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The Nature of Jewish Studies

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The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies

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Abstract and Keywords

The recognition of Jewish studies as an area of knowledge worthy of research and teaching in universities is a quite recent phenomenon. From an exceedingly small base in the first half of the twentieth century, the subject has now burgeoned. The great centres for research and teaching reflect the main contemporary centres of the Jewish population, Israel and North America, but Jewish studies are also now taught in other countries where Jews live in large numbers. This explosion of interest, particularly since the 1960s, has led to a massive increase in the number of scholars for whom research in Jewish studies forms a significant part of their academic careers. The discoveries and assertions of scholars about aspects of Jewish culture and the Jewish past are as influential in moulding the Jewish self-consciousness of secular diaspora Jews as the writings of Zionist academics have been in the creation of Israeli identity.

Keywords: Jewish studies, Judaism, North America, Israel, Zionist academics

THE decision to produce a handbook of Jewish studies at this stage in the development of the subject has been felt justified for two reasons. The first is practical: no similar introduction has ever been written and students often find it difficult to find out what issues are worth discussion and where to get an appropriate bibliography to help. The second is more philosophical: practitioners in the field, both researchers and students, all too rarely seek to put their studies into a general perspective in this way, and it is to be hoped that doing so may produce insights of many different kinds. Hence when the proposal for the Handbook was first mooted by Oxford University Press, the distinguished colleagues asked for advice as to whether and how it should proceed responded with much enthusiasm for the project as a whole—albeit, with a great variety of conflicting suggestions as to how it should be carried out. Enthusiasm, conflict, and diversity are

indeed characteristic of the subject in its present state, and it will be the task of this Handbook not to resolve but to reflect this state.

The topics included under the rubric of Jewish studies are exceptionally disparate, ranging not only over a long period of time and all the countries in which Jews have lived, but also over a plethora of different aspects of Jewish culture—literature, history, theology, law, sociology, the fine arts, and more. No method of dividing up these topics is without drawbacks, and any method will be the product, at least in part, of an ideological stance of one sort or another, a problem discussed more fully below. The approach taken in this Handbook is therefore necessarily imperfect, but (p. 2) it is pragmatic. Topics have been assigned in the first half of the Handbook roughly by period, in the second half by theme, reflecting current trends both in research and in teaching.

One effect has been some overlap between chapters, although this has been kept to a minimum. Other issues, such as whether to include biblical studies at all within Jewish studies (since to do so might indicate a particular attitude to the Bible), have been tackled head on: thus one of the main problems discussed in CHAPTER 2 is precisely whether and how biblical studies can be seen within this context. The Handbook thus errs on the side of inclusiveness, but it cannot claim to include every area that might, and sometimes does, crop up at a Jewish studies conference. There is thus, for instance, no separate chapter on the flourishing fields of Jewish genealogy¹ or Judaeo-Greek studies,² although it is to be hoped that brief discussions in other chapters and judicious use of the index will provide help to those who wish to investigate these areas further.

The recognition of Jewish studies as an area of knowledge worthy of research and teaching in universities is a quite recent phenomenon. From an exceedingly small base in the first half of the twentieth century, the subject has now burgeoned. The great centres for research and teaching reflect the main contemporary centres of Jewish population, Israel and North America (the United States and Canada), but Jewish studies are also now taught not only in other countries where Jews live in large numbers, such as France and Argentina, but also in countries where few Jews are now found. Fine scholarship in the field can be found in universities in many countries in Western Europe, in South Africa, Australia, Russia, Japan, and Korea—that is, in almost every country that boasts a higher-education system which incorporates humanities and social sciences on the western pattern.³ This explosion of interest, particularly since the 1960s, has led to a massive increase in the number of teachers and scholars for whom research in Jewish studies forms a significant part of their academic careers, with a concomitant burgeoning of publications. Many of the major academic presses now produce a Jewish studies list, and the subject features with disproportionate prominence in some of the more self-consciously intellectual magazines and newspapers, particularly in the English-speaking world.

The rationale for this rapid spread of interest is rarely spelled out within general academic circles. Often universities adopt the subject because it is fashionable, because there is student or faculty demand, or because a donor offers to fund a faculty post. If

pressed, supporters of Jewish studies may claim that the Jews and Judaism deserve intensive study because of their exceptional impact on world civilization. This would not be untrue, but nor would it explain current interest (p. 3) compared to the general academic neglect of Jewish culture for much of the history of western scholarship since the Renaissance. For a fuller explanation, it is necessary to see the history of Jewish studies against the background of the history of the Jews.

