

**Samuel Hirsch**

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# Samuel Hirsch

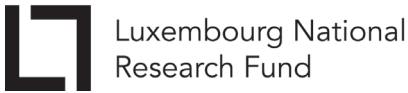
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Philosopher of Religion, Advocate of Emancipation  
and Radical Reformer

Edited by  
Judith Frishman and Thorsten Fuchshuber

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Judith Frishman and Thorsten Fuchshuber

## Introduction and Acknowledgements

Rabbi Samuel Hirsch (Thalfang near Trier 1815 – Chicago 1889) is one of the most important Jewish Reform theologians and philosophers of religion of the first half of the 19th century. To this day, he remains one of the key figures for understanding the debates of the time on questions of Jewish emancipation, the shape of Jewish identity, the compatibility of religion with state and society, the relationship between particularism and universalism as well as the critique of anti-semitism, all of which resonate in current debates. As a “Jewish Hegelian”, he debated with Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Karl Marx and others about the legacy of Hegel’s philosophy of religion. His writings are among the most authoritative of Reform Judaism; his influence on liberal Judaism in Europe and the USA is rivalled only by that of Abraham Geiger. Surprisingly, no detailed monograph or lengthy publication has yet attempted an overall presentation of the multi-layered significance of Samuel Hirsch. It is the aim of the present volume to fill this lacuna. The impetus for this publication was an international conference held at the University of Luxembourg in October 2010 as part of the research project “Nation-building and Democracy: The Struggle for Participation in Luxembourg from the French Revolution to the Beginning of the Second World War (1789–1940)” (PARTIZIP). The conference, jointly organized with the Leiden University Institute for Religious Studies, was sponsored by the Luxembourg Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR). Almost all those researching the life and work of Samuel Hirsch attended and their contributions are presented in this volume. These have been complemented by essays by other leading experts in the field by invitation of the editors. The result is a comprehensive portrayal and historical analysis of almost all the important aspects of Samuel Hirsch’s multifaceted career. The title of the event, “Samuel Hirsch: Philosopher of Religion, Advocate of Emancipation and Radical Reformer”, has been retained for this anthology. It is the opinion of the editors that this title epitomizes the significance of Samuel Hirsch’s life and works and his lasting, yet often unacknowledged, influence.

En route from Thalfang via Dessau and Luxembourg to Philadelphia, Hirsch left his mark on societal, religious, and philosophical developments in manifold ways. By the time he was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community in Luxembourg in 1843, he had already written many of his most important works on the philosophy of religion. In the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg the legal and political equality of the Jews implemented in 1797 under French rule was neither revoked at the end of Napoleon’s reign nor after the Congress of Vienna in

1815. In Luxembourg one of Hirsch's main endeavors was advocating for the emancipation of the Jews in Europe. At the same time, he fought against Jew-hatred, which in Catholic-ultramontane dominated Luxembourg manifested itself both in the form of traditional religious anti-Judaism and in modern forms of antisemitism. As a newspaper editor Hirsch took up his pen and spiritedly intervened in debates on social equality. When, at the final stage of his career, he moved to the USA with his family in 1866 to succeed his friend David Einhorn as rabbi of the Reform congregation Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, his reputation as a leading figure in the Jewish Reform movement had already preceded him. In the USA, where a mass immigration of German Jews in the 19th century had taken place, he also played a decisive role in shaping Reform Judaism and was thus able to reaffirm his importance as a modernizer of Judaism.

This anthology attempts to do justice to all these aspects of Samuel Hirsch's work and to place them in their specific historical context. To facilitate reading and to make Hirsch's development comprehensible, we have divided the volume into several sections that occasionally (and inevitably) overlap thematically. The introductory section of the book comprises a detailed biographically oriented article. Tracing our protagonist's footsteps through his three cities of residence – Dessau, Luxembourg and Philadelphia – Christian Wiese places Samuel Hirsch's various creative phases in their respective geographical and intellectual context, exploring how his distinctive approach to modern Judaism was shaped and developed. The four years Hirsch spent in Dessau are of particular significance for the interpretation of his intellectual growth, as Wiese explains. It was during this period of his life that he developed the central themes of his sermons as well as his primary philosophical work into an overall concept of religious philosophy. Moreover, during the Dessau period he formed his argument in defense of the Jews' participation in European society and culture that included the retention of a distinct, independent religious and cultural identity as a *conditio sine qua non*. He grounded these demands theologically in Israel's universal, historical mission. As for his debates with non-Jewish intellectuals, Hirsch was particularly embroiled in a dispute with the anti-Jewish attacks of the Young Hegelian Bruno Bauer that coincided with his arrival in Luxemburg 1843. Upon his arrival in the United States in August 1866 Hirsch would become David Einhorn's successor and one of the leading intellectual figures of radical Reform Judaism in the United States. While Hirsch held to the most important elements of his philosophy, Wiese notes that it is impossible to overlook the fact that the difference in conditions there contributed to a significant shift in his thinking.

The second section examines fundamental elements of Samuel Hirsch's religious philosophy in the light of their societal and political implications. Focusing on Hirsch's Dessau years, Gershon Greenberg argues that it was there that

Hirsch established freedom as the principle of Judaism. The emancipation of Jews in Western Europe opened uncharted territory for intellectual activity, Greenberg argues. It also created a stage for new and original points of departure for systematic Jewish thought, such as the principle of freedom that undergirded Samuel Hirsch's Jewish, Hegelian, religious philosophical undertaking. According to him, freedom entered history with Abraham, who instilled it in the people of Israel. Under God's leadership, Israel's history was a process of overcoming sin and realizing freedom. Drawing on *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, Greenberg examines Hirsch's concept of freedom in depth. The driving force behind the religious philosopher's historiosophy was the ongoing correlation between the divine ground of freedom and the human actualization of potential freedom. This applied to the political arena as well. Even though Hirsch resented the state for not including Judaism on its own terms as an integral part of society but instead merely tolerated the Jews, he attributed the failure of emancipation primarily to Jews themselves and to Christians, as Greenberg explains. Jewish emancipation, understood in terms of the principle of freedom, was thus undermined by both Judaism and Christianity alike: they failed to foster the coalescence between the divine and human realms requisite for the state to be a vessel for a life of freedom.

In her contribution, Irene Kajon turns to the more philosophical aspects of this problem. For Hirsch, modern society and thought were unable to offer a connection between life and spirit, between the individual human being and the social whole, between history and time on the one hand, and the universal and eternal on the other. Hirsch therefore sought to find a philosophical solution to this crisis: Judaism could offer European culture and human beings a way out of their unhappy condition of oscillation between being circumscribed within their own mortality and dissipating in the All. This, however, required a turn from a metaphysics grounded in the problem of being to a metaphysics grounded in human ethical actions and divine ethical attributes, Kajon explains. Hirsch thus turned to the philosophy of Maimonides as a precursor of philosophical anthropology focused mainly on the ethical in human actions. Like his predecessor, Hirsch believed that thinking should start from a given reality – that of familial and social relations marked by justice and loving-kindness. For Hirsch, Kajon notes, the core of this philosophy is deeply meaningful not only for the Jews, but for all humans. Philosophy and religious philosophy cannot demonstrate the truth of “religious consciousness” but can only recognize it as a fact reflecting both man's belonging to nature and history and his difference from both: man as a finite-infinite being, part of natural and historical being, but able to have an ethical relationship with other human beings in the world. It is within this ethical relation that divine transcendence takes shape. Precisely

because this relation finds its expression in Jewish sources, Samuel Hirsch sees Judaism as a religion of the present.

This applies also to his understanding of the role of Judaism in state and society, as Judith Frishman explains. According to Hirsch's vision of the ideal state, religion and state service are not contradictory, but complementary. Referring to the discussion on Jewish emancipation in mid-19th century, Frishman demonstrates how Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer transformed key concepts of Christian anti-Judaism, particularly stubbornness and exclusiveness, into secular philosophical, political and material arguments, thereby contributing to the development of modern antisemitism. Frishman thoroughly examines how Samuel Hirsch engaged with the two Young Hegelians' contentions, arguing that his main goal was to secure a place for Judaism in modern society. Hirsch wholly adopted the Hegelian concept of the Christian state with the monarch – whose rule was willed by the people – as its head, and then attempted to include Judaism in that state. He emphasized the importance of religion for the universal state – specifically the transformed, ideal versions of Christianity and Judaism – rather than engaging with the Christian state's unwillingness to grant anything more than tolerance to other religions, calling for the separation of Church and State or rejecting religion altogether as did Bauer.

