent support of Jewish self-defense and Zionist activity.¹⁸ Whereas Yavetz had returned from Palestine, unable to secure there a livelihood or scholarly recognition,¹⁹ Dinur set his sights on Eretz-Yisrael as a place of settlement and the focus of Jewish activism.

Perhaps it was the perceived dialectical nature of Zionism which appealed to Dinur—that is, the simultaneous negation and absorption of prominent elements of traditional Judaism. For, on one hand, Zionism entailed a completely new attitude towards the Jewish *modus vivendi* in the Diaspora; neither the passive expectation for redemption nor the precarious dependence on Gentile hosts held sway any longer. The struggle for self-sufficiency and self-dignity, which Dinur and others

advocated, was to be waged in *this world*, not the world to come; moreover, its terms should be dictated by Jews alone, for only through a reassertion of the national will to exist could their fate be altered. Zionism then (at least in the Eastern European milieu which was Dinur's) was in part a refutation of traditional Jewish orthodoxy, which placed fate firmly in the hands of the Divine.

On the other hand, Zionism drew, as Dinur was wont to emphasize in his research, *positive* components from the traditional interpretation of Jewish identity, as well as from variants of it: for example, Zionism attempted to realize the ideal of "shivat Zion" (return to Zion) which was ingrained, though not always active, in medieval Jewish religious culture;²⁰ and, Zionism shared with the Haskalah agenda the desire to revive a dormant Hebrew culture by bringing it into contact with contemporary intellectual and cultural currents. Of course, it also was stimulated by the increasingly common expressions of nationalist sentiment heard among the peoples of Europe during the second half of the 19th century.

With this mixture of old and new, it can be offered that the emergence of the Zionist movement constituted an unparalleled moment of collective self-consciousness in Modern Jewish history. In proposing a change in locale and communal structure, the movement forced both supporters and detractors to confront the scope and rationale of Jewish dispersion. Dinur came of intellectual age at such a moment of self-consciousness, and the result was a lifetime devoted to the establishment of a viable Jewish society in Palestine. Not only did Dinur's Zionism lead him to an activist stance in the realm of politics and propaganda; it also set the tone for his labors in the world of pedagogy and scholarship. It is to Dinur's further evolution as a scholar that I now turn.

III

In the decade after his arrival in Vilna at the age of sixteen, Dinur ambitiously followed two paths—historical study and political activism—which eventually became one. In terms of the latter, Dinur's Zionist involvement found expression not in mainstream "bourgeois" circles, but in the smaller and often clandestine socialist-Zionist factions.²¹ Simultaneous with his Zionist activities, which took him throughout Russia, Dinur embarked upon a course of self-education in the fields of Hebrew literature and Jewish and general history. Typically, in cities which he visited, Dinur would befriend the leading Zionist personalities, who often happened to be of a maskilic bent. From these people to a Jewish library, where sought-after books could be found, was usually a short distance, and Dinur took full advantage of his acquaintances to pursue scholarly interests. Included in his curriculum were the study of Jewish

historiography, the acquisition of languages (Russian, German, Latin, and French), and an examination of general and Russian history.

In 1911, Dinur adopted a more intense and directed path in Jewish history by entering the “Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums” in Berlin. There, he came under the influence of Eugen Taeubler, who instructed Dinur in ancient Jewish and Roman history. Taeubler soon became both a friend and a mentor to Dinur, demanding from him a scholarly rigor which no one, including Dinur himself, had previously demanded.²² Though of a different Jewish background and ideological orientation, Taeubler was able to influence Dinur’s developing views on Jewish history, especially in his emphasis on its organic unity and on the importance of investigating the interplay between internal and external historical forces. (I shall discuss this influence in more detail later.)

Through Taeubler, Dinur arranged to continue his advanced studies at the University of Berne in Switzerland.²³ At Berne, Dinur supplemented his work in history with courses in classical philology, psychology, and philosophy. He also settled on a topic for his dissertation—“Government and Self-Government in Palestine from Septimius Severus to Diocletian”—which he worked on in Berne and in Russia in 1916. Why Dinur shifted from Berne to Petrograd is not clearly spelled out in his memoirs. What is duly noted is that the original copy of Dinur’s completed dissertation was left in the library of the Petrograd “Society for the Propagation of Enlightenment among Jews”—and promptly lost.²⁴ As a result of this nightmarish episode, Dinur never received a doctorate, a fact which may partly explain why he did not become a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem until the age of 64!

While engaged in his undergraduate and graduate studies, Dinur always maintained an active interest in local and world Zionist politics. He attended and even offered lectures on Zionist policy; moreover, he sought out and organized fellow students with Zionist proclivities. Political activism was more than just a complement to Dinur’s scholarly interests. Together, Zionism and historical method presented an opportunity for reflecting critically upon the source of one’s Jewish roots in a way that Dinur’s Hasidic upbringing never allowed. Indeed, for Dinur, Jewish self-definition and historical research were closely, if not inseparably, linked. This is evident in his decision to immigrate to Palestine in 1921; there he labored as a teacher and scholar, attempting to define the contours of Jewish historical consciousness over the ages.²⁵

IV

A quick perusal of the Dinur bibliography will reveal two distinct genres of historical writing represented. The first consists of monographs of

varying length devoted to personalities and subjects of Jewish history, with a special emphasis on Zionism.²⁶ The second genre, more commonly associated with Dinur, consists of collections of documents and sources, whose aim is to bring to life the social and spiritual manifestations of Jewish existence in the Diaspora and in the land of Israel. For Dinur, this genre was ideal for pedagogic purposes, in that the student could be exposed to important primary source material and still benefit from the explanatory notes of the compiler.²⁷

What is interesting about this method of compilation is not the novelty of it, but rather the motivation that lay behind it. To be sure, the gathering and annotation of primary source material as a pedagogic tool and a medium for scholarly investigation did not begin with Dinur. He himself learned Jewish and Roman history through close textual analysis of primary sources in seminars in Berlin and Berne. Nonetheless, his own endeavor in compiling sources was informed by a special sense of mission related to his Zionist commitment.

The nature of this mission was first spelled out to Dinur by Hayim Nahman Bialik, whom Dinur encountered in Odessa shortly before his departure for Berlin and the "Hochschule". As Dinur relates it, Bialik issued a call in 1911 to the enlightened Jewish populations to assist in the collection of Jewish folklore material.²⁸ Dinur responded by volunteering to compile sources which he came across while studying abroad. More than a quarter century later, Dinur recalled Bialik's appeal in the introduction to a collection of Zionist and proto-Zionist sources, *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*. Writing in 1938, Dinur remembered that, for Bialik, the momentous turning point in Jewish history signalled by Zionism required a certain historical accounting.²⁹ In order to grasp the import of the Zionist revolution and to herald its triumph, recollections of prior Diaspora existence should not be excised; rather, they should be gathered and recorded for posterity.

