Otto Dov Kulka

German Jews in the Era of the "Final Solution"

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Essays on Jewish and Universal History

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And yet there is this terror.
Is it the memory of times long past or the premonition of times to come? Does this old animal perhaps know more than the three Generations of those who are gathered together in the Synagogue?

Franz Kafka, The Animal in the Synagogue

The situation can approximately be described by saying that humankind's history has once again become 'labile', and apparently more 'labile' than ever before. [...] The human being is exposed. But the most exposed human family are the Jews.

Martin Buber, Jüdische Rundschau, 7 July 1933

Foreword

The present selection of essays and texts stretches over half a century of research and thought on German and Jewish history, reflective memory and what I call my "private mythology." It deals with the uniqueness of a phenomenon in its historical and philosophical context. My attempt to approach this unique chapter of history with the "classical" empirical tools of a historian and incorporating it into the continuum of Jewish and universal history, tries to understand the meaning behind the unprecedented, ideologically motivated mass murder and immense suffering. All these dimensions of my research work, my memory and imagination, though focusing on the period between 1933 and 1945 are aiming at an aspect of the developments of over three centuries in modern times, which might be called "The Era of the 'Final Solution.'"

The opening article, "Reflections on Jewish Studies, the Jerusalem School and the Research on the Era of the 'Final Solution'," serves as an introduction to the entire volume. It examines the conceptual and methodological questions of my entire way of research on a subject of major significance in universal historical consciousness and in historiography, and defines my position within the historical discipline of Jewish Studies.

The first chapter, on German Jewry in historical perspective and in a comparative context, summarizes my previous research on this subject and presents an integrative history,[1] with the main focus on the period of the Third Reich. Although it provides an opening overview, in retrospect it can also be read as the summarizing chapter of the book's primary research sections.

The three following chapters are devoted to the three central aspects of the history of this period: Modern Antisemitism and the Ideology of the "Final Solution" (Chapter II); German Society and the Jews under the Nazi Regime (Chapter III); Jewish Society and its Leadership in Nazi Germany (Chapter IV).

Chapter V closes the scholarly section of this volume. It opens with an article which examines sixty years of German historiography on National Socialism and the "Final Solution." The other two articles in this chapter deal with subsequent historiographical controversies, including the most recent.

1 The relatively recent term "integrative history" in the historiographical context of Nazi Germany and the "Final Solution" does not limit itself to the one-dimensional research of the persecution and annihilation of the Jews. It denotes the methodology which combines the writings on Nazi ideology and policy, the attitude of the German population to the Jews and the self-perception of the Jewish population and its leadership. See also the penultimate paragraph of the introductory essay, "Reflections on Jewish Studies, the Jerusalem School and the Research on the Era of the "Final Solution".

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The last chapter of the book – In Search of History and Memory – is devoted to my reflections on memory and imagination and approaches the period of the "Final Solution" from a non-scholarly viewpoint. The language in this chapter is predominantly metaphoric. The name Auschwitz almost never appears, but instead the Metropolis of Death, and so, too, the Great Death and the unalterable Law of the Great Death. Memory here becomes very personal, and takes on a metaphorical historical meaning.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 2019

Editorial Note

The original titles of the articles and papers in this volume, along with their bibliographical indications, appear in the list of "Annotated References". Some of the titles have been slightly modified, in line with the current terminology which developed in historiography since their original publication. The same applies also to terminology used within the texts of the individual articles. So, for example, the term "messianic antisemitism" has been replaced by the now more widely used "redemptive antisemitism." My original term for "Public Opinion" (in parantheses), in regard to the Nazi secret reports on the attitudes and mood among the German population, is now, more aptly, "Popular Opinion."

Similarly, in the scholarly apparatus I have added and updated references to recent important publications which appeared subsequent to the articles in this volume.

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Acknowledgments

During over five decades in which the essays of this volume appeared I had the privilege of enjoying a fruitful collaboration and exchange of views with many colleagues and friends in Israel and abroad. Among them I am particularly indebted to Sir Ian Kershaw for our longstanding intellectual friendship, which yielded so many ideas and insights that shaped our research on Nazi Germany and the fate of the Jews. A no less lengthy collaboration involves the late Eberhard Jäckel, the co-author of our extensive documentary edition on German society and the Jews under the Nazi regime. I also wish to express my thanks and appreciation to other historians and colleagues for a fruitful and creative, in part also critical, dialogue on various aspects of the research underlying the articles in this book, among them Martin Broszat, Richard Y. Cohen, Israel Gutman, Susanne Heim, Ulrich Herbert, Michael Meyer, Hans Mommsen, Ernst Nolte and Moshe Zimmermann.

The joint publication of this book by the Hebrew University's Magnes Press and De Gruyter Oldenbourg was initiated by the director of Magnes Press, Jonathan Nadav. I express my appreciation to him for this idea and its realization, and in particular to Dr. Julia Brauch, De Gruyter's Acquisitions Editor, Jewish Studies & History, and Lukas Lehmann, Production Editor, for their outstanding and devoted care in regard to every detail of this book. This publication was supported by a generous grant from the Richard Koebner Minerva Center for German History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and I am grateful and appreciative for the initiative and support of the center's director, Prof. Ofer Ashkenazi.

My warmest thanks go to my two excellent assistants: Esther Rachow, who worked with me in the initial stages of shaping this book, and Shiri Shapira, who helped me bring the manuscript to its completion.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my wife Chaia for her support and patience during all the years of research and publication of my works.