The relevant parts of that history commence with the status of Jews as an oppressed minority in medieval and early modern Europe and then the emancipation of Jews in some parts of Europe during the eighteenth century. Emancipation encouraged both assimilation into the wider society and a search for a distinctive identity within that society. Jewish intellectuals debated the nature of that identity for much of the nineteenth century. In particular, some restricted Jewishness to the religious sphere, others advocated nationalism, leading to the foundation of the Zionist movement at the end of the century. In the twentieth century the impact of these trends was seen in diverse ways, above all in the defining events of the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. The majority of Jews in the second half of the twentieth century have found themselves either in Israel, a Jewish nation state in which the pressures of government have encouraged a widening divide between religious and secular Jews, or in the United States, a selfconsciously pluralistic, multicultural society in which, at least since the 1960s, ethnic groups have been encouraged to express their distinctiveness rather than just merge themselves into a common culture. This privilege has been especially extended to Jews, along with a great increase in Jewish-Christian dialogue, in the light of the horror felt by a predominantly Christian society about the holocaust of Jews in Europe. A further factor has been the increased awareness among non-Jews of the continuing vitality of Jewish culture demonstrated by the prominent role of the State of Israel in international affairs for much of the second half of the twentieth century.

The history of Jewish studies has been affected by every aspect of this story. The high valuation of learning about the Torah as a pious activity in itself has been a distinctive aspect of rabbinic Judaism since late antiquity. Yeshiva education, centred on expertise in talmudics, has retained a prestigious role among religious Jews down to the present day. But this learning, which aims at the elucidation and reconciliation of texts as the expression of God's law, is to be distinguished from the study of Jews and Judaism without (at least in principle) any objective beyond a search for the truth.

Not that a totally objective approach to Jewish culture has ever been possible. The earliest students of Jewish literature in European universities were Christian professors of classical Hebrew in the medieval period whose concern was to discover the true meaning of the text of the Old Testament. Christian Hebraists in the Renaissance hoped to find in the Jewish mystical texts esoteric insights to match those of the pagan and Christian Neoplatonists of late antiquity. Much of the best scholarship on Jewish history and literature in the Second Temple period has been, since the nineteenth century, the work of Christian theologians primarily interested in the background to the New Testament. Similarly, the first foray by German Jews, (p. 4) in the early nineteenth

century, to create what they proclaimed as a 'science of Judaism' had the clearly apologetic aim of demonstrating to the wider world that Jewish culture could and should be analysed with the same tools as that of other peoples, and in particular the classical cultures of Greece and Rome.⁴

The efforts of the creators of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* still underpin contemporary study of some aspects of Jewish culture. But in some respects these pioneers may be deemed to have failed for most of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, in contrast to advocates of other national cultures such as English or German studies whose promotion in universities alongside classics was strikingly successful. Attempts to encourage European universities to establish posts to teach Jewish culture outside the context of Christian theology were only sporadically successful before the mid-twentieth century. Those few attracted into the field were almost exclusively Jews; the lecturers and professors in rabbinics and Jewish studies in places like Oxford, Cambridge, University College London, Paris, Harvard, and Columbia were all Jews before the late twentieth century, whereas teachers of Arabic were rarely Arabs, and teachers of Chinese were not Chinese. Most of what was written was the product of Jewish institutions, rabbinic academies which tried to combine yeshiva learning with the methods of scientific scholarship. Much was defensive, with aspects of Jewish culture singled out for special praise and the history of the Jews described as far as possible on the model of a national state rather than a dispersed religious minority. The non-Jewish world, both within and outside the universities, paid little attention to what was written, and in much of Europe even such modest advances as had been made were brought to an end either by the upheavals of the 1930s or by restrictions within the communist bloc during the Cold War.

Where the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* took hold most firmly was in the national homeland. In the 1920s the Hebrew University, with its Institute of Jewish Studies, was established on the European, and especially the German, model as a university for the Jewish people, with the task both of researching the nature of Judaism and of describing a living Jewish culture for the Jewish people. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 this educative role became a major task as the new nation strove to create an appropriate collective consciousness out of a (necessarily selective) evocation of the Jewish past.

