

**Association for Jewish Studies**

Center for Jewish History

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## The Apocalypse Issue

Fall 2012

**The Latest:**

The Dictatorship of the Comedian

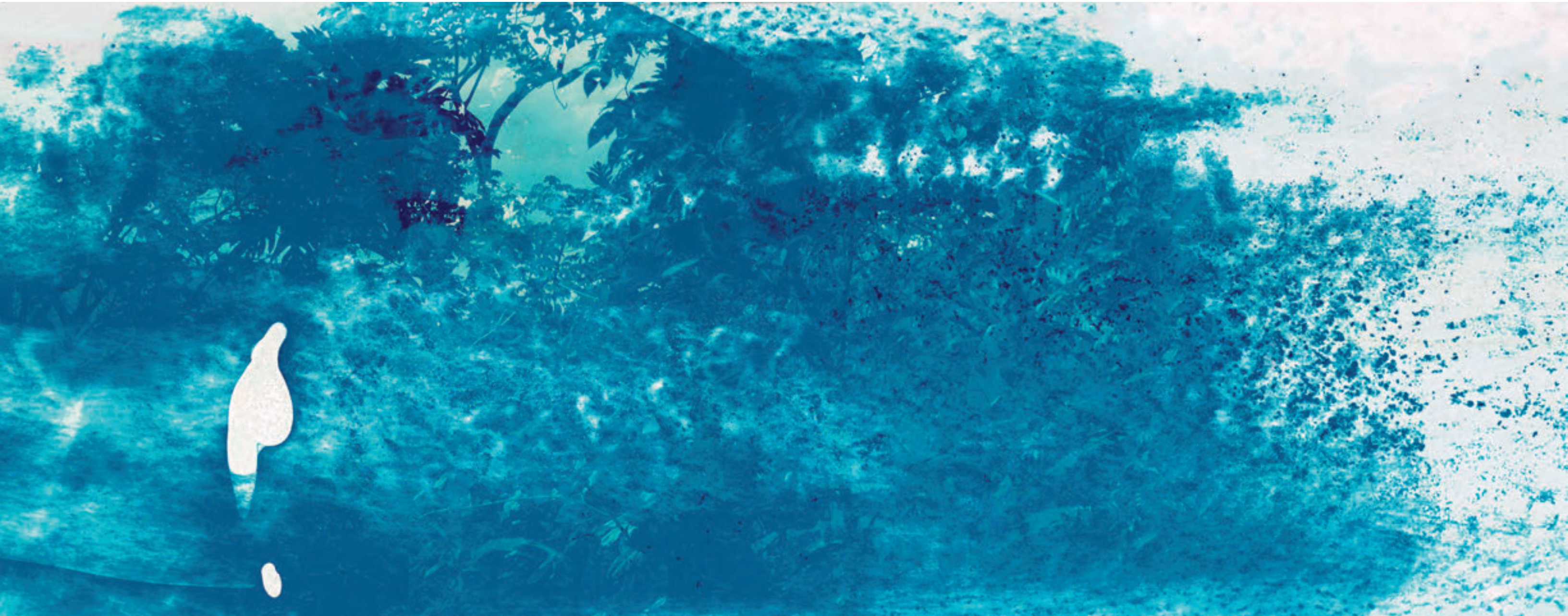
The Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive

**The Questionnaire:**

As a professor of Jewish Studies, how do you perceive your responsibility to the Jewish community?

# AJS Perspectives

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES









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CORRECTION: We apologize for an error made in the Spring 2012 issue of *AJS Perspectives* in which we mistakenly misspelled the name of our colleague Atina Grossmann.

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# From the Editors

## *Dear Colleagues,*

What is the apocalypse? When is it coming?

Even though fears of a 2012 apocalypse predicted by the Maya rest on a misinterpretation, global events point to the erosion of venerable institutions, the exhaustion of familiar political and economic systems, and the depletion of vital resources. With so many things reaching their terminal point, scholars from across disciplines find themselves engaged in speculation about the end. Amidst this flurry and variety of apocalyptic discourse, we present cutting-edge articles that analyze and historicize Jewish thinking about the end times.

Visions of the apocalypse express a yearning for a redemptive return to a moment of primal origin. Mircea Eliade famously described ritual as a means of departure from the depleting effects of history and a return to a mythic state of unity. Scholars have linked Eliade's critique of history and valorizing of essential identities with his fascist leanings and cast doubt on the motives for dismissing history in the name of purity. In its pursuit of redemption and purity, apocalypticism subjects history to a more violent fate. It perceives a corruption so thorough as to require the obliteration of the sociopolitical order.

Since the corruption is even imagined as infecting nature, the physical world itself needs restoration. Where ritual, according to Eliade, seeks to exit history, apocalyptic thought wants to stop history in its tracks.

Ironically, the apocalyptic pursuit of purity takes the form of wild and violent images. Apocalyptic visions subject enemies to grand cruelties and enumerate excessive cataclysm. Revenge, more than redemption, seems to be the pleasure conferred by the apocalypse. In its various permutations, apocalyptic discourse functions as political hyperbole, flagging ubiquitous corruption and dramatizing oppositional positions. It wavers between fervent longing for society to come crashing down and anxiety that the failure to change the course of human history will result in widespread suffering and punishment.

**Matti Bunzl**

*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

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*University of Illinois at Chicago*

# From the President

## *Dear Colleagues,*

The words “humanities” and “technology” seem to be inseparable of late. Digital resources for humanities scholars now burgeon on the Internet; scholars are busy exploring new ways to deploy databases and digitized texts to support research in history, literature, and other fields of humanistic study; online systems have become the new standard for providing students with evaluations, readings, assignments, correspondence, and, in growing numbers, instruction. Virtually every aspect of scholarly work bears the impact of new possibilities—and challenges—posed by recent innovations in technology.

These developments seem daunting and unprecedented in scope. At the same time, I see them as part of an issue of ongoing importance in Jewish Studies—namely, the attention that scholars working throughout this wide-ranging field pay to matters of mediation. These matters range from the relation between the oral and the written transmission of teachings, dating back to ancient times, to the ongoing role of translation in establishing and transforming Jewish literacy; from the interrelation between texts and images to the transformative impact of print culture on early modern Jewish thought and practice. And, of course, there is a growing number of scholars examining the role of photography, sound recording, film, broadcasting, video, or digital media in Jewish life. Almost every Jewish Studies scholar—working in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, and regardless of the time period, place, or phenomenon that is the focus of one's research—grapples with questions of how information is encoded, disseminated, and received. The current attention to humanities and technology, which may seem at first like an issue exclusively

for scholars of contemporary culture or media studies, is, in fact, relevant for everyone in Jewish Studies. Indeed, this is in some way a familiar subject.

The lessons we have learned in Jewish Studies from attending to issues of mediation can inform how we address new technologies. For example, technological innovations are creating new possibilities for communication that can transform how ideas not only circulate but even how they are conceptualized. Digital publishing has the potential to revolutionize how scholarly writing is produced—notably, in challenging the peer-review process by allowing scholars to publish unvetted work on a platform that then invites feedback and enables authors' responses. New digital platforms for creating texts also foster collaborative writing and facilitate alternatives to linear expository narratives. Engaging these innovations can entail our looking back in time as well as forward. None of these developments is entirely new—indeed, they hearken back to ancient writing practices. At the same time, these changes are groundbreaking in how they challenge contemporary protocols of authoritative scholarly writing.

Innovations in communications technologies invariably come with unanticipated consequences. New media often seem to promise greater standardization and permanence in communication, but they can prove to be, if anything, more destabilizing. An error in a printed text can spread misinformation much more widely than a mistake in a handwritten manuscript; celluloid film stock, on which motion pictures were recorded for decades, turns out to be less mutable than



the newer medium of videotape, which is, in turn, less vulnerable to corruption than the more recent digitized code on a DVD or stored on a server. The discovery of unanticipated consequences also extends to social practices around new media. Searching for books through online databases yields different kinds of serendipitous discoveries than does browsing the stacks of a library; querying an archivist or teacher in person is not the same as doing so on the telephone or via online exchanges.

Given the great diversity of Jewish Studies scholarship, it is not surprising that AJS members run the gamut in their interest in and facility with new media technologies. This is not simply a matter of generation or field of expertise (I have a colleague who teaches the sociology of communications who has long refused to establish an email account). Negotiating one's way through the wealth of available communications technologies is a task of modern life for everyone, and decisions of what to accept or reject (Smart phone? Tablet? Personal website? Blog? Facebook page? LinkedIn account? Twitter feed? Pinterest?) are often ultimately a matter of idiosyncratic sensibility. For scholars, employing new technologies in research or teaching also entails questions of investing time, money, personnel, or intellectual energy, as well as nagging concerns that what is state-of-the-art today will be out-of-date sooner than we dare think.

AJS is committed to addressing the cascade of questions that new technologies pose to scholars, starting with two important new events at our 2012 Annual Conference in Chicago. The conference opens on Sunday morning with **THATCamp Jewish Studies**. A project of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University,

THATCamp (short for The Humanities And Technology Camp) is a model for convening open meetings in which "humanists and technologists of all skill levels learn and build together in sessions proposed on the spot." THATCamp's "unconference" format has no formal presentations or prepared lectures but enables anyone participating in the meeting to convene informal, impromptu conversations. This is a rare opportunity for AJS members to explore issues of special interest related to Jewish Studies, technology, and digital media, ranging from practical "how-to" questions to more theoretical topics.

During the conference, AJS will also hold a **Digital Media Workshop**, featuring 9 presentations of research and teaching tools in an informal and interactive setting. The workshop will enable conference goers to explore a wide range of new media projects created by AJS members and, moreover, to speak directly with them and other colleagues about innovative practices and ideas. (Digital media have not obviated the oldest of communications practices—face-to-face conversation.)

These two conference events are part of AJS's ongoing commitment to addressing new developments in scholarship. As technological innovations continue to pose new opportunities and challenges to Jewish Studies scholars, we will continue to consider how to engage these developments, and we look forward to hearing from AJS members—using whatever medium suits them best—with suggestions for how to move forward in this area of vital importance for us all.

**Jeffrey Shandler**  
*Rutgers University*

## From the Executive Director

### *Dear Colleagues,*

As the executive director of a non-profit organization in the midst of a prolonged national economic crisis, I never take for granted the ability to present positive reports to the board of directors. Indeed, over the past nine years that I have served as executive director of the AJS, I have with few exceptions been able to share good news: about a growing membership, record-breaking conference submissions, new grant-funded programs, exciting new initiatives. Thanks to the devotion and foresight of an extraordinary series of presidents, board members, volunteers, and staff, the AJS membership has grown close to 40 percent since the early 2000s, it has received several hundred thousands of dollars in outside funding, and its range of programs and services has increased several-fold.

While the AJS does what it does very well, I think it is still vital for the organization's health to ask, is there more that we could be doing? Should we look beyond our traditional programs to other areas of activity? Are there other projects and services we might undertake that would enhance the professional lives of our members and the field of Jewish Studies as a whole? Many organizations only face these questions during a period of crisis—for example, when there is a constituency that no longer sees the organization as relevant or a cause that no longer needs redress. But what better time for the AJS to reflect on its

work, its mission, and its activities than from a position of stability and strength?

The AJS Board of Directors has decided to address these questions by launching a six-month strategic planning process, beginning this fall. This process will be led by Marta Siberio, a highly experienced and respected organizational consultant, and the AJS Strategic Planning Committee: Beth Berkowitz (Barnard College), Mark Kligman (HUC-JIR), Rebecca Kobrin (Columbia University), Hartley Lachter (Muhlenberg College), Joshua Lambert (University of Massachusetts, Amherst and National Yiddish Book Center), Vanessa Ochs (University of Virginia), Rona Sheramy (AJS), Adam Teller (Brown University), Shelly Tenenbaum (Clark University), and Jeffrey Shandler (chair, AJS President, Rutgers University).

This will be the AJS's first strategic plan, and it comes at a time both of great strength for the organization and of rapid shifts in the landscape of the academic profession, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, due to economic concerns, technological developments, and other factors. These developments are transforming how scholars do research, teach undergraduates, and train graduate students. Through this strategic planning process, AJS will reflect on its mission and will map out key areas on which the organization should focus its



attention and resources over the next several years. Our utmost priority is to preserve the core mission of the AJS—to promote, maintain, and improve teaching and research in Jewish Studies at colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. Through this strategic planning process, we will strive to ensure that we are doing so in the most relevant, thoughtful, and meaningful ways possible in a changing scholarly environment.

This strategic planning process will consist of several components, including several opportunities for members to share their vision for the organization. The Strategic Planning Committee will meet several times with the consultant to discuss key organizational issues, review findings at each stage, and plan next steps. Marta Siberio will also conduct interviews with board members, editors, AJS staff, and several supporters, in order to understand the culture of the organization, the community it serves, its status and reputation within and outside the membership, and the interests of its various constituencies. She will also reach out to executive directors of other learned societies to gain greater insight into their policies, programs, funding, and organizational structure, and to learn how other societies' best practices might be applied to the AJS.