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Reflections on Jewish Studies, the Jerusalem School and the Research on the Era of the "Final Solution"

During one of the early stages of my academic career at the beginning of the 1970s I experienced a remarkable episode. I was asked to deliver a course, for the first time in the curriculum of the Department of Jewish History at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, on the subject of Nazi Germany, which I called: "The Third Reich and The Jews—The Jews in the Third Reich".[1] I composed a series of lectures accompanied by exercises on selected sources and basic readings in historiography that were conducted by me and three tutors. At the end of the course one of those tutors, who later became a distinguished historian and colleague of mine, approached me with a surprising observation: "During the whole cycle of your lectures, you haven't used the term Holocaust once". And indeed, I hadn't. When examining myself to answer him I looked back and asked: "what have I been using instead?", there were two terms which I consciously and intentionally used: "History of the Jews under the Nazi-Regime" or "The Final Solution."

And indeed, as the following essays are going to show, it seems as if I felt that the term Holocaust, in its original Greek meaning "burned offering", as well as the amorphous term for a catastrophe—"Shoah"—were inadequate. The "Final Solution", however, denotes most exactly the teleological meaning of its goal (telos), the ultimate end of the historical existence of the Jewish People as well as its heritage in Judeo-Christian civilization. The term "Jewish History under the Nazi Regime" integrates this unprecedented chapter, in all its aspects, in the historical continuum. Until today, the term Holocaust, that became an almost indispensible *terminus technicus*—is only used by me in rare, unavoidable cases, e.g. titles of articles, quotations, or in relation to historiography. In the present essay I wish to examine the origins of my integrative approach in the research of the era of the "Final Solution", the Jerusalem School of history and its place in the broad context of two centuries of Jewish Studies.

Multiple usages have been foisted on the term "Jerusalem School" in the various debates and controversies that have sprung up concerning the Jewish history in the Israeli historiography. Rarely, however, has the broad meaning of this term been addressed—that is, within the context of the original goals set for Jewish studies by its founders. Likewise, the question of whether the research

1 The original Hebrew tape recorded version of the lectures from the academic year 1971/ 1972 as well as the digitized text is included in my scholarly estate at the National Library in Jerusalem.

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of the "Final Solution" in Israel possesses special traits in terms of a connection with Jewish studies has not been discussed on its own terms. In this article I shall offer some reflections on these two issues, which in my view are in need of clarifications and definitions.

It is perhaps not superfluous to recall the leading figures who founded and represented this important stream—innovative at the time—of modern Jewish historiography, known as the Jerusalem School, and their specific guiding principles. From the broad gallery I will mention Gershom Scholem, Ben-Zion Dinur, Yitzhak Baer; and, from a different generation, Shmuel Ettinger, Jacob Talmon, and a name that many will find less obvious: the sociologist and historian Jacob Katz.[2]

True, the members of this school refrained from dealing directly with this period. The only exception, and as early as 1943, was Dinur, in his illuminating article, "Diasporas and their Destruction."[3] However, he too recoiled in the face of the blinding glare of the flames, as he put it, and the unfathomable depths in which the diasporas were annihilated before his eyes. Instead, Dinur developed an impressive historical construct encompassing two millennia of Jewish diaspora life vitiated by a chain of destruction of all the "centers of exile," nearly always at the peak of their flowering.

Dinur's basic thesis was that by its very flourishing —culturally, economically, or otherwise—every Jewish center in the diaspora bore within it the seeds of its destruction. The ground for the thesis and its conclusions are presented at the end of his article. Its body, as noted, offers a sweeping historical construct. Opening with a description of the rise and destruction of the Jewish communities in the Hellenistic cities, particularly Alexandria in the lifetime of the great Jewish philosopher Philo, the essay goes on to recount the destruction of about a thousand Jewish communities in the Byzantine empire of the ninth century and the annihilation of the great Jewish centers in Babylon and Persia. The arena now shifts to the Jewish centers in Europe, where the same pattern is found: the expulsion of the Jews from England in the twelfth century and from France in the thirteenth century; the horrific devastation wrought upon the flourishing

2 I draw here on the retrospective categorizations and assessments of Katz himself concerning the totality of his historiographic work, in an article from the beginning of the 1990s, which he described to me shortly before its publication as "Katz vs. Katz." "Zur jüdischen Sozialgeschichte. Epochale und überepochale Geschichtsschreibung," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 20 (1991) 429–436; English "On Jewish Social History. Epochal and Supra-epochal Historiography," *Jewish History* 7 (1993) 89–97.

3 Ben-Zion Dinur (Dinaburg), "Galuyot veHurbanan" (Diasporas and their Destruction), *Knesset: Writers' Essays in Memory of Hayyim Nachman Bialik* 8 (1943) 46–60 (in Hebrew).

communities of Central Europe in the mid-fourteenth century during the "Black Death"; and the expulsion of the magnificent Jewish community of Spain at the close of the Middle Ages in the late fifteenth century. Dinur concludes his historical survey with a description of the crises and upheavals in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, as the background to the "great calamity" (*ha-shoah hagdolah)*.[4]

At the end of the article, Dinur reiterates his basic belief that the flowering of the diaspora centers contained the seed of their annihilation; in his words, "Destruction is merely the shadow of the exile."

Jewish existence throughout the diaspora is likened to a house with walls and a roof but lacking foundations in the earth. Every wind, every outside shock, will leave it in ruins. It can be inferred, then, that only in the Land of Israel is the ground stable enough to build lasting foundations. Dinur concludes by setting forth his credo of a secular, political messianism of "*Aliya bachoma*"—"storming the battlements." This doctrine is intended as a rebuke to those who follow the halakhah (Jewish religious law) and oppose attempts to revive Jewish national and political existence before the advent of the messiah. Dinur urges the unity of the Jewish people and the ingathering of the nation in its historic homeland. The termination of the historic halakhic prohibition against "storming the battlements" is also, Dinur maintains, one consequence of the destruction of the Diaspora.