In North America, by contrast, Jewish studies took off in the last quarter of the twentieth century in an entirely different direction. A general liberal awareness, particularly in the United States, of the sometimes arbitrary and oppressive concentration of traditional scholarship on the achievements of the wealthy and powerful led in the 1960s to encouragement of minority studies, such as women's studies and black studies. Jewish studies have flourished in many universities under the same general rubric, but with a rather firmer intellectual base precisely because of the (p. 5) solid work of the pioneers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The claim to intellectual respectability has often been

bolstered by describing the subject as Judaic studies or by sheltering (not altogether satisfactorily) under the rubric of Hebrew studies.

These developments have been, of course, only partly the product of the wider social changes just described, since something at least must also be due to the efforts and inclinations of the scholars themselves. Thus discoveries of new evidence such as the Cairo genizah, the Dead Sea scrolls or, more recently, documents about Jews in the state archives of the former Soviet Union, have stimulated whole new fields of research. Types of scholarship which were previously the preserve of the dedicated few have been opened up through the availability of resources such as the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the National and University Library in Jerusalem, or the publication on CD-ROM of rabbinic texts (e.g. *Bar-Ilan's Judaic Library* 1997), talmudic manuscript readings (Lieberman Institute 1998), and computer-enhanced photographs of the Qumran scrolls (Alexander and Lim 1997).

The institutions in which Jewish studies are based in the early twenty-first century reflect this history of the development of the subject. Thus much is achieved by a coterie of university-based institutions dedicated to the subject, both teaching departments and research centres, but most of these are quite small and of recent foundation. Much the most influential has been the oldest, the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University set up in 1925, but more recent years have also seen numerous important publications by other Israeli research centres, notably the at Rosenberg school at Tel Aviv University, and in Bar-Ilan University, but also in the many more specialized institutes such as (for example) the Ben-Gurion Research Centre in Beer-Sheva and the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Outside Israel, there are also a few specialized institutions, such as YIVO in New York and the research centre at the University of Pennsylvania which, metamorphosed from Dropsie College and the Annenberg Center into a full part of the university, has become a powerhouse for scholarship through a well-developed and well-funded programme of research seminars for visiting scholars. A similar programme is also administered by the Institute for Advanced Study at the Hebrew University and, on a less ambitious scale, by the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies which, like the Institut für Judaistik at the Freie Universität in Berlin, also provides courses for graduate students.

But these centres are the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, despite the efforts of co-ordinating institutions both on the national scale (the oldest being the Société des Études Juives, founded in Paris in 1880) and internationally (from the World Union of Jewish Studies, founded in 1947 to hold a congress in Jerusalem every four years, to the Association of Jewish Studies (1968) with its annual meeting, usually held in Boston, and the European Association of Jewish Studies (1982)), many scholars in the field work in isolation from most of their colleagues.

(p. 6)

Thus much important scholarship is still done by enthusiastic amateurs outside the university world, particularly in such fields as genealogy and local history, and much is achieved also within the confines of religious institutions. The Jewish theological academies, pre-eminently the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Hebrew Union College, retain great influence, although less than their counterparts in Central and Western Europe before the Holocaust. In contrast, there is now very little contact between academic Jewish Studies and the yeshiva world, a reflection of the polarization of the religious world which has also created difficulties for universities such as Yeshiva University in New York and Bar-Ilan University in Israel, which was set up in the 1950s precisely to give to orthodox Jewish students the best of both worlds. Similarly, much of Jewish studies is still done under the aegis of Christian faculties of theology, particularly in Europe and in parts of Latin America.

But the bulk of Jewish studies scholars work in quite disparate faculties, in which their interest in Jewish matters constitutes only a small element in their intellectual identity. Thus the academic addresses of most members who attend and speak at the World Congress of Jewish Studies will be faculties of history, sociology, religious studies, oriental languages, politics, and so on—that is, almost any faculty in the humanities and social sciences—and it will be to those disciplines, rather than to their Jewish material, that these scholars may feel their primary allegiance.