The third section examines the concept of education that Hirsch's philosophy of religion connotes. This is closely related to the question of the contribution Judaism can make to enable a flourishing coexistence of different social groups and religious communities. Like the aforementioned authors, Laurent Mignon turns to Samuel Hirsch's debate with Bruno Bauer. He suggests that in refuting Bauer, Hirsch sketched the possibility of an inclusive society where religious difference was not an obstacle for inter-communitarian relations. Mignon then draws attention to the fact that quite a few scholars have compared 19th century anti-Jewish argumentations like those of Bauer to current day anti-Islamic and anti-immigration discourses. While it would be wrong to postulate an equivalence between antisemitism and anti-Islamic resentment, as Mignon states, the two exclusionary ideologies that developed in different contexts do however share common features. He claims that the strategies of response developed by victims of this discourse are a fertile area of research that could stimulate discussions about the development of policies promoting multicultural and interreligious exchange and the countering of exclusionist ideologies. With this in mind, Mignon examines Hirsch's rebuttal of Bauer's arguments in depth. By emphasizing the need for a scrupulous and cautious approach to religion and culture as objects of study, Hirsch seems to invite us today to question the representations of Islam as an essentially different, morally, and intellectually inferior, monolithic, and static religion, Mignon concludes.

Comparing the concepts of Jewish education in the works of Samuel Hirsch and Abraham Geiger, Ken Koltun-Fromm argues that the educational approaches of both sought to secure Jewish identity in the modern world. While Hirsch produced a liberal religious catechism that offered progressive Jewish answers to pressing spiritual questions, Geiger appealed to foundational experiences and sensibilities to inform Jewish obligations. As such their educational programs were in keeping with their larger philosophical tendencies. Contrary to Geiger, Hirsch did not fear that the notion of *Weltbürgerlichkeit* (world citizenship) would separate Jewish children from their historical and local environment. Moreover, Hirsch sought to define the world citizen in Jewish terms. If Geiger worried that such a global fellowship would weaken local bonds, Hirsch responded that Jewish identity could flourish only within a broader, national community. Koltun-Fromm points to the importance of Jewish religious borders in both their concepts: while Geiger aimed to delineate these borders in order to strengthen local, sentimental ties, Hirsch desired to expand them in order to enable Jewish universal truths to become the inheritance for all. Koltun-Fromm concludes his contribution by reflecting upon how these two divergent trajectories still resonate within contemporary educational theory.

George Y. Kohler discusses Hirsch's concept of education in its relation to his understanding of messianism. Hirsch emphasizes the universal aspect of the messianic era, entailing the future unification of all humanity. For Hirsch, humankind is involved in a slow process of learning, bringing humans closer to self-betterment, for that is the historical objective set them by God. While he keeps to the idea of an individual Messiah, Hirsch wants to avoid the concept of some form of miraculous, supernatural salvation at all costs, as Kohler demonstrates. Hirsch argues that the Messiah can only bring justice there where all desire justice. Humanity therefore must first destroy evil in order to enable the arrival of the Messiah. Kohler points out that although strictly monarchist, Hirsch's messianism, as he understood it while in Europe, is not restorative; it does not constitute a simple return to some early period of a naturally peaceful, glorified utopia and original human harmony. The Messiah does herald truth and justice to a humankind ready for free judgement and is in no way defined by considerations of political power. Hirsch's Messiah is thus naturally weak and requires the willing recognition of the congregation that is able to vanquish evil on its own accord. The Messiah, therefore, cannot suddenly and unexpectedly appear as God's representative. Instead, the messianic age requires humanity to undergo a process of gaining ever increasing knowledge that will in the end lead to a universal and moral kingdom of peace.

In the fourth section, Samuel Hirsch's stay in Luxembourg and the social, political, and economic circumstances of his presence are examined in greater

detail. Norbert Franz points to the fact that Hirsch's activities in both the political and religious sphere in Luxembourg transpired during a particularly dynamic phase of the country's nation building. In the mid-19th century, the first effects of modern industrialization were gradually being felt. However, it was only at the end of the century that the Grand Duchy developed into one of the leading iron producers of Europe. Franz illuminates some aspects of this social and political transition in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, amongst them the causes of Luxembourg's statehood formation and its continued existence. Further examining the functions of the state beyond its core governmental functions, namely law, order and national security, Franz discusses the governmental activity regarding religious communities in particular. He concludes with an analysis of the socio-economic structure of Luxembourg's urban society and the position of Samuel Hirsch's family within a model of the municipality's social stratification.

The short period from the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 to the end of Napoleon's reign in Luxembourg in 1814 was a key period in the development of the Jewish community in Luxembourg, as Renée Wagener elaborates. Starting with a brief discussion of the situation of the Jews during the *Ancien Régime*, Wagener discusses the effects of the *décret infâme* on Jewish emancipation as part of the prequel to Samuel Hirsch's arrival in Luxembourg. While the territory of the Duchy of Luxembourg was integrated for the most part into the French "Département des Forêts", it was not until 1797 that the revolutionary French law system, and along with it the principle of equality, was implemented there. The *décret infâme* imposed by Napoleon on March 17, 1808, however, had consequences that were not merely symbolic. As a set of separate legal regulations imposed on the Jewish population, it invalidated the French Revolution's principles of equality and served as a decisive instrument for the social classification of Jews. Nonetheless its specific impact in Luxembourg remains unclear: The local Jewish community's desire to be exempt from the decree put them under pressure to conform, thus undermining Jewish particularism. Yet it was the civic rather than the social integration of the Jews that was stimulated, as Wagener shows.

In her contribution, Stephanie Schlesier explores the daily lives of the Jews who settled in Luxembourg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, surveying their religious practices and the ways in which they were able to participate in social life. She describes the relationship between Jews and Christians as a "growing closeness". Since Jews only represented a small minority of Luxembourg's population, frequent contact with the Christian inhabitants was unavoidable, specifically in areas such as business and trade, and locations such as schools and taverns. Due to their scattered settlement, Jewish inhabitants usually had Christian locals as immediate neighbors. While the sources only permit a fragmented reconstruction of

the religious life of Jews in Luxembourg at that time, Schlesier does conclude that religion occupied a very important place in the daily lives of Christians and Jews alike. Focusing on the Luxembourg Jews' religious institutions, Schlesier's research indicates that these were by and large established in the capital, and only later in smaller cities. The author also discusses Samuel Hirsch's position in the community and the role he took upon himself of ameliorator of the Jews' circumstances.

The final section of the book is dedicated to Samuel Hirsch's transition from Luxembourg to Philadelphia and his life and work in the United States. Thorsten Fuchshuber analyses Hirsch's short career as a journalist and publicist in Luxembourg. Hirsch was a founding member and almost certainly the main editor of the short-lived liberal newspaper *Der Volksfreund* (March 1848 – June 1849). In his articles, Hirsch advocated social emancipation and combatted antisemitism, as Fuchshuber shows. Engaging in fiery debates with the Jesuit-dominated Catholic newspaper *Luxemburger Wort*, Hirsch advocated against the former's attempts to repeal the emancipation of the Jews in Luxembourg. The Catholic Church's efforts to maintain power despite fundamental societal changes and the formation of the modern state provided more than just an opportunity for the articulation of anti-Judaism. Essential elements of modern antisemitism *avant la lettre* are recognizable in this battle against Jewish emancipation, since it was necessary to find other ways to harm and exclude Jews after they had successfully attained political and legal equality in Luxembourg. Hirsch's disappointment at this upsurge of anti-Judaism and the refusal of his fellow Freemasons to defend him was reason enough to accept a rabbinical appointment in the United States, despite his criticism of American democracy.

Taking a close look at the final phase of Hirsch's career, Michael A. Meyer points to the obstacles Hirsch faced in America. He was haunted by the fact that he had not been a democrat but a monarchist in Europe and seemed to have remained one. His intemperate relations with others and his position on the radical side of the Reform spectrum further alienated him from his rabbinical colleagues and from his own congregation. In defense of his political philosophy, Hirsch averred that he no longer believed that the king stood fully above his subjects; moreover, the law of the state was God's law only if the king acted in accordance with the constitution. Yet he remained critical of American democracy whose shortcomings included the oppression of minorities by a tyrannical majority. Hirsch focused particularly on America's history of black slavery, thus pointing to a topic that continues to unsettle society today. His stance on topics such as mixed marriage, celebrating the Sabbath on Sunday and mixed, family seating in the synagogue caused him to be numbered among the most radical of the prominent Jewish religious reformers in America, Meyer concludes.