There is no doubt that this bold, towering construct of the course of Jewish history through two millennia of exile, conceived against the backdrop of the great conflagration that consumed the centers of exile in Europe, is suffused with a radical Zionist spirit. It is no less than a convergence of ideology and historiography at a point as sensitive as it is painful: the incipient attempt in the Land of Israel to cope with what today is known as the Shoah, the Holocaust.

As noted, the founders of the Jerusalem School avoided dealing directly with the period of the "Final Solution"; however, they imparted to us, as their third generation, their guiding principles. And, as their successors at the Hebrew University, we received them not as a credo but as a challenge. We set out to test them and implement them, confirm or refute them; and above all, to apply the methodological tools they had devised for earlier periods to the singularity of the period we were about to study. And beyond this, to try to integrate that period into

4 This is probably the first appearance in historiography of the terms "*ha-shoah hagdolah*" and "*shoah*"—coined by Dinur in this paper and its printed version in 1943—in their full historical dimension.

the historical continuum—or exclude it from the historical sequence—but on the basis of empirical research, not merely an a priori declaration.

What united all the adherents of the Jerusalem School was a deep-seated national approach: Zionist ideology and belief, if you will (or, if you will, a type of secular redemptive doctrine). They also believed fervently that the establishment of the Center for Jewish Studies in the revived Land of Israel would free them from dependence on the theological institutions of the various streams of diaspora Jewry and from apologetically subjugating Jewish studies to their self imposed limitations. Yet, as Scholem himself wrote in his trenchant 1944 Hebrew article "Reflections on the Science of Judaism": "We sought to rebel but found ourselves continuing instead."[5] Continuing, among others, by subjugating Jewish studies anew—to the by now institutionalized ideology of the Zionist rebellion.

However, Scholem, as well as Dinur—from different and similar perspectives—also put forward a powerful and original conceptual approach to the modern period in Jewish history, as a deep internal crisis. In their view, it was not external historical causes—Enlightenment, acculturation, Emancipation, and so forth—that underlay the advent of the modern period in Jewish history; but rather an immanent and shattering turning point within Jewish history: the Sabbatian crisis and its consequences. This is argued by Scholem in his article "The Holiness of Sin,"[6] and more forcefully in his monumental work *Sabbatai Sevi*;[7] and by Dinur in his collection of articles, *The Turn of Generations*.[8]

Indeed, within the context of their conception of the modern era as an immanent crisis—though external, too, of course—they both adduced the message of redemption; that is, the eradication of the sages' traditional imperative against "storming the battlements" and the rebellion against it through Zionism, their secular doctrine of redemption. This approach, I would say, is characteristic of and shared by all the adherents of the Jerusalem School, among whom I include, as noted, Shmuel Ettinger and Jacob Talmon.

I am certain that objections can be raised to my interpretations. But I have raised the ideological element in the doctrine of the proponents of the classic Jerusalem School here for one reason—a paradoxical one—namely that it is impossible to discuss this subject without it. But—and this is the crucial point—it was

5 גרשום שלום, מתוך הרהורים על מדעי היהדות, לוח הארץ ד (תש"ה), 94110: "באנו למרוד ונמצאנו ממשיכים".

6 גרשום שלום, "מצוה הבאה בעבירה", כנסת, תרצ"ז, 347–392 (מחקרים ומקורות לתולדות השבתאות וגלגוליה, ירושלים תשל"ד, 67–9).

7 *Sabbatai Sevi. The Mystical Messiah*, translated by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975.

8 בנציון דינור, במפנה הדורות: מחקרים ועיונים בראשיתם של הזמנים החדשים בתולדות ישראל, מוסד ביאליק, ירושלים, 1972.

present in our consciousness as young teachers at the Hebrew University in the first half of the 1980s when we developed, so I believe—Israel Gutman, Richard Yerachmiel Cohen, and I—what one might call *the Jerusalem School of Holocaust Research in Jewish Studies*. The paradox was that this aspect—the ideological baggage we received from our teachers—was excluded from our conception.

What, then, did we receive, apply, and pursue, to the point where I dare to present it here as the Jerusalem School's continuation and innovation in regard to a subject which, as I pointed out, its practitioners refrained from dealing with directly: the period of the "Final Solution"?

The classic Jerusalem School formulated two axiomatic basic principles concerning the Jews' overall history: the unity and continuity of Jewish history: unity for the places where Jewish history unfolded throughout the world, and continuity for the periods of a history covering more than 3,000 years.

Here we need to add another important concept, as all this occurred—perhaps in the spirit of the historiosophic doctrine propounded by Hegel and the founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the Science of Judaism), who were his pupils—primarily with regard to the Jews' *historical consciousness* and the consciousness of their identity in each different place and time.

Methodologically—and this, too, the Jerusalem School received, and applied boldly, albeit dialectically, from the founders of the Science of Judaism in the first third of the nineteenth century—the demand was to study the history of the Jews in the totality of its aspects, both external and internal, and of course in all its periods.[9]

Suffice it to mention here the tremendous conceptual and methodological program propounded by Leopold Zunz and the other cofounders of the Society for the Culture and History of the Jews, and Scholem's specific reference to them in his 1944 article cited earlier. Notwithstanding the paradoxicality inherent in his critique of the founders of the Science of Judaism, their doctrine became the alpha and omega of the pristine aspirations of Jewish Studies in the emerging scientific environment of the Land of Israel. (Let us recall that Zunz and his colleagues had in mind the total, impartial study of all the historical aspects of the Jews' existence and works, and their reciprocal relations with their surroundings.)