Perhaps most importantly, Marta Siberio will attend the AJS Conference in December, where she will hold a focus group with AJS

members, as well as have an opportunity to experience the one event that brings our diverse field together. The AJS will be inviting international members, and U.S. members from institutions outside the Northeast, to participate in this focus group and share their vision for the organization, profession, and field as a whole. The AJS will also be providing other opportunities for members to offer feedback and share their ideas, including an online survey in the early spring.

The final result of this process will be a plan document that will outline the AJS's strategic vision for the next three years, the goals and objectives needed to accomplish that vision, and specific programs and resources required to fulfill these goals. This will be a flexible plan; our intent is not to limit the projects and plans the AJS can take on but rather to provide a road map for the next few years, which will ensure that the AJS's activities best reflects its members' and the field's needs and goals. We hope to share the plan's findings with the AJS membership by summer 2013. Until then, please don't hesitate to contact me with any ideas or thoughts you have. I look forward to your input and to sharing in an exciting new vision for the AJS's future.

**Rona Sheramy**  
*Association for Jewish Studies*

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# The Apocalypse Issue

## Apocalypse Then

John J. Collins

In modern parlance, an apocalypse is a disaster of cosmic proportions, such as might be set off by a nuclear explosion. It derives this connotation from the prototypical apocalypse, the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, which does indeed describe cosmic disasters on a grand scale. Revelation chapters 8 and 9, for example, describe a series of disasters introduced by trumpet blasts that destroy much of the earth. In those days, we are told, people will seek death and not find it. Eventually, the present heaven and earth pass away and are replaced by new ones. In an age where cosmic catastrophe is all too real a possibility, these ancient images of destruction are often eerily relevant.

The Book of Revelation was an adaptation of a genre that flourished in Judaism around the turn of the era. The earliest examples date from the early second century BCE. Typically, they are attributed to famous ancient figures, such as Enoch or Daniel, who could not possibly have been their real authors. (Enoch supposedly lived before the Flood; Daniel in the Babylonian Exile, but his visions concern a time some four hundred years later.) These names lent authority to the revelations, and also enabled the authors to present overviews of the intervening history in the guise of predictions. Since these “predictions” were known to have been fulfilled, the real predictions of the future could be trusted too. Apocalypses were often written in response to actual disasters. An early cluster of apocalypses, including the Book of Daniel, is associated with the disruption of the temple cult by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BCE. Another series of apocalypses was written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE (Revelation, and the Jewish apocalypses 4 Ezra, 2 and 3 Baruch). The images of destruction, then, reflected actual experiences, but projected them onto a cosmic scale. But there was more to ancient apocalypses than the imagery of destruction.

The word *apocalypse* actually means “revelation.” Apocalypses are typically visions that disclose not only the future but also



Albrecht Dürer, *Saint John Devouring the Book*, c. 1498. Woodcut. Courtesy of the Wetmore Print Collection, Art History Department, Connecticut College, New London.

the supernatural world. Several apocalypses contain visions of God’s throne in heaven (Daniel 7, Revelation 4), based on older, biblical visions in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. They are typically populated by angels and demons, which influence human action on earth. Some apocalypses include detailed descriptions of the heavens or the netherworld. They are not

only predictions, but provide an alternative way of imagining the world, one in which things are not what they seem from an earthly perspective. Often the authors draw on ancient myths to describe this view of the world. One such myth describes a great conflict between a divine, or semidivine, figure riding on the clouds of heaven and a





Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, c. 1498. Woodcut. Courtesy of the Wetmore Print Collection, Art History Department, Connecticut College, New London.



beast or dragon that rises from the sea. This myth, in various forms, was often used to describe creation in the ancient Near East. In the apocalypses, especially in Daniel and Revelation, it is projected into the future, suggesting that the world will have to be created all over again. (This future projection of the battle with the dragon is found already in Isaiah 27:1, which says that “on that day: the Lord will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.”)

The disasters that the apocalypses foretell are not just natural upheavals like tsunamis or hurricanes but acts of divine judgment. Like the prophets before them, the apocalyptic writers believed that God would intervene to judge the world. In the prophets, the judgment was primarily the judgment of Israel and was carried out by God’s proxies, such as the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The apocalyptic writers, however, envisioned the judgment of these foreign powers, which had oppressed Israel. (This is still the case in the Book of Revelation, whose author identified himself as Jewish, and which foresaw God’s judgment on Rome.) Moreover, the judgment in the apocalypses has an otherworldly dimension. Not only will the hostile powers, such as Syria or Rome, be destroyed, and the wicked be condemned to eternal punishment, but the righteous will be rewarded with eternal life with the angels in heaven.

We can appreciate easily enough why these texts were appealing in times of persecution, or in the wake of a disaster like the destruction of Jerusalem. Apocalypses gave people hope in times of despair. They also gave people the strength to endure. The goal of life was not the traditional one of living long in the land and seeing one’s children’s children, but eternal life with the angels in heaven.

One could afford to lose one’s life in this world, in the hope of gaining life everlasting. In both Daniel and Revelation, the heroes are those who let themselves be killed rather than be unfaithful to their religious beliefs.

Many people, however, would argue that the hope the apocalypses provided was false. Typically, apocalypses promised that the judgment they describe must take place soon. In modern times, apocalypticism is often associated with setting a date for the “end.” This was the case with the Millerite movement in Ohio in the 1840s, and again with the predictions of Harold Camping as recently as 2011. There are remarkably few attempts to set exact dates in the ancient apocalypses, though the Book of Daniel is a notable exception. The book ends with a double prediction: “From the time the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days. Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty five days” (Daniel 12:11–12). Evidently, the first number of days passed uneventfully, and the author recalculated—a procedure that is well documented in modern apocalyptic movements such as the Millerite’s. Of course, the second number of days also passed, but the prophecy was not discredited. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing some 250 years after Daniel, said that Daniel was the greatest of the prophets because he not only predicted what would happen but also said when it would happen. Josephus, like many people in antiquity, assumed that if the prophecy was not fulfilled literally, then it could not have been intended literally. People continued to reinterpret Daniel’s prophecies down through the Middle Ages, often assuming that a “day” in the prophecy really meant a year. The problem then was to determine

the correct starting point. The predictions of the Millerites, and of other modern apocalyptic movements have been based on reinterpretations of Daniel in this way.

Given that apocalyptic predictions inevitably fail, we may wonder why this kind of literature retains its appeal. The use of mythic language lends itself constant reinterpretation. In Daniel, the fourth beast rising out of the sea was the Greek empire. In Revelation and in 4Ezra, it is Rome. Many other identifications would be made over the centuries. In the twentieth century, the identification of apocalyptic imagery with current political figures and events became a virtual industry, in the hands of authors like Hal Lindsey, whose best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, has sold tens of millions of copies since 1970. But while these identifications all need constant revision, and consequently seem illusory, apocalyptic visions still strike a chord in the human psyche. They underline the fragility of human existence, and speak to a deep-rooted fear of annihilation. On a more personal level, they speak to the fear of death. The hope for an afterlife—which is an integral part of apocalyptic expectation—provides a way of soothing that fear. Apocalyptic literature reminds us that this world, in fact, is passing away.

Even if the physical universe remains forever, all our lives are finite, so that we always live in anticipation of an ending. It is that enduring dimension of the human condition that gives apocalyptic literature its power.

*John J. Collins is the Holmes Professor of Old Testament at Yale University. He is the author of The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature (Eerdmans, 1998).*

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# The Pursuit of the Millennium at Qumran

Albert I. Baumgarten

I recently suggested that Qumran studies were at least in part a product of the time of their discovery in ways that may have contributed to their shape. Orwell's *1984*, with its dysfunctional, dictatorial society that controlled every aspect of citizens' lives, appeared at the same time as the discovery and first publication of the scrolls in 1949. At the same time, the world had experienced the horrific realities of Stalinist communism, with its constant purges, and even more "darkness at noon" that followed in the rampant terror of Stalin's last years. A relentless, uncompromising, unforgiving, and persecutorial movement that seemed bent on erasing every iota of dissidence (ideological, political, or practical), no matter what the cost, seemed the norm. Total loyalty always seemed to be required, and I suggest that it was in that context that the Qumran group was understood.

The best evidence I can produce for the consequences of this mindset on Qumran scholarship was the growing dismay among scholars when it turned out that there were gaps within the corpus of texts found at Qumran—not all the sources agreed with each other on all points. True, Morton Smith (1915–1991) may have been prescient and had the dangers of the Stalinist model in mind when he warned, in 1960, that:

even if we suppose that all books came from the official library, we cannot be sure that everything in the library reflected faithfully and directly the beliefs of its owners—that sort of *absurd supposition should be left to the secret police* (emphases mine).

But this caution did not prevent the offering of more and more far-fetched explanations of the history and origins of the discovered Qumran scrolls as the years passed by and as the gaps within the Qumran

scrolls became increasingly obvious, as a consequence of more extensive and complete publication of the corpus. How else could one account for the divergences between texts in matters of practice and belief in a movement perceived by Stalinist preconceptions? It seemed absurd to consider any possibility of "unreconciled diversity" in matters of belief, as argued by Smith in 1959, or of "tolerated

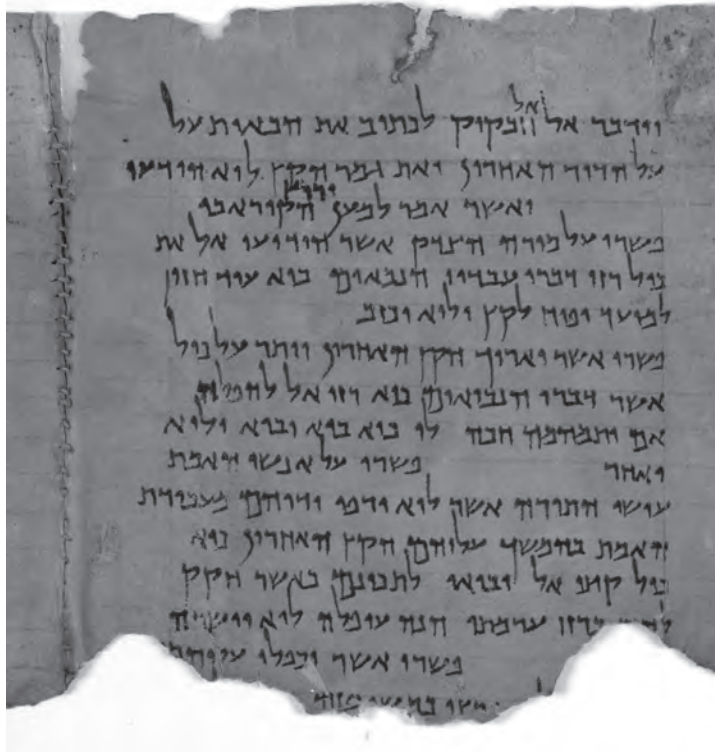
themselves or each other. On the one hand, when this awareness is transferred to the Qumran community and its texts, it allows appreciation of at least some of the differences between Qumran texts that have puzzled scholars. On the other hand, it can also enhance the significance of cases in which internal dissent was not tolerated at Qumran.

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One famous instance, when internal dissent was not well tolerated, occurred when there was disagreement at Qumran about when the "end of days" would end, as discussed in the Qumran Peshet to the prophet Habakkuk (1QpHab vii). This was a sensitive issue, because as Richard Landes observed, at a time of intense hope of the ultimate redemption of the world, there is no *שנאה היגב* (unjustified hatred). Ironically, at times like that all hatred is fully justified, lest any sins of other Jews, any deviation from the norms, delay or even abort the promises, hopes, and proofs of immediate divine redemption, in which so much has been invested. Experience shows, however, that similar hopes in the past were disappointed. For this reason, while this time the promise is

certain, paradoxically, it is also fragile: past disappointment may recur. Accordingly, any false move could be disastrous.

Peshet Habbakuk interprets the words of the Biblical prophet as referring to contemporary times. It reveals the hitherto hidden message concealed in the original revelation, foretelling a moment when the "men of truth, the doers of the law," i.e. those who remained loyal to the "Teacher" (the leader and perhaps founder of the Qumran group, in the incarnation known from the sectarian texts discovered there) were praised, while others were denounced, when the expected end of the "end of days" took longer than anticipated (1QpHab vii:9–14). That is, the Qumran sectarians were certain



Commentary on Habakkuk, col. vii. Reproduced by permission of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

dissent" in matters of practice at Qumran (to adopt a term suggested by Talya Fishman in 1997 for Jews of medieval Ashkenaz).

Recognizing the differences between Qumran and Stalinist movements, I suggest that we can learn an important lesson from the study of Rabbinic Judaism and consider the legal sources as normative. Rabbinic sources do not describe life as it was lived to the last detail. Rather, they are prescriptive, setting forth a vision of life as "it should be lived," of the beliefs one should believe. They, too, are gapped: they do not always agree with

that their times were those of the end of days. All that now remained was to await the end of the end of days. When that grand finale took longer than some expected it was a case of classic “disconfirmation,” which, in many other well-documented cases (the Jehovah’s Witnesses, at several moments in the twentieth century, for example), has produced schisms. The events narrated in 1QpHab, col. vii, are therefore not surprising.