Jewish studies have thus developed in a fragmented and amorphous fashion, with concomitant problems. In essence, the subject is not really a specific discipline in its own right. It certainly does not conform to the norms of a classic historical or literary discipline based upon either a specific place or a specific language: Jewish languages are multifarious and the countries Jews have inhabited all too many. All too often it is impossible to understand aspects of Jewish culture without a detailed knowledge also of the surrounding non-Jewish world, so that a total mastery of Jewish studies requires almost encyclopaedic knowledge. Not even the reductive definition of the subject as ‘anything to do with Jews and Judaism’ is as simple as it looks, since the definition of Jewishness has been slippery in many periods of Jewish history, not least in recent debates in Israel about ‘Who is a Jew?’ Thus, although Jewish studies may perhaps be best viewed as analogous to a field of area studies to which various disciplines are applied (history, geography, philology, and so on), even that analogy is not exact.

Against this background it is fruitless to expect consistent methods across the whole field. Most of the journals devoted to Jewish studies specialize in particular parts of the subject, either openly as official editorial policy or in practice through the preferences of editors or the growth of traditions. Thus the two most venerable journals ostensibly devoted to the whole of Jewish studies, *Jewish Quarterly Review* (originally published in England from 1889 to 1908, and in a new series in the United States since 1910) and *Revue des Études Juives* (published since 1880), are both quite selective in their coverage. *Hebrew Union College Annual* (published since 1924) has (p. 7) predominantly material about Judaism rather than secular issues, and the *Journal of Jewish Studies* (published since 1949) deals mostly with late antiquity, with only a few articles on

medieval or modern issues (although the reviews section is more eclectic). *Tarbiz* (1929), in Hebrew, still covers a broad chronological span. *Sefarad*, founded in Spain by non-Jewish scholars in 1940 and published in Spanish since 1941, has a wide remit in Hebrew topics, with a special interest in Sephardic studies. Perhaps the widest spread of topics is to be found in *Mada'ei haYahadut-Jewish Studies* (1925–6, with gaps in publication), the forum of the World Union of Jewish Studies, now published annually, and the *Association of Jewish Studies Review* (1976), which reflect (if, of necessity, only patchily) all the subjects which interest the members of these associations, and the newer *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (1993). The predominant use of English and Hebrew in such journals is striking: most nonspecialized German periodicals, such as the *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, published in Leipzig in the 1850s, and the *Monatschrift für die Literatur und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, published in Vienna in the 1880s, have not survived. Most current journals are devoted to particular periods—for example, all the journals on biblical subjects, the *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* (1970), and *Modern Judaism* (1981) and the *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (2002)—or to particular aspects of Jewish studies, such as Jewish history (*Zion* (1935, in Hebrew); *Jewish History* (1986)); Hebrew literature (*Prooftexts* (1980); *Modern Hebrew Literature* (1975, refounded 1988)); contemporary society (*Jewish Journal of Sociology* (1959), *Jewish Social Studies* (1939); *Israel Affairs* (1994); *Israel Studies* (1996)); the history and current state of Judaism (*Judaism* (1952); *Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* (1998); *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* (1991)); law (*Jewish Law Annual* (1978)); art (*Jewish Art*, originally *Journal of Jewish Art* (1974)); politics (*Jewish Political Studies Review* (1989)); the Hebrew language (*Leshonenu* (1928)); Jewish languages other than Hebrew (*Jewish Language Review* (1981)); or bibliography of Jewish studies (*Kiryat Sefer* (1924, in Hebrew) and *Journal of Jewish Bibliography* (1938)). As will emerge from the brief paragraphs of suggested reading at the end of each chapter of the Handbook, many journals have sprung up in recent years devoted exclusively to what might appear to be small corners of the subject when Jewish culture is viewed as a whole—thus (for example) there are two journals for the Dead Sea Scrolls (*Revue de Qumran* (1958) and *Dead Sea Discoveries* (1994)), and a flourishing annual for Polish Jewish studies (*Polin* (1986)).