9 Siegfried Ucko: "Geistesgeschichtliche Grundlagen der Wissenschaft des Judentums." *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* (1937) 1–34. Max Wiener, "The Ideology of the Founders of Jewish Scientific Research," YIVO Annual V (1950), 194–196; Nahum Glatzer, "The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies," in: Alexander Altman (ed.) *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1964, 27–45; H. G. Reissner, "Rebellious Dilemma: The Case Histories of Eduard Gans and some of his Partisans," Yearbook of Leo Baeck Institute, II (1957), 179–193.

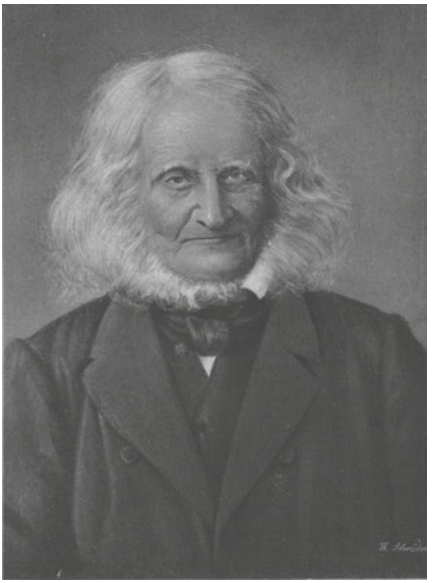

Fig. 1: Leopold (Jom Tov Lippmann) Zunz (1794–1886), one of the founding fathers and the lifetime scholar of Wissenschaft des Judentums.

Fig. 2: Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), the most prominent personality among the Jerusalem School of Jewish Studies.

From our point of view—by which I mean a group of teachers and research students at the Hebrew University in the 1980s and their approach to the study of the period of the "Final Solution"—this meant researching simultaneously, or in parallel:

1. The external ideological and political aspects that determined the fate of the Jews, and of course the antisemitic factor in historical perspective and contemporary incarnation;
2. The attitude of the various segments of the surrounding population to the Jews—before, during, and perhaps also after the period of Nazi rule; and
3. The Jewish society itself—its form of organization, institutions, and leadership—including its diverse religious and political streams, spheres of activity, and its achievements; not omitting, of course, its attitude toward the government and surrounding society. But always hovering in the background is the question of the Jewish society's self-awareness, fixed and variable in changing situations, and the identity consciousness of the Jewish society and of each individual within it, encompassing the entire range of the streams and Jewish identities of the period.

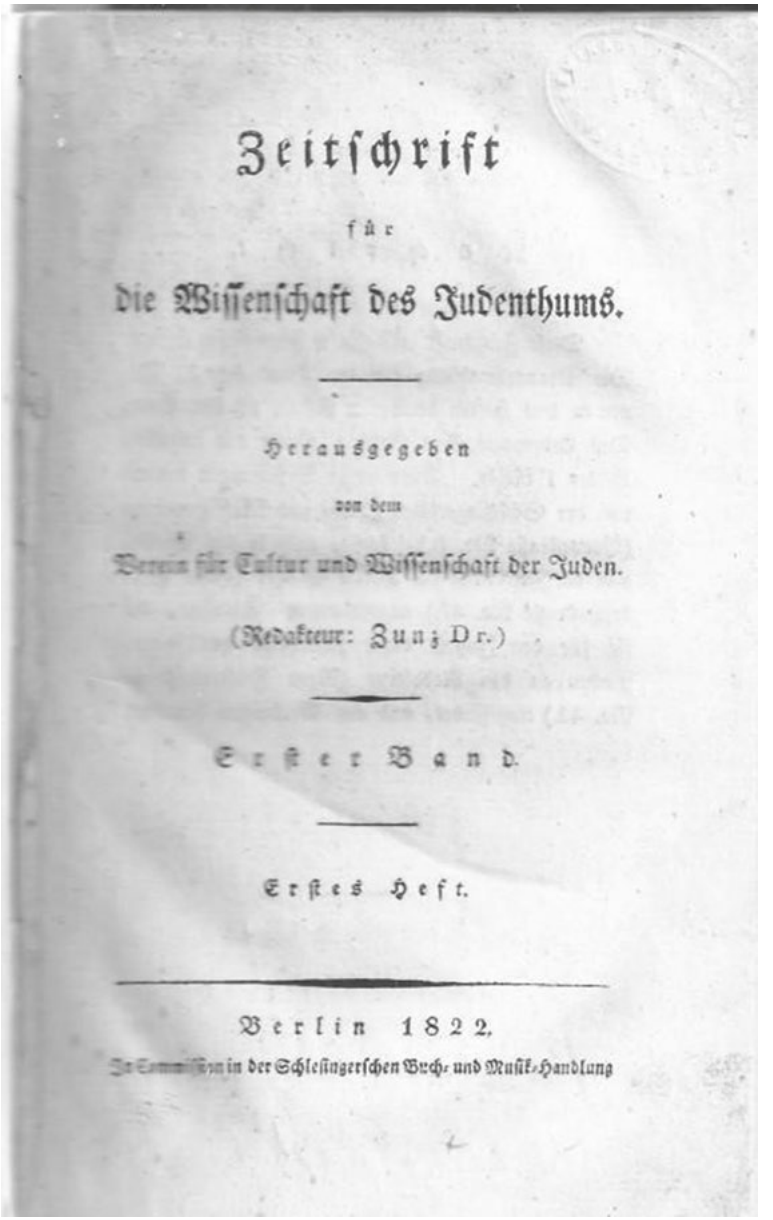

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Fig. 3: Cover page of the first issue of the *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin 1822.