The editors would like to thank the Fonds National de la Recherche of Luxembourg and the Historical Institute of the University of Luxembourg for financially supporting the publication of this volume. This support enabled the translation of the articles of Franz, Fuchshuber, Schlesier, Wagener and Wiese from German to English by Jessica Ring. We also express our gratitude to the staff of the Partizip research project, especially its directors Norbert Franz, Jean-Paul Lehnens and Sonja Kmec, for making it possible to work on this important chapter in transnational Jewish history and the modernization of Judaism within the framework of the research project on the social, economic and political participation of Luxembourg's varied population. The editors hope that this will stimulate a more in-depth exploration and analysis of the life and work of Samuel Hirsch, including the fairly unchartered role played by his long-term membership in the Freemasons lodge as well as the systematic influence of Hegelian philosophy on his philosophy of religion in general and of Judaism in particular. The work of Samuel Hirsch still has much to offer for thorough investigation in the future.

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**Part I: From Thalfang to Philadelphia:  
An Introduction to Samuel Hirsch's  
Life and Times**



Christian Wiese

## **“An Intimate Friendship with Modernity”. Samuel Hirsch’s Reform Philosophy in the Context of the Ideological Controversies of the Times**

For fifty years of active life as rabbi, both in Europe and the United States, he was the most fearless and consistent champion of enlightened liberal Judaism; and by words of mouth and pen he never tired of holding up its tenets as fundamentally the doctrine destined to be the religion of humanity, looking neither to the right nor the left, but confident of the invincible power of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

These are the reverential words engraved on the base of an eighteen foot high obelisk in Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago marking the grave of the philosopher and reformer Samuel Hirsch (June 8, 1815 – May 14, 1889). They render homage to one of the most important representatives of the nineteenth-century radical Jewish Reform in Germany and the United States, a thinker who occupies a lasting place among the many German Jewish philosophers who advanced the modernization of Jewish thought and practice in the wake of the Enlightenment, in confrontation as well as in dialogue with contemporary German culture and politics. He was, indeed, both a religious and a political thinker, and inevitably so. Jewish religious philosophy in the long, protracted era of Jewish emancipation in Germany, with the great hopes and profound disillusionments it entailed for the Jewish minority, was at no point a purely academic discipline. Particularly since it was – as was the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in general – excluded from the universities and, at the same time, compelled to constantly defend the right of the Jewish community to assert its place in German society as well as Judaism’s role as a legitimate element of modern European culture.<sup>2</sup> Jewish philosophy –

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Elmar P. Ittenbach, *Samuel Hirsch: Rabbiner – Religionsphilosoph – Reformier / Rabbi – Philosoph – Reformier* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2014), 104. This article is a revised and expanded version of Christian Wiese, “Von Dessau nach Philadelphia: Samuel Hirsch als Philosoph, Apologet und radikaler Reformier”, in Giuseppe Veltri and Christian Wiese, eds., *Jüdische Bildung und Kultur in Sachsen Anhalt von der Aufklärung bis zum Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Metropol, 2009), 363–410. I would like to thank Jessica Ring most sincerely for her accurate translation of a shorter German lecture based on that article, and Judith Frishman for her careful editing of the entire English manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> For the debates in Hirsch’s generation, see Michael A. Meyer, “Should and Can an ‘Antiquated’ Religion Become Modern? The Jewish Reform Movement in Germany as Seen by Jews and

from the representatives of the *Haskalah*, through the Jewish intellectuals of the early and mid-nineteenth century, to thinkers such as Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) and Leo Baeck (1873–1956) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – was part of an intellectual project that fought for social, political, and cultural equality. It promoted Jewish integration and transformed Judaism into a religious tradition that responded to a diverse set of challenges posed by modernity: How to reinterpret Jewish tradition in the light of contemporary non-Jewish *Wissenschaft*? How to refute religious, cultural, and political discrimination by the dominating Christian environment and make a convincing case for Jewish emancipation by embracing contemporary ideas and values without sacrificing Judaism’s distinctiveness? And how to avert the threat resulting from the explosive mixture of anti-Jewish hostility, pressure to convert or at least renounce a “separate identity”, and indifference toward Jewish tradition or even internalization of negative images of Jews and Judaism? Samuel Hirsch’s biographical and intellectual path – from his native village in a rural part of Germany to Philadelphia, and from the yeshivah to a leading role in the radical German and American Reform movement – perfectly illustrates the complexities of Jewish modernization and the way a specific trend within nineteenth-century Jewish religious philosophy responded to those challenges. By exploring Hirsch’s thought within the different geographical and intellectual contexts that shaped his distinctive approach to modern Judaism, the following reflections will touch upon crucial aspects of the Reform-oriented theology and philosophy between the 1840s and the 1880s. These include the redefinition of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, the interpretation of the tension between Jewish universalism and particularism, and the new conceptions of religious and ritual practice resulting from a new, historical, understanding of divine revelation.

## The Years in Dessau (1838–1841/42) and the Philosophical Leitmotifs of his Sermons

Yes, Father! You deserve gratitude and honor! [...] How many good things have you offered to our Fatherland, and how many good things have you offered to us, the sons of Jacob, within this our Fatherland! Once it was gloomy and dark; it was unknown that [...] ‘the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord’ (Proverbs 20:27), it was unknown that [...] ‘the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light’ (Proverbs 6:23), destined to illuminate humankind, to banish all darkness from their heart – and it became light in our dwellings! The inhabitants

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Christians”, in idem, *Judaism Within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 209–222.

of our fatherland recognized that man cannot live by bread and the mundane alone, but that a worthy life can solely be found where one wishes to live for and from what issues from the mouth. You then gave us princes who, like the dawn, announce the day of light; you endowed us with a prince who kindled the torch of *Bildung* and Enlightenment in Germany's provinces for the nations of Germany and for us in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

With this homage to the ruling family, characteristic of German Jewish sermons of the early nineteenth century, Samuel Hirsch commemorated – in a service at the Dessau synagogue in 1840 – the one-hundredth anniversary of the enlightened prince Leopold III Friedrich Franz of Anhalt-Dessau (1740 – 1817), under whose tolerant reign the Jewish congregation of Dessau had experienced a period of prosperity.<sup>4</sup> From Hirsch's point of view, the prince had embodied the hope that the path toward Jewish emancipation in Germany was irreversible and that events such as the Damascus Affair, which had unsettled the Jewish world that same year, would face the resistance of the European governments as well as the public.<sup>5</sup> “Father Franz”, according to him, had been an important initiator of equality, peace, and enlightened educational policy from which the Jewish population had profited immensely. Most notably, he had ensured that Jews enjoyed respect and that justice was done to their religious and cultural needs by promoting their synagogue services and school system. “He has built a temple for the Jews in one of his finest gardens – but he has done even more. He did not merely give them a building of wood and stone, but also elevated the Jews' temple spiritually”, particularly by encouraging a reform of the religious service.<sup>6</sup> Starting with this praise of the deceased prince, Hirsch next expressed his hope that the

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3 Samuel Hirsch, *Predigt zur hundertjährigen Geburtsfeier Sr. Hochfürstl. Durchlaucht unseres hochseligen Herzogs Leopold Friedrich Franz, am 10. August 1840 in der Synagoge zu Dessau gehalten und zum Besten der israel. Franzschule herausgegeben* (Dessau: Hermann Neubürger, 1840), 1.

4 See Erhard Hirsch, *Die Dessau-Wörlitzer Reformbewegung im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: Personen, Strukturen, Wirkungen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 151–172; idem, “Fürst Franz und die anhalt-dessauischen Juden: ‘Von der Dessauer Gemeinde ging die Emanzipation der deutschen Juden aus’”, in Evelien Goodman-Thau, ed., *Zwischen Wörlitz und Mosigkau*, Dessau-Wörlitzer Beiträge 8 (Dessau: Museum für Stadtgeschichte, 1998), 11–18.