This proliferation of specialist publications encourages the intellectual disintegration of the subject as a whole. For many scholars in the field, their main intellectual allegiance is to their primary discipline and their concern is as much to bring a Jewish dimension to the attention of their colleagues in these disciplines as it is to use the methods of those disciplines to enlighten students interested in other aspects of Jewish culture. Few boundaries can be clearly set. The traditional investigation of any aspect of Jewish life 'through the ages', such as 'Jewish Thought' (p. 8) or 'Jewish Art', is open to the objection that it reflects an apologetic search for an essence of Jewishness which may have never existed. The common division of the subject into 'ancient', 'medieval', and 'modern' is similarly open to the charge that, for instance, it assumes a major shift from medieval to

modern which may be by no means apparent to some who believe that they still live out the unchanged oral Torah as given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Some scholars, including some who have made important contributions to knowledge of Jewish history and culture, are so impressed by these problems that they refuse to accept that Jewish studies is a field at all, but I think it is unnecessary to despair over such issues of definition and organization. Almost all humanities subjects raise some questions of this kind, although Jewish studies may raise more than most. But they do help to explain some of the current debates among those in the field, such as the distinction in Germany between *Judaistik* and *Jüdische Studien*: practitioners of the former have insisted on the necessity to view Jewish culture as a whole, requiring (usually) knowledge of Hebrew and earlier Jewish history and literature even for those specializing in more modern topics; practitioners of the latter have asserted the validity of historical, political, and sociological studies about the lives and institutions of Jews in more recent periods without need for knowledge of the earlier Jewish background.⁵ Another debate has centred on the appropriation of the name of Jewish studies by orthodox religious Jews keen to provide an attractive modern gloss to traditional yeshiva learning. This is an extension of an apologetic tendency which, despite pretensions to academic objectivity, Jewish studies has found it difficult to shed, not least because funding for teaching the subject in diaspora universities has often come from donors who see such encouragement as a means to reinforce local Jewish communal identity.

On a more parochial level of the politics of university administration, teaching staff have needed to balance the advantages of the dispersal of Jewish studies posts into the departments or faculties which house their main disciplines (such as history or modern languages)—which may give disciplinary credibility but may also leave the subject vulnerable when the current postholder retires—against the advantages of coalescence into an identifiable Jewish studies department, in which lack of methodological common ground may leave colleagues unable to judge each other's work; a compromise, to create 'programmes' or 'centres' of Jewish studies using teachers with primary allegiance in other departments, has been quite commonly adopted, but it is probably too early to know whether this form of organization will indeed ensure the continued vitality of the subject.

The solutions to these theoretical and practical problems have been different in the different parts of the world where Jewish studies are to be found, not least because sources of funding vary. Regardless of any protestation by both donor and recipient, it would be naive to expect the wishes of the paymaster to have no effect (p. 9) whatever on the directions taken in academic research. Thus in Israel the study of Jewish culture is financed primarily by the state, and historically has played an important role in defining (and questioning) national identity in the new state through the creation and demolition of national myths such as the heroic defence of Masada, the ambiguous role of Bar Kochba, and the contribution of archaeology to Jewish claims to the land. Jewish studies in Israel in the past generally tended towards validation of Jewish culture, with the added patina of authenticity derived from publication in Hebrew, although some of the current

generation of younger Israeli scholars see their role as 'post-Zionist' and deliberately divorced from the ideology of the state. In some parts of the field orthodoxies laid down by the giants of the early generations at the Hebrew University were for years only slowly challenged, not least because, in a small country with a culture traditionally respectful towards teachers, many Israeli academics were the direct intellectual descendants of these pioneers, but again, this attitude of deference was never universal, and in the current generation younger scholars sometimes make a virtue of radical departures from the consensus. Perhaps for similar reasons Israeli academics within Jewish studies did not always welcome forays into Jewish topics by their colleagues in other departments, and some areas of Jewish studies, particularly the study of rabbinic texts, have been in danger of becoming too esoteric for those outside the field to venture to use such texts at all. It does not help that the academic study of rabbinics within Jewish studies is also in some danger for a different reason, the current sharp divide between the religious and the secular in Israel. For much of the twentieth century the great figures in this area were scholars who had come to academic study only after a deep yeshiva education. People interested in combining yeshiva learning with an academic approach to rabbinic literature are not now common.