But I have put the cart before the horse: I have not yet related the story of the birth—with a question mark, of course—of the "Jerusalem School of Holocaust Research."

In the first half of the 1980s, three teachers at the Hebrew University—Israel Gutman, Richard Yerachmiel Cohen, and I met—at my initiative, as I recall, though also under the inspiration of the fascinating seminars of teachers and students held at the home of the late Prof. Shmuel Ettinger. The three of us planned a multiyear series of seminars for M.A. and PhD students on the subject of "The Study of the History of the Jews under the National-Socialist Regime in Europe."

One of our guiding principles was to hold a comparative discussion based on the perspective that I mentioned in connection with the Jerusalem School—the unity and continuity of Jewish history—here in regard to the period of the "Final Solution". My research students and I discussed Germany and Central Europe, Richard Cohen and his students addressed France and Western Europe, and Israel Gutman with his many students took Poland and Eastern Europe as their subject.

Within this framework we examined the various subjects and areas, though always with an eye to the historical perspective of all the subjects we considered. Here too the guiding methodological approach we had received from the Jerusalem School via our teachers came into practice: to examine the historical reality in the totality of its manifestations—in our case, in terms of the regime's ideology and policy and the attitude of the surrounding society, and the Jewish society itself.

We addressed the first two principles, posited as axioms in the original Jerusalem School—the unity and continuity of Jewish history—through comparative research and discussion: horizontally, on the ground; and vertically, in time. And even though the Jews' shared sealed fate is more blatant in this period than at any other time in the history of the Jewish diaspora, we found much that was both similar and different, unifying and differentiating, in different places and different historical perspectives. What we took as a basic, almost deterministic assumption, became an important and productive point of departure in our work for an examination based on comparative critical research.

As for the methodological approach that entails an all-encompassing historical inquiry—which, as we saw, originated in the modern science of history in the nineteenth century and became an integral aspect of the study and teaching of history at the Hebrew University in regard to other periods—we applied it beyond the boundaries of historical time demarcated by our teachers, who refrained from dealing with the period of the"Final Solution". But it was precisely our affinity for the classic Jerusalem School that differentiated us then from researchers of Nazism and the "Final Solution" in other countries, most of whom confined

themselves solely to the ideological and political dimension of the study of the persecution and annihilation of the Jews.

To sum up: our teachers, the architects and representatives of the Jerusalem School, aspired, by means of a paradoxical dialectic, to realize fully the pristine principles of the founders of the Science of Judaism in the nineteenth century—without apologetically subjugating themselves to the modern Jewish conditions of diaspora existence in the Emancipation era. In retrospect, owing to the immanent perception of the Zionist revolution in their aims, they "sought to rebel but found themselves continuing instead" by creating new confines for the goals of the pure Science of Judaism.

They did not engage directly in the study and teaching of the "Final Solution" period; indeed, one can say that they recoiled from crossing its threshold (with the possible exception of Jacob Talmon, in one aspect of the subject, though even so very impressionistically, albeit most impressively at the time). However, they endowed us with conceptual approaches and methodological tools which made it possible to approach the study of this singular period like any other historical period. We proceeded without the ideological baggage that distinguished their national conceptions and messages. Our studies, accordingly, were open-ended in every direction.

These joint seminars of teachers and students from different departments of history went on for three years in this format, and were followed by a joint seminar with Israel Gutman on the historiography of the "Final Solution". No few of our students who took part in these seminars later became teachers in Israeli and foreign universities, and their students after them. This integrative conception and methodology was accepted, or developed in parallel, in much of the Israeli historiography and in historical research in other countries. The most conspicuous, later, example of that integrative concept and methodology in the study of the "Final Solution" period is Saul Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.[10]

In regard to the place of the "Holocaust" in the historical memory, in public rhetoric and in the various historians' controversies, let me reiterate: The singularity of this period and of the phenomenon of National-Socialism and the "Final Solution," where that singularity exists and if it exists—and I believe that it does exist—is not determined by its a priori declaration, but by means of systematic comparative research that is integrated into history, and not by wrenching it from history.

10 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, two vols., London, 1997, 2007.

I German Jewry under the National Socialism in Historical Perspective

1 German Jewry under the National Socialism in Historical Perspective

The first few Jews to arrive in Germany came there in the wake of the Roman legions and settled in the cities along the Rhine. The earliest documents attesting to a sizable Jewish population are imperial edicts, dating back to A.D. 321 and 331, concerning the city Colonia Agrippensis (Cologne). There is no clear evidence, however, of an uninterrupted presence of a Jewish population in Germany after the Roman Empire came to an end, and it is only from the tenth century, when Jewish merchants from Italy and France settled in Germany, that a continuous history of Jews in Germany is certain.

By the late Middle Ages the Jewish population of Germany was consolidated. The German Jewish community became one of the centers of spiritual creativity among European Jewry, and the cradle of Ashkenazic Jewry and the Yiddish language. The most significant body of Jewish community and supra community organizations developed in the three flourishing cities along the Rhine, Speyer, Worms and Mainz, known for their preserved constitution (*takanot Shum*). In the economic sphere the Jews grained prominence in commerce (including trade with Near Eastern countries) and later primarily as money-lenders. This period, however, witnessed widespread persecution of Jews and, even the destruction, in various parts of Germany, of entire Jewish communities. The persecution of Jews, in most cases, was set against a background of religious and social ferment and political upheaval. The worst persecutions took place during the Crusades (especially the first Crusade in 1096) and during the period of the Black Death (1348–1349). From the fifteenth century, and especially during the Reformation, the status of the Jews and of the role they played deteriorated, and they were expelled from most of the large German cities. Some of those expelled remained in Germany, taking up residence in hundreds of small communities while others migrated to the newly emerging centers of Jewish population in the countries of Eastern Europe. In the Age of Absolutism the situation of Jews improved, one of the reasons being the status and activities of the "court Jews" (*Hofjuden*), who were instrumental in enabling Jews to resettle in the large cities.