5 Hirsch, *Predigt*, 6; however, Hirsch was profoundly dismayed by “what has been written, discussed, and believed about this horrible, dreadful [ritual murder] accusation in the midst of the splendor of European *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft*”. See Samuel Hirsch, *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen: Zur Erbauung denkender Leser* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1843), 273. For the “Damascus Affair” see Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: ‘Ritual Murder’, Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Ronald Florence, *Blood Libel: The Damascus Affair of 1840* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

6 Hirsch, *Predigt zur hundertjährigen Geburtstagsfeier*, 15.

protection and support the Jewish community of Dessau had enjoyed under the prince's rule would also be granted by the current ruler, Duke Leopold Friedrich (1794–1871), and his wife Friederike (1797–1850).<sup>7</sup>

Who was this young rabbi in Dessau, the city in which Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1789) had been born, and what was his personal and religious background? Hirsch was born on June 8, 1815 in a small village in the Hunsrück region called Thalfang, which he himself later remembered as a place characterized by peaceful and tolerant relations between the Christian and Jewish population.<sup>8</sup> The gifted son of Salomon Hirsch, a livestock dealer, and his wife Sara Gottlieb left Thalfang after his bar mitzvah, visiting the yeshivah in Metz led by the Orthodox Talmudist Aron Worms (1754–1836) and, from 1830, a yeshivah in Mainz.<sup>9</sup> After those years of training in the field of Jewish religious tradition, during which he also engaged in clandestine autodidactic secular studies, Hirsch eventually enrolled at the University of Bonn on June 1, 1835, with special permission of the Prussian authorities since he had no official “Abitur”-certificate. He studied philosophy there until the summer of 1837, attending lectures on history, literature, and even on Christian theology and dogmatics, chiefly under the tutelage of the eminent Protestant theologian Carl Immanuel Nitzsch (1787–1868), who introduced him to Schleiermacher's thought.<sup>10</sup> From November 18, 1837 until September 24, 1838, he enrolled in the philosophy department at the University of Berlin, where he studied philosophy, oriental and

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7 Ibid., 23.

8 Samuel Hirsch, *Das Judentum, der christliche Staat und die moderne Kritik: Briefe zur Beleuchtung der Judenfrage von Bruno Bauer* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1843), 14. For his biography, see Heinz Monz, “Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889): Ein jüdischer Reformator aus dem Hunsrück”, *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 17, 1 (1991), 159–180, and Ittenbach, *Samuel Hirsch*, 12–45.

9 Ittenbach, 16; and see Bernhard Felsenthal, “Gedächtnisrede”, in Chicago Sinai Congregation, *In Memory of Dr. Samuel Hirsch, Rabbi Emeritus Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, Philadelphia* (Chicago: S. Ettlinger, 1889), 23–25, here 23. This information can also be found in the article on Samuel Hirsch in *Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner*, vol. 1: *Die Rabbiner der Emanzipationszeit in den deutschen, böhmischen und großpolnischen Ländern 1781–1871*, Michael Brocke and Julius Carlebach, eds., arranged by Carsten Wilke (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2004), 445–447, here 445.

10 For Nitzsch, see Friedrich Schweitzer, “Kirche als Thema der praktischen Theologie: Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, sein wissenschaftstheoretisches Programm und dessen Zukunftsbedeutung”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 90 (1993), 71–86; Henning Theurich, *Theorie und Praxis: Die Predigt bei Carl Immanuel Nitzsch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, “Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, 1787–1868”, in *Bonner Gelehrte. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Wissenschaften in Bonn, 150 Jahre Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1818–1968*, vol. 1: *Evangelische Theologie* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1968), 15–30.

religious studies and where he was strongly influenced by Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–1872) as well as the Hegelian philosopher Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801–1893). Whether or not he also briefly studied at the University of Leipzig remains uncertain. What is certain is that while passing Dessau on his way back from Berlin to Thalfang, he was appointed rabbi of the Duchy Anhalt-Dessau on November 18, 1838, as the successor of Rabbi Joseph Wolf (1762–1826) – apparently not without strong and enduring opposition by influential members of the community.<sup>11</sup> On February 10, 1839 Hirsch received his rabbinical ordination from the radical reformer Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860).

Hirsch’s impressive literary debut was a bar mitzvah sermon he delivered on June 17, 1838, while still in Berlin, entitled “What Is Judaism, and What Is Its Relationship to Other Religions?” – the first reference to the topic that would engage him throughout his entire life. The intentions of the sermon were threefold and resonated with the same elements of thinking that permeated all of his work: firstly, the attempt to “obliterate indifferentism in Judaism”; secondly, the goal to unite the Orthodox and Reform interpretations of the ceremonies into “a third, higher vantage point”; and finally, the determination to convince the state that the efforts of the “more recent Judaism” were also still “truly revealed religion”, bearing no relation to deism.<sup>12</sup> In the preface to the sermon, Hirsch criticized the inadequacy of the apologetics formulated by Jewish theologians of his era, which concentrated on refuting Jesus’ miracles and the Christian dogmas of Original Sin and the trinity. He claimed that it was much more important to philosophically establish a “principle of Judaism”, “which could recognize Christianity in its truth while maintaining its own validity”.<sup>13</sup> What characterized Judaism, in contrast to Christianity, was its foundational revelation – a revelation that created the self-consciousness of an entire people, the “history of monotheism’s confrontation with polytheism”, which had also become the foundation of Christianity, making the latter a “flower of Judaism”.<sup>14</sup> His crucial argument for the continuing legitimacy of Judaism’s existence alongside Christianity, however, was that, contrary to the latter’s claim to being the true realiza-

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<sup>11</sup> For the opposition and bitter conflicts Hirsch was exposed to in Dessau, see Ittenbach, *Samuel Hirsch*, 18–21; for Hirsch’s period in Dessau, see Bernd G. Ulrich, “Samuel Hirsch als Rabbiner in Dessau”, *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Anhaltinische Landeskunde* 16 (2007), 104–132.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Hirsch, *Was ist Judentum und was dessen Verhältniss zu andern Religionen? Predigt zur Einsegnungsfeier seiner beiden Zöglinge Theodor und Oskar Heymann gehalten am 17. Juni 1838* (Berlin: Heymann, 1838), 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

tion of the Hebrew Bible's messianic promises, the Jewish tradition kept alive the awareness that the victory of good over evil had yet to be won, even after the coming of Jesus. Moreover, the Jewish people, as the true Servant of the Lord, were God's instrument for the ultimate fulfillment of the universal messianic world.<sup>15</sup> What constituted the essence of Judaism was not a binding doctrinal theology, but rather its history: "While all other peoples still languished in the darkness of heathenism, God chose us in order to impart to us the truth of the One Holy God, of the loving Father of all creatures. He has preserved us through all the storms of time, despite all the instruments enrolled to destroy us; he will forever preserve us."<sup>16</sup> The people of Israel had been chosen to be the priests of God and to bring all people to God – not "by means of proselytism" or by "shouting others down", but by serving through actions as an example of virtue and morality. According to Hirsch, the ceremonies of Judaism were not a critical factor in that process but could – if understood correctly – symbolically express the great extent to which Jews were indebted to God, and "serve as a reminder of the favors our Nation has received from God". The period of "iconoclasm against ceremonies", as Hirsch characterized the debates at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had been overcome "with the blessed era of the Enlightenment": Orthodox as well as non-Talmudic Jews should now acknowledge each other as legitimate Jews and live according to God's will in order to bring about the messianic age.<sup>17</sup>

The four years Hirsch spent in Dessau are of particular significance for the interpretation of his intellectual growth. It was during this period of his life that he developed the central themes of his sermons as well as his primary philosophical work into an overall concept of religious philosophy. The key leitmotifs, found in varying forms throughout his works, are: the search for a philosophical "principle" or "essence" of Judaism that differentiated it from Christianity and determined its significance for the future of religion and society in modern Europe; the firm belief in the chosenness of the Jewish people and Judaism's providential role in human history; and the question concerning the appropriate valuation of Jewish rites and ceremonies in the context of Judaism's Reform movement. In 1842, before leaving Dessau, he received his doctoral degree from the University of Leipzig,<sup>18</sup> based on what later became the first chap-

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>18</sup> The records are located in the archive of the University of Leipzig (Phil.Fak.Prom. 00101, May 26, 1841). The documents show that influential members of the Dessau congregation encouraged him to pursue his doctoral studies and funded the costs involved.

ter (entitled “Das Ansieh der aktiven Religiosität und der Abfall von ihr”) of his major philosophical work, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*. It was this book that made the 26 year old rabbi widely known as one of the most creative philosophers of Judaism alongside Salomon Ludwig Steinheim (1789–1866)<sup>19</sup> and Salomon Formstecher (1808–1889)<sup>20</sup> and – with Samuel Holdheim,<sup>21</sup> David Einhorn (1809–1879),<sup>22</sup> and Abraham Geiger (1810–1874)<sup>23</sup> – as one of the leading theoreticians of the Jewish Reform movement in Germany and later in the United States.<sup>24</sup>

Hirsch first formulated the theology of his Dessau rabbinate in his early sermons, which he published under the title *Friede, Freiheit und Einheit* (“Peace, Freedom, and Unity”). Obviously, he developed his thinking not merely in con-

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19 See Aharon Shear-Jashuv, *The Theology of Salomon Ludwig Steinheim* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Julius H. Schoeps, Anja Bagel-Bohlan, Margarete Heitmann, and Dieter Lohmeyer, eds., *Philo des 19. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Salomon Ludwig Steinheim* (Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York: Olms, 1998).