Dinur announces the guiding principle of his work in the introduction to *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*: "The starting point of all work of collection in our generation is Zionist ideology".³⁰ It is important to recognize that "ideology" in this context signifies neither a partisan agenda nor an impoverished or false state of consciousness;³¹ instead, Dinur conceives of it as the reflection of a concrete historical force which has engendered a new (and healthy) perspective on the past. In the realm of scholarship, the crystallization of the Zionist movement spawned a new era in which pre-Zionist Jewish history could be recorded more precisely and critically, without the biases of previous chroniclers. Along with other historians in Jerusalem, Dinur shared in the expectation that Zionism, as a force capable of "normalizing" Jewish existence by restoring Jews to their land, could also "normalize"—and, ultimately, make objective—the writing of Jewish history.³²

Our own attempts to understand Dinur may be well-served by the sociology of knowledge framework presented in the work of Karl Mannheim. In exploring the social construction of “ideology”, Mannheim recognized that “the specific character and life-situation of the subject influence his opinions, perceptions, and interpretations.”³³ That is, one’s intellectual and cultural values take shape not in splendid isolation, but rather in the midst of, and in reaction to, concrete historical circumstances which define the social milieu.³⁴

We have already suggested that Dinur’s devotion to the Zionist cause can be traced to his formative environment. As the scion of a Hasidic family in Russia, Dinur underwent a different kind of ideological transformation than that faced by urbanized Western and Central European Jews. Assimilation, for Dinur, meant abandoning “talmud torah” as an exclusive way of life; it did not entail abandoning the Hebrew language, the performance of “mitzvot”, or least of all, the Jewish people. For, in Eastern Europe, the “secular” forces which lured Dinur away from the world of the yeshivot—for example, the “Haskalah” and Zionism—were suffused with important remnants of traditional Judaism. As we have seen, Zionism, on his view, was both a rebellion against Jewish dispersion and an activation of the deeply buried impulse of “shivat Zion”. This combination yielded in Dinur not a tortured and divided Jewish loyalty, but rather a singular commitment to explaining and upholding what he saw as the unifying bond of Jewish history: the attachment to Eretz Yisrael.³⁵

That this commitment represented both an affirmation of and rupture with traditional Jewish existence was true not only for Dinur, but for other Jews who identified with Zionism. However, for Dinur, it was the very perspective afforded by Zionism’s radical break with the past that allowed him to recover (and reconnect with) that past. Unlike some historians working within the Zionist context, Dinur was not content “merely” to acknowledge the new vistas afforded by Zionism; rather, he set out to discover Zionist traces and precursors in every period of Jewish history. Perhaps his single-mindedness was the result of a less ambivalent Zionist commitment than other colleagues in Jerusalem had—a consequence of his upbringing and subsequent experiences in Russia.³⁶ Or perhaps, Dinur’s monolithic, and rather simplistic, view of Jewish history can be attributed to his training and powers of analysis. In terms of historical research, he clearly lacked the intellectual refinement and methodological sophistication of his colleagues, Gershom Scholem and Yitzhak Baer, who were born and educated in a German milieu.³⁷

These suggestions should not diminish Dinur’s value as an historian. Without question, he did have a remarkable range of knowledge in Jewish history, which was revealed in his annotated collections. Even

more significant for our purposes is Dinur's unusual sensitivity to the functioning of historiography in relation to national consciousness. In line with his view of "ideology" as consciousness rooted in concrete historical experience, Dinur regarded historiography as an important literary vehicle for Jewish collective memory. While echoing a common theme of general European historical thinking, Dinur observed: "The historical experience of every generation directs the vision of historians to areas of historical reality that earlier were not paid attention to. In this sense, the value of historiographical attitudes and perspectives exists as a reflection of historical reality."³⁸ More so than other Jewish historians, Dinur admitted—and wrote about—the vital link between the perspective of the historiographical observer and his/her historical situation. This is a notable achievement. For, while it seems that, since the emergence of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, succeeding generations of Jewish historians have pointed out the ideological motivations of preceding ones, rarely have they underscored the impact of these motivations in shaping their own angle of vision.³⁹ To do so might be construed as compromising the historian's own professional standards.

In order to understand Dinur's open discussion of the influence of Zionism on historians and historical thought, we must bear in mind his interpretation of Zionist "ideology" (as distinct from the Mannheimian sense). It signified not a partisan political agenda, but rather a collective consciousness dictated by changing historical reality. The values taking shape out of this changing reality were not of a particular group or stratum, but of the Jewish people at large. In this scheme, the role of historiography was to record faithfully the changing reality (and consciousness) of respective generations.⁴⁰ Accordingly, with the culmination of two thousand years of Diaspora existence in the Zionist era, Jewish historical writing would reach its ultimate stage of development: chronicling the attainment of the Jewish people's most profound aspiration—the return to Zion.

Dinur's historiographical approach reflects, then, a belief in the inevitable and global success of Zionism as a redemptive force. It also reflects his view that Jewish historians caught in the historical tide of Zionism were afforded a unique opportunity to re-assess the Jewish past. Conversely, what is lacking in Dinur's writing is the recognition that Zionism was not *universally* perceived by Jews as a long-anticipated redemptive force, but rather as one among several possible solutions to an unsatisfactory Diaspora existence. As a result, our assessment of Dinur's Zionist "ideology" should follow the Mannheimian sense, that is, as reflecting the "life-situation" of a particular sub-stratum of Jews—first in the context of Eastern Europe and later in that of Palestine/Eretz Yisrael. Without such an understanding of "ideology", we can not make sense of Dinur's apparent obtuseness to the highly selective tendencies in his

monolithic view of Jewish history. Similarly, without an understanding of Dinur's own use of "ideology", we can not make sense of his candid discussion of the link between historiographical interpretation and changing historical reality.

v

One of the most challenging tasks which modern Jewish historians have faced is balancing the forces of continuity and change in the Jewish past. Assuming this task often has led to a scholarly distinction between internal and external forces, between the inner spiritual will of the Jewish people and extraneous social pressures.⁴¹ It can be argued that this distinction reflects a sort of double allegiance on the historian's part. On one hand, the historian is informed by the standards of critical historical methodology, and thus, attempts to discover the source of Jewish identity without recourse to mystical or supernatural explanations. Consequently, he/she tries to define Jewish collective identity not only within a vacuum of internal Jewish development, but also as shaped by outside forces. This impulse draws from the professional standards of the historical discipline to which Jewish scholars assiduously hold. On the other hand, Jewish historians (who, like Dinur, are usually Jewish) often hold to the *a priori* assumption of Jewish continuity. In that case, the Jewish historian's research may fill an important existential function: proceeding deductively from the guiding principle of Jewish continuity, the historian traces its spiritual and physical manifestations over the ages; this exploration, in turn, becomes an expression and affirmation of one's intimate connection to the guiding principle. A possible ramification of this search is the tendency to concentrate interest and attention on the internal Jewish, as opposed to external social, forces.

It may be unfair to suggest that all Jewish historians bear such a tendency in their research. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to argue that the work of all historians, Jewish and non-Jewish, reveals ties to both professional and existential concerns.⁴² In any event, it seems clear that Ben-Zion Dinur's work reflects a certain tension between the commitment to critical historical methodology and his Jewish world-view. His allegiance to the former did not always accommodate (or perhaps was not always accommodated by) his desire to reveal the unbroken bond between the people and the land of Israel; ultimately, the role of external forces in Jewish history was subordinate to the inner Jewish will.

Interestingly, Dinur believed that his work constituted a major advance over his predecessors precisely in regard to this matter—the balance of internal and external forces. In his introduction to the anthology *Yisrael Ba-Golah*, he criticized the earlier scholars of the *Wissen-*

schaft movement in Germany for overemphasizing the impact of external political and military developments upon Jewish history.⁴³ Dinur also claims that when they did discuss the inner Jewish “essence”, they defined it exclusively in religious/spiritual terms rather than national/historical.⁴⁴ The one historian who wins praise from Dinur for his successful integration of internal and external forces is Eugen Taeubler. Yet, it is not because Dinur’s one-time mentor in Berlin emphasized the unceasing link between the Jewish people and the land of Israel in his work.⁴⁵ Rather, Dinur found a certain sensitivity in Taeubler that was lacking in other predecessors, an intuitive grasp for the ongoing struggle of Diaspora Jewish communities with the alien environment in which they were located.