In the United States the quite different pressures on the local Jewish population have encouraged widespread adoption of the model of interdepartmental programmes of Jewish studies, not least because many American Jewish students are attracted by the prospect of including an element of Jewish studies within their modular courses as part of a search to establish their identity. The needs of such students have been pre-eminent for many of the private benefactors responsible for the establishment of Jewish studies posts, often combined with a hope that the incumbent of the post may also play a role within the local Jewish community. The interests of such benefactors in promoting specific aspects of Jewish studies, such as research into the Holocaust and the history of anti-Semitism, reflect to a large degree the concerns of North American Jews as a whole. The result has been some odd imbalances. Two examples may illustrate. First, many courses are taught to Jewish students using sources from within the Jewish tradition, but because the students concerned lack time or inclination to learn the Jewish languages in which these texts were written, much is done in translation. One effect of this is that few students who graduate in Jewish studies are qualified without further training to (p. 10) teach Jewish studies at university level. Second, a desire to maintain academic independence from theological pressures, perhaps a reflection of the divide between the religious and the secular in the American constitution, remains strong. It led to a debate when the Association for Jewish Studies was inaugurated as to whether rabbis should even be allowed to join; they were, but when classic rabbinic texts are taught in American universities it is often in departments of religion, where many of the students are not Jews but enthusiastic Christians seeking to understand the background to Christianity.

Elsewhere in the world the pattern of development of Jewish studies has generally followed a similar route to that in the United States (so in Canada, South Africa, and Australia); thus the efflorescence of Jewish studies in Russia has mostly been fuelled by the desire of Russian Jews to explore their identity (and by the willingness of American

and Israeli institutions to fund and advise them). The position in Western and Central Europe is rather more varied. In some countries (such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and elsewhere) there has been much scholarship on the history of the local Jewish populations, partly perhaps in an effort to assert the rightful place of Jews within the history of each nation. The large Jewish population in France, many of North African origin, has encouraged an expansion in Sephardic studies, and in many universities Jewish studies are taught by Jews to Jews. By contrast, most teachers and students in Germany are non-Jews, although in recent years there have been more Jewish students in Germany of Russian origin. In the United Kingdom the field is neatly divided between the mostly Jewish staff and students in places such as the Hebrew and Jewish Studies department at University College London, and the mostly non-Jewish teachers and students in other universities where Jewish studies are more fragmented and still often an offshoot of Christian theology—it is not accidental that for the first ten years or so after its inauguration in 1974, the British Association for Jewish Studies timed its annual meeting always to follow on after the meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study.

Regional variety is most clearly expressed in the different trends to be found in the historiography of local diaspora communities. There has been room in the Handbook to discuss in some detail the historiography of Jews in America, but it would have needed a separate chapter on each diaspora country to include an account of all the roughly parallel developments elsewhere over the past century and a half, such as the sterling work on Anglo-Jewish history carried out since 1893 by the Jewish Historical Society of England, and the highly productive efforts in examining German-Jewish history made by (for example) the S. L. Steinheim Institut für Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte. In many countries the agenda for such study was long driven by enthusiastic, often exceptionally expert, local Jewish amateurs, and the subject has only recently been adopted by professional scholars based in universities. Specialists in such local Jewish history often feel, not without justification, that their discoveries receive less attention than they deserve from colleagues (p. 11) engaged with non-Jewish history of the same time and place, while being marginalized as parochial within Jewish Studies as a whole.

Where should the subject go in the future? A search for total unity and generally accepted norms, either for methods or for a common curricular core of Jewish studies, seems futile. Instead it may make sense to celebrate precisely the diversity within the field. On the one hand more can be done to introduce a Jewish element into the general curricula of history, philology, theology, and other disciplines. On the other, specialists in Jewish studies can make a virtue of the special insights that may come through cross-disciplinarity. Certainly, any tendency to exclude some scholars from serious consideration on the grounds that they cannot ‘really’ be in Jewish studies because they lack certain (usually linguistic) skills needs to be firmly resisted by the new generation of scholars trained in the 1990s and the present. There remains a great deal to be discovered

about Jews and Judaism, and all methods are to be encouraged: proponents both of Judaistik and of Jüdische Studien must learn to cohabit.