20 See Bettina Kratz-Ritter, *Salomon Formstecher: Ein deutscher Reformrabbiner* (Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York: Olms, 1991); Thomas Meyer, “Salomon Formstechers ‘Religion des Geistes’ – Versuch einer Neulektüre”, *Aschkenas* 13 (2003), 441–460.

21 See Christian Wiese, ed., *Redefining Judaism in an Age of Emancipation: Comparative Perspectives on Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

22 See Christian Wiese, “Samuel Holdheim’s Most Powerful Comrade in Conviction: David Einhorn and the Debate Concerning Jewish Universalism in the Radical Reform Movement”, in idem, *Redefining Judaism in an Age of Emancipation*, 307–373.

23 See Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Abraham Geiger’s Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Christian Wiese, Walter Homolka, and Thomas Brechenmacher, eds., *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne: Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

24 For Samuel Hirsch’s intellectual path and philosophy, see, e.g., Gershon Greenberg, “Samuel Hirsch, Jewish Hegelian”, *Revue des études juives* 129 (1970), 205–215; idem, “Religion and History According to Samuel Hirsch”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972), 103–124; idem, “Samuel Hirsch’s American Judaism”, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (1973), 362–382; idem, “The Historical Origins of God and Man: Samuel Hirsch’s Luxembourg Writings”, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 20, 1 (1975), 129–148; idem, “The Messianic Foundations of American Jewish Thought: David Einhorn and Samuel Hirsch”, *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 6 (1975), 115–226; idem, “‘Religionswissenschaft’ and Early Reform Jewish Thought: Samuel Hirsch and David Einhorn”, in Andreas Gotzmann and Christian Wiese, eds., *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness: Identities – Controversies – Perspectives* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 110–144; Manfred Vogel, “Does Samuel Hirsch Anthropologize Religion?”, *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981), 298–322; Kenneth Koltun-Fromm, “Public Religion in Samson Raphael Hirsch and Samuel Hirsch’s Interpretation of Religious Symbolism”, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 69–105; Irene Kajon, “Hegel, la Wissenschaft des Judentums et Samuel Hirsch”, in Gérard Bensussan, ed., *La philosophie allemande dans la pensée juive* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1997), 115–127.

frontation with contemporary philosophy and the political discourse on Jewish emancipation but also in dialogue with his congregation, whose character, behavior, and problems challenged him to reflect on the plight of the Jewish community at the beginning of the 1840s. In his inaugural sermon on March 23, 1839, Hirsch, who felt blessed to have been given the opportunity “to work as a young inconnu in one of the larger communities in Germany”,<sup>25</sup> invoked the Jewish people’s consciousness of freedom. This freedom despite centuries of persecution, had not allowed them, as “God’s chosen sufferers and fighters”, to be dissuaded from fulfilling their covenantal tasks and from reconciling humankind with God. According to Hirsch, if this state of being at peace with God were to be visibly lived in the Jewish community, then Jews would be granted emancipation automatically, and the non-Jews would “accept us into the great league of humankind as brothers”.<sup>26</sup> This, however, would only happen if the Jews managed to overcome the “wrong type of Enlightenment” that led to the deadening of religious sentiments, and aspired to be renewed and permeated by “the spirit of the divine Torah”.<sup>27</sup>

Further elements of Hirsch’s sermons consist in a justification of Judaism’s religious value for human history as well as for contemporary society. The Jewish tradition, according to the Dessau rabbi, was based on divine moral laws rather than irrational dogma, which facilitated a “profound affiliation of all things human with the Divine”.<sup>28</sup> By virtue of their divine election for this task, the people of Israel had become the “exemplary model for all nations”. However, because of their historical misfortune they had, at the same time, also become a “warning sign” that would teach all the nations “that the state as well as the life of the state could only persist and achieve its goal if the mundane and the spiritual would mutually inform each other”.<sup>29</sup> This was the divine meaning of Israel’s dispersion in the Diaspora: it gave the Jewish people the opportunity to spread *Bildung*, scholarship, and the divine truth of the Holy Bible within European history. Thus, in the present, most of the nations, and particularly “the enlightened man of the German Fatherland”, had come to understand that “God had but one will, and that He requires man to lead a free life, a human-divine life”.<sup>30</sup>

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25 Samuel Hirsch, *Friede, Freiheit und Einheit: Sechs Predigten gehalten in der Synagoge zu Dessau* (Dessau: Hermann Neubürger, 1839), i.

26 *Ibid.*, 16.

27 *Ibid.*, 21–22.

28 *Ibid.*, 48–49.

29 *Ibid.*, 50.

30 *Ibid.*, 52.

As far as the actual situation of the Jewish minority in Germany was concerned, Hirsch emphasized that the state supported its citizens’ religious education and assigned responsibility to the Jews themselves: The state was indeed required to recognize freedom of conscience, and the Jewish people’s desire for equal participation in governmental and social life was of course justified. Yet German Jews had to “renounce that gift” if it meant abandoning Jewish tradition and identity. In their struggles for equality, if anything the Jews in Germany had attempted to conceal their religion, thus failing to convince the state they were worthy of emancipation. They could earn the trust of the state solely by living an exemplary religious life: “... then they would gladly recognize us as free men, as free men capable of leading others to freedom. Then we could enroll our power for the benefit of the state and humanity; then Israel and humanity will head toward a felicitous future, one so eloquently depicted by the prophets as the perfection of humanity.”<sup>31</sup> The Hebrew Bible, as a testimony of the history of Israel’s election for this noble task, should fill the Jews with pride and prevent the increasing indifference toward Jewish tradition, including the inclination to convert to Christianity. Hirsch’s collection of sermons culminated in reflections upon “Israel’s mission”: While the Greeks had contributed to the history of humankind’s development a sense of art and beauty, the Romans a sense of justice and law, and the Germans the “depth of soul” (*Gemüthstiefe*), Israel had given the world “the true religion.”<sup>32</sup> The Jewish people’s priestly role was, in Hirsch’s eyes, the main justification for the right of the Jews to participate in the life of the European nations and their obligation to hold on to their religious lifestyle rather than simply merging in the non-Jewish society:

Israel should be the center of all nations, the unifying link between all intellectual tendencies, the heart of all spiritual life – it should represent the realm of religion. [...] Israel represents [...] the blood of humankind, its seat of life. And as the blood perfuses all parts of the body, Israel in the Diaspora has, thanks to God’s wonderful guidance, permeated all nations, all the parts of humankind’s body. And as the blood again and again draws new strength from the nourishment with which the body is provided, Israel, too, appropriates each true progress of humankind and draws from it new strength for her existence and for her activities. And as the blood, while circulating through all parts of the body, should not itself be transformed into those parts, should the body stay healthy and not begin to putrefy, Israel, while permeating all nations, should not be transformed into a part of those nations, should humankind remain healthy. And as the blood should not wish that all parts of the body dissolve into the blood, Israel, too, must not wish that all human beings call themselves Israel.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 52–54.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 101–102.

Central to Hirsch's thoughts during the Dessau period was thus his argument for the Jews' participation in European society and culture while simultaneously retaining a distinct, independent religious and cultural identity, which he grounded theologically on Israel's universal, historical mission. Hirsch's motivation was twofold, i. e., an attempt to defend Judaism's religio-cultural relevance in the modern era against the manifold anti-Jewish implications of contemporary theology and philosophy, as well as the wish to strengthen the Jewish minority's loyalty to their own religion and history. These can be found in systematized form in his major work, which he had originally announced as *Das System der religiösen Anschauung der Juden und sein Verhältnis zum Heidenthum und zur absoluten Philosophie*. As Hirsch wrote to his mentor Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) in April 1841, he had ambitiously planned this work as a three-volume study, each comprising three parts (“Apologetics”: religious philosophy, philosophy of religion, and historical theology; “Theoretical Theology”: theology, cosmology, and anthropology; “Practical Theology”: morals, ethics, and pneumatology).<sup>34</sup> The first and ultimately only volume of this work was almost 900 pages long and published in 1842 under the title *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*. It was designed to speak to “theologians of all denominations as well as to educated non-theologians”, and even, as Hirsch wrote in his preface, “readers unpracticed in philosophical thoughts, although we do not want to be read with a cup of coffee on a sofa. Rather, we have those readers in mind [...] for whom [...] it is worth the trouble to make the mental effort to gain religious conviction”.<sup>35</sup> The apologetic intention is obvious when Hirsch emphasizes how much the Jews felt denigrated by the enduring Christian stereotypes of Judaism and their being merely tolerated rather than accepted as an equal part of society. This despite their liberation from the ghettos and subsequent sincere efforts to become acquainted with and embrace the German language, thought and *Bildung*. “One tolerates only what one wishes to be rid of but as yet is unable to eliminate; which is appalling and the result of the temporary imperfection of human conditions. If the state merely tolerates our religion, it feels obliged in its inner essence to bring about a time in which it no longer needs to tolerate it, i. e. in which it works toward the annihilation of Judaism. Can we, indeed, bear this any longer? If our religion means anything at all to us, are we not obligated to

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<sup>34</sup> See Greenberg, “Samuel Hirsch, Jewish Hegelian”, 209.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden oder das Prinzip der jüdischen Religionsanschauung und sein Verhältnis zum Heidenthum, Christenthum und zur absoluten Philosophie dargestellt und mit den erläuterten Beweisstellen aus der heiligen Schrift, den Talmudim und Midraschim versehen* (Leipzig: Hunger, 1842; reprint Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York: Olms, 1986), xxxii.

purge it of this disgrace?”<sup>36</sup> Instead of allowing Judaism to be considered a “non-divine, abnormal moment in contemporary humankind”,<sup>37</sup> Jews – and Jewish philosophy in particular – had to engage in the noble task of defending Judaism by means of the most modern insights of *Wissenschaft*, demonstrating its divine character as well as its cultural contribution to modernity.