But just what happened between the Teacher and the different groups of his followers, as narrated in our text from Peshier Habakkuk? On what did they disagree? I would like to propose a different understanding of this text than usual and explore its implications. The text begins with the assertion that God told the prophet Habakkuk all, but withheld from him exact knowledge of when the end of the end would take place (1QpHab vi:12–vii:2). It then continues by declaring that the Teacher knew all the secrets of God’s servants, the prophets (1QpHab vii:3–5). I take this literally, to mean that the Teacher *knew no more than Habakkuk. As Habakkuk was ignorant of the end, so was the Teacher.* Yet, not all at Qumran members seemed to have followed the Teacher’s agnostic lead. Some, disregarding the Teacher, apparently expected the redemption imminently. Of course, they

were disappointed and the Teacher’s position was fully vindicated when the “new heaven” and “new earth” did not materialize. Therefore, while God will ultimately destroy all the wicked, presumably including those who did not follow the Teacher (1QpHab vii:14–17), those “doers of the law” who were steadfast in their faith in the Teacher will get their ultimate reward (1QpHab vii:17–viii:3).

In times in which there is no “unjustified hatred,” there was no room for “wide margins of indifference”—to invoke a term suggested by George Duby for understanding the dynamics of heresy in Medieval Europe. This disloyalty could not be tolerated. For that reason, these dissidents were denounced, while those who remained loyal to the Teacher were praised.

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On this understanding of the key passage in 1QpHab, the Qumran community remains a hotbed of imminent eschatological redemption. This expectation was a key element in their belief system. Freed of Stalinist expectations of absolute conformity, however, we can recognize differences among the members as well. To employ another set of terms proposed by Richard Landes, we can identify Qumran “owls,” proclaiming that the night was not yet over, as well as Qumran

“roosters,” crowing in joy at the breaking dawn, all to be found in the Qumran barnyard. In the instance narrated in our text from Peshier Habakkuk, contrary to what we might have expected, the Teacher was the biggest owl of them all, but not everyone there followed his lead. Eschatological hopes, in the end, were and remain individual, like other dreams. Qumran was no exception.

1QpHab v:9–12 tells us about the “House of Absalom,” whose name suggests some sort of internal deviants, ultimately expelled from the group, but we don’t know who the members of the House of Absalom were, and have only hints of the practical ways in which they were different, or the beliefs for which they were considered disloyal. All we know is that they remained silent when reproved by the Teacher and did not take his side against the “Man of Lies.” Thanks to our text in Peshier Habakkuk vii, analyzed here, we are better informed about at least one fissure in the Qumran community: We have a moment of brief insight into the clash of different millennial expectations at Qumran, and their social consequences in the dynamics of the life of the group.

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# Apocalypse in the History of Judaism: Continuities and Discontinuities

Hindy Najman

There are two assumptions that guide the study of apocalyptic literature. The first contends that apocalypticism arose in ancient Judaism when prophecy ended, around the second century BCE. The second asserts that apocalypticism exhausted itself or was suppressed within rabbinic Judaism but continued in Christianity, as evidenced by Revelation and its prominence in the New Testament and later Christian reception. Both assumptions are false, but each contains a seed of truth.

What is apocalypse? In a pioneering study, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* (1979), John Collins defined it as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” Such works develop elements of prophecy (revelation to a human recipient), wisdom (knowledge of transcendent reality), and eschatology (disclosure of the end of days), forerunners of which are found already in texts from the Hebrew Bible. To be sure, the human recipients in apocalyptic works were often figures associated with the past, such as Enoch or Ezra. But is there any prophetic or apocalyptic work that can be said with certainty to contain no trace of pseudepigraphy? In any event, the institution of prophecy may have ended, and some writers or interpretive communities may have felt it necessary to efface their own identities in order to present revelations as received by authoritative figures. But surely this was, as much as anything, the continuation of prophecy in the broader sense of revelatory communication. Apocalypse was only one among many ways in which Israel continued, even in the late Second Temple period and, indeed, after the destruction of the Temple, to express its encounters with divinity. The presence of both prophetic and apocalyptic features continued well beyond Second Temple period (see Michael Stone).

As for the supposed exclusion of apocalypse from rabbinic Judaism, Gershom Scholem, in his magisterial study, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (1973), called this “one of the strangest errors of the modern *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” which “contributed much to the modern falsification of Jewish history and to the concealment of some of its most dynamic forces, both constructive and destructive.” Many works from the late classical rabbinic corpus such as *Sefer Elijah* and *Sefer Zerubbabel*, as well as texts ascribed to R. Shimon ben Yohai, exhibit features of the apocalyptic genre defined by Collins, and discussed by many other scholars. There have been many episodes of Jewish apocalypticism, of which the Sabbatean movement and the recent fervor surrounding the death of the Lubavitcher Rebbe are two well-known examples, although, to be sure, there are many others.

Yet there is a seed of truth in the old assumptions. If apocalypse was not the end of prophecy, it did mark the transformation of revelatory encounter into an increasingly interpretive enterprise, citing and reworking earlier traditions in order to authorize specific teachings and in order to continue Israel’s relationship with divinity. This interpretation is clear in texts such as 1QM (The War Scroll) and 4Ezra. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls are the Pesharim. Instead of producing new apocalyptic texts—such as Habakkuk, Isaiah, and Nahum—often in order to apply apocalyptic themes to contemporary events. It was a matter of urgent importance to situate the imperial power to which Jews were subject within apocalyptic schemes drawn from these prophetic texts such as Isaiah and Habakkuk and of course from the book of Daniel.

If apocalypse was not excluded from “normative” rabbinic Judaism, it was nevertheless marginalized. Some rabbinic traditions, notably the famous dictum of Mar Shmuel (BT Berakhot 34b) that the messianic days involve only the restoration of sovereignty, sought to decouple messianism from apocalypticism. Others,

like the tradition attributed to R. Yonatan (BT Sanhedrin 97b), leave the linkage intact, but curse those who calculate the date of the Messiah’s arrival. Moreover, when advocates of apocalypse sought to move into the center of Jewish concern, they had to stake their claims not on the basis of newly disclosed mediated revelations but on interpretations of what became a fairly standard collection of authoritative texts. As John Reeves has pointed out in his invaluable collection, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalyptic Reader* (2005), the angel who appears to Zechariah in his proto-apocalyptic visions does not cite scripture but in later works like *Sefer Zerubbabel* and the *Secrets of R. Shimon ben Yohai*, the angel Metatron has become a master of scriptural interpretation (see the work of Martha Himmelfarb). Revelatory encounter continues, but it is now triply mediated: by the angel, by the human recipient drawn from the past, and by scripture. Within medieval Judaism, as Amos Funkenstein noted in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (1993), “apocalyptic images and motifs persisted as an integral part of messianic folklore,” but “calculations of the end” were carried out by individual scholars or transmitted in relatively autonomous esoteric traditions that were only tangentially connected to mystical and Kabbalistic bodies of lore. If this marginalization of apocalypticism was overcome, it was only within antinomian communities such as the Sabbateans after their Messiah’s conversion to Islam, and the Frankists—in short, groups that had themselves become marginal. Of course, it is the perceived threat to normative Judaism posed by such groups, along with Christianity, perhaps the first apocalyptic offshoot of Judaism, that can help explain rabbinic anxiety about apocalyptic elements of messianism. And it is the perceived threat of such groups to Judaism’s reputation for rationality that explains the drastic underestimation of the historical importance of apocalypse by the pioneers of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.



How much does it matter that the Hebrew Bible includes no apocalyptic work after Daniel, and that later apocalypses are found only in works marginal to the rabbinic corpus, such as the aforementioned *Secrets of R. Shimon ben Yohai* or *Pirquei de R. Eliezer*? Does this mean that, if we want to understand “normative Judaism,” we need pay no attention to “noncanonical” texts such as Jubilees, the Enochic corpus, or 4Ezra?

This would be a misunderstanding of the relationship between scriptural and nonscriptural texts in Judaism. Insofar as scripture is authoritative in Judaism, it is also generative. But this generativity can also be perceived as a threat to its authority. The vitality of scripture finds new ways of

expressing itself in texts that spell out the gap between scripture and interpretation such as pseudepigrapha, Midrashim (see S. Naeh, *Tarbiz* 66 [1997]), and in commentaries and Kabbalistic treatises. And the possibility that one of these expressions will threaten—or be perceived to threaten—the scripture that gave birth to it can never be eliminated. Scholem and Funkenstein both understood that apocalyptic texts and ways of thinking exemplify this point: they may fall just below the radar of normativity because of a potential threat that is in fact rarely actualized, yet they are nevertheless integral to the life of the Jewish tradition.

If we are to understand the authority of Scripture, Midrash, the Talmud, and

even later mystical corpora, then we must also understand the traditions that these collections generate, along with the challenges to authority to which they sometimes give rise. Apocalyptic texts are key examples of marginal texts that arise from but that can also threaten the so-called canonical collections. The question still remains: how are we to acknowledge potentially subversive apocalyptic and esoteric texts as integral parts of a tradition that accords certain texts the status of scriptural authority?

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# Apocalyptic Science

Seth Sanders

Strangely, the earliest known Jewish apocalypse is also the earliest known Jewish scientific work. The Aramaic fragments of the Astronomical Book of Enoch, composed in the third century BCE or earlier and found at Qumran, represent the first appearance of astronomy and mathematics in Jewish literature. But this science comes in a vision. The angel Uriel takes the patriarch Enoch on a heavenly journey where he sees the clockwork of the universe: the gates through which the sun, winds, and heavenly bodies regularly move.

What did scientific and apocalyptic knowledge have to do with each other, and why did they take the stage together? To us, apocalypses seem like the opposite of empiricism and sober analysis—epics of cosmic paranoia that presage both Kabbalistic visions and militant fanaticism. But the maverick historian of religion Jacob Taubes already suggested a different analysis in 1947:

The science of apocalypticism can be defined as the exact numerical calculation of the end of time. It is intended to provide absolute assurance to faith and hope.

Was quantitative precision bound to eschatological vision from the beginning? Close linguistic analysis of the Qumran fragments, when placed in the history of biblical exegesis, helps us to answer this question. A single Aramaic phrase—which, for interesting reasons, appears in no modern translation—connects the history of science, apocalypticism, and knowledge itself in ancient Judaism.

The Bible shows no interest in science: in fact, Deuteronomy (4:19) warns the Israelites about the dangers of astronomy. Conservative attitudes are still reflected in book of Daniel (completed in the second century BCE), which asserts the uselessness of foreign knowledge in comparison to the wisdom God reveals (e.g. Daniel 1:20, 2:19). But already before the Bible's completion, some Jewish writers were adopting new attitudes toward knowledge of the physical world. By the third century BCE, Biblical patriarchs like Enoch were represented as learning and teaching about numbers and the stars.



Gustave Doré, *The Saintry Throng in the Shape of a Rose*, c. 1868. Engraving. Reprinted from Dante Alighieri, *The Vision of Purgatory and Paradise* (London and New York: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1868).

Recent scholarship has shown us how the astronomy and mathematics of Enoch derive from Babylonian scholarship, the world's longest-running empirical scientific tradition. Enoch is not alone: the Aramaic Levi Document, another early visionary work found at Qumran, clearly uses Babylonian mathematics. This was not despised “foreign wisdom”: these scientific works, with their Babylonian roots, were accepted by the Jews of Qumran alongside the Torah and revelations of Moses. By the first century BCE, the Qumran community was drawing on this astronomy to make their calendars. And these texts are only the earliest evidence of a pattern of systematic cosmological speculation in Jewish tradition that continued to evolve through the middle ages in texts like the *Pirquei d'Rabbi Eliezer*.

Does Judaism enter the history of science here, in a kind of Hellenistic renaissance?

To the eminent scholar of Midrash and mysticism, Philip Alexander, these cases of serious interest in mathematics and astronomy suggest the dawn of a kind of scientific thought in Judaism. Alexander has been followed by a set of scholars who convened at New York University last year, to begin integrating early Jewish thought into the history of science—and science into the history of Judaism.

Early Jewish thinkers would have traced systematic knowledge of the universe further back: the Priestly source of the Torah shares, with Babylonian scholarship, an interest in precise categorization and description of the physical world. This interest appears in the creation account of Genesis 1–2:4a, the temple revelation of Exodus 25–31 (cf. Exodus 35–40 and Ezekiel 40–48), and Leviticus 12–15, with its rules for observing

physical signs as symptoms of the skin disease *sara'at*. But the Priestly source does not assume the opposition between nature and culture found in Greek philosophy. God created the universe with the same type of commands that were then transmitted to Moses: rather than an opposition between nature and culture there is a homology between created and commanded.

In the Priestly worldview, the cosmos and the temple are analogous and show a fascinating coherence: “My Sabbaths you shall observe/And my sanctuary you shall revere: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:30 and 26:2).