The economic rise of an elite Jewish group and the penetration into late 18th century Jewish society of the ideas of Enlightenment marked the beginning of the process of the social and political emancipation of the Jews, the struggle for which was waged throughout the 19th century and reached its goal, in formal terms, when Germany was unified in 1871. The drawn-out struggle for emancipation, and the new ideological trends that had emerged among German Jewry since the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment movement) in the 18th century,

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had a very significant impact on Jewish communities in other parts of Europe and overseas. Among the important transformations that took place in German Jewry in the 19th century and that affected Judaism as a whole were the rise of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the modern scholarly study of Judaism and Jewish history); the growth of new religious movements in Judaism—Reform, Conservative, and Neo-Orthodox; the rapid urbanization of the Jews; and their integration into modern society and the economic life. In the 19th century the Jews of Germany made important contributions to cultural life, to social and political philosophy, to the economy, and even to political life. Among outstanding Jews were the poet Heinrich Heine; the fathers of socialism, Ferdinand Lasalle and Karl Marx; the bankers of the Rothschild and Bleichröder families; and the leaders of the National Liberal party, Eduard Lasker and Ludwig Bamberger.

The emancipation of the Jews, however, and their integration into the various spheres of German life, met with resistance from a sizable part of German society. By the 1870s this opposition led to politically organized antisemitism—which in its modern form also had racism as a basic ingredient. In the following two decades antisemitic political parties ran in elections and scored successes. The influence of these parties waned toward the end of the 19th century, but antisemitism continued to flourish in economic, social, and academic organizations. It also penetrated the major political parties in various ways and became a factor in the struggle between the national conservative and democratic socialist camps over the future political character of German society.

The rise of modern antisemitism, in addition to other factors, led to the establishment of political organizations among German Jewry in Imperial Germany. The most important organization established in this period (in 1893) for the defense of the Jews' civil rights was the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (CV, Central Union of German Citizens of Jewish Faith). It had been preceded by the non-Jewish *Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus* (Association for Combating Antisemitism), founded in 1890. Also in the 1890s, with the awakening of Jewish national movement, the German Zionist Federation was formed. Before long, its leaders, including David Wolffsohn, Otto Warburg, Arthur Ruppin, and Max Bodenheimer, assumed leading posts in the World Zionist Organization. From the death of Theodor Herzl up to the end of World War I, the organizational center of the Zionist movement was located in Germany.

During World War I, antisemitism was again on the rise. Its most humiliating manifestation was the German High command's decision in 1916, in response to the demand of certain sectors of public opinion and the Prussian officers' corps, to take a special census of Jewish soldiers to determine whether the number of Jews serving in the armed forces, and especially the number in combat units, was in proportion to their percentage of the general population. The results of

that census remained officially unpublished, though according to the research of the former Jewish front-soldiers' organization from the beginning of 1930s their number, as well as their number among the fallen soldiers exceeded the percentage of the Jews among the total of Germany's population.

Weimar Republic, 1918–1933

A new era in the history of German Jewry began when Imperial Germany collapsed and was replaced by the democratic regime of the Weimar Republic. The outstanding feature of this period was the polarization between the unprecedented integration of the Jews in every sphere of life, and the radicalization of political antisemitism among various organizations and political parties, especially in the immediate postwar years.

Important achievements by Jews were recorded in the theater (Max Reinhardt), in music (Arnold Schönberg), in the visual arts (Max Liebermann), in philosophy (Herman Cohen), and in science (Albert Einstein). Among the Nobel Prize winners in Germany up to 1938, 24 percent were Jews (nine Jews out of a total of thirty-eight). It was in political and public life, however, that the Jewish role was most prominent. Jews played an important role in the first cabinet formed after the 1918 revolution (Hugo Haase and Otto Landsberg), the Weimar Constitution was drafted by a Jew (Hugo Preuss), and Jews were conspicuously present in the abortive attempts to create radical revolutionary regimes, especially in Bavaria. The revolutionary government in Munich was headed by Jewish intellectual, Kurt Eisner, and after his assassination, two other Jewish leaders, Gustav Landauer and Eugen Levine, assumed positions of major influence in the short-lived "*Räterepublik*" ("Soviet" Republic). Rosa Luxemburg, who was also assassinated, was a leader of the revolutionary *Spartakusbund*, which was one of the predecessors of the German Communist party.

In the following years as well, Jews held major political posts, primarily in the leadership of the democratic and socialist parties. The most prominent Jewish political figure was Walther Rathenau, who served first as minister for economic affairs and then as foreign minister. Rathenau's murder by right-wing radicals in June 1922 was one of the dramatic high points of the antisemitic incitement that charged the Jews with responsibility for German's defeat in the war (the *Dolchstoßlegende*, or "stab-in-the-back" myth) and for the economic and social crises that struck the newly born republic after the war, reaching their climax in the terrible inflation of 1922 and 1923. The presence of Jews from Eastern Europe (*Ostjuden*), who had immigrated to Germany before, during and after the war, was also a favorite subject of antisemitic incitement.