But such cohabitation is not without its dangers, particularly where intellectual trends are led by market forces of student demand or donor wishes, which will tend to favour encouragement of subjects which do not require deep immersion into the difficult languages and texts of classical Judaism. Someone has to keep alive the study of classical Hebrew as a language and of the Talmud as a text from late antiquity. There is not as yet any sign that this need is in danger of not being met within the world of Jewish studies as a whole, but in particular countries these central subjects are too often ignored, and those who care for the subject as a whole will need to ensure they are preserved. And in some respects diversity and fragmentation cannot be left to flourish wholly unchecked. On a basic level, it is clearly undesirable that practitioners in the different streams of Jewish studies should simply ignore the work done by others, either on the grounds that their approaches are wholly different (a reason which used to be given for mutual indifference between Israeli and American scholars in some parts of the field) or, even less respectably, because scholars write in different languages. The main languages currently in use in Jewish studies scholarship are Hebrew, English, French, and German, but a good deal is also published in other European languages (particularly on local Jewish subjects), and it is incumbent on all in the field to take due note of whatever is produced. In particular, the development in some areas of Jewish studies of particular Francophone and German specialities is in large part due to the failure of other colleagues to interact sufficiently with those who write in these languages. The failure is two-way: the subjects covered, for instance, in the *Revue des Etudes Juives* are primarily those subjects (medieval rabbinics, Sephardi studies, contemporary sociology) in which French colleagues specialize (with, interestingly, more awareness outside Francophone scholarship of what is written in Hebrew than of work in English or German). It is a sign of some desperation that scholars who write (p. 12) only in German find themselves almost wholly ignored by many of their non-German-speaking colleagues, a degree of insularity not to be found in other humanities subjects, such as history or classics.

A second argument for increased unity arises from the newfound success of practitioners of Jewish studies in establishing their subject as worthy of academic attention. The stronger the subject becomes, the less need there is for scholars to be concerned that their efforts will appear only as a branch of apologetics. It is true that some areas of Jewish studies remain too sensitive for entirely free exchanges of ideas. In particular, writing in specific ways about the Holocaust, or Jewish-Christian relations, or the contemporary or recent politics of Israel, may seem to provoke the wrath of an academic establishment more powerful and unified than in other humanities subjects. But despite such pressures revisionist scholarship, even in these areas, does get written, discussed, evaluated, and when appropriate, imbibed into the common stock of knowledge. That is to say, Jewish studies are sufficiently mature to accept the value of dissent without concern that the main foundations of knowledge will be in danger of collapse.

Hence it may be time for all in the field to drop the pretence that there can ever be a fully objective 'science of Judaism' and to confess that, despite all our striving for objectivity, it is unavoidable that we must come to our studies for particular reasons and therefore with particular interests and biases. The trend in other humanities subjects for scholars to state openly what their interests are, so that readers may be aware of what they are getting, is to be encouraged in Jewish studies as well. Such openness also has to confront the undoubted effects of academic insights on the self-perception of Jews in the wider Jewish world. The discoveries and assertions of scholars about aspects of Jewish culture and the Jewish past are as influential in moulding the Jewish self-consciousness of secular diaspora Jews as the writings of Zionist academics have been in the creation of Israeli identity. It is irresponsible of scholars to ignore the undoubted impact of their work on real people: the search for the essence of Judaism or Jewishness may be bound to fail, but it cannot be simply ignored. At the very least, it is incumbent on all those engaged in Jewish studies at least occasionally to indulge in the kind of self-reflection which it is the intention of this Handbook to encourage.

Suggested Reading

The fine volume edited by Cohen and Greenstein (1990) contains only a very brief introduction, by Ismar Schorsch, to Jewish studies as a whole, but other topics touched on in this chapter are discussed by other contributors to that volume. There are observations on teaching in Neusner (1981 and 1984) and Garber (2000). Much can be found in Davis (1995: 9–117 and *passim*), with an emphasis as much on how Jewish studies are taught as on trends in (p. 13) research. Other published reflections on the current state of Jewish studies tend to be found in newspaper articles and other ephemeral media rather than more substantial publications.

There is a proliferation of dictionaries and encyclopaedias which can give guidance on specific topics in the field, most importantly Roth and Wigoder (1972). Much can be culled from the internet, but it is of varying quality.

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Notes:

(1) See e.g. the periodical *Shemot*, published since 1993.

(2) See the *Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies*, published since 1987.

(3) For a partial list of places, see Davis 1995: 253–363, partially updated for countries in the former Soviet Union in Chulkova (1996) and for Western Europe in Winkelmann (1998). All such lists go out of date very rapidly.

(4) On the history of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see e.g. Schorsch (1994).

(5) See discussions in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1994) and Brenner and Rohrbacher (2000).

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