Exodus’s revelation about the temple is a divine speech that specifies the precise measurements and materials of the tabernacle, the ritual prototype of the temple, and its implements (Exodus 25–31). Remarkably, it presents its information not as words but as a visual model: “Exactly as I am **showing** you (כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְרַאֶה אֹתְךָ)”—the pattern (תְּבִנִית) of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings—so shall you make it.” Note that here Moses does not “see” the pattern on his own, but rather God causatively shows him, in the *hiphil* (causative) of the standard Biblical Hebrew verb of seeing, רָאָה.

In fact, all descriptions of Moses’s vision of the Tabernacle are narrated with syntactically passive forms (Exodus 25:40, Exodus 26:30; effectively, Exodus 27:8). Moses is *shown* the Tabernacle’s rules: (כְּמִשְׁפָּטִים), that you **were shown** (הִרְאִיתִי) on the mountain.

The grammar of seeing in the tabernacle vision denies Moses’s epistemological agency: he does not even see the tabernacle under his own power, but is passively shown—literally *caused to see* by God. How is cosmic knowledge gained in the first apocalypse? Surprisingly, important pieces of the Babylonian astronomical knowledge that Enoch learns in the Astronomical book are learned the same way: they parallel the passive syntax of Moses’s tabernacle vision in Exodus. They are framed as **הַשְּׁבוֹן אַחֵרן אַחֲזִית** “I was shown [literally *caused to see*] another calculation.” (This phrasing of the fragmentary passage 4Q209 f25 l3 must underlie both Enoch 74:1–2 and 78:1.) Grammatically a verbal phrase based on the passive of the causative of **הִזָּה**, here we see the “scientific” categories of observation and calculation brought together in a new way. Enoch neither observes nor calculates the formulae himself. Rather, just as Moses is caused to see the cosmic rule (מִשְׁפָּט) of the tabernacle, so Enoch is caused to see the calculations that order the

spheres. Enoch’s other early otherworldly journey in the Book of the Watchers (4Q204 f1xii:30 // 4Q206 f1xxvi:17 = 1 Enoch 32:1, 4Q204 f1xii:26–28 = 1 Enoch 31:1–2).

And this phrase is not isolated in the Astronomical Book but paralleled in the early Enochic visions of the Book of the Watchers (4Q204 f1xii:30 // 4Q206 f1xxvi:17 = 1 Enoch 32:1, 4Q204 f1xii:26–28 = 1 Enoch 31:1–2). Not just the Astronomical Book but the second oldest Enochic work also drew on the image, and grammar, of Moses’s passively gained vision. The language of knowledge in Aramaic Enoch is both a reference to the Priestly Tabernacle vision and an editorial device linking the Astronomical Book and the Book of the Watchers. And it is thus a clue about the creation of early Enochic literature. Its creators shared a subtler and deeper connection with the language and imagery of the Pentateuch than we thought. Yet so far, no modern version of Enoch consistently passes this information on to the reader because they tend to base their readings on the complete Ethiopic manuscripts, which have lost the passive grammar.

The original Aramaic (as well as its antecedent Biblical Hebrew) grammar also reveals something new about early apocalyptic knowledge. Enoch’s visions are, of course, a mode of revelation. But there is a more specific epistemic value that vision has—grammatically. Verbs of seeing function in Aramaic (as well as modern English) constitute evidentials—a linguistic category indicating the source and certainty of the speaker’s knowledge. Evidentials—such as “I see that you are right” or “she saw that the test had succeeded”—encode the speaker’s epistemology, how they know what they know.

We cannot really oppose a category of revelation to a category of science in the conceptual world of early Enochic literature because the evidential grammar of Enoch’s visions entailed that the exact knowledge he learned was both evidence of divine order and something that God causes the knower to see. This framing device and its grammar subverts any opposition between revelation, as a mode of knowledge based on the claim “God revealed X,” and science, as based on the claim “I observed or calculated X.” What we see at Qumran is a “revealed science”—exact knowledge of the created world framed as divine discourse, with the role of human agency suppressed. The way the story is told, the specific language of knowledge, helps explain how it emerged

in a way that could claim to be continuous with earlier authoritative Jewish genres.

It also might explain why early apocalypticists produced no new “science” of their own: its framing as revelation foreclosed these knowledge production mechanisms. Did these apocalypses, then, succeed or fail as science? The evidence suggests something else: they laid the foundation for the different but quite productive intellectual agenda of universal history. To return to Taubes’s provocative concept, “apocalyptic science” suggests why the Astronomical Book could have been both the earliest known Jewish scientific work and the earliest Jewish apocalypse. The real legacy of apocalyptic science may not have been in what we call science at all but rather in a new vision of history.

The events of the world are written on the face of the divine clock, so the point is to follow the course of world history to determine the hour of the aeon. Apocalypticism is the foundation that makes universal history possible.

At least according to the Astronomical Book, apocalyptic revelation was experience, but not in any ineffable private way. On the contrary, Enoch’s revelations were religious experience in its etymological sense of *experiment*, “observation as the source of knowledge” (from Old French *esperience* meaning “experiment, proof, experience,” and Latin *experientia* “knowledge gained by repeated trials”). It is crucial to see here what the concept of religious experience was created to protect, and from what. As Wayne Proudfoot has demonstrated, the category arose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a way to defend the validity of religious accounts *against* scientific claims, at the cost of their authority. Revelation moved from being true to being merely legitimate, or at least unembarrassing. This is why the scientificity of early mystical accounts needed to be forgotten: to protect them from a later opponent and an anachronistic charge. But reconstructing this lost science reveals something essential: how visionary experience worked as evidence of the apocalypses’ accounts of history and justice.

*Seth Sanders is assistant professor of Religion at Trinity College. He is co-editor, with Jonathan Ben-Dov, of Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in the Second Temple Period (forthcoming from the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World/NYU Press).*



# Unveiling the Veil: Apocalyptic, Secrecy, and the Jewish Mystical Imaginaire

Elliot R. Wolfson

Among the various gifts that Judaism has bestowed upon the spiritual imagination of Western culture, we can include messianism and apocalypticism. Needless to say, even though these two phenomena can be distinguished conceptually and empirically, they have often been closely aligned. The discursive space where the two lines intersect is marked by the sentiment expressed in the words of Jeremiah, “And there is hope for your future, declares the Lord, your children shall return to their boundaries” (Jeremiah 31:17). Both the messianic and apocalyptic sensibilities, which have in varying degrees of intensity infused the three Abrahamic communities through the ages, are rooted in the prophetic promise that forges an indissoluble link between the future and the hope of coming back home. This juxtaposition of hopefulness and homecoming holds the key to understanding the spatial bridging of the temporal distance between present and future that is essential to the apocalyptic imagination.

In this brief essay, I will not review the history of Kabbalistic apocalypticism but focus instead on the philosophical implications of the ontology of time and the hermeneutics of secrecy that can be elicited from reflecting on this phenomenon within the broader framework of Jewish esotericism. Let me begin by echoing the common scholarly distinction between apocalyptic as a sociopolitical movement and apocalyptic as a literary genre. In spite of the soundness of this division, it is obvious that the two cannot be completely separated, since Jewish and Christian apocalyptic movements invariably have gained their inspiration from visions recorded in written (and, most often, scriptural) texts, whereas these visions are frequently thinly veiled attempts to challenge the status quo of current conditions on earth by appeal to an extraterrestrial source of power, the heavenly order that will intervene in the natural course of events and alleviate the suffering of the persecuted. From that vantage point apocalypticism can be classified as theopolitics, since it is predicated on the invocation of the divine being as the

counterforce that will topple the imperial oppressors at a given historical juncture and thereby empower the disempowered. This struggle is often depicted mythically as the cosmic battle between light and darkness, the righteous remnant and the corrupt ruler. For this reason, apocalyptic visions are typically suffused in the rhetoric of violence, which bespeaks the profound dissatisfaction with what is perceived as a corrupt religious and/or national authority. To comprehend the concurrence of hope and futurity, one must be sensitive to the inherent disjointedness that underlies what Derrida called the “enigmatic desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil, for elucidation, for critique and truth, but for a truth that at the same time keeps within itself some apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, in order to demystify or, if you prefer, to deconstruct the apocalyptic discourse itself.”

With more than a touch of irony, Derrida viewed apocalyptic—a literary genre usually thought to be entirely mystifying—as that which imparts the desire for clarity and elucidation, a desire expressed most fervently as the vigilance to subject all thinking to critique even to the point of demystifying or deconstructing the genre of apocalyptic itself. Derrida’s exegesis builds on the fact that the term “apocalypse” is from the verb *apokalypso* (to uncover), as in stripping the veil to reveal the face of the virgin. To heed the philological resonance of the term, therefore, is to discern that the apocalyptic desire is a gesture of unveiling. It follows that apocalypticism is, first and foremost, a discourse about secrecy. In time, the mysteries that were revealed were primarily thought to be the celestial secrets about either historical events or the otherworldly beings. The former has dominated the conventional characterization of apocalyptic literature, but one must bear in mind that knowledge about both the future of the world and of the nature of the supernal beings—whether angelic or divine—were thought to serve equally as the means to help individuals escape looming danger and/or to overthrow an existing political agency. The spatiality

of the heavenly abode and the temporality of the eschatological future intersect in a variety of symbolic ways, perhaps most tellingly in the fact that often enough, the secrets pertaining to the end are revealed in the visionary ascent. The imaginary vision, which facilitates the ecstatic journey into the celestial realm, yields foresight into the future. Eschatological salvation and the supernatural plane, respectively the temporal and spatial coordinates, are intertwined branches on one hermeneutical tree.

The secret revealed in the apocalyptic vision pertains essentially to the end, which is marked by the expectation of the final judgment of the wicked and the righteous. Even cosmological secrets of nature or theosophic mysteries of the divine in primeval time before creation revealed in the apocalypse are generally related to the end of the present historical epoch. The intrinsic nexus between the visionary secret and the end is epitomized in the advice given to Daniel by the angelic voice, “Now you keep the vision a secret, for it pertains to far-off days” (8:26), words reinforced by the counsel of God, “Keep the words, and seal the book until the time of the end” (12:4). The seer must conceal the secret until the time of the end, for the secret primarily concerns the end of time. The preservation of the secret until the end, moreover, is accomplished by sealing the secret in a written text. Not only is the act of writing endowed with special significance in the narrative accounts of the apocalypses, but the committing of the secrets in a book also opens the possibility, nay the necessity, that the secrets will have to be revealed through interpretation at the appropriate historical juncture. The form of writing is thus a process of concealing by way of revealing, which secures the need for someone to reveal what has been concealed in proximity to the endtime. Repeatedly in the history of Jewish mysticism, we find examples of individuals that claim for themselves or for their teachers messianic authority based on the proposition that the hidden secrets are now being disclosed, a sure sign of the imminent redemption.

Here I will mention one of the more striking examples from the sixteenth-century Kabbalist Ḥayyim Vital. In the introduction to his massive treatise in which he committed to writing the teachings of his master Isaac Luria, which he called *Eṣ Ḥayyim*, Vital privileges Luria's rank by emphasizing that he received the secrets through a revelation of Elijah, an ecstatic experience that was necessary to reopen the chain of tradition that terminated with Naḥmanides in the thirteenth century. Vital relates this to a tradition he cites from Menahem Recanati that the first Kabbalists received a revelation from Elijah but also with a passage from the introduction to *Tiqqunei Zohar* to the effect that Elijah, the souls of the departed righteous, and all the angels joined Simeon bar Yoḥai when the composition (*hibbura*) of the *Zohar* was written. Even more poignant is a second passage from this work cited by Vital according to which the zoharic composition will be revealed in the final generation by Moses, or more specifically, by the manifestation of Moses appropriate to that time. Vital clearly identifies the Mosaic figure as Luria, which imparts to him a messianic comportment. Extrapolating from a passage in the *Zohar*, Vital assumes that the whole anthology was written by R. Abba, the scribe of the mystical fraternity, who recorded the oral discourses of Simeon bar Yoḥai. The latter gave him permission to write down the zoharic homilies because he knew through the holy spirit that R. Abba had the acumen to garb and to conceal the esoteric matters in the cloak of enigma (*ḥiddah*) and allusion (*remez*). Indeed, R. Abba wrote down the secrets in such a "great concealment" (*he'lem gadol*) that "it was as if they were not written at all." Only Luria, the Moses of the final generation that is in close proximity to the messianic era, had the ability to bring those hidden mysteries to light. Vital thus justifies his own literary effort in decidedly apocalyptic terms: those engaged in the study of the mysteries disclosed by Luria will hasten the advent of the redeemer.

True to its philological roots, apocalyptic is a form of revealing secrets, but the mode of revelation is concealment. The doubling of secrecy—the secret occluding itself as secret to be disclosed as secret—is, as I have argued in many of my studies, a salient feature of Kabbalistic esotericism. Leaving aside the historical and literary complexities surrounding the compositional and redactional history of the *Zohar*, it is instructive that Vital perceptively noted that the form of writing in this work is a form of



Marc Chagall, *Moses Breaking the Tablets*, 1957. Hand-colored etching. Collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Haggerty.

erasure insofar as what is revealed is revealed by being concealed. Read through this prism, the zoharic compilation is inherently an apocalyptic text. The apocalyptic imagination that has shaped the messianic impulse in Jewish mysticism envisions the unveiling of the unveiling of the veil at the end, the final seeing without a veil, which consists of seeing that there is no seeing but through a veil. To apprehend the secret about the end, the secret disclosed at the end, is to attain the gnosis that there is no secret but the secret that there is no secret.