Among the antisemitic movements and political parties, the most radical was the relatively small National Socialist party, which had been founded in Bavaria in 1919. Its platform included conspicuous racialist paragraphs calling of the abolition of civil rights for Jews and far-reaching measures for eliminating Jews from various spheres of life. The propaganda speeches and publications of the party's leaders, especially those of Adolf Hitler, presented a radical antisemitic ideology that did not stop short of demands for the "total removal, the elimination of the Jews" and called for the *Ausrottung* ("extermination") of the Jews *mit Stumpf und Stiel* ("root and branch"). Despite the party's nationalist character, the antisemitism it advocated went beyond the confines of national categories, its redemptive ideology demanding a radical solution of the "Jewish question" in order to save all of human society. The National Socialist racial doctrine, which was based on the inequality of races and a pseudo Social Darwinist struggle for survival among them, regarded Judaism and Jews as spiritual and biological source of universalist ideologies (including Liberalism, democracy, Marxism, and even Christianity) that defy the "nature's order" (*Naturgordnung*) of inequality of races, their hierarchy and the struggle for survival.

As a result of the stabilization of the German economy and of the republic in 1924, the strength of the antisemitic parties went into a temporary decline and the number of their members in the Reichstag dropped from forty to fourteen.

According to the 1925 census, the Jewish population of Germany was 564, 379, representing 0.9 percent of the total population. The great majority (377,000, or 66.8 percent) lived in six large cities, which also had the largest Jewish communities: Berlin (with 180,000 Jews, a third of the entire Jewish population in the country), Frankfurt, Hamburg, Breslau, Leipzig, and Cologne. Approximately 90,000 Jews (16 percent) lived in the smaller cities, and 97,000 (17.2 percent) in over a thousand towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000. For the most part the Jews belonged to the middle class and were self-employed, in various branches of business and in the professions. The Jews' intensive participation in the active life of German society accelerated the process of assimilation, which was manifested in the growing number of mixed marriages, secessions from the organized Jewish community, and conversions to Christianity. Thus, in 1927, 54 percent of all marriages of Jews were contracted with non-Jews, and in that year one thousand Jews are estimated to have opted out of Judaism, about half of them by conversion to another faith.

On the other hand, in the Weimar era the activities of the Jewish political religious and social organizations were maintained and even expanded. New organizations were added to the *Centralverein*, the Zionist Federation, the

Orthodox and Liberal organizations, and the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* (German Jews' Aid Society), which all had their beginnings before Weimar. The major new organizations were the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten* (RjF, Reich Union of Jewish Frontline Soldiers); left- and right-wing Zionist parties such as the *Jüdische Volkspartei*, or Left Zionist Workers Party (*Poalei Zion Smol*); youth and sports organizations; student groups, and so forth. The Jewish communities retained the officially recognized legal status they had attained under the Kaiser; the innovations in the Weimar era were the establishment of supra-communities *Landesverbände jüdischer Gemeinden* (Regional State Unions of Jewish Communities) and attempts to organize all of German Jewry into a nationwide body.

The influx of Jewish scholars and intellectuals from Eastern Europe, coupled with the revival of Jewish consciousness among the established Jewish population, turned Germany in that period into a great center of modern Jewish scholarship and culture. As a result of efforts of Jewish thinkers and educators—men like Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber—large groups among the general Jewish population began to take an interest in Jewish learning, leading to the establishment of *Jüdische Lehrhäuser* (institutes of Jewish learning) for adult Jewish education. A wide range of Jewish periodicals and Jewish publishers played an important role in Jewish life; two of the significant publishing projects undertaken were the five-volume *Jüdisches Lexikon* and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (of which ten volumes had appeared when its publication came to a halt in 1934).

The final years of the Weimar Republic, during which Germany was hard hit by the global economic crisis, were marked by the rise of the National Socialist party. Just before the crisis broke out in 1928, the Nazis won only three percent of the vote; however, in the first elections that took place during the crisis in September 1930, their share jumped to 18 percent, and in July 1932 to 37 percent of the vote. With 230 members in the *Reichstag*, the Nazis became the largest party—and retained that position in the next elections in November 1932, despite a drop to 33 percent of the vote and 196 *Reichstag* members.

During those years, antisemitism came to have a profound effect on Jewish life. It was one of the central elements in the Nazi party's violent struggle for power, and its effect on the Jews was not confined to physical violence (desecrations of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, and even attacks on individual Jews). Nazi political propaganda succeeded in making the "Jewish question" into a major issue in the Nazi struggle against the democratic regime. As a result, not only was the position of the Jews in German society impaired, but many of them underwent a crisis of Jewish consciousness and began to reexamine their Jewish identity.

From 1933 to 1938

In January 1933, on the eve of Hitler's rise to power, the Jewish population of Germany (including the Saar district, which two years later was reincorporated into Germany) numbered 522,000 Jews by religion; under the racist criteria established by the Nazis, which were to form the basis of their persecution of the Jews and to find formal expression in racist legislation, the number of Jews by race was 566,000.

On January 30, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Reich chancellor. This appointment was the outcome of a continuous economic and parliamentary crisis in which the democratic system of government became an authoritarian regime, on the basis of the emergency powers granted to the president by the constitution. As soon as Hitler was appointed, the National Socialist party and its paramilitary organizations—primarily the SA (*Sturmabteilung*; Storm Troopers) and the SS—launched a drive to seize, by violent means where necessary, all government and public institutions and to transform Germany into a totalitarian state. In the ensuing terrorist actions (as early as February and March 1933) against opponents of National Socialism, especially members of the Left political parties, liberals, and intellectuals, the Jews were a major target. Many Jews were subjected to public humiliation and were arrested; others were forced to quit their posts, especially at the universities and the law courts. Before 1933, the Nazis had called for the damaging of Jewish property and for a boycott of Jewish businesses and services; this was now adopted as the official policy of the ruling party. A climax was reached with the Anti-Jewish Boycott of April 1, 1933, the first occasion on which the new regime openly took discriminatory action against a part of the country's citizens. It caused a deep shock to Germany's Jews and evoked a sharply hostile reaction from world public opinion.