On Dinur’s view, it was in this struggle that manifestations of the bond between the people and the land of Israel could be revealed. Interestingly, the entire temporal frame of reference which he sets for it in *Yisrael Ba-Golah* is novel. His periodization of the Jewish exile from Palestine does not begin following the destruction of either the First or Second Temples, as earlier Jewish historians argued in their histories; nor was it the loss of political sovereignty or the partial dispersion of Palestinian Jewry which determined the starting point of Exile. Dinur suggests that “Galut” begins with the loss of the Jewish “character” in Palestine following the 7th century Arab conquest. What he has in mind is the penetration of new population groups (i.e., Arabs) into Palestine as permanent residents. This demographic transformation led to a shift in balance in economic and territorial terms; agriculture was taken over by the invaders, as were large amounts of Jewish land. Although Dinur admitted that the process of social and territorial displacement extended back to the time of Hadrian, he still maintained that it was the Arab conquest which effectively eliminated the Jewish “character” from Palestine.⁴⁶

Dinur’s new periodization of Galut is closely related to his equation of the interplay between internal and external forces in Jewish history—and not only with respect to the 7th century. The eight periods which cover the history of Israel in the Diaspora are defined by this interplay, and are manifested in alternating states of stability or crisis.⁴⁷ With the exception of the first and last periods, each lasted between one hundred and one hundred and fifty years.

As Dinur envisioned it, the alternating periods of stability and crisis comprised a cycle. Beginning with the first period in 636 C. E., Jews responded to Galut first by attempting to integrate into the culture of their hosts. The skills and qualities acquired in earlier dispersions served them well in these stages of assimilation; they were able to serve as economic middle-men, political agents, and translators. However, as Jews began to assume these vital functions—and, simultaneously, as their

yearning for Palestine became more diluted—resentment from the native population began to build and ultimately came to a boiling point.

This line of argument may not seem so novel. Dinur here hints at the issue of Jewish “royal alliances”, which, of course, was discussed in more direct fashion by other writers.⁴⁸ Unlike them, however, Dinur was not primarily interested in analyzing the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. As we know, he was intrigued by what he saw as the ongoing link between people and land in Jewish history. Thus, in his scheme, the anti-Jewish sentiment that followed successful Jewish integration into high economic and political offices had an instrumental function—to revive the profound sense of alienation which Jews felt towards their Diaspora surroundings.⁴⁹ Also revived was the yearning for Eretz Yisrael, culminating in individual and collective immigrations, or “*aliyot*”, to the ancestral Jewish homeland. Herein lay the distinctiveness of Dinur’s vision. What other historians considered to be either marginal or aberrational phenomena prior to the eighteenth century—i.e., the movement of Jews from their countries of residence to Palestine—Dinur regarded as central. Moreover, this movement adhered to a certain pattern, rising and falling in response to regular periods of crisis and stability.

As we can see then, Dinur’s outline of Jewish history in the Diaspora followed a cyclical scheme. And yet, Dinur’s vision also contained a *telos*, a stage at which Jewish history would ultimately arrive—the establishment of the State of Israel. In discussing the course of events leading up to this development, Dinur introduced into his outline two concepts intended to capture the passive and active facets of Jewish national identity in the Diaspora. The first of these, the socio-psychological dimension, can be defined as the static and constant source of Jewish historical consciousness; as such, it consists of “memories of the past common to all members of the nation and a recognition of their historical and cultural unity”.⁵⁰ Actual manifestations of this constant element of Jewish identity are the Hebrew language (which, Dinur offers, never ceased to be used in the Diaspora), Hebrew literature, domestic habits, and prayer and ritual.

In juxtaposition to the socio-psychological is the more dynamic socio-political dimension of the Jewish people, which Dinur describes as “the living and conscious link with the Land that constitutes and nurtures the active messianic expectation, the desire for redemption, and the sense of alienation in a foreign environment”.⁵¹ The most tangible reflection of this facet of Jewish identity is, of course, “*aliyah*” to Palestine, including the waves of immigrations promoted by messianic movements. Given its dynamic nature, the impulse to “return to Zion” is foremost in the nation’s consciousness in times of crisis. Conversely, in periods of stability, this impulse is repressed, and it is the socio-psychological facet which preserves Jewish distinctiveness.

Taken together, the socio-psychological and the socio-political represent the two essential components of Jewish national identity in Dinur's scheme. Not surprisingly, they very nearly coincide with his notion of alternating periods of stability and crisis. With all of this neat correspondence, we should reconsider the causal force which Dinur saw as effecting the transition between stability and crisis. Indeed, what activates the socio-political dimension of Jewish identity? It is in this question that the tension in Dinur between a critical historical sensibility and his Zionist allegiances most visibly surfaces. For, in one place, Dinur suggests that momentous changes in world history necessarily bring about changes in Jewish history; it is these turning points that give life to the socio-political dimension.⁵²

In the same essay, Dinur affirms the immutability of Jewish national unity. Without an elaborate historical explication, he simply notes that even after Exile, "the complete unity of the Jewish nation remained unbroken. Only its external conditions changed, not its essence and being."⁵³ Here, a powerful causal agent is at work, unaffected by external historical forces, and driving Jewish history along a linear path towards its ultimate fulfillment. The result is that an apparently linear vision of historical development co-exists with the cyclical pattern of stability and crisis outlined above. It would seem that, while the former is stimulated exclusively by an internal Jewish impulse, the latter is motivated by external forces.⁵⁴

What is interesting about this melange of countervailing interpretations is the similarities it shares with pre-modern Jewish historical thought. Through comparative analysis, contemporary scholars have illuminated several important permutations of that thought in the periods before and after the destruction of the First Temple.⁵⁵ Following the exodus from Egypt, for example, Jews were driven by the expectation that what had been promised them—namely, their land and fulfillment of the Covenant—would be granted; at that point, a teleological conception of history, drawing divine meaning from the mundane act or event and culminating in a return to Zion, supplanted the pagan view of arbitrary cycles. David Roskies has observed that, on this view, "(r)estoration, not blind repetition, was the proper direction for history to take, a linear route that ended in Zion and that depended entirely on man's contractual agreement with God."⁵⁶

Abandoning the pagan/mythic perspective did not, however, insure the eternal primacy of the teleological conception. An "extraordinary tension" remained between the two even as one gained ascendance over the other.⁵⁷ Moreover, following the period conventionally regarded as post-Exilic (though not so in Dinur's scheme), a new cyclical perspective was introduced into Jewish historical thought, as historical events became more and more tied to calendrical rhythms.⁵⁸ The result, Yosef Yeru-

shalmi suggests, was a “merging of historical and liturgical time, of verticality and circularity . . .”⁵⁹ Essential to remember in this regard is that “historical time” was not yet the critical evaluative tool of moderns, but rather an incarnation of the soteriological expectation borne of the Covenant.