In that sense, the end and the secret belong together, for the end can only be imagined as the terminus that can never be terminated. From beginning to end, the end is the mystery that marks the horizon of our envisioning and delineates the limit of our language. The apocalyptic secret orients one to the decisive point in time, the end that is close at hand, the tomorrow that is today because today it is tomorrow. Ingrained in the texture of Jewish apocalyptic is this structure of secrecy, for the mystery is connected to the future that is revealed in



the present as not being present. The secret of the end, which must always be manifest in a present, is of the future that originates in the past. What is yet to be, accordingly, reverts to what has already been, but what has already been issues from what is yet to be. I thus disagree with those who argue that the linear eschatology of the apocalyptic orientation is opposed to the cyclical view of time of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. The paradoxical nature of time in apocalyptic symbolism entails that what recurs is what has never been. The delay of the end's materialization is precisely what secures the potency of its constant instantiation. The continual stay of the moment, the not-yet that is resolutely yet not at hand, is what eternalizes the temporal and temporalizes the eternal. The exposure of the eschatological secret in the present thus bridges the rupture between past and future by imparting hope in the return of what is to come.

The path of thought winds back to the prophetic utterance with which I commenced

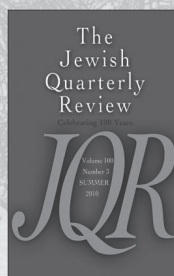
these reflections: "There is hope for your future," *yesh tiqvah le-ah, aritekh*, that is, the future is dependent on the not-yet that already is what-is-to-come. Apocalyptic hope—the hope of the dream that renews itself sporadically as the hope that is deferred perpetually—stems structurally from the infinite negativity of time, the impossible possibility that makes it always possible that the future that is coming threatens not to be the future for which one has hoped. To plumb the depth of the apocalyptic spirit, one must be attuned to the hopelessness of the hope that ensues from the fact that the future for which we are constantly awaiting can never transpire in time. Rather than fostering despair, the inevitable nonoccurrence of the messianic event—in Derridean terms, the apocalypse without apocalypse—secures the expectation of its unremitting occurrence, the end that is always the beginning that is yet-to-come and therefore must have already been. The perpetual motion of the temporal torrent, we might say, is an expression of

the expectation engendered by a future that infinitely transcends any finite actualization. The Messiah, Kafka famously wrote, will come on the day after he has arrived, not on the last day but on the very last. The *very last day*—the day that can never come to pass in the wavering of time, the day that succeeds the last day. Anticipation of that day requires, as Levinas put it, the pure patience of awaiting without something awaited. On this score, there is a radical subversion of the apocalyptic belief: if there is no end for which to wait, then, at best, we are waiting to wait no more, albeit a no more that is interminably not yet. For the one enlightened in this wisdom, redemption would consist ultimately of being redeemed from the desire to be redeemed.

*Elliot R. Wolfson is the Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. His latest book is A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination (Zone Books, 2011).*

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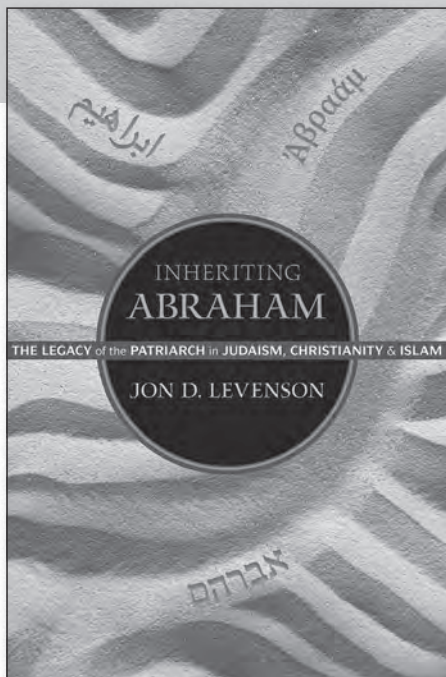
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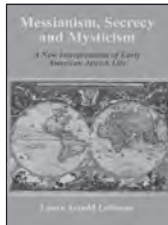
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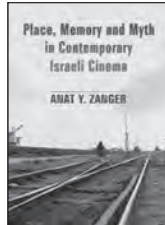
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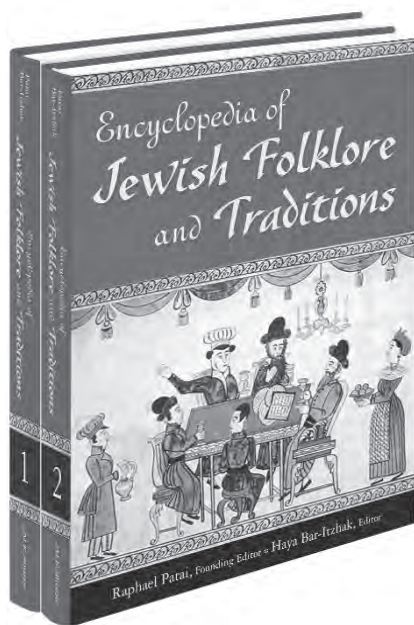
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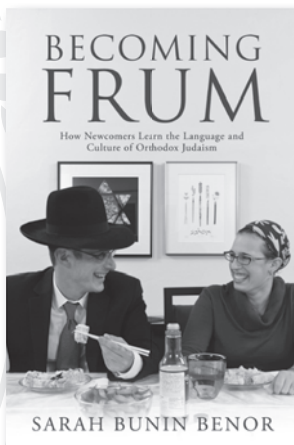


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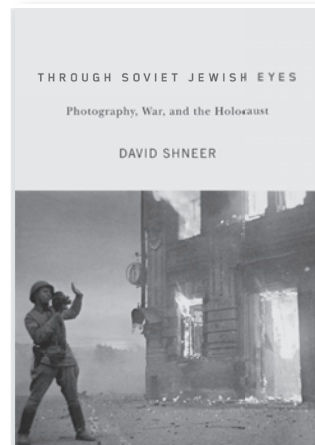


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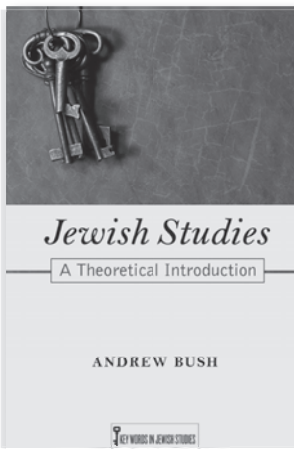
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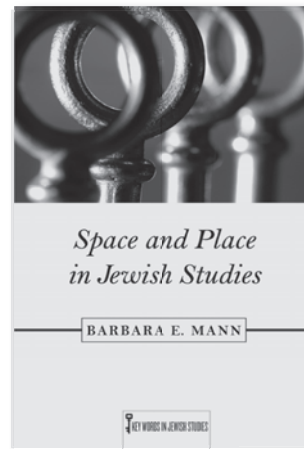


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# Messianism: Apocalyptic between Magic and Religion

Marla Segol

**A**pocalypse. Martha Himmelfarb defines it by its concerns with messianism, eschatology, and astronomy. It lives on the border between religion and magic, between ritual and efficacy. In many ways apocalypse is the telos of religion, but it is also religion's dark and glistening underbelly—the very thing that confounds enlightenment attempts to rationalize it, ethicize it, make it hygienic. Until quite recently, functionalist, social definitions of religion have prevailed, separating religion from magic. Apocalypse in general, and messianism in particular, challenges these theories, because its goal is to end the social as we know it and to stop time. The social functionalist view of religion, then, renders messianism either problematic or invisible.

This view partly characterizes scholarship on the golem. It is, perhaps, a test case for understanding what our critical lenses allow us to see, since its messianic function remains largely ignored. The golem is an artificial anthropoid, a pile of mud or dust sculpted into the shape of a human being and animated by ritual performances consisting of letter combination and circumambulation. The rituals used to make the golem are derived from the late antique cosmogonic work, the *Sefer Yetsirah*, and elaborated in the form of recipes or ritual instructions in its medieval commentaries. According to the commentaries, the operator recites combinations of either the tetragrammaton (Idel and Bilski, 122), or of the twenty-two Hebrew letters. The operators combine this with a ritual dance, a *makhol*, in which they circumambulate the creature while reciting these permutations. Together, these actions work to form the creature and alter the constellations. Hence they are often categorized as magic and not religion. Yet medieval commentators hoped that the golem-making ritual would bring the Messiah and end time, clearly a religious goal.

Here's how it works: each step of the ritual serves either to pre-enact the resurrection of the dead or to stop time and

inaugurate the messianic era. Because the *Sefer Yetsirah* narrates divine creation by letter combination in the golem-making ritual it re-enacts the creation, but it is also meant to pre-enact the gathering of the bones for resurrection. So, too, with the ritual dance performed as the letter combinations

In the future, the righteous will cause the resurrection of the dead [like] Eliyahu, Elisha, [and] Ezekiel . . . [the verse] hints at the righteous who know how to create by means of the combination of letters, and they created a man by means of the *Sefer Yezirah* . . .



Commentary of *Sefer Yetsirah*, Attributed to Sa'adiah Gaon, fourteenth century, Italy, folio 17b. MS 1895. Courtesy of The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

are recited. This imitates and anticipates the joyous dancing of the afterlife. Letter combination also acts on the constellations to stop their movements and in this to stop time. It is messianic through and through.

The messianic function of letter combination is widespread across the commentaries. In Eleazar of Worms's *Sefer Tagin* (twelfth century) the ritual aims to resurrect the dead:

Joseph Ben Shalom Ashkenazi's fourteenth-century commentary assigns a messianic function to letter combination, stopping time in addition to resurrecting bodies. Letter combination repairs the Pleiades, which in turn repairs human bodies: "The Pleiades is the strengthening of all the limbs that are broken, and torn off (taken to pieces) and banished, and he (the operator) binds them together." In a parallel fashion, letter combination also reunites the Pleiades (Kimah) and binds Orion (Kesil)," each of which is understood to be "broken" or missing stars.

In the Pseudo-Saadya Commentary (thirteenth century), letter combination serves to stop time as well; the repair of Kimah and Kesil must be considered in the context of Talmudic *aggadah*, in which the flood of Genesis was caused by the removal of two stars from the Pleiades (Kimah), so that the heavens could open to rain: "When the Holy One . . . wanted to bring a flood upon the world, He took two stars from *Kimah* and brought a flood upon the world." When he wanted to stop the flood,

according to the same verse, he removed two stars from Kesil to replace them (Mancuso, 72). These are described as the "sons" of the Great Bear. They were placed among the sisters of the Pleiades, so that the Great Bear constantly pursues the Pleiades, seeking the return of her two sons and causing the movement of the heavens. The Pleiades, in turn, seek the return of their sister. When the Pleiades get their sister back, they will stop looking for her. And when Ursa gets her sons, she will stop chasing the Pleiades. When the constellations end their pursuits, so does time.

The ritual dance (*makhol*) also has messianic meaning. In it, the operator is instructed to circumambulate the inert

form of the golem to animate it. According to the pseudo-Saadyan commentary, “R. Saadyah explained that the dance (*makhol*) means that someone goes as in a dance (movement) when he wants to create . . .”

R. Aharon Berakhiah of Modena writes about this too (Ma’avar Yaboq, sixteenth century). He links that dance to the one performed in the afterlife, in the Garden of Eden:

and the secret of this going around is in the form [dugma] of that dance [hola] that God will prepare for the righteous in the Garden of Eden, since then the Maiden of Israel will be delighted, in that dance (*makhol*).

The secret, it seems, is one of sympathetic efficacy. The golem-making dance, performed below, will prepare the righteous for the one performed in the afterlife.

In these steps, the golem-making ritual is messianic, apocalyptic, even. The letter combination simultaneously animates the

golem, pre-enacts the resurrection of the dead, and brings the Messiah, while the ritual dance inaugurates the afterlife. The golem creation ritual contains three steps that are embedded in Jewish canonical narratives, and which are meant to bring the salvation they promise. It is religious to its very core. So why don’t we know this better?

Many who have studied the golem do not emphasize its messianic function because they do not see the golem-making ritual as a religious act. The same applies to messianism generally. The past few years have seen big changes in the way we understand religion. Bruce Lincoln’s book, *Holy Terrors*, took the best of the functionalist views of religion and combined them to define religion as possessing transcendent discourses, practices, communities, and institutions performing particular functions. For example, he defines religious practice by its aim to create the perfect subject and/or world. If human perfection brings redemption, it is the telos of religious ritual, period. Hugh Urban adds to this argument in his 2011 book on the

Church of Scientology in which he argues that religion is not merely a product of the scholar’s study nor authorized solely by the institutions that regulate it.