In his *Religionsphilosophie*, Hirsch further developed his intellectual justification of the Jewish religion,<sup>38</sup> arguing against Hegel who, in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, interprets the supposedly exclusive “spirit of Judaism” and its “particularistic God” as an outgrown stage in the unfolding of the divine spirit.<sup>39</sup> Hirsch placed special value on demonstrating that Judaism was capable of generating a systematic religious philosophy based on its own religious sources, including the Bible, the Talmud, Midrash, and the commentaries. It would incorporate Hegelian thought but would at the same time subversively turn it on its head, refuting particularly some of Hegel’s assumptions and conclusions regarding Judaism, especially his famous statement: “The belief in something divine, in something great cannot live in excrements. A lion has no room in a nutshell; the infinite spirit has no room in the dungeon of a Jewish soul.”<sup>40</sup>

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36 Ibid., vi.

37 Ibid.

38 For Hirsch’s *Religionsphilosophie*, see Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Die Geschichte der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie in der Neuzeit*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Vortrupp-Verl., 1935), 93–132; Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1968), 120–139; Julius Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums. Mit einer Standortbestimmung von Esther Seidel und einer biographischen Einführung von Fritz Bamberg* (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2000); Gershon Greenberg, *Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 171–204.

39 For Hegel’s attitude toward Judaism, see, e.g., Micha Brumlik, *Deutscher Geist und Judentum: Das Verhältnis des philosophischen Idealismus zum Judentum* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000), 196–249; Gudrun Hentges, “Das Janusgesicht der Aufklärung: Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus in der Philosophie von Kant, Fichte und Hegel”, in Samuel Salzborn, ed., *Antisemitismus – Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Gießen: Netzwerk für politische Bildung, Kultur und Kommunikation, 2004), 11–32.

40 “Der Glaube an etwas Göttliches, an etwas Großes, kann nicht im Kote wohnen. Der Löwe hat nicht Raum in einer Nuß; Der unendliche Geist hat keinen Raum im Kerker einer Judensee.” Georg W. F. Hegel, “Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal”, in Hermann Nohl, ed., *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften. Nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1907), 241–342, here 312. For Hirsch’s attitude toward Hegel’s philosophy, see Emil L. Fackenheim, “Samuel Hirsch and Hegel”, in idem, *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 21–40; William Kluback, “The Jewish Response to Hegel: Samuel Hirsch and Hermann Cohen”, *The Owl of Minerva* 18 (1986), 5–12.

At the center of this interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity within the context of Hirsch's refutation of Hegel is the problem of Original Sin and free will. He read Hegel's religious philosophy as a modern variant of the Pauline theology of Original Sin and incarnation that, in Hirsch's view, radically contradicts the Jewish worldview and conception of humankind and is a remnant of "heathenism" (*Heidenthum*). "The fundamental principle of Judaism" is not the notion of Original Sin, but the knowledge that evil "should remain a possibility and never become a reality".<sup>41</sup> In Hirsch's opinion, the truth of Judaism as an "absolute religion", as exemplified in the figure of Abraham, lay in its silent witnessing of the principle of moral freedom and in the protest against Christianity's anthropological pessimism.<sup>42</sup> It is Israel's providential duty to safeguard the prophetic concept of freedom and moral responsibility throughout history and to declare humanity Judaism's most precious legacy. In contrast, as a missionary world religion, Christianity diluted its Jewish legacy by incorporating pagan elements introduced by Paul. Nonetheless, Hirsch (as Moses Mendelssohn before him and as Abraham Geiger after him) conceded that Christianity did have a world-historical "Christian mission": the dissemination of Jewish concepts and values throughout the nations of the world.<sup>43</sup> However, Judaism too has a universal mission: for Jews to live their lives as an example of the belief in the one God and of the ethics of freedom in their role as the "light to the nations". In that way, they would contribute to the future kingdom of God in a world of peace and justice.<sup>44</sup>

In consequence, Hirsch's *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden* culminates in reflections on the character of Judaism's messianic promises. They demonstrate that he – like the Reform movement in general – was challenged to account for the relationship between universalism and particularism in Judaism in order to counter anti-Jewish attacks against the integration of the Jewish minority into European societies. Hirsch made it very clear, in contrast to later versions of Reform theology, that Judaism was not a "confession" but a "nationality", and that Jews were Jews by virtue of their birth. He clarified, however, that his concept of "nationality" was a spiritual rather than a political one. Judaism's national character defines its historical existence, and, interestingly, even the "messianic age" (*Messiaszeit*) of the "absolute religion" – in which all peoples will realize peace on earth and will recognize God as the one God and all human beings as His free image – contains an enduring particularistic element. The na-

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<sup>41</sup> Samuel Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, 41–42.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 863–879.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 832–839.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 861–868.

tions will reconcile themselves with the people of Israel, will “become fond of them” (*es lieb gewinnen*) and bring them to Jerusalem. Not for the purpose of founding a state there, but rather to “establish the most exalted form of worship, the Jewish national religion” (*um dort den Cultus aller Culten, den jüdischen Nationalcultus zu errichten*). It would “be honored and loved by all humans who will indirectly participate in it while Israel will participate directly” (*der von allen Menschen geehrt und geliebt sein, an dem alle Menschen mittelbar, Israel aber unmittelbar Theil haben wird*).<sup>45</sup> This vision of the future reflects a theology of history inspired by the belief in chosenness, even in the messianic age, which aims to preserve Jewish identity by asserting the uniqueness and superiority of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity.<sup>46</sup> In terms of the definition of the relationship between universalism and particularism, Hirsch’s concept of the messianic future was initially markedly different than the one offered, for example, in Samuel Holdheim’s book *Das Ceremonialgesetz im Messiasreich* (1845), according to which Israel’s universal messianic role would cease at the end of days and give way to universal truth.<sup>47</sup> In his later writings, however, Holdheim came much closer to Hirsch’s position, taking the historical and ‘particular’ aspects of Jewish tradition more seriously<sup>48</sup> and even speaking – in his work *Ha-emunah*

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45 Ibid., 882.

46 For the concept of messianism in the early Reform movement, see the article by George Y. Kohler in this volume and his “Einleitung: Die Wiederentdeckung des Messianismus in der jüdischen Reformtheologie der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts”, in idem, ed., *Der jüdische Messianismus im Zeitalter der Emanzipation: Reinterpretationen zwischen davidischem Königtum und endzeitlichem Sozialismus*, Mar’ot: Die jüdische Moderne in Quellen und Werken, vol. 2 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter and Oldenbourg, 2014), 1–91; for a critical analysis of Hirsch’s interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, see Judith Frishman, “Good Enough for the Goyim? Samuel Hirsch and Samuel Holdheim on Christianity”, in Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner, eds., *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 271–287.

47 See Samuel Holdheim, *Das Ceremonialgesetz im Messiasreich: Als Vorläufer einer größern Schrift über die religiöse Reform des Judenthums: Nebst einem kritischen Anhang über den Aufsatz: Reformbestrebungen und Emancipation in der Zeitschrift für die Interessen des Judenthums* (Schwerin: Kürschner, 1845). This very much corresponds with Abraham Geiger’s attitude; see Michael A. Meyer, “Universalism and Jewish Unity in the Thought of Abraham Geiger”, in Jacob Katz, ed., *The Role of Religion in Modern Jewish History* (Cambridge, MA: AJS, 1975), 91–107.