Though there has been a good deal of discussion among scholars regarding the transvaluation of religiously-inspired messianism into secular forms,⁶⁰ one must be cautious when analyzing Dinur. After all, it is doubtful that he expected anything other than an end to Israel’s political and cultural subjugation with the return to Zion;⁶¹ and in contrast to medieval messianic activists, he regarded the religious element only as a component of the broader national identity. Nonetheless, Dinur’s vision did share its teleological quality with traditional messianic belief, and its sense of the importance of human catalysts with messianic activism. Dinur maintained that national redemption would take place in Zion, and would be advanced through the efforts of human actors. Moreover, his alignment of past events into a neat linear scheme paralleled the use of history by messianic activists throughout the ages.⁶² In Dinur’s case, the Zionist movement was cast as the long-awaited fulfillment of expectations held by Jews during their tenure in Galut. Present events thus served as both the end and the validation of Jewish history hitherto. In this way, historical interpretation functioned, as with medieval messianic activists, as an existential guide to past, present, and future.

VI

It must be pointed out that Dinur’s historical vision entailed a far more prosaic notion of causality than that found in traditional messianic belief: with the Divine Hand largely absent from his scheme, it is human agents who determine the course and pace of events leading to ultimate redemption.⁶³ And, as distinct from medieval activists, Dinur expected neither a cataclysmic battle between the forces of good or evil, nor apparently a major theological reordering to attend redemption.

Is there any value then in discussing Dinur’s views in terms of messianism? One compelling reason to answer affirmatively is that those are the very terms in which Dinur himself described the thread of “Zionist” activism which ran through Jewish history.⁶⁴ Indeed, for him, the primary stimulus for all messianic activity was the fundamental incapacity of Jews to accept the consequences of exile from their homeland. The revolt against Galut thus lay at the core of Jewish messianism, whether in the case of the 8th century activist Yudgan, the 17th century Sabbatai Zevi, or Dinur’s own contemporaries.

Dinur believed that that which distinguished the medieval and

modern manifestations of this rebellion was the degree of realism accompanying them. On this point, he shared common ground with his colleague in Jerusalem, Gershom Scholem; both men saw the advent of organized Zionist activity as a powerful moment of realism in Jewish history. However, an important difference separated the two men and their assessments of Zionism: whereas Scholem regarded Zionism as a realistic *alternative* to the folly of messianic activism and the passivity of traditional messianic belief,⁶⁵ Dinur retained the category of messianism to describe the various incarnations of Zionism in the modern period. For instance, of the immigration to Palestine of Rabbi Yehuda He-Hasid and his followers in 1700, Dinur wrote that it “marked the beginning of a more realistic course of messianic activity”.⁶⁶

The aliyah of Rabbi Yehudah also signalled for Dinur the beginning of modern Jewish history. Here, his principles of periodization reach their most idiosyncratic,⁶⁷ as Dinur elevated this heretofore marginal event to the status of “turning point”.⁶⁸ For him, it was not the French Revolution or the permeation of Enlightenment values into Jewish thought which marked the dramatic change in Jewish self-perception emblematic of modernity.⁶⁹ Rather, it was this episode of realistic messianic activity—Yehudah He-Hasid’s aliyah—that reified the age-old yearning for a return to Zion, thereby setting the tone for subsequent historical developments leading to the establishment of the Jewish state.

Needless to say, this event did not occur in a contextual vacuum. Laying the groundwork for R. Yehudah’s organized rebellion against Galut was the outbreak of the messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi in the 17th century. Not coincidentally, Dinur begins the first volume of the anthology, *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut: Mevasre Ha-Ziyonut* (The Book of Zionism: Zionist Precursors), with documents pertaining to the emergence of this movement.⁷⁰ On his view, Sabbatianism brought to a conclusive end the Jewish Middle Ages by rejecting the ingrained passivity of communal and rabbinic leaders with respect to Exile. The false messiah lit a spark of rebellion that quickly became a raging conflagration throughout the Jewish Diaspora. As a result, the dynamic national force, the socio-political dimension in Dinur’s scheme, was activated. Even with Sabbatai Zevi’s failure to inaugurate the era of redemption, the residue of messianic activism remained for later personalities and generations to pick up. One such figure was Yehudah He-Hasid, who harnessed the immense energy expended in the Sabbatian revolt against Diaspora existence into a constructive social movement of “aliyah”.

What distinguished this “modern” movement from medieval ones was the relative insularity of the latter as opposed to the organized and collective nature of the former. Prior to the explosive outburst of Sabbatianism, acts of immigration to Eretz Yisrael were largely individual, as in the celebrated case of the 12th century poet, Yehudah Ha-

Levi;⁷¹ until that time, the imperative to overthrow the oppressive weight of Galut was not fully recognized and absorbed into the collective Jewish consciousness.

Thus, one of the most powerful and ultimately liberating sentiments unleashed in the wake of Sabbatai Zevi was an irreconcilable malaise with Diaspora existence. Subsequent waves of aliyot, Dinur argued, no longer accepted the *modus vivendi* which this existence implied; it was neither safe nor convenient to remain in the Diaspora. Dinur even goes so far as to vest in Rabbi Yehudah He-Hasid and his followers phenomenal powers of clairvoyance in this matter; they sensed that their aliyah would save them “from the impending catastrophe of European Jewry”.⁷²

It is in an instance like this that Dinur’s historical method becomes most suspect. Not only has he elevated a figure previously considered marginal to the course of Jewish history to the status of path-breaking pioneer. He has also bestowed upon R. Yehudah the ability to prophesy, to encourage immediate action through an anticipation of later events. One sees here the ultimate projection of contemporary values and sensibilities onto the past. Dinur’s realization of the imminent triumph of Zionism over all other Jewish ideologies—and his sympathy with it—impel him to reward those historical actors who carried the banner of that ideology in earlier ages. They are the agents of Zionism’s victory, of the triumphalist history which emerges from Dinur’s vision. All share, on his view, a prescient and intuitive understanding of the dangers of Galut and the need to return to Zion.

Not all of these personalities, however, are obvious choices for inclusion in Dinur’s pantheon of Zionist luminaries. After all, qualifications for inclusion often seem to be little more than an oblique reference to Eretz Yisrael, which, on Dinur’s reading, loses all traces of ambiguity. An instructive case in point is Dinur’s treatment of Baruch Spinoza in *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*. At the end of the third chapter of *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza explains Israel’s election by God not “in respect to its wisdom nor its tranquility of mind, but in respect to its social organization and the good fortune with which it obtained supremacy and kept it so many years.”⁷³ For Dinur, this explanation is taken as unequivocal affirmation of the political/national, rather than spiritual, nature of the election.⁷⁴ In all fairness, it should be noted that Dinur is not the only one to extract from Spinoza’s comments a proto-Zionist message.⁷⁵ But, his complete lack of reticence and skepticism while interpreting Spinoza’s words is striking: “One must see in Spinoza’s views on the possibility of achieving redemption . . . a first manifestation of some of the principles of modern Zionism.”⁷⁶ A figure who just as easily can be cast as a precursor to Jean-Paul Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* is here understood as a forerunner of Herzl, the modern political Zionist. No other possibility is imaginable in Dinur’s reading.