Instead the category of religion is continually negotiated between scholars, institutions, and the individuals assigning transcendent meanings to their actions. We see this interaction in the golem rituals: medieval commentators viewed the ritual as an enactment of sacred discourse, and so it was religious to them. Yet this happened outside, and perhaps even at the expense of, the last two of Lincoln’s categories—community and institution. As such, the golem-making rituals negotiate the content of religion, so, too, does its study.

*Marla Segol is associate professor and the Fannie Kestenbaum Paull Chair of Jewish Studies at the Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage at SUNY Buffalo. She is the author of Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah (Palgrave, 2012).*

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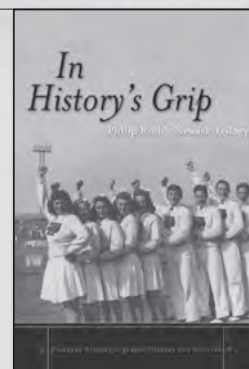
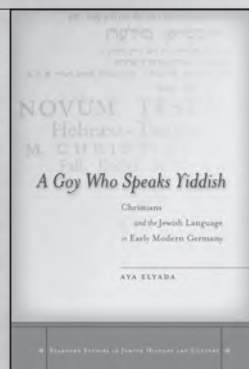
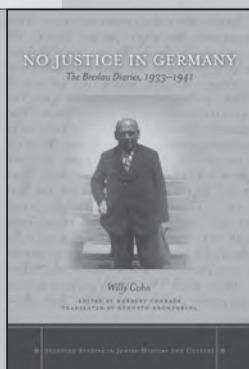
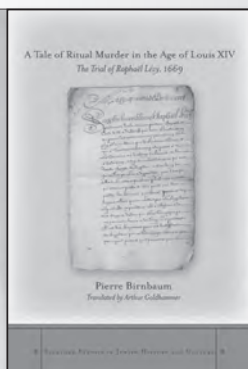


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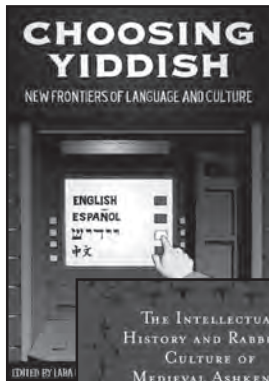
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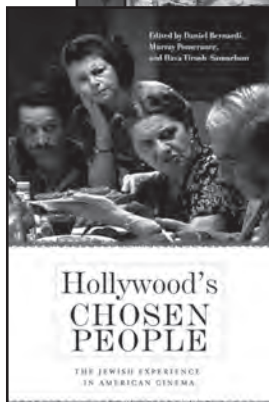
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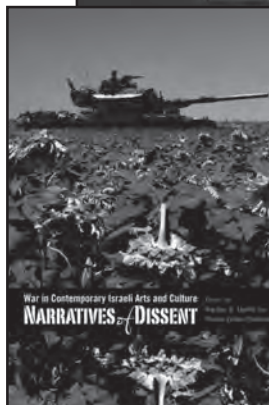
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# Imagining the End in Thirteenth-Century Acre

Uri Shachar

A group of European Jews who set sail for the Holy Land in the spring of 1211 chose to portray their passage as a part of an apocalyptic drama that involves purging the Land of Israel in preparation for the coming of the Messiah:

Redemption begins with the “ingathering of the Exiles” [in which] each person among the Israelites contributes [. . .] to go to the Land [of Israel] and to settle in the holy city of Jerusalem [. . .] But let no-one say that the King Messiah will be revealed on an impure Land, [. . .] nor that he will be revealed in the Land of Israel amidst the Gentiles . . .

This group was the first in several waves of Jewish immigrants from western Europe that reached Palestine over the course of the thirteenth century. The immigration movement was unprecedented in scope, and included notable religious leaders, whose authority as jurists and exegetes had been well established in Europe prior to their departure. Among them were such luminaries as R. Samson of Sens as well as R. Joseph of Clisson and his brother Meir. In Palestine, the French and English immigrants first settled in Jerusalem, but after the destruction of the city’s fortification in 1219, the majority of Jewish inhabitants resettled in Acre. Thus, the acting capital of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem came to house a vibrant intellectual community of prominent European Jews, toward which subsequent immigrants, both individuals and groups, continued to gravitate throughout the thirteenth century.

The new immigrants arrived at a time of political turmoil in the Near East. They found a region plagued with internal rivalries, suffering from the lack of political or religious cohesion. These tumultuous circumstances were primarily the result of an abrupt erosion of the polarized political landscape that prevailed in the region prior to the death of Saladin in 1193. Afterward, the Ayyubid sultanate and the Frankish Kingdom both experienced a rapid process of disintegration that created constant instability and an incessant battle for political domination. With the weakening of the Christian and Muslim hegemonies, there emerged a

dynamic network of alliances that extended beyond traditional political, linguistic, and religious boundaries. The political landscape was characterized by the formation of ad hoc pacts between Muslim princes and semi-independent Christian rulers, in the face of either internal or external threats.

This disintegration of the Ayyubid and Frankish regimes over the turn of the thirteenth century not only enabled Jews to settle in the region, it also shaped the very *language* in which they framed their mission. Jewish immigrants chose to portray their journey to, and presence in, the Holy Land through a highly sophisticated framework of apocalyptic Messianism. There is no indication that participants in the movement were trained or equipped to undertake any type of warfare. Nevertheless, they employed a language that portrays, if only allegorically, their commitment to the Holy Land in overtly belligerent terms. Furthermore, their accounts mirror contemporary Near Eastern Muslim and Christian narratives not only in the preoccupation with Holy War as a way to convey cultural, hermeneutical, and political claims, but also in their depiction of messianic wars. In fact, numerous Jewish texts make sophisticated use of Christian and Muslim figures as they envision the messianic wars that they expected to take place as a result of the immigration to Palestine.

What is more, the ideological foundations that the first generation of immigrants had established became the backbone for several subsequent attempts by thirteenth-century Jews in the East to convey their sense of possession of the Land and their spiritual intercession on its behalf. Among those renditions are a number of texts that appear to continue the tradition of the immigrant pioneers to Acre and assume a great deal of familiarity with the political affairs of the Near East. Following in the footsteps of the first generation, these tracts build on ancient traditions to frame their disposition toward the Land and its gentile occupants in messianic terms, and to provide an apocalyptic vision of their recent past.

Most thirteenth-century treatises invoke messianic traditions that enumerate the signs [*Otot*] that are associated with the arrival of the Messiah. Authors build on traditions

that originate in late antiquity or the early middle ages, and supplement or amend them to fit their own contemporary political and cultural outlook. Most significantly, authors consistently insist on staging the messianic drama not as a fantasy about a distant future but rather as a continuation of the present political landscape. If the traditions that the thirteenth-century texts build on were originally used to interpret turbulent and tragic events in optimistic and appeasing ways, the Jewish immigrants to Acre (and their successors) appear to have put them to an entirely different use. They used this language deliberately to portray the footprint of a political movement that sought to make claims about the Land of Israel, sovereignty, and the nature of their spiritual and ritual experience upon it. Each generation added an interpretive layer to the apocalyptic discourses in order to come to terms with the spiritual sense of sacred violence and with the ways in which it is mapped on to a material, and political, appreciation of the Land.

One central motif, however, runs through the generations: the purificatory power of the Israelite people on the Holy Land. Whereas both the Christian and Muslim societies have consistently displayed paralyzing fragmentation while simultaneously trumpeting a voice of religious belligerence, the Israelites are able to unify around the one ruler of Davidic ancestry. Authors repeatedly insinuate that the reprehensible alliances among, and intermingling between, Christian and Muslim groups are what will bring their fall. Israel, in contrast, will purify the Holy Land by maintaining the purity of their conduct and the unity of the People.

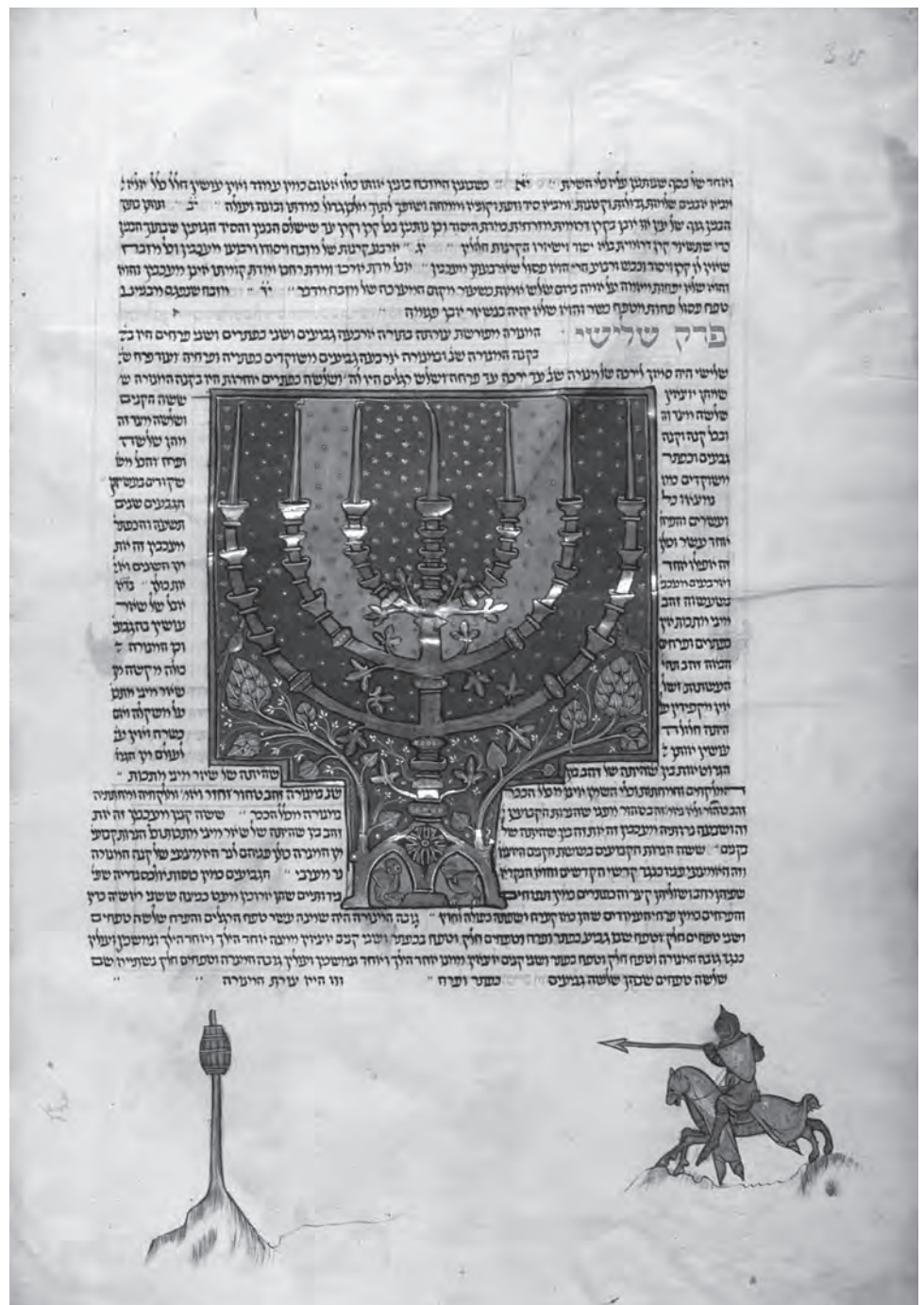
At the heart of one homily, for example, is a discussion about the group of devoted Jews who gather in Palestine and conquer the Land of Israel in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. By heading east, they set in motion an elaborate process that involves several cycles of triumph and defeat and that is to end with the ultimate conquest of the Holy Land. The homily dwells on the figure of the martyr King Messiah who undertakes a belligerent mission to purify the Land of Israel, and portrays this king through a dialogic encounter with his mythical nemesis,

Armylus. The bellicose messianic posture depicted in the treatise emphasizes the ritualistic role of the Jews who immigrate to the Holy Land, bring the Messiah, recognize his arrival, and fight alongside him.

According to another homily, the first contingent of immigrants plays a pivotal role in setting the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. While people from diverse backgrounds may find a way to contribute or participate, "each in accordance with the willingness of his heart," it is the "scholars and righteous people" who undertake the crucial responsibility of identifying the Messiah. Furthermore, the community of recent immigrants must engage in a number of activities that lay symbolic foundations for the building of a stable governance, a spiritual focal point, and a marker of cultural continuity in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

Most importantly, these immigrants must purify the Holy Land by ridding it of gentiles and their defiling presence. Only when the Land is occupied solely by "bearers of the Law, righteous people, 'men of deeds' from all over the world," we are told, will the Messiah appear among them. This central motif characterizes the way authors of this apocalyptic corpus envisioned the mission of the pious immigrant movement and the messianic wars. The immigrants are, in other words, tasked with *purging* the Land of Israel from the presence of the Franks and Ayyubids. This motif figures dominantly in both Muslim and Christian reflections about holy warfare. Time and again, authors in both cultures portray pious armies and valorous warriors as purifying the polluted land from the defiling presence of the unbelievers, rendering it both pure and sacred once again.