The boycott was brought to a halt after a day had passed, but from April 7, anti-Jewish laws were enacted that in effect abolished the principle of equal rights for Jews, rights that had been established by the German constitution in 1871. The legal basis for these measures was the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enabling Law), passed on March 24, 1933, which gave the government dictatorial powers first for a four-year period and subsequently for the life span of the Third Reich. The regime used this emergency law to abolish the democratic freedoms that had been in force under the republic and brought about the dissolution of Germany's independent political parties and organizations. The process of totalitarian *Gleichschaltung* ("coordination," that is, Nazification) held to the reorganization of all spheres of public and official life, including control of the media and all forms of publication, and a thorough and far-reaching purge of the civil and

public service. In the March 5 elections, which nominally were still democratic and were held before the Enabling Law was passed, the Nazis received only 44 percent of the vote, as against the more than 90 percent support they achieved in the November 1933 referendum and later.

Anti-Jewish policy was put into effect on two parallel levels: from below—"spontaneous" acts (*Einzelaktionen*) of terror and incitement of the population to hostility and demonstrations against the Jews; and from above—anti Jewish legislation: the early anti-Jewish laws included the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. The racist basis of that law was expressed by the *Arierparagraph* ("Aryan Paragraph"), which became the foundation for all anti-Jewish legislation passed during the years before the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in the fall of 1935. Other laws passed at that stage restricted the practice of law and medicine by Jews; a special law mandated that the number of Jews in an educational institution must not exceed that proportional to their percentage of the population; and Jews were excluded from cultural life and journalism. The only (temporal) exception to these laws applied to Jews who had served as frontline soldiers in World War I.

The main purpose of the legislation was to give formal expression to the ideology and policy of discrimination against and persecution of the Jews, but it was in part also meant to serve as a means of restraining violent excesses of terror actions and stabilizing the status of the Jews in the National Socialist state. In particular, it was the conservative elements in the government coalition who in the second half of 1933 advocated such "stabilization," out of concern for the country's international standing and the adverse effect that unstrained Nazi action against the Jews could have on efforts to restore the country's economy. Among the officials who warned of the impact that a foreign economic boycott might have on Germany was Hjalmar Schacht, head of the *Reichsbank*, and Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath. Hitler spoke in a similar vein in July 1933, when he called for a curb on the revolutionary zeal and the need to direct it into channels designed to consolidate the foundations of the new regime.

The methods employed in the regime's terror campaign against its opponents consisted mostly of arrest and imprisonment in concentration camps. The percentage of Jews among the detainees was quite high, and they were singled out for particularly cruel and humiliating treatment, which in many instances resulted in death. Shocked by such terrorization and the overall onslaught on their position in the country, many Jews reacted with headlong flight, a wave of emigration that encompassed thousands of people. According to the census taken in June 1933, the Jewish population in Germany was 502,799 (by religion) or 540,000 (by race); these figures show that since January of that year about 26,000 Jews "by race" had left the country. By the end of 1933, 63,000 Jews had emigrated, according

to retrospective statistics compiled in 1941 by the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich Association of Jews in Germany).

Support of the German people for the regime's policy against the Jews was not uniform, and while there was broad recognition of the need to find a "solution" to the "Jewish question," there were also reservations about the violent methods being applied, as well as individual cases of solidarity with the Jews. However, few public protests were made by the leadership of institutions that were still relatively independent, such as the Protestant and Catholic churches; the objections raised to the persecution of the Jews referred primarily to the thousands of Christians of Jewish origin who were affected by the racist legislation.

Among the Jews, the reaction to what was happening was different on the individual and the organizational level. Although the Jews' social and political status had suffered a tremendous blow, their existing organizational network was scarcely touched—indeed, new organizations came into being. In this respect the situation of the Jews was in stark contrast to the prevailing trend of totalitarian *Gleichschaltung*, the purpose of which was to destroy the existing social and political fabric of German society and construct a homogeneous national society in its place. It was the exclusionary racist principle on which the policy toward the Jews was based—their separation and isolation from the general society—that made possible the continuing existence of the Jews' own institutions. Moreover, "alien" and "decadent" ideas and principles such as political pluralism and democracy, which were now beyond the pale among the general population, were still the rule in Jewish public life. This was, however, the freedom of the outcast, of a community that now seemed doomed to disappearance (at this stage of the Nazi regime) through emigration.

The mass flight and emigration and the large number of suicides were manifestations of the crisis experienced by German Jewry as it saw the fundamental premises on which its existence had been based collapsing. At the same time, the organizational structure of German Jewry adapted itself to the changing conditions, and even intensified its varied internal activities. Prior to 1933 the Jewish religious communities had been entities recognized by public law—a status they retained under the Nazis, in that early stage—but no nationwide organization of Jewish communities of similar official status had come into being. In 1932 a beginning was made with the formation of a loose national federation of regional associations of Jewish communities (*Landesverbände*), which in the Third Reich made its first public appearance in a memorandum published in May 1933. It was only in September of that year, however, that a truly representative and comprehensive national organization was established, which, in addition to the *Landesverbände*, included the major political bodies and the large communities. This was the *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews), under the leadership of