Through this case, we can see how difficult it was for Dinur to discard any Jewish personality or movement from the stream of history leading to redemption in Zion. On a global level, this difficulty is apparent in his elucidation of the socio-psychological component of Jewish identity; what seems to be a process of accommodation to Diaspora life on the part of Jews, he regards as proof of an ongoing Jewish consciousness which sustains the yearning to return to Eretz Yisrael.⁷⁷

With this in mind, it is interesting to review the watersheds in Dinur's periodization of modern Jewish history. The emergence of Spinoza, the outbreak of Sabbatianism, and the aliyah of Rabbi Yehudah He-Hasid—all of these moments, occurring within a half century of one another, reflect a change in historical consciousness, a turning point in the self-perception of Jews vis-à-vis Galut.

Perhaps even more interesting and surely revealing is the *terminus ad quem* of modern Jewish history in Dinur's scheme. On his view, the modern period commences at the beginning of the 18th century and culminates in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel.⁷⁸ The establishment of the State is cast as the long-anticipated *telos* of Jewish history. Consequently, the post-State period opens a new chapter altogether in the annals of the Jewish people, a secular surrogate for the Messianic Age which can best be identified as "post-modern".⁷⁹

VII

At the epochal moment of national reconstitution, Dinur's personal aspirations and professional interests reached mutual fulfillment. He had committed his life to the creation of an independent Jewish society in Palestine, as evident in his various Zionist and governmental involvements.⁸⁰ Moreover, his entire pedagogic career had been dedicated to exposing the unceasing link between people and land in Jewish history. This governing objective did not drain Dinur's work of illuminating insights. His Zionist perspective did, indeed, open new vistas for historical research, by challenging the periodization schemes and conceptual boundaries found in Jewish scholarship of the previous century. At the same time, it sensitized him to the importance of ideology in setting the mental frame of reference from which historians observed and wrote. Thus, in depicting "Zionist ideology" as the culminating force of a teleological process, Dinur was certain of its role in shaping the historical consciousness of his generation.

With this in mind, it can be said that Dinur surely saw the forest, if not always the trees. That is, he was quite aware of the overarching influence of that "ideology" in molding his and others' world-view. Yet, he was hardly attuned to the conceptual limitations imposed by Zionism

upon his historical vision.⁸¹ We have seen that this may be explained by his understanding of “ideology” as an objective indicator of change in historical reality. It may also be explained by his passionate and single-minded commitment to the very cause whose ideology he heralded as an objective indicator.

Still, in assessing Dinur, we should not hasten to condemn his “engagé” approach to scholarship. First of all, one wonders whether Dinur’s utilization of the historiographical medium to advance his political/ideological position was unique in Palestine-Jewish scholarly circles. Indeed, for those scholars who believed that Zionism afforded a new perspective onto the Jewish past (and who were convinced of its therapeutic powers), is it reasonable to expect that their work was untouched by the overarching conceptual influence of Zionism?⁸² And if their work were shaped in part by this influence, would it be so different in kind from that of the great Diaspora Jewish historians of modern times—Graetz, Dubnow or Baron?⁸³ Far from constituting a violation of the historian’s professional ethic, this kind of conceptual influence seems to be an ineluctable (and, by no means undesirable) component of historical interpretation.

Does Dinur’s work actually reflect then an ironic understanding of the limits and potential of the historiographical process? We might be inclined to say yes if we recall his explicit recognition of the role which historiography has played as a mouthpiece of “Zionist ideology”. Significantly, Dinur did not offer his observation of this relationship as a methodological criticism, but as an ideological affirmation. The Zionist historian should serve to fortify, or even reconstruct, the bridge between past and present. Dinur set out this task in a personal reflection on the occasion of his seventieth birthday:

To the best of my ability, I have tried to instill in students the same link to our history that I believe is a vital condition for solving one of the most difficult problems facing us: how to revive the Covenant of generations. The force of 4000 years of history is great if it is alive in our hearts, but if it is merely written in books, then it has no value. If we want to be the heirs of the people of Israel, then we must instill those 4000 years into the heart of every person.⁸⁴

Supported by Dinur’s conscious aim “to revive the Covenant of generations”, we should understand his collecting work as an historiographical elaboration of the guiding principle of his life. From this standpoint, Dinur appears anomalous in the community of modern Jewish historians in one respect; there is an utter lack of pretense or ambiguity in his merging of history and ideology (which is understandable if one recalls his interpretation of “ideology”).

While attempting to adhere to the “scientific” standards of his discipline, Dinur unabashedly pushed the subjective dimension of historical interpretation (common to all historians) to the limits of its constructive

potential—in the service of Zionism. Ultimately, the value of such a conclusion lies neither in disdaining his methodological simplicity, nor in condemning the substance of his ideological motivation. Rather, Dinur's work offers us a good opportunity for exploring the relationship between historical observation and ideological predisposition against the backdrop of the Zionist redefinition of Jewish identity. It also forces us to question whether this relationship is reflective of a double allegiance—to modern and traditional sensibilities—which attends not only Zionist historiography, but Jewish historiography at large.

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NOTES

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1. On the view of Dinur and his colleagues (e.g., Yitzhak Baer, Yosef Klausner, and Gershom Scholem), the Zionist impetus towards political and cultural sovereignty in Palestine afforded a unique opportunity for Jewish historical scholarship: the "normalization" of the Jewish people (which Zionism hoped to effect) might allow scholars to see and write about the past without ideological biases impinging upon their work. This expectation can be said to characterize the "Jerusalem School" of Jewish historians. For a recent discussion of this group of historians (focusing on Baer and Dinur), see Efraim Shmueli, "The Jerusalem School of History (A Critical Evaluation)" in *The Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. LII (1986), pp. 147-178.

2. For a discussion of some fundamental tensions pervading historicism in general, see Georg G. Iggers' treatment in *The German Conception of History*, (Middletown [CT], 1983), pp. 13 ff.

3. For a brief, though enlightening discussion of the evolution of a critical scientific method in Jewish historiography, see Michael A. Meyer's *The Origin of the Modern Jew* (Detroit, 1979), chapter 6. Meyer summarizes the new position staked out by the *Wissenschaft* circle as "the assumption of a stand outside of and vis-à-vis the tradition instead of within it, approaching it with the discerning but cold eye of the scientist." *Origin*, p. 162.

4. Leopold Zunz was quite aware of the instrumental role of Jewish scholarship in his time, though he strenuously objected to it. In *Zur Geschichte*, he observes:

Thus we spend time on subjects which appeal to us because they serve transitory ends, while we avoid periods entirely unresearched. And since we do not study men and their actions as an end in itself, but rather for the sake of our anticipated advantage, we remain sunk, no less than our scornful enemies, in unfair prejudice toward many works of the past.

Quoted in Ismar Schorsch's introduction "Ideology and History in the Age of Emancipation" to his edition of Heinrich Graetz's *The Structure of Jewish History*, (New York, 1975), p. 29.

5. On this point, see Schorsch, p. 51, n. 120. Dinur himself takes Graetz to task for ignoring the historical achievements and significance of Russian Jewry. See Dinur, "Be-ayat Halukatan shel Toldot Yisrael li-Tekufot Ba-Historiyografia Ha-Yehudit" in *Dorot u-Reshumot* (Jerusalem, 1978), p. 31. In general, Nathan Rotenstreich considers the historical selectivity of the modern Jew to be a function of secularization. Rotenstreich, *Tradition and Reality* (New York, 1972), p. 18.

6. Various commentators have pointed to the importance of the conscious break with the past which marked the formative stage of the *Wissenschaft* circle. From this perspective, an intense reflection on one's own tradition would have to be considered a primary characteristic of the first modern Jewish historians. See for example, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Philadelphia, 1982), chapter 4; Rotenstreich, p. 22; and *Origin*, pp. 164-65.