It is at this point that the final act in the messianic drama begins: the Messiah erects an army of brave men from "the four winds of the world" to fight Edom and Ishmael, and to drive away the uncircumcised from Jerusalem. This homily ultimately celebrates the victory of the unified pious immigrants, who manage to *purify* the Land and subdue the impure, fragmented gentiles. The notion of purity, however, served as a metaphor for the need to maintain a steadfast cultural frontier. In the face of political and linguistic confusion, multiple contemporary homilies engaged with issues of religious, social, and political cohesion. Authors incorporated the language of holy belligerence in order to crystallize a hermeneutical cohesion of Israel in the face of their cultural and political enemies.



*Mishne Torah*. Northeastern France, 1296, folio III.3v. MS Kaufmann A 77. Courtesy of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Throughout the second half of the thirteenth century, Jewish authors in the crusading Near East continued to employ visions of apocalyptic purification, distinguishing themselves from their neighboring Muslims and Christians. By the 1280s, however, the Jews in Acre must have sensed that the political end of their community was imminent. The fall of the Frankish Crusader Kingdom in the spring of

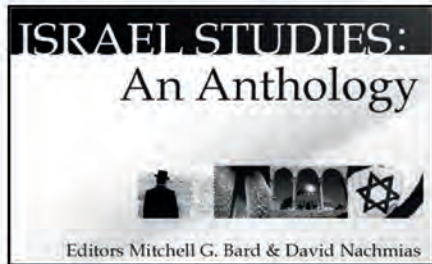
1291 to the massive Mamluk army marked the end of a glorious tradition. As the Jews of Acre perished, so too did the heritage of their vibrant intellectual community, of which only whispers remain.

*Uri Shachar is completing a dissertation at the University of Chicago on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim languages of militant piety in thirteenth-century Near East.*



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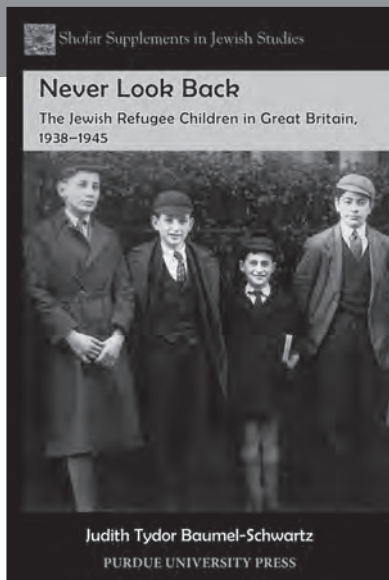
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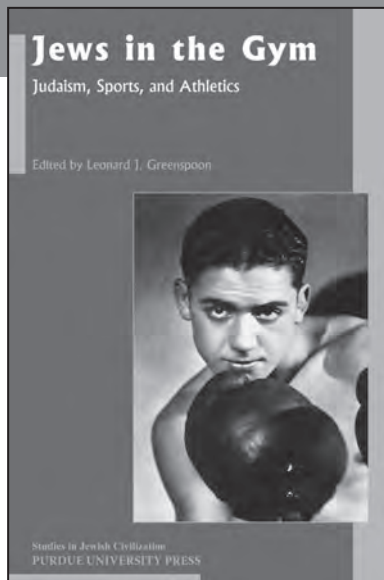
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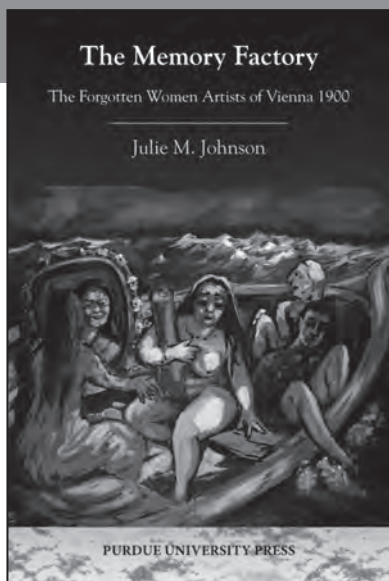
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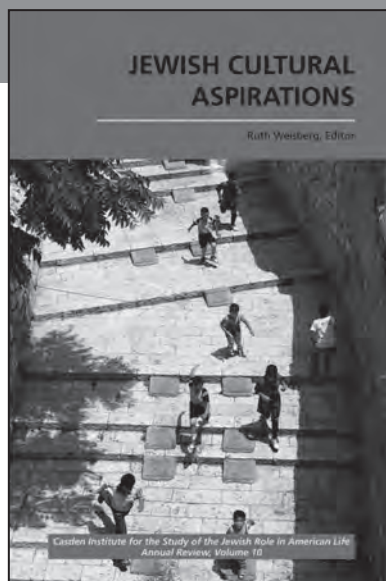
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# Apocalypse Deferred: Gershom Scholem and Philip K. Dick

Bruce Rosenstock

**G**ershom Scholem and Philip K. Dick? Despite whatever may have divided them, they each shared one goal: to investigate—with all the rigor and honesty they could muster—the historical experience of time lived under the shadow of the apocalypse. Neither Scholem nor Dick ever succumbed to the Faustian temptation to hasten the apocalypse, to leap headlong into the abyss of destruction. In fact, one might say that all their intellectual and creative efforts were directed at diagnosing this Faustian temptation, exposing its sources, and offering some guidance to those who prefer to live in the time opened up by the deferral of the apocalypse.

Scholem's 1919 essay "On Jonah and the Concept of Justice" is his earliest exploration of the theme of apocalypse deferred. In it, Scholem interprets the Book of Jonah as a lesson about how prophecy announces and enacts the deferral of divine judgment. The story told in the Book of Jonah describes a man fleeing his prophetic calling. Jonah is told to inform the citizens of Nineveh about God's impending punishment for their inequities. Jonah knows that the prophetic calling, if it is successful, must overturn the prediction it declares. He runs from a task that seems self-defeating. He would rather not have to bear the responsibility of a self-canceling utterance. He prefers the disengaged role of what Scholem calls a "historiographer," someone who announces an impending doom as a straightforward, inevitable fact. But the Book of Jonah is a lesson in prophecy's difference from historiography, according to Scholem. Prophecy utters the verdict in which a divine judgment is announced but the judgment is *not* executed: "Judgment is allowed, but the execution of it remains something entirely different." Prophetic justice is not judgment but the deferral of judgment. Scholem claims that the nature of prophetic utterance as it represented in the Book of Jonah defines the nature of all of the (written) Torah's commandments: they cannot be executed as they stand ("the written Torah cannot be applied"). The non-executability of the written Torah calls into being a tradition of endless oral interpretation. Justice thus exists in the necessary delay between canon as judgment and tradition as interpretation. And that delay is nothing other than "messianic



Gershom Scholem in sukkah learning Zohar, 1925. Gershom Scholem Archive, ARC. 4\* 1599/38-39 II. Courtesy of The National Library of Israel, Archives Department.



Photograph of Philip K. Dick with Cat by Anne Dick. Copyright © by Anne Dick, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

time as eternal present" (p. 359). The Jewish people live within the messianic time of deferred judgment by virtue of the endless tradition—continuing revelation—of the Torah. The Jewish people keep up the "steady stream of transformations" in which they do *not* enact the Torah's judgments. The written Torah, because it cannot know in advance the circumstances that each case involves, could only be applied in a mechanical way, deaf to any appeal. Interpretation is not so much about applying the law but delaying its execution with appeal after appeal.

The Torah, Scholem explains, enjoins the death penalty for homicide, but Talmudic

interpretation with its demand for two concurring eyewitnesses makes a guilty verdict practically impossible. The prophet's speech, like the Talmud's interpretation of the written Torah's homicide law, also operates in the gap between judgment and execution, but the stakes are much greater. "The prophets demand justice, in order infinitely to eliminate the Last Judgment" (p. 357). The Last Judgment is deferred when the prophet, or indeed any righteous individual (*zaddik*), stands before the divine court to ask one more question. "Where the court pronounces a verdict, justice raises a question" (p. 357). The Book of Jonah, read on the afternoon of the Day of Atonement, teaches the Jewish people not to wait passively for the Messiah but to live in the messianic present in which "no Last Judgment follows." The key is to *put the Last Judgment in the past*. Deferral is accomplished through a form of temporal overleaping, or short-circuiting, of the apocalypse.

I like to think that Scholem would have been a great fan of Philip K. Dick's science fiction—not only because Scholem appreciated good science fiction. Scholem actually gave Walter Benjamin a science fiction book as a wedding present, Paul Scheerbart's *Lesabendio*. (One wonders what Dora made of this gift.) It's rather that Dick, at least in his last novels, seems almost to be channeling Scholem. Scholem describes the messianic present of the non-execution of God's judgment as "perpendicular to his command, just as forces relate in physics" (p. 355). The "orthogonal" relation of our clock-time to messianic time is perhaps the central theme of Dick's *Exegesis*, a collection of more than eight thousand notebook sheets written from 1974 to 1982 containing his theological and philosophical reflections about the meaning of certain "road to Damascus" experiences that befell him in February and March of 1974. (*The Exegesis* was first published last year.) *The Exegesis* and the late novels that were written in parallel with it are an extended exploration of the basic themes that inform Scholem's scholarship, from Gnosis and its Jewish background to the Torah as continuing revelation. Dick seems to be led to conclusions similar to those that inform Scholem's early essay "On Jonah and the Concept of Justice." In a June 1981 entry in *The Exegesis*, Dick writes: "In their [the Jews']

concept of Torah (apparently living info) they have one of the most valuable concepts known to man . . . If the Jews froze this information, they would stifle the process-life in it—like endlessly playing one tape cassette on your audio system forever” (p. 752). The living Torah for Dick—what Scholem calls “the unending deferral of tradition”—is the information that overrides mechanical causation and the clock-time linearity that ultimately leads to entropic disintegration and nothingness. Dick describes the unwinding, mechanical clock of “normal” temporality as the working of a “retribution machine” (p. 567): “Sentence by the court is automatic, not interpretive. . . . The court knows only the info fed to it; it is a machine” (p. 561). The living Torah (Dick will give it many names besides Torah, including Christ and Shekhinah) enters time to override and reverse the judgment. “It is impossible that the wellspring of prophetic inspiration ‘could have dried up in the first century C.E.’ Closing the canon is a human—not divine—idea” (*Exegesis*, p. 752). Like Scholem, Dick believes that to close the canon is to break the link between our world and revelation, and to do this is to cast the world into nothingness: “No you and no world. Cosmic death.”

In one of his last novels, *Divine Invasion* (1981), Dick gives narrative shape to the drama of the living Torah holding the apocalypse at bay. The novel presents us with the biblical God, “Yah,” who is suffering in exile on a barren planet, driven from the earth by the two empires who have divided the earth between themselves, one serving the principle of atheistic science, the other serving tyrannical faith. Returning to earth in the womb of a woman who dies in a terrible accident upon the reentry of her spacecraft into earth’s atmosphere, Yah (named Emmanuel now) grows up with brain damage. As he slowly recovers his sense of his identity, assisted by a mysterious young girl who educates him, the child Emmanuel decides that the suffering he has endured at the hands of the powers in control of the earth must be answered with the destruction of the earth. There is no other remedy for a world under the unjust rule of what Dick calls “the Empire.” The effort to stay this decision of annihilation takes up the last section of the novel. Emmanuel is won over by the young girl through a wager in which she leads him into another world of her creation, a world of beauty. After Emmanuel falls in love with this world and with the young girl, she reveals herself to him as his own creation. She is the Torah, also known as the tenth *sefirah*, Shechinah. But here the story does not end, for

in an act of mercy upon the animals caged in zoo, they unwittingly release the goat-shaped Belial, the Evil One, into the world once more. The drama begins again, but the possibility of experiencing the world as beauty remains to assist humanity in the unending effort to overcome the nihilism of Belial for whom creation is only ugly. The final sentence of the novel reads: “Gathering together the broken fragments of what had once been light.” It is not an ending, but an endless battle that Dick says “is waged for each soul individually.” He explains: “This is what the rabbis teach. They have no doctrine of fallen man as a whole. Salvation is on a one by one basis” (p. 232).


Dick’s novel, despite how it may sound from this synopsis, is far from being a strained theological allegory. Dick uses a Jewish *nebbish* named Herb Asher as the focus of the narrative. In the opening of the novel, we find Asher living in voluntary exile on the planet to which Yah has been exiled. Yah interrupts the audio tapes that Asher listens to with “faint but obviously sentient dribbles of information” (p. 22). Herb Asher is commanded by Yah to return to earth along

with the young woman, living in a nearby shelter, who will carry Yah in her womb. Herb Asher, seriously injured in the reentry accident, is placed in cryonic suspension. His mind replays, just as if it were happening for the first time, his recent past on the distant planet. A radio transmitter near the hospital where Asher lies in cryonic suspension broadcasts round-the-clock Broadway musicals, and Asher is both puzzled and annoyed by recurring snippets from *Fiddler on the Roof* that seem to break into the audio tapes he listens to in his outpost. Now, in Asher’s relived memories of his exile, melodies from *Fiddler on the Roof* compete with the “faint dribbles” from Yah, the exiled God, for Asher’s attention. This is an allegory for the modern Jewish condition that Scholem, I am pretty sure, would have appreciated.

*Bruce Rosenstock is associate professor in the Department of Religion at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His most recent publication is his translation and commentary, Moses Mendelssohn’s Last Works (University of Illinois Press, 2012).*

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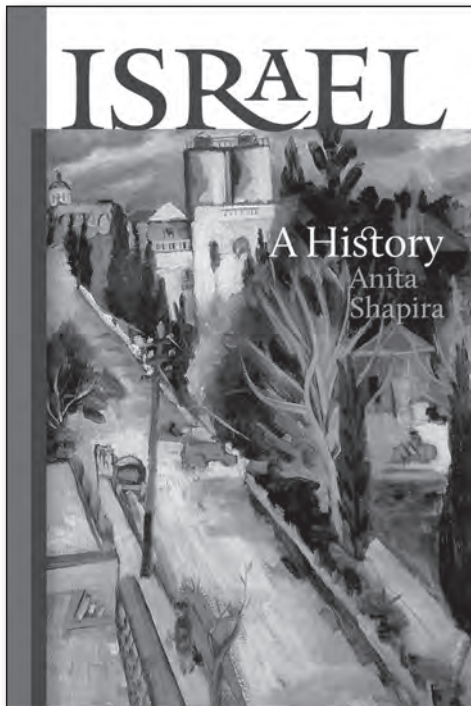


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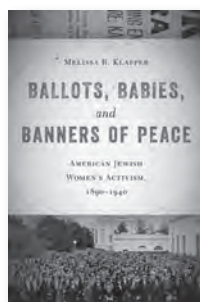
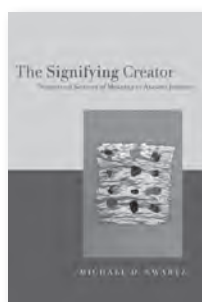
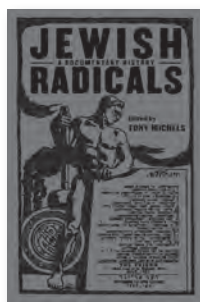
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# Apocalyptic Anxiety and Zionism

Michael Feige

As a young sociology student, I conducted research in early 1982 in the desert city of Yamit, doomed to destruction and soon to be returned to Egyptian rule. When the city drew toward its final days, the municipal services stopped functioning, and sand started drifting back to cover the streets. It seemed as if the desert were reclaiming its own. I was immediately struck by the resemblance to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the city of Makondo, built within the jungle, failed to sustain its arbitrary existence and melted back into the environment it temporarily cultivated.

Zionism both inherited and tacitly nurtured an existential anxiety of non-being. As a movement of homecoming nationalism, the specter of failure was always a looming possibility, and the horrific price tag of such an outcome was spelled out through Jewish history, as it was told in Zionist historical narrative. This apocalyptic trepidation, though a basic underlying motif of Israeli culture, is often hinted yet rarely discussed openly in Israeli political discourse or in its vibrant public sphere. I want to inquire into this omnipresent yet invisible anxiety, mainly through the use of the Crusader analogy, presented in David Ohana's new book, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites Nor Crusaders* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

The Crusader story tells of European invaders who establish their presence through military operation, certain that the land belongs to them by divine right. While they enjoy a lasting successful presence, they are eventually evicted from their promised land and return defeated to their European homelands, leaving behind ruined fortresses with exotic names. The crucial point of the myth is that they were displaced and replaced due to the fact that from the beginning they were misplaced. The Arab-Muslim presence, the crude physical and social realities of the Orient, proved to be the defining features of the place, re-homogenizing space by obliterating in the long run all obtrusive foreign elements.

Like other modern political myths, the Crusader story is based on sound historical evidence that received, through the years,



The evacuation of Yamit in the North Sinai, as part of the peace agreement with Egypt. In the photo, IDF soldiers evacuating a settler, April 22, 1982. Photograph by Tel Or Beni. Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.

mythical proportions, moral connotations, and simplistic narrativity. In that sense, the Crusader myth is no different from other Zionist political myths, such as Masada and Tel Hai. Those myths, however, had tangible manifestations in their heydays, such as places of pilgrimage, days of remembrance, and sacred texts that tied them into the national ethos. For the Arab world, the Crusader analogy operates as such a positive myth. Leaders such as Gamel Abdul Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Yasir Arafat made frequent use of the analogy to signify their future victory over what they defined as the contemporary Crusaders. For Israelis, the Crusader story is a negative myth, characterized by silence, evasion, and alarm, never to be discussed in fear of weakening the national resolve.

The lack of tangible presence does not reduce its importance. It is, rather, a myth in the most profound sense of the word, emerging from the existential situation, expressing the deepest fears, relating to critical contradictions, without ever reaching a satisfactory comforting solution. As a

negative myth, the Crusaders' presence in Israeli society can be studied mainly deductively, through deciphering the logic of Zionism, reflecting on its existence in space and comprehending its ethno-religious ethos.

Zionism defines itself as return to place, the homeland of the national collective. This declaration has three interrelated aspects. First, this place belongs to the Jewish people. Second, this place does not belong to others. Third, other places do not belong to the Jewish people, even after hundreds of years of continuous presence. The Crusader myth is subversive to all three premises. It raises the question of to what degree the land of Israel is the true and ultimate place of and for the Jewish people. Then it asks whether the place belongs to others, who will sooner or later reclaim it. Finally, it suggests that the true Jewish home is somewhere else, maybe Europe, maybe exile or Diaspora, and maybe the Jewish people by their very essence are not destined to find an eternal earthly home. In other words, the Crusader myth reflects the anxiety that the Zionist adventure is a reckless game of monumental proportions, committed irresponsibly by people who were never meant for heroic deeds such as building a state and a nation, and in general, participating actively, if not hyperactively, in history. It suggests that the transformation that Zionism wished to bring to the old Jew and the renovation that was proposed to the old land could be well beyond its powers.

The Crusader myth talks of *return*, yet not about *the right of return*, which is so dominant in the regions' political discourses. It rather tells about reversal and negation of history as such, as the land returns to its previous owners and obliterates the remnants of the root-less invaders. Zionism cultivated a linear advancing narrative, promising its followers a better—obviously different—future. This is a version of the determinist modernist story, which replaces the old with the new and traditional millennia-long social and environmental realities with man-made inventions. The Crusader myth, on the other hand, implies a circular historical logic. To use Edward Said's definition, the Crusader myth is a classical orientalist expression, contrasting the West to an imagined East, describing how the Levant is concomitantly

enchanted, primitive, and frightening, outside of the linear advancing history represented by the victorious West. The attempts of the West to modernize the Orient are by no means assured: the inertia of tradition may easily turn modern flourishing city back into desert.

When the Crusader myth questions the linear modernist historical narrative, it unsettles Zionism and brings back the suppressed, which in this case means the Arab, the Orient, the exilic and the old Jew, who, according to many critical thinkers today, hold similar symbolic place in Zionist mythology. It implies a strict binary division between East and West, not allowing for hybridity or the possibility of deep cultural change or exchange. With the radical otherness represented by the determinism of the Crusader's myth, any option of merging into the area is ideologically declined. It is especially threatening when offered by Jews coming from Arab countries, a Trojan horse of a sort, that sees the surrounding culture as an alternative cultural option that holds advantages rather than being a

mortal threat. Ironically, the apocalyptic fear can also be comforting. It tells the encircled people their essential core is immune to change, and that they are on the side of progress, modernity, and humanity.

There are two basic causes for the power of the Crusader myth, and picking between them is a matter of personal preference and ideological inclinations. One has to do with the unique connection of the Jewish people to its ancient homeland and to spatiality in general. In the book of Genesis, the land was promised to Abraham with these words: "Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father's house to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). The land, the birthplace, and father's house are therefore not considered to be the true homeland, while an arbitrary chosen land, at that stage holding no historical memories, belongs nevertheless to the not-yet-born people of Israel. Given by God, the land can just as easily be taken away, as exemplified time and again throughout the biblical narrative. In Jewish thought, existence on the land is inherently

temporary, dependent on moral virtue. Zali Gurevitz and Gideon Aran (along with many prominent thinkers of the Jewish existential situation) noted that there always is the thorn in the mattress of the Jewish place, and the Jew can never sit comfortably anywhere.

The second reason for the anxiety is not as profound, and has to do with Zionism as Diaspora nationalism and its conflict against native people. The threat of evicting Jews, be it from the entire land or from certain parts of it, was prominent all through Zionist history, brought often to the negotiating table, and never far away as a concrete historical possibility. The overt threat made by many Arab leaders, leading to today's Iran, was of politicide, namely the obliterating of the political entity, and often genocide. The anxiety is, therefore, a logical conclusion of the geopolitical situation, especially in the context of a colonizing national movement.

The traumatic memory of the Holocaust also nurtures fears that it may make a horrific return, and this motif has repeated itself in Zionist history leading to the present



Soldiers taking a screaming resistor to the evacuation center in Yamit, April 22, 1982. Photograph by Tel Or Beni. Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.



day. It is, however, important to stress the transformed meaning of such a calamity after the establishment of a Jewish state. Zionism was meant to give an answer to the exilic situation and to save the Jews from the possibility of further holocausts. Casting doubt on the solution, the Crusader myth is the virus that attacks the immune system, leaving the Jew with no safe haven. It therefore transforms the sacred memory of the dead into an ominous warning for the future.

Crusader anxiety can be found in seemingly confident political statements meant to bypass and negate it. Claims regarding the eternal belonging of Hebron or the Golan Heights, or that Yesha (Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip) is here, only pinpoint where the fears are strongest. The discourse of the left is no less explicit in its anxiety. Yitzhak Rabin's slogan before the 1992 election was to extract Gaza from Tel Aviv, while Ehud Barak's stance in 1999 was "We are here and they are there," and later he offered his villa in the jungle metaphor for the Israeli geopolitical situation. The West Bank settlements have often been compared to Crusader fortresses. With the building of the separation wall on roughly the Green Line, the entire country is becoming one.

Israeli political discourse needs constantly to produce and reproduce Israel's distinction from its surroundings, while promising that the fate of the Zionist enterprise will be radically different from that of the Crusaders.

The common behavioral response to Crusader anxiety is active denial and the hyperactive construction of a reassuring reality. The obsession with construction—both actual and symbolic—is an integral part of the Zionist ethos. Making the desert bloom, covering the ground with a dress of cement, building ever more settlements, all contend with the primal fear of non-existence.

The possible return of the repressed is a recurring motif in Israeli literature. Following Walter Benjamin, authors ask if the destroyed absence still exists somewhere beneath the ground as a repressed presence, waiting for its chance to return, and some of the symbols they used were distinguishable and alarming. Amos Oz's heroes heard jackals that symbolize the wilderness that preceded Jewish settlement, and in Meir Shalev's novel the swamps make a surprising return. Young Israeli writers, such as Haggay Dagan, Eshkol Nevo, and Alon Chilo, have also found the national anxiety a thrilling challenge and fruitful inspiration for new literary inventions.

Probably the most striking example appears in an early story from one of Israel's greatest authors, A. B. Yehoshua. In his novel, *In Front of the Forest*, he wrote about the burning of the Jewish Agency forest built on top of a ruined Arab village. The deed was done by a mute old Arab, while the Jewish ranger was working on his dissertation—about the Crusaders, of all subjects. The repressed has never returned in a more dramatic fashion.

Being able to talk about existential anxieties may be a first stage toward a solution, though with Jewish memories and Israeli contingencies, a full "recovery" from the apocalyptic threat is probably far in the future. While apocalyptic anxieties may have their functions, they are not always the best guidance for an informed policy. The evolution of Israeli society, demographics, and politics, as well as the transformation of its geopolitical environment, may eventually put the Crusader myth to rest.

*Michael Feige is senior lecturer at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His book *Settling in the Hearts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009) won the Shapira Award for best book in Israel Studies.*



The evacuation of Yamit, part of the peace agreement with Egypt. In the photo, a violent confrontation between IDF soldiers and evacuation resisters, April 22, 1982. Photograph by Tel Or Beni. Courtesy of the Israel Government Press Office.

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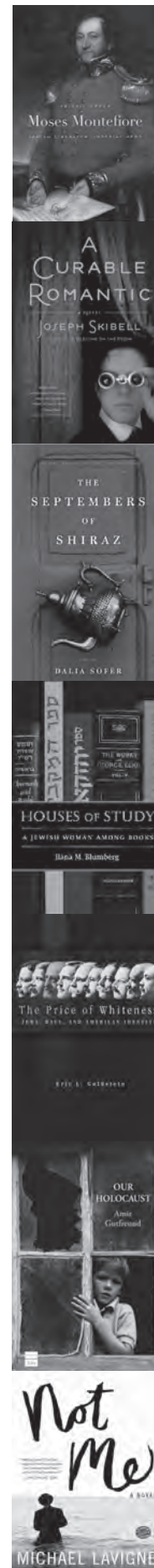
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