In his famous book, *The Idea of History*, the English philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood offered a revealing criticism of the late-19th-century German thinker Heinrich Rickert. According to Collingwood, Rickert failed to grasp an essential truth of history:

The peculiarity of historical thought is the way in which the historian’s mind, as the mind of the present day, apprehends the process by which this mind has itself come into existence through the mental development of the past.¹

Rickert’s infatuation with the individual historical datum, isolated and frozen in the past, suppressed the impulse to examine his own intellectual origins. To avoid this trap, Collingwood suggested, historians must analyze—or historicize—their own line of inquiry and acknowledge that facts do not constitute “a dead past but a living past, a heritage of past
thoughts which by the work of his historical consciousness the historian makes his own.20 Failure to do so risks self-delusion about one’s own existence as an historical being. In a similar vein, Collingwood’s countryman, Sir Herbert Butterfield, implored historians to study the history of their predecessors in order to situate themselves “within the long, unceasing stream of history.”21

For Butterfield, this act of self-contextualization was a major stimulus to recording the history of historiography. And yet, historians have not always or universally regarded the study of scholarly predecessors as a noble or worthwhile pursuit. The unreflective impulse of historians is particularly evident in the case of Jewish scholars, about whom no comprehensive history was written until 1993.22 Thus, the rather rich tradition of modern Jewish scholarship, extending back at least to the early decades of the 19th century, offers almost no parallels to 20th-century histories of historiography written by Fueter, Gooch, Barnes, Breisach, or Blanke, among others.23 Anecdotally, I can report that my first awkward forays into the history of Jewish historiography, as a graduate student, were met with disdain by more than a few scholars in the field. It was not deemed suitable by them to study historiography at the beginning of one’s career. Such work, if undertaken at all, was best left to the twilight years, after one had earned the right, through a series of rigorous monographs, to meditate more expansively upon the discipline of history.

The veil of inauthenticity that cloaks the study of Jewish historiography relates, I think, to the unwillingness of Jewish scholars to relent on the steadfast claim to objectivity that has accompanied their efforts from the advent of Wissenschaft des Judentums. While Jewish scholars have frequently directed polemic volleys at their predecessors, they have rarely sought to contextualize their own work through systematic analysis of the social context and intellectual direction of earlier generations. To do so would be to acknowledge extra-“scientific” considerations in the production of historiographical work, thereby undermining the validity of the scholar’s quest for truth. The price of such acknowledgment is often perceived to be too high. For researchers of Jewish history are not merely scholars; they tend to be Jews, and as such, members of a group that has struggled to define its identity in the midst of powerful social pressures and in the absence of satisfactory categories of group identification. The rather desperate adherence of Jewish scholars to the ideal of objective scholarship, and concomitant obtuseness to their own biases, reflected a decided lack of security over their own societal position. As a result, Wissenschaft came to serve as “an existential and epistemological anchor,” a source of stability and validation in often turbulent and uncertain milieux.6

The hyper-scientism of Jewish historical scholars has not gone unnoticed. A distinguished line of Jewish thinkers from Samson Raphael Hirsch and Samuel David Luzzatto in the mid-19th century to Franz Rosenzweig and later Baruch Kurzweil in the 20th has called attention to the defects and delusions of Jewish historians. Noticeably, few of these critics were historians. Indeed, Jewish historians rarely trained a critical gaze on themselves or their intellectual roots — at least until quite recently. They were, to paraphrase the words of Norman Hampson, too busy teaching, writing, and being Jews “to worry very much about the nature of what they are trying to do.”77

A landmark departure from the tradition of opaqueness among Jewish historians was Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory. Published some fifteen years ago, Yerushalmi’s brilliant reflections inaugurated a new era of introspection into the history and practices of Jewish historians. With sweeping erudition, Yerushalmi cast a dourful eye on the enterprise of modern Jewish historiography, noting its instinct to strip the cloak of sanctity off traditionally remembered events or figures. In sharp contrast to the holistic force of pre-modern collective memory, historiography had become “the faith of fallen Jews.”78 Several years after Yerushalmi’s retrospective was published, his great teacher Salo Baron brought out a slim volume, The Contemporary Relevance of History, which analyzed the historiographical currents against and out of which his own scholarship emerged. Without making reference to Yerushalmi, Baron offered a defense of modern historical research, lauding its “methodological pluralism” and advancing the belief that history could still “serve as a sort of new historical midrash and help answer some of the most perplexing questions of the present and the future.”79 To bring matters full circle, Baron himself became the subject several years later of a full-length biography by Robert Libet. These developments are emblematic of a wider and overdue interest in historiography emerging among Jewish scholars over the past decade and

The introspective turn of Jewish historians is not merely the product of an inner resolve to redress the neglect of previous generations. At the risk of affirming the banal, it must be noted that like Jewish history, Jewish historians do not operate in a vacuum. They are exposed to the same intellectual currents that induce periodic meditations on, and even crises of, historicism. Contemporary students of Jewish history, for instance, inhabit the same postmodern world as other historians, a world in which fixed meaning—literary, historical, or otherwise—is assumed not to exist. The pervasive skepticism of the postmodern moment has undoubtedly disrupted received wisdoms regarding the very possibility of historical veracity. But it has also mandated that historians adopt a new critical self-awareness as they go about selecting subjects, sifting through evidence, and producing historical narratives.

It is out of this moment that the current volume takes shape. The essays collected here represent a unique collaboration by students of Jewish history intent on examining old scholarly truths and practices. More than half are the product of a group of scholars fortunate enough to have spent the 1994-95 academic year as fellows at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Judaic Studies. In the extraordinarily congenial environs of the Center, the fellows engaged in constant and stimulating debate on the shaping and reshaping of Jewish historical narrative. The fellows’ deliberations culminated in an end-of-year conference in May 1995 to which a number of other distinguished scholars were fortuitously invited.

Based on that conference, the papers in this collection offer a series of sustained insights into the work of Jewish historians whose work extends across the Jewish past—from antiquity to the modern period, and from the land of Israel to Italy. They are not intended as a complete catalogue of all of the great figures and themes of modern Jewish historiography, but rather focus largely on important 20th-century Jewish historians. Hence, there is no essay-length discussion of the founding figures of 19th-century Wissenschaft des Judentums, a topic that has developed its own small coterie of experts. Nor does any of the essays engage the three grand narrators of Jewish history in the modern age: Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, and Salo Baron. Each of these three has already received significant, though by no means exhaustive, biographical attention. And yet, with the exception of Gershon Scholem (surely one of the most intriguing of 20th-century Jewish scholars), the remaining figures discussed in this volume have largely escaped careful analysis and scrutiny. It is thus the mission of the volume to fill a considerable gap in the modern writing of Jewish history.

The task of revisiting one’s predecessors is a most complicated one, not least because it invariably activates deep anxieties of influence. As Anthony Grafton averred in his richly textured essay on Jacob Bernays and Joseph Scaliger, “historians of scholarship set out to identify and study their betters.” In doing so, they are condemned “to struggle with more Oedipal demons” than they can handle. Grafton’s essay hints at a powerful mimetic impulse in the history of scholarship; the historian’s treatment of an earlier scholar tends to follow the latter’s interest, priorities, and strengths. What results is a “heroic portrait of a past master, robed in purple” rather than a critical uncovering of “a past physiognomy, warts, period features and all.”

On this reading, the history of scholarship approximates the shalshelet ha-kabbalah, or scholarly genealogy, that surfaces frequently in medieval Jewish literature. Grafton relates that Bernays “saw himself as one link in a chain of tradition—and held that anyone who hoped to join that chain must do so by finding a connection, as Bernays did, to earlier links.” Grafton acts on Bernays’ charge in a particularly intimate way—by linking himself to the chain of tradition which Bernays represents. Indeed, he undertakes the same kind of scholarly excavation of Bernays that Bernays undertook of Scaliger. Grafton thereby exemplifies what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons, a site where present interpreter meets past scholar or, in Grafton’s works, where historians come to terms with their historiographical betters.

While Grafton uncovers—and himself manifests—a reverential impulse in the history of scholarship, he is hardly uncritical of either the 19th-century Bernays or the 16th-century Scaliger. Indeed, by analyzing the glaring omissions Bernays made in writing about Scaliger, Grafton exposes the
points at which Bernays demonstrably departs from his predecessors. At the same time, he signals his own desire for critical distance from Bernays. Grafton is not content merely to replicate the tendencies of his predecessor, for to do so would be to deny his own need for intellectual autonomy. In general, the historian’s quest for both autonomy and self-understanding requires an awareness of the breaks and ruptures, as well as continuities, in historical consciousness. Concomitantly, this quest entails an exercise in self-contextualization vis-à-vis one’s predecessors — as part of the essential act of exercising one’s “Oedipal demons.”

Inspired by Grafton’s example, the essays before us move between the reverential and critical poles, constantly seeking to arrive at a meaningful fusion of horizons. It is precisely this balancing act that lends the volume its distinctiveness and authority. But its importance extends, like all good histories of historiography, beyond the nuanced readings of the essay writers. The volume also attests to an historical moment, or series of moments, significant on their own terms.

One such moment gives impetus to the cluster of papers addressing the formation and development of Israeli historical scholarship. While none of the authors professes to be a “New Historian” intent on upending established truths and foundation myths of Israeli history, each is clearly informed by a critical perspective toward the historiographical past that grew out of broader political, cultural, and generational transformations in Israeli society. Thus, Moshe Idel continues the mission begun in his Kabbalah: New Perspectives (1988) by challenging the schema for the history of Jewish mysticism set out by the legendary Gershom Scholem. In fact, Idel’s task is even broader: to revise Scholem’s sweeping view of Jewish history based on the dynamic and subversive force of mysticism. Idel begins to unravel an alternative view of Jewish history attuned not to dramatic rupture, but to the preservative force of stasis. An essential catalyst toward this new view is Idel’s critique of the historical method of Scholem and his “school” of disciples. Idel argues that Scholem’s “historico-critical school” lacks a sensitivity to the structural parallels and continuities that run throughout Jewish intellectual and cultural history, and so possesses no instinctive feel for a phenomenological approach to Jewish mysticism. Idel’s corrective directly confronts two pillars of the Scholemian system: first, that there was an ancient Jewish mystical tradition that predated and/or was uninfluenced by the sudden intrusion of Gnosticism; and second, that intense messianic concern was not a direct outgrowth of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, but, rather, has a pedigree in the history of Kabbalah that long precedes the Spanish expulsion in 1492. The effect of Idel’s challenge is to highlight, perhaps in exaggerated fashion, the immanent features of Jewish history, those that resist or are unmoved by “external” events and which explain the survival of the Jews throughout history.

In this regard Idel embraces, paradoxically, the immanentist position for which Scholem and his Jerusalem colleagues were often accused. This point emerges periodically in Israel Jacob Yuval’s study of the intriguing career of Scholem’s friend and fellow German Jew, Yitzhak Fritz Baer. After decades of distinguished scholarly work in medieval Jewish history, Baer turned his attention in the late 1940s to the Second Temple Period. Yuval begins his inquiry by participating in the mimetic work of the historian of scholarship, suggested by Anthony Grafton; that is, he notes Baer’s appreciation of Christian influences on medieval Ashkenazic Jewish culture, and thereby locates an eminent precursor for his own important and controversial work in medieval Ashkenazic history. And yet, Yuval’s short piece has a more important task: it demonstrates that Baer’s shift in scholarly emphasis to Second Temple history was motivated by the desire to find a pre-Christian Judaism; this desire, Yuval implies, was impelled both by the historical trauma of the Holocaust, and by the impulse to find ancient roots for the new Jewish state. Ultimately, Baer’s journey throughout the Second Temple period was to lead him to “an authentic Judaism, free of Christian influence, and yet European.” In this regard, Yuval suggests that Baer pushed in the direction of a more immanent explanation for Jewish history. At the same time, he observes that Baer’s search for pre-Christian roots led him to “the encounter between Judea and Greece in Antiquity” out of which an authentic Judaism emerged. The tension between the immanentist and externalist explanations, as well as the failure of Baer’s model of a pre-Christian Judaism to sink deep roots in Israeli historical consciousness, may well have resulted from Baer’s own European roots. As Yuval concludes, Baer’s philosophy of history was most “suited to the biography of a German immigrant who had settled in Jerusalem.”
The suggestion that Baer and his fellow first-generation colleagues at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem did not fully remake themselves—or, for that matter, Jewish historical scholarship—stands at the center of my own contribution to the volume. Despite frequent programmatic declarations of innovation, the “Jerusalem scholars,” as I call them, transported deeply entrenched institutional and conceptual models from their European homes. Not only were the disciplinary priorities of the Hebrew University’s Institute of Jewish Studies similar to those of European rabbinical seminaries, the Jerusalem scholars also remained beholden to the mesmerizing ethos and language of Wissenschaft, which so captivated 19th-century Jewish scholars. Moreover, they departed from “orthodox” Zionist ideology in locating historical value in, rather than negating, the Diaspora past. In focusing on both the continuities and changes represented by this generation of Jewish scholars, I argue that they were possessed of a dynamic, unresolved, and hybrid identity. Just as they swung between the cultural universes of Europe and Palestine, so too the Jerusalem scholars moved between the competing demands of collective memory and critical history.

My own efforts to rethink the historical contours of the “Jerusalem school” are situated in a distinct moment in which new approaches to the Jewish and Israeli past seem to abound. In Derek Penslar’s lucid paper, the author sheds new light on that moment through a systematic review of Zionist historiography over the past three decades. Eschewing the tendency to label all historical service rendered by scholars committed to Zionism as “Zionist historiography,” he offers instead a careful analysis of academic scholarship on Zionism and the history of the land of Israel/Palestine from the 1960s. Underlying Penslar’s treatment is the conclusion that much of what passes for New Israeli History in the 1980s and 1990s (for example, the work of Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Zeev Sternhell) was anticipated by scholars in prior decades. Here again, despite fervent claims to intellectual innovation, old arguments were replicated in whole or part (suggestions, for example, that Israeli “statist” ideology, or mamlakhbysts, was born before 1948, or that Labor Zionism did not maintain a steadfast commitment to socialism). Whereas the “new historians” have been both celebrated and condemned for their novelty, Penslar’s important work of

historiographical contextualization provides a much needed and nuanced framework in which to evaluate their work.

If Israeli historiography forms a distinct subtext throughout the volume, perhaps even more pervasive is the theme of the dynamic nature of Jewish cultural interaction. Thus, David Ruderman offers a re-assessment of Cecil Roth, the delightful and oft-dismissed historian of Italian Jewry (among other subjects). Ruderman’s paper is, in essence, a super-commentary, offering an extended gloss on the stinging criticism of Roth by the contemporary scholar Robert Bonfil, and challenging Bonfil’s characterization of Roth as a base apologist for the idea of a Jewish Italian Renaissance. Contrary to Bonfil’s claims, Cecil Roth was not intent on portraying Italian Jewish life as “a carousel of servile imitation.” Rather, Roth provides a “perfectly balanced argument that Italy was never immune from hostilities and anti-Jewish agitation.” Moreover, Roth was dedicated to demonstrating that Italian Jewry struck a creative balance between its own religious and cultural heritage and the surrounding environment. In concluding his discussion, Ruderman seeks to mediate between the competing perspectives of Bonfil and Roth, but ultimately identifies himself more with the latter. It is Roth’s passion for describing “those dimensions of Jewish culture closely related to general civilization” that Ruderman finds so valuable. This should not come as a total surprise. Both Roth and Ruderman are Diaspora Jewish scholars, wedded to the image of the cosmopolitan and interactive Jewish culture whose boundaries are constantly and creatively redrawn. Such a perspective stands in contrast to the image of Diaspora Jewish life that emerges from Robert Bonfil’s work—or, for that matter, from the work of Yitzhak Baer, Bonfil’s predecessor in Jerusalem. For the two Israeli scholars, Diaspora history is fraught with elemental dangers, ranging between the poles of persecution and self-negation. In this respect, they both embody a deep skepticism toward the Diaspora that forms one pillar of the Zionist historiographical enterprise.

The historiographical optimism of Cecil Roth — so tellingly contrasted to Bonfil — is matched by a fellow Englishman, Israel Abrahams, whom Elliott Horowitz treats in his paper. Like Roth, Abrahams has been regularly dismissed as an engaging, but shallow, historical popularizer whose narra-
tive favored florid description over penetrating analysis. Horowitz adds nuance to this conventional image by situating Abrahams within the historical context of late Victorian England. He argues that Abrahams absorbed the Victorian nostalgia for the "lost paradise" of the Middle Ages, particularly in the widely disseminated Jewish Life in the Middle Ages. Comparing the medieval Jew favorably to the later "ghetto" Jew, Abrahams sought to expose "the genuine pleasures which had been made possible by the more robust popular culture" of the Middle Ages.\(^{26}\) In this respect, Abrahams preceded his countryman, Cecil Roth, in incorporating popular culture into the narrative account of the Jewish past; likewise, Abrahams preceded Roth in holding "that the vitality of Judaism was enhanced by exposure to and interaction with outside cultures."\(^{27}\) Horowitz's "recovery" of Abrahams thus calls attention to a frequently neglected "tradition" of Jewish historical writing, that produced by English Jews with a flair for the colorful and an aversion for the lachrymose. At the same time, it makes a strong case for the relevance of social history in attaining a richly textured grasp of the Jewish past.

The theme of cultural interaction, so central to the work of Roth and Abrahams, surfaces with equal force in Gideon Libson's exposition of Shelomo Dov Goitein.\(^{28}\) Libson presents an extensive bio-bibliographical review of Goitein's monumental labors, noting an interesting shift in scholarly direction that bears resemblance to Yitzhak Baer's career. The first phase of Goitein's professional career was devoted to the study of Islam, and more specifically, to cultural relations and interaction between Judaism and Islam. Goitein's interest in the meeting of these two religious cultures reflected his own desire to open "a shutter, perhaps a large window, on the world of the East."\(^{29}\) Here Goitein was reflecting the pervasive quest for spiritual authenticity, and the concomitant turn to the East of many Germans, particularly German-Jewish intellectuals, in the first decades of the 20th century. Consciously or not, Goitein's search for an Islamic-Jewish "symbiosis" may well have had its roots in his own early attempts to forge a distinct German-Jewish identity. One also wonders whether Goitein's scholarly labors in a later phase of his career reflect a certain frustration, born of contemporary political realities, with the ideal of Islamic-Jewish symbiosis. Did the experience of living in the State of Israel during a period of great military tension between Jews and Arabs alter his perspective, even after his decision to leave Jerusalem for Princeton? Without addressing this question directly, Libson does note that in this later phase Goitein shifted the focus of his research away from the dynamics of symbiosis to the existence of one historical culture (Jewish) within a broader one (Islamic). Drawing on the treasure trove of social historical material in the Cairo Genizah, Goitein undertook a systematic investigation of Jewish life in the Mediterranean world. His multi-volume A Mediterranean Society, with its Braudelian scope, stands as one of the landmark contributions to Jewish historical scholarship in the 20th century.

Libson observes that Goitein was reticent to use the word "influence" in describing interaction between cultural traditions. Rather, he preferred to speak of "parallels" or "interplay," terms that do not entail the decisive "victory" of one culture over another. This usage hints at the phenomenological approach favored by Moshe Idel in his above-mentioned article. Moreover, a good number of other papers—such as those of Yuval, Myers, Ruderman, and Horowitz—address the issue of influence in Jewish history. Does the term "influence" adequately represent the dynamic and textured interaction of Jews and non-Jews? Or does it presuppose the existence of a world divided between cultural conquerors and victims? Conversely, can we speak intelligently of immanence as a category of historical (as opposed to metaphistorical) causality? The answers to these questions shed light not only on the intellectual sensibilities of past scholars but on the cultural/ideological prodigities of their more contemporary glossators—as we see in the case of David Ruderman and his polemical foil, Robert Bonfil.

Martha Himmelfarb continues the debate over cultural influence in her discussion of Elias Bickerman, the outstanding scholar of Hellenistic-Jewish culture. On Himmelfarb's reading, Bickerman eschewed the crudely hegemonic implications of the term "influence." Instead, he aimed at analyzing what Himmelfarb calls the "restructuring of ancient Judaism." This meant studying "the dynamics of the reception of Greek culture by the Jews: how the Jews transformed Hellenism and how in turn Judaism was transformed."\(^{30}\) The paths of cultural transmission were bi-directional: neither Judaism nor Hellenism emerged intact, or destroyed, from their encounter. In elaborating on this point, Himmelfarb is careful to note that Bickerman...
was very much a product of his time. While the theme of a constant cultural negotiation generally operated in his work, Bickerman's analysis of the Maccabees in 1937 marked a departure. His Der Gott der Makkabäer described the Jewish reformers of the 2nd century BCE as traitors to the Jewish cause. Under the strain of Nazi threat, Bickerman could not prevent himself from projecting his own damning judgment of Jewish assimilation onto the historical canvas, even when that judgment was at odds with his usual emphasis on the subtle process of restructuring ancient Judaism.

Himmelfarb's conceptual vocabulary bears the traces, deliberately or not, of recent writing in cultural studies. By contrast, Sara Japhet's paper takes a strong stand against recent currents in Bible scholarship which challenge the "valid modern and rational terminology applicable in the historical discipline." In particular, Japhet directs her critique at Philip Davies' *In Search of Ancient Israel*, published in 1992. Japhet intimates that Davies' book reflects a scholarly trend to upend conventional truths in the name of iconoclasm. Thus, for Davies, the basic term "Biblical Israel" possesses no stable meaning; in fact, the Bible is itself a literary source of dubious historical value. Davies prefers to speak of an "historical Israel" which, Japhet argues, is no less arbitrary a construct than "Biblical Israel." Not content to accept a state of terminological caprice, Japhet sets out to rebut Davies' claim that the historical Israel was none other than a group of "foreign transportees" of unknown origin and background, brought to Judah under coercion by the Persians for the purpose of agrarian development.

For Japhet, this challenge to the authenticity of historical evidence drawn from the Bible—as well as the very idea of a biblical Israel—suffers from more than methodological defects. It assumes the form of theology, the apparent opposite of history. Davies' theology, according to Japhet, is one of "condemnation" which, though never defined, presumably entails invalidating Judaism and its historical sources. Japhet hints unmistakably that Davies' book is a latter-day religious polemic that is unsupported in the world of critical scholarship. And yet, Japhet's own reading of Davies affirms the importance and value of studying historiography; more than merely a (secondary) source of validation, the *historiographical* text can and must be read as an *historical* text, with all the requisite attention to context on which historians pride themselves.

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**Introduction**

In light of this charge, Japhet's sharp criticism of Davies should not obscure a proposition that ties together many of the essays in this volume—namely, that extra-scholarly concerns invariably intervene in the production of scholarship. On the whole, this volume represents an attempt to acknowledge and contextualize such extra-scholarly concerns in the work of our predecessors. But this enterprise is far more than merely an antiquarian foray. It constitutes a working through of the present historian's own anxieties, interests, and limitations, a self-analysis of the hidden secrets and more blatant biases that animate the historiographical text. Given the traditional inhibition among students of Jewish history to engage in the hard work of self-analysis, this book is offered as a tentative first step in understanding more fully, to paraphrase R. G. Collingwood, how the Jewish historical mind has itself come into existence.

**NOTES**

I would like to thank David Goldenberg for his helpful editorial suggestions and criticism of this introduction.


2. Ibid., 170.


8. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), 86.
14. Ibid.
15. For a pre-eminent example, see Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, edited by Gerson Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967). See also Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 57–62.
16. Grafton, "Jacob Bernays."
17. I owe this formulation to David Goldberg.
20. Ibid.