7. I take issue with Shmueli's attempt to explain Dinur's understanding of the objective and subjective facets of historical interpretation as a bold advance over his 19th century scholarly predecessors. Dinur's work reveals strong traces of a dual allegiance—to "scientific" history and to a Jewish ideology (Zionism)—which places him on a continuum of Jewish historians from the first *Wissenschaft* generation to the present. See Shmueli, pp. 153-155.

8. One obvious area of research explored under the auspices of a "Zionist" historiography (and closely related to Dinur's efforts) is the study of the Jewish settlement in Palestine after the destruction of the Second Temple. For example, this research has yielded important information on the Jewish presence in Palestine during the Crusades, during the height of kabbalistic influence in the 16th century, and, of course, immediately preceding and during the modern effort to resettle the ancestral homeland.

9. In a penetrating, though somewhat back-handed tribute to Dinur, Gershom Scholem discussed the invariable subjectivity present in Dinur's favorite historical medium, the anthology of primary sources. See *Devarim 'al Prof. B. Z. Binur, Sar Ha-Hinukh ve-ha-Tarbut Be-Meleat Lo Shev'im Shana* (Jerusalem, 1954), p. 12. In a revised version of this tribute, Scholem offered an interesting analogy, comparing the anthologizer's work to that of a theater director molding actors into his own artistic image. See Scholem's comments from *Molad*, No. 67 (1954-55), reprinted in *Devarim Be-Go*, Vol. II, (Tel-Aviv, 1982), p. 513.

10. For an account of Dinur's upbringing, see the first volume of his autobiography, *Be-Olam She-Shaka': Zikhronot u-Reshumot me-Derekh Hayim* (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 11-12. Much of the following biographical information is drawn from that memoir.

11. *Be-Olam*, p. 13.

12. *Be-Olam*, p. 25.

13. Dinur recounts one disappointing instance in which a scholar gave him a complimentary letter of recommendation, "even though he did not single me out as 'one in a generation'". *Be-Olam*, p. 63.

14. *Be-Olam*, p. 82.

15. *Be-Olam*, p. 102. See also the poem Dinur wrote in this period, revealing his ongoing commitment to Torah studies. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

16. *Be-Olam*, p. 96.

17. We should note that Dinur's association with Zionism preceded his arrival in Vilna. He relates in his memoirs a memorable episode which adumbrates his future direction: while studying in the "Keneset Yisrael" yeshivah in Kovno, Dinur caught wind of an attempt by regional Hasidic, Mitnagdic, and even Maskilic forces to organize a front against pro-Zionist activists. Dinur's own uncle had been sent as an emissary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Bar Shneerson, to assemble signatures for a manifesto condemning the Zionists. As a result of this familial link (and his presence in the yeshivah), Dinur was privy to intimate details of the anti-Zionists' plans. After several sleepless nights, he decided to pass on information about the anti-Zionist front to local Zionist leaders. He also decided to maintain friendly relations with leaders of the anti-Zionist drive, so that he could continue to serve as a conduit for information to the Zionist camp. For an account of this story, see *Be-Olam*, pp. 86-90.

18. In his personal life, Yavetz followed a path opposite to that upon which Dinur would embark. According to his biographer, Yavetz left Palestine in 1894 to return to Vilna, where his scholarly efforts would be more enthusiastically supported. See A. S. Herschberg's retrospective "Toldot Rabbi Zeev Yavetz z"l", appended to Yavetz's *Toldot Yisrael*, Vol. XIV, in the revised edition of Dr. B. M. Levin, (Tel-Aviv, 1944-45), p. 148. On the other hand, Dinur, as we shall see, would devote much of his life to the cause of Zionist resettlement in Palestine, and himself immigrated there in 1921.

19. According to Herschberg, Yavetz was criticized by certain Maskilim as a "clerical fanatic", whereas by the ultra-orthodox he was considered an "apikoros" (heretic). This double-edged assault sheds light on the distinct and often difficult path which Yavetz forged as a traditionally observant Russian Jew writing a "critical" historical account of his people. See Herschberg's biography in Yavetz, Vol. XIV, p. 147.

20. For a discussion of the Jewish "revolt against Exile", which Zionism aimed to foster through its institutional and spiritual force, see Dinur's "Ha-Mered Be-Galut Hu Ha-Yasod, *Be-Ma'avak Ha-Dorot* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 271-283. In the case of Hasidism, Dinur held that that movement attempted "to channel the messianic energy (of the Jewish people) into new horizons", by encouraging a rebellion against existing Diaspora institutions and authority, and by encouraging "aliyah" to Eretz Yisrael. See "Reshita shel Ha-Hasidut ve-Yesodoteha Ha-Sotsiyaliyim ve-ha-Meshihiyim" in *Be-Mifne [Ha-Dorot]* (Jerusalem, 1972-73 [second printing]), p. 227.

21. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Dinur was a member of the important Zionist Socialist Workers' Party (ZWSP). Though Dinur had left the ranks of this party by 1906 and returned to more conventional Zionist circles, his sympathies continued to reside with the socialist-Zionists after he immigrated to Palestine. One interesting consequence of his involvement with the ZWSP is that Dinur at one time supported the Uganda option for Jewish national settlement—a somewhat ironic fact given his later "Palestinocentrism".

22. See Dinur's discussion of Taubler in *Be-Olam*, pp. 364 ff. For an indication of the great reverence in which he held his teacher, see Dinur's tribute, "Eugen Taubler: Ha-Ish, Ha-Moreh ve-ha-Hoker", reprinted in *Dorot u-Reshumot*, pp. 262-276.

23. *Be-Olam*, pp. 370-371.

24. *Be-Olam*, p. 384.

25. In a lecture delivered before the 13th convention of the Historical Society of Israel, Dinur alluded to the important function which modern historians and academic institutions have to play in fostering Jewish historical consciousness. See his "Hakarat He-'Avar Be-Todo'at Ha-Am u-Ve'ayot Ha-Heker Ba", reprinted in *Dorot u-Reshumot*, pp. 160-172.

26. Over the course of his career, Dinur wrote monographs on Josephus, Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn, Shelomo Yehuda Rapoport, and Avraham Mapu (among others). In the area of Zionist history, Dinur published works on Peretz Smolenskin, Hibat Zion, and Theodor Herzl, to mention only a few. For a review of Dinur's myriad publications prior to 1949, see the bibliography included in *Sefer Dinaburg*, edited by Y. Baer, Y. Guttmann, and M. Shuva, (Jerusalem, 1949), pp. 427-447.

27. In fact, Dinur's first book-length work was such a collection entitled *Toldot Yisrael*, published in both Hebrew and Yiddish by the Petrograd "Society for the Propagation of Enlightenment" in 1919. As the title page indicates, this collection, which traces the course of the Jewish people from its first wanderings in the land of Israel, was intended for Jewish teachers and students alike. The collection was later reprinted in 1938 in Palestine as the first volume of *Yisrael Be-Arso*.

28. *Be-Olam*, p. 353. Bialik himself was engaged at this time in the collection of folklore, most notably through the anthology of important aggadic material, *Sefer Ha-Agada*, which he assembled with Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky.

29. In *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*, Dinur's indebtedness to Bialik's conception of "kinus" (collection) is revealed in his reiteration of Bialik's rationale for that activity: "New combinations of old things build new worlds and destroy old ones, uproot centers from their place and plant them in another. All new material, after it is uprooted and passed through the filter of the new sensibility and the new spirit of our day will be seen . . . in a completely new light; moreover, our emotional bond to it will be totally different from that of previous generations. Its fate is to become a new creation." Quoted in *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut: Mevasre Ha-Ziyonut*, Vol. I, Book I, (Tel-Aviv, 1938), p. 19. Of course, for Bialik, as for Dinur, Zionism was the filter through which historical and folkloristic material should now pass.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

31. Dinur's use here does not, then, fit the particular (as opposed to total) meaning of "ideology" which the sociologist Karl Mannheim defines in his *Ideology and Utopia*. That is, Dinur is not referring to a set of ideas which are "more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation". Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, 1936), p. 49. Nor is he implying an absence of realism, which Mannheim discerns, for instance, in Napoleon's designation of certain opponents as "ideologists". *Ibid.*, p. 63.

32. For the views of Dinur's eminent colleague, Gershom Scholem, on the "normalizing" potential of Zionism in the realm of scholarship, see this author's "The Scholem-Kurzweil Debate and Modern Jewish Historiography", *Modern Judaism* (October 1986), especially pp. 264-269. See also Shmueli's discussion in *PAAJR* 1986.

33. Mannheim, p. 50.

34. We should be careful to distinguish here between Mannheim's understanding of "ideology" as a category for historical-sociological analysis and Dinur's as an historical force to which he was inextricably and personally bound; the former understanding is reliant on a certain emotional and temporal detachment, whereas the latter entailed a primary and immediate existential commitment. For a relevant discussion of Zionism as ideology and historical force, see N. Rotenstreich's "Zionism as an Ideology and as a Historical Force: A Current Evaluation", *Essays on Zionism and the Contemporary Jewish Condition* (New York, 1980), pp. 58-71.

35. A similar commitment can be seen in Zalman Shazar (Rubashov), the third president of the State of Israel, whose career parallels Dinur's in many respects. Shazar too was brought up in a Hasidic environment, though, like Dinur, he became involved at an early age in socialist-Zionist activities. In addition to their active political interests, the two men shared certain scholarly interests; both were intrigued by the rebellion against Galut which fueled the Sabbatian movement and by the aliyah of R. Yehudah He-Hasid, which they saw as a harbinger of national redemption.

36. Though Dinur turned away from the Hasidic world of his family, he never abandoned a commitment to Jewish existence, or to the observance of the commandments, for that matter. Indeed, the passion of Dinur's Jewish commitment never abated, though its ideological and theological substance changed. This becomes important when we juxtapose Dinur to the product of an assimilated German-Jewish family like Scholem. Scholem's approach to Jewish studies was that of "looking from the outside in"; unlike Dinur, he was not raised in an environment in which familiarity with traditional Jewish sources was assumed. For a discussion of Scholem's upbringing, see his autobiography, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, translated from the German by Harry Zohn, (New York, 1980).

37. As a result of his strong Hasidic background, his political activism, and his inability to get accepted to a Russian university, Dinur remained an auto-didact in "secular" subjects until the age of 28, when he went to Berlin.

38. See "Be'ayat Halukatan" in *Dorot u-Reshumot*, p. 48.

39. See, for example, Gershom Scholem's attack upon the 19th century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in "Mi-Tokh Hirhurim 'al Hokhmat Yisrael", reprinted in *Hokhmat Yisrael: Heybetim Historiyim u-Filosofiyim*, (ed.) Paul Mendes-Flohr, (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 153-168. It must be noted that Scholem suggests in this article that not all of the negative tendencies found in *Wissenschaft* scholars have been eradicated under Zionist auspices. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-168.

40. Dinur divides the history of Jewish historiography into six periods, in each of which "the subject of Jewish history, and also the content of that history, are apprehended differently by Jewish historiography." See Dinur's comments in "Be'ayat Halukatan", pp. 33-34.

41. Though I will not be able to develop fully this theme here, I would like to suggest that this distinction actually parallels an age-old tension in Jewish historical conceptualization between the transcendent or essential and the ephemeral. While Jews of medieval times saw their fate as determined by the Divine Hand (and maintained their faith in the advent of the messianic era), they nonetheless lived, worked, and interacted on a prosaic human level in their daily

existence. When these two modes of thinking and living—embodied in the distinction between *historia sacra* and *historia profana*—converged, it was through the power of rationalization, i.e., to explain miracles or catastrophes. It has commonly been thought that the modern historical consciousness eliminated the distinction between the two modes. I will take up this issue in the case of Dinur in this part of the paper.

42. In the case of Jewish historians, Ivan Marcus recognizes the existence of such a dual loyalty. He proposes that “scholars have to function within two intellectual and professional paradigms, know when each is appropriate, and be conscious of how they complement one another in theory and practice. A form of Jewish biculturalism—of fealty to scholarly canons and to Jewish communal needs—is not only possible but desirable.” See Ivan G. Marcus, “Beyond the Sephardic Mystique”, *Orim*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), p. 50. See also the intriguing comments of Hayden White on the creative role of the historian in “The Burden of History” in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 27-50.

43. For a detailed discussion of Jost, Graetz, Geiger, and Teubler in this matter, see Dinur’s introduction to *Yisrael Ba-Golah*. I have consulted the English translation of that essay, “Israel in Diaspora”, in *Israel and The Diaspora* (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 17-33.

44. In a way, Dinur’s critique is unfairly drawn; for, though he recognized that the *Wissenschaft* scholars “reflect the historical outlook of a generation”, he measured their success or failure in apprehending the inner force of the Jewish people largely according to Zionist criteria. The retroactive expectations which Dinur held for the 19th century German scholars reveal to us a transparent projection of his own values onto theirs—an act fully consonant with his triumphalist view of Zionist ideology. See also Dinur’s criticism of the Russian-Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, “Israel in Diaspora”, p. 44. According to Dinur, Dubnow’s mistake was his failure to grasp the “Palestino-centrism” of the Jewish people, as reflected in his notion of shifting Diaspora centers of authority.

45. Though Dinur calls Taeubler a Zionist, he quickly qualifies this designation by pointing to Taeubler’s doubts about the role of Zionism in the West. Moreover, he suggests that Taeubler advanced a universalistic conception of Judaism and the Jewish people which was reflective of his cosmopolitan German background and education. See *Dorot u-Reshumot*, p. 274.

46. “Israel in Diaspora”, pp. 3-4.

47. Dinur’s eight periods of Israel in the Diaspora, alternating between stability and crisis, are: 1. from the time of the Arab conquest to the First Crusade (636-1096); 2. from the First Crusade to the Fourth Lateran Council (1096-1215); 3. from the Fourth Lateran Council to the outbreak of the “Black Death” (1215-1348); 4. from the “Black Death” to the expulsion from Spain (1348-1492); 5. from the expulsion to the Chmielnicki massacres (1492-1648); 6. from the massacres to the French Revolution (1648-1789); 7. from the French Revolution to the pogroms in Russia (1789-1881); 8. from the pogroms to the establishment of the State of Israel (1881-1948). Cf. “Israel in Diaspora”, pp. 66-76. The difficulty of periodizing in such a mechanical fashion is perhaps best exemplified by Dinur’s designation of the immediate post-expulsion period as one of general stability.

48. On this alliance, see the following important contributions: the various articles and chapters of Salo W. Baron dealing with the medieval institution of

“servi camerae”; and Hannah Arendt, who discusses the relationship between Jew and sovereign against the backdrop of the rise of the Absolute State, in her chapter “Antisemitism” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1979), new edition with added prefaces.

49. “Israel in Diaspora”, pp. 52-53.

50. “Yisrael Ba-Golah” in *Dorot u-Reshumot*, p. 123.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

54. This issue is further complicated by Dinur’s assertion that the dramatic external developments which effect cyclical change in Jewish communities are not restricted to certain locales, but are global in scope. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

55. See, for example, Yerushalmi’s discussion of the distinction between Greek and Biblical historical conceptions in *Zakhor*, pp. 6 ff. See also David Roskies’ review of Biblical archetypes of history in *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 17 ff.

56. Roskies, p. 22.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Zakhor*, pp. 40-42, 48-50.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

60. For a discussion of the secular transvaluation of religious messianism, see the following: in the context of the philosophy of history, Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949); in the context of 19th century political ideology, J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (New York, 1968 [second printing]); and in the Jewish context, Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Golah ve-Nekhar* (Tel-Aviv, 1929), Vol. II, Books 1-2.

61. Such an expectation constitutes the basic Maimonidean position on the messianic era. In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides affirms the Talmudic view (Sanhedrin 91b) that “the only difference between the present and the Messianic era is that political oppression will then cease”. See also *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:2 and Melakhim 12.

62. Note, for instance, the practice of *vaticinium ex eventu*, the declaration of a prophecy based on an event which has already occurred. We see this technique in the apocalyptic accounts of Jewish messianic activists, as in Eleazar Ha-Kalir’s “Oto Ha-Yom” or the “Nistarot shel Rabbi Shimon ben Yokhai”. See *Midreshe Geulah*, (ed.) Yehudah Kaufmann (Ibn Shmuel), (Jerusalem, 1953-54 [second edition]), pp. 158-160, 187-198.

63. See, for example, Dinur’s comment regarding the motivations of Yudgan, the 8th century messianic activist from Persia. Dinur suggests there that Yudgan and his followers believed “man is the possessor of a free will. Everything, including his personal and national happiness, depends on him. Similarly, redemption is dependent on Jews and their activities. From this point of view, messianic activity appears as the demand to bring the Coming of the Days closer through human acts and deeds.” Cf. *Yisrael Ba-Golah*, Vol. I, Book 2, (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 275, n. 59. Though this statement is intended to reflect the Yudganist perspective on human agency, it more accurately reflects Dinur’s own sense of the need to take control of one’s fate. This statement assumes ultimate significance when placed in the context of the Zionist call to action.

64. Dinur quite explicitly stated his view on the connection between messianism and Zionism in *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*: “The spiritual background out of which the foundations of messianic ideology crystallized into a Zionist framework comes from messianic expectation—the active and intense expectation which did not cease even after the failure of the Sabbatian movement.” *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*, p. 4.

65. According to Scholem, “the Messianic idea has compelled a life lived in deferment”, a sentiment which Zionism must overcome if it is to succeed. See Scholem’s seminal essay, “Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 35-36. See also Yosef Yerushalmi’s gloss on Scholem’s view in “Vers une histoire de l’espoir juif” in *Esprit*, 8-9 (1985), p. 37.

66. See “The Modern Period” in *Israel and The Diaspora*, p. 90.

67. As I noted above (n. 35), however, Dinur’s colleague, Zalman Shazar, also pointed to the seminal role of Yehudah He-Hasid in leading the modern revolt against Galut.

68. For a critique of Dinur’s position and an overview of periodization schemes among modern Jewish historians, see Michael A. Meyer’s “Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?”, *Judaism*, Vol. 24 (1975), pp. 329-338. See also the comments of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson in “Dat ve-Hevra Be-Mishnatam shel Ben-Zion Dinur ve-Yitzhak Baer” in his collected essays *Retsef u-Temurah* (Tel-Aviv, 1985), p. 412.

69. Cf. “The Modern Period”, pp. 79-82 and Meyer, pp. 331-332.

70. The first chapter of this anthology is entitled “The Search for Paths of Redemption from the Failure of the Sabbatian Movement until the Immigration of the Perushim”.

71. See Dinur’s comments on Ha-Levi in *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*, p. 6.

72. “The Modern Period”, p. 94.

73. Benedicto de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, translated from the Latin with an introduction by R. H. M. Elwes, (New York, 1951), p. 46.

74. See *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*, pp. 169-170.

75. The cause for ambiguity is the following comment by Spinoza on the prospect of Jewish national regeneration: “Nay, I would go so far as to believe that if the foundations of their religion have not emasculated their mind they may even, if occasion offers, so changeable are human affairs, raise up their empire afresh, and that God may a second time elect them.” Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 66. Among contemporary researchers, Shelomo Pines suggests that Spinoza held out the possibility of a political reconstitution of the Jewish nation, though he did not necessarily support its realization. See Pines, “Histabrut Ha-Tekumah mi-hadash shel Medina Yehudit lefi Yosef Ibn Kaspi u-lefi Spinoza” in *Beyn Mahshevet Yisrael le-Mahshevet Ha-Amim* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 277-305. For other perspectives on Spinoza’s intentions, see Leo Strauss’ comments in the Preface to his *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (New York, 1982), pp. 15-21; or Yosef H. Yerushalmi, “Divre Spinoza ‘al Kiyum Ha-Am Ha-Yehudi” in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences*, Vol. VI, No. 10, (Jerusalem, 1983-84) p. 7, n. 12.

76. Cf. *Sefer Ha-Ziyonut*, p. 90.

77. At this point, Dinur’s instrumental approach to the Diaspora becomes clear. It is commonly believed that Zionist historical thought embodied a thoroughly negative attitude to the Diaspora consistent with the political objective

of “shelilat ha-golah” (negation of the Golah). Symbolic of this view, though in the extreme, is the oft-quoted Yudka, protagonist of Haim Hazaz’s “The Sermon”. Dinur, however, maintains that Diaspora existence preserved Jewish national identity until the moment was propitious to return to Zion. The Diaspora thus served a vital role—to be sure, an instrumental one, but one which should not be erased from memory. In future work, I would like to explore this instrumentalist perspective within the context of Zionist historical thought.

78. “Israel in Diaspora”, p. 75.

79. This is Michael Meyer’s designation. According to Meyer, this designation reflects an historical assessment shaped by Zionist criteria, with little regard for Diaspora Jewish existence as a creative force in its own right. Meyer, pp. 332-333.

80. Dinur’s long career of Zionist activism culminated in his election to the First Knesset, and subsequent appointment in 1951 to the office of Minister of Education and Culture. Through that office, Dinur played a prominent role in developing the national educational curriculum in the nascent State of Israel.

81. See Michael Meyer’s critique (*supra* n. 79) of the exclusivist tendency of this approach (especially as it relates to the Diaspora in modern times).

82. See my comments in “The Scholem-Kurzweil Debate and Modern Jewish Historiography”, *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (October 1986), pp. 261-286.

83. That which distinguishes Zionist historians from other Jewish historians is not their tendentiousness *per se*, but rather the ideological coherence and the degree of institutional support informing their work. This reflects more on the relative success of Zionism as a Jewish ideology than on the integrity or professionalism of Diaspora historians.

84. Cf. “Devarim ’al Prof. B. Z. Dinur”, p. 28.