48 See, for instance, Samuel Holdheim, *Die Erhaltung des Judenthums im Kampfe mit der Zeit: Ein Bild aus der Vergangenheit belehrend für die Gegenwart. Predigt gehalten im Gotteshause der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin (am 11. Mai 1851)* (Berlin: L. Lassar, 1851). For the transformation of Holdheim’s thought, see Michael A. Meyer, “‘Most of My Brethren Find Me Unacceptable’: The Controversial Career of Rabbi Samuel Holdheim”, in Wiese, *Redefining Judaism in an Age of Emancipation*, 3–22.

*veha-deah* (1857) – of Judaism’s lasting ethnic dimension. In his chapter “Von dem Ceremonial- oder Ritualgesetz” (On the Ceremonial Law or Ritual Law), Holdheim now emphasized that cultural integration was not a matter of extinguishing the characteristic features of the Jewish people, of divesting Judaism of its historical shell and “merging it as a monotheistic people with other peoples”. On the contrary: “Israel would never cease” – as Holdheim’s imperative now put it – “to be a historical people, [nor] Judaism to be a historical religion.”<sup>49</sup> Concerning the messianic age, this new emphasis on an “inextinguishable historical characteristic” replaced Holdheim’s original concept of Israel’s eventual merging with other nations with the conviction of the Jewish people’s “eternal distinctiveness”.<sup>50</sup> In this regard both Holdheim’s and Hirsch’s thoughts strongly differed from the Reform philosophy of their ally David Einhorn (1809 – 1879). The latter, despite its characteristic emphasis on the “priestly people’s” essential distinctiveness during the course of history, firmly insisted that this role was, indeed, limited, outlining an image of the future according to which one day all “natural special characteristics” would vanish.<sup>51</sup>

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**49** Samuel Holdheim, *Ha-emunah veba-deah: Jüdische Glaubens- und Sittenlehre. Leitfaden beim Religionsunterricht der jüdischen Jugend. Zunächst für die Religionsschule der jüdischen Reformgemeinde zu Berlin* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1857).

**50** For a critical view of this shift, see David Einhorn, “Stein’s Thora umizwah und Holdheim’s Haemuna wehadea”, *Sinai* 1, 4 (1856/57), 507–511; continuation under the title “Holdheim’s Religionsbuch: Haemuna wehadea”, *Sinai* 4 (1859/60), no. 2, 33–38; no. 3, 65–71; no. 4, 97–102; no. 5, 129–137; Holdheim’s views are cited in no. 5, 136. Einhorn rightly saw Holdheim as taking a new direction and praised the latter’s emphasis on Judaism’s remaining historical distinctiveness, criticizing, however, that he went too far by insisting on the continuation of these “distinctive characteristics” in the messianic era. This, he argued, was a conspicuous return to particularistic thinking, against which one must protest determinedly (*ibid.*). Einhorn thus implicitly accused Holdheim of a covert return to rabbinical thinking, for in his view the idea of a continuation of the “eternally separate hereditary nobility” even in the kingdom of the Messiah was a characteristic feature of the Talmud. The fact that Holdheim embraced this Talmudic concept was, from Einhorn’s point of view, a deviation from contemporary Reform Jewish interpretations of Jewish universalism. See David Einhorn, “Prinzipielle Differenzpunkte zwischen altem und neuem Judentum”, *Sinai* 1 (1856/57), no. 6, 162–164; no. 7, 193–197; no. 10, 290–294; no. 11, 333–335; no. 12, 365–371; 2 (1857/58), no. 1, 399–404; no. 5, 540–544; no. 6, 572–576; 7 (1862/63), no. 12, 320–327, here 323–325.

**51** See David Einhorn, “Holdheim’s Religionsbuch: Haemuna wehadea”, *Sinai* 4, 5 (1859/1860), 136–137: “The messianic kingdom shall no longer have need of it [...], nor of the characteristic spiritual life of historical Judaism. Whatever retains any power of sanctification in this spiritual life, in the history of Israel, even amid a messianic humanity, shall and must penetrate the totality of peoples and wed itself closely to their peculiarities, just as our spiritual life as well as our history has become at least in part the innermost property of countless non-Israelites. It is impossible for this to be claimed exclusively for the Israelite tribe without at the same time grant-

In addition to presenting his system of thought and reform theory in his *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, Hirsch also undertook to make his ideas accessible for a lay audience, particularly by publishing a collection entitled *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen* (1843). He based this book on sermons he had delivered or drafted in Dessau between 1839 and 1841/42 while working on his academic book.<sup>52</sup> These texts offer a glimpse of his thinking during this period as well as the way he tried to win over the Israelite Congregation in Dessau for his interpretation of Judaism. The sermons were devoted to the messianic period (*Messiaszeit*), the history of the Jews, the “essence of Judaism”, a comprehensive reflection upon the specifically Jewish rituals and festivals, and questions regarding Israel’s national character and messianic mission. They were to convey to his congregation what he had characterized in his introduction to the *Religionsphilosophie* as the task “to bring to mind the distinctiveness, the positive worldview of the Jewish religion and of the forms it has taken, i.e. to understand its ceremonies and customs in their absolute necessity and to elevate them in the hearts, making them a vital deed, to build up rather than pull down, to preserve rather than abandon [...]”.<sup>53</sup>

One of the leitmotifs of Hirsch’s sermons is the urgent warning not to sacrifice the Jewish faith and its distinctiveness for equality and integration. Even if the price to be paid was continuing deprivation of rights, the Jewish minority should hold on to precisely those messianic hopes which prompted non-Jews to argue that Jews were incapable of “loving their present Fatherland and to be loyal to it with their entire soul”.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, Hirsch tried to dissipate potential religious doubts caused by the people of Israel’s suffering in history, the contempt with which the nations confronted them, and Judaism’s contempo-

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ing it eternal holiness. By contrast, whatever no longer possesses any power of sanctification whatsoever, or at least not in the messianic stage in Jewish spiritual life, shall and must perish along with the distinctive features of the tribe in the world-encompassing divine covenant. This despite its appeal to the Jewish nature as charming and delightful, and to the national egoism as worthy of continued preservation. Judaism, as a historical religion, shall become the common property of the nations, but then the priestly people shall exit the scene just as once the Aaronic priesthood did with the destruction of the temple, [...] then shall Israel merge entirely with the nations amongst whom it lives in dispersion.”

52 Samuel Hirsch, *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen. Zur Erbauung denkender Leser* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1843), vi-vii.

53 Hirsch, *Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, ix.

54 Hirsch, *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen*, 2–3. In his further argument Hirsch rejects the image of Judaism as a nation that would wait throughout history for a cruel revenge, hoping for the annihilation of the nations in the Messianic period (*ibid.*, 9–10). Cf. the article of George Y. Kohler in this volume.

rary inner crises. He reminded his congregation of God's covenantal loyalty: "It is He who allowed us to be despised, persecuted and oppressed, and who, even today, according to his wise, fatherly decision, tolerates our being powerless among the nations."<sup>55</sup> Hirsch held a firm belief in Israel's divine education and purification, which was designed to make God's chosen people an instrument of the fight against sin, to make it a people, "in whose spirit the Lord's teaching sits enthroned, in whose heart it has been inscribed for eternity."<sup>56</sup> Therefore the Jews should continue to trust in God's covenantal love, instead of allowing themselves to be deterred from their divine mission by the resistance of their non-Jewish environment against their providential role. The wish "to be acknowledged within the German Fatherland as Germany's sons and to be permitted [...] not only to love God and the King, God and his anointed one, but also to worship them", had to be borne by the awareness "that the people of Israel serves the Fatherland to a much greater extent if they hold fast to their religion."<sup>57</sup> Hirsch combined this plea for a patient loyalty to Jewish identity, despite potential disillusionment in view of the delayed process of emancipation, with a peculiar religious legitimization of the king: the latter, as he put it, fulfilled the divine will – in his capacity as God's "anointed one" – by provisionally continuing to exclude the German Jews from full political participation.<sup>58</sup>

Hirsch's sermons on the "Essence of Judaism" particularly emphasized Israel's role as a divine instrument for humankind's gradual liberation from heathenism.<sup>59</sup> They were devoted to the central themes of his years in Dessau: the rejection of a misguided turn to Enlightenment and *Bildung* for the sake of mundane indulgence whose price was the abandonment of true religiosity,<sup>60</sup> and the lament about an increasing alienation from tradition as well as the inclination to "divest [the Bible] of its holiness".<sup>61</sup> Hirsch coupled this to an urgent reminder that the Jews embrace their universal mission and remain – against all odds – visible in modern society as "Israelites".<sup>62</sup> In this period Hirsch still clearly de-

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 41. Should the performance of the Jewish ceremonies inhibit "the divine goal of the state", it would even be forbidden by God; however, he believed, the overwhelming majority of these ceremonies served the same task "for which the state has been established by Him" (ibid., 45). See the article of Judith Frishman in this volume.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 82–84.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>62</sup> See ibid., 125: "Get up, shine brightly in the darkness that reigns over the world; shine as an Israelite son and an Israelite daughter. Thank God for being an Israelite and for having a share in

efined the “essence” of Judaism as rooted in the holiness and authority of God’s revelation in the Torah. This essence would not persist without a lived religiosity, a metaphorical language as well as specific forms, and should not be reduced to an allegedly purely religious faith, liberated from the burden of tradition.

The period of rationalistic reform projects, which were based on the assumption that “pure Judaism had been found as soon as one had removed everything that – alone – is capable of expressing and giving testimony to the pure Judaism in our lives”, had definitely come to an end.<sup>63</sup> This is why Hirsch’s sermons focus largely on providing a detailed account of the spiritual meaning of the Jewish “forms”, the rites and festivals, hoping thereby to stop their abandonment. For many wished to escape the dictatorship of the ritual tradition and a traditionalism that slavishly worshipped the literal meaning of the Torah, “until the letter grows into entire books and the spirit is overwhelmed by the fine and overly subtle distinctions, circumventions and artifices”.<sup>64</sup> It seems obvious that Hirsch, like so many of the contemporary reformers, regarded rabbinical literature as an “obscure product of dark centuries”<sup>65</sup> – an assessment evocative of contemporary Protestant stereotypes concerning Judaism’s “legalism”. Yet he was equally aware of the fact that many of those Jews who dissociated themselves from their tradition did so mainly for shame of the Jewish rituals and a desire to avert social discrimination.<sup>66</sup> In order to counter such feelings as well as the widespread opinion among contemporary scholars that Judaism was “a specter,

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the lofty Israelite mission. Dismiss the misguided shame that prevents you from making the Israelites’ light shine. Don’t be ashamed to be called baneful (*Finsterling*) by those who are baneful, nor to be considered less enlightened by the obscurantists (*Dunkelmänner*), who are floundering about in the mist of finitude and temporality.”

**63** *Ibid.*, 147.

**64** *Ibid.*, 170.

**65** *Ibid.*, 247. “Read the multi-volume works of the commentaries on the commentaries to the commentaries, of the commentaries on the commentaries to the Talmud, which itself intended to be only the – albeit transmitted – commentary on the observance of the Law. Read it, and you will ask yourselves with astonishment and wonder, where you have gotten. You will be appalled by this aberration of the human spirit! [...] This and that is discussed there, everything imaginable is being treated, the most pedantic issues are given inordinate importance – but you will hear nothing about religion; in the name of religion, religion is obliterated; the name of religion is intended to sanctify a wit and subtlety that otherwise – as can be sensed – would be considered pathetic” (*ibid.*, 246).

**66** *Ibid.*, 178–179. For Hirsch’s and the Reform movement’s dilemma regarding the rabbinic tradition, see Judith Frishman, “The Pitfalls of Counterhistory: Abraham Geiger and Samuel Hirsch on Rabbinic Judaism”, in Wiese, Homolka, and Brechenmacher, *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne*, 341–358.

an inanimate body”,<sup>67</sup> Hirsch attempted to convince both Jews and non-Jews of the deeper meaning of the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws as well as the traditional Jewish festivals. It was only by respecting and actively living their own religion, he insisted, that Jews in post-Enlightenment Europe would be able to “reconcile the world with Judaism”,<sup>68</sup> whereas the idea that denying it would help eradicate hatred against Jews was an illusion. The task of bearing witness to Judaism in the world, however, necessarily included the observance of the Jewish religion’s external customs, which Hirsch, as we shall see, interpreted in terms of a symbolic expression of Judaism’s essential teachings.

Like Hirsch’s *Religionsphilosophie der Juden*, his sermons on Israel’s “mission” eventually led to thoughts on the character and relevance of Judaism’s messianic hopes. They are particularly important for an understanding of his philosophy since they demonstrate the extent to which he, too, as in the case of other reformers, was struggling with the difficult matter of finding an adequate interpretation of the relationship between universalism and particularism in Judaism (including the question concerning the nature of Israel’s messianic future). At the same time, he was being forced to fend off attacks from non-Jewish intellectuals who claimed that the Jewish minority, due to its particularistic tradition, was unable to integrate into the European societies. In a sermon entitled “Israel’s Nationality and Return to Palestine”, Hirsch attempted to give his congregation an understanding of the philosophical and political balancing act involved. He implored them, on the one hand, not to abandon the hope for the actual fulfillment of the prophets’ messianic promises, and, on the other hand, encouraged them to brace themselves for the accusation of harboring particularistic-national aspirations:

How many accusations [...] did we have to face because of this hope! How much does the reigning egoism that stubbornly opposes our endeavor to gain acknowledgement and legiti-

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<sup>67</sup> Hirsch, *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen*, 198. Hirsch accused contemporary Christianity of having appropriated Judaism’s religious convictions and values without, however, being willing to attribute this “glorious truth” to Judaism itself: “To us Jews God is supposed to be alien and have been alien [...]; Judaism [according to Christian views] has allegedly never been capable of worshipping God as a loving father, of considering man as His precious, dignified child, of being aware of God’s presence rather than believing in his absence. [They claim that] a new religion was needed in view of which Judaism, like paganism, was destined to disappear. Solely this religion was suited to redeem man from his sense of nothingness and ignobleness, make him aware of the nobility of his spirit and teach him that man is of divine origin and should imitate God on earth. God in heaven, we thank you that you have given us the Sabbath! The Sabbath will rescue us from this lie and honor the Truth!” (ibid., 199).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 205.

macy for our heartfelt thoughts among contemporary humankind wish to use exactly this hope as a pretext to deprive us of everything of which we are so direly in need! [...] Don't you constantly hear that because we hope for the future restoration of Israel, we cannot have a Fatherland here; that we are at best entitled to ask for toleration; and that the happiest state is the one that does not even need to tolerate us and our way of worshipping God? And how many reproaches [...] do we, indeed, deserve because of that hope! Not because we are harboring it, but because we are starting not to harbor it; because we allow ourselves to be misled by the loud demands of our ill-wishers that we give up the firm belief in the holy and eternal word of God, just to please them. Our present aspirations are so near and dear to us that, for their sake, we have lost sight of the aspirations we had from the very beginning and should pursue until the very end. We have been foolish enough to believe that we might reach the goal of our present aspirations after having relinquished the goal of our existence on earth. Our hope for Israel's future restoration is the keystone of our entire teaching, and we are foolish enough to think that, after having renounced the keystone, we would nevertheless be more than a ruin!<sup>69</sup>

Israel's unforsaken hope for the promised national restoration and return to Zion, was, however, as Hirsch hastened to emphasize, “of a religious rather than of political nature” and had absolutely nothing to do “with any questions concerning our civic aspirations in the present”.<sup>70</sup> The history of the people of Israel in the Jewish state in antiquity as well as throughout their centuries-long exile was proof of the fact that they had never sought political power. It was thus also the case that Jewish messianism was not an expression of the desire of sovereignty and dominion, let alone for particularistic-national ambitions or an inner dissociation from Europe; it was rather the articulation of a yearning for the time when the goal of history and the hopes of all humankind would be fulfilled.<sup>71</sup> Hirsch's Dessau sermon on the Jewish people's messianic role consis-

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<sup>69</sup> Hirsch, *Die Messiaslehre der Juden in Kanzelvorträgen*, 375–376.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 382. Addressing non-Jewish society, Hirsch added: “Ask all times [...] whether we have ever betrayed you, whether we ever sought to leave you and conquer Palestine for ourselves; whether we haven't always patiently awaited the fulfillment of the time in which the land of our fathers would bear spiritual – and not just material – fruit; in which God Himself will move into Yerushalayim und will make His teaching pour forth from Zion, until you will rush there, too, in order to find the Lord there, explore His teaching and to walk in His ways!” The European Jews had never attempted to take the messianic future “by storm”, nor had they declared Jerusalem their earthly Fatherland – instead they had gratefully embraced the new home in Europe. “We are aware that we are not to go to Yerushalayim on our own; rather you are meant to bring us there. Now, have we ever asked you to bring us there? Have we ever requested that you should conquer Palestine on our behalf and surrender it to us? Would we be grateful if you would develop such an idea, so as to eliminate us from your midst? [...] We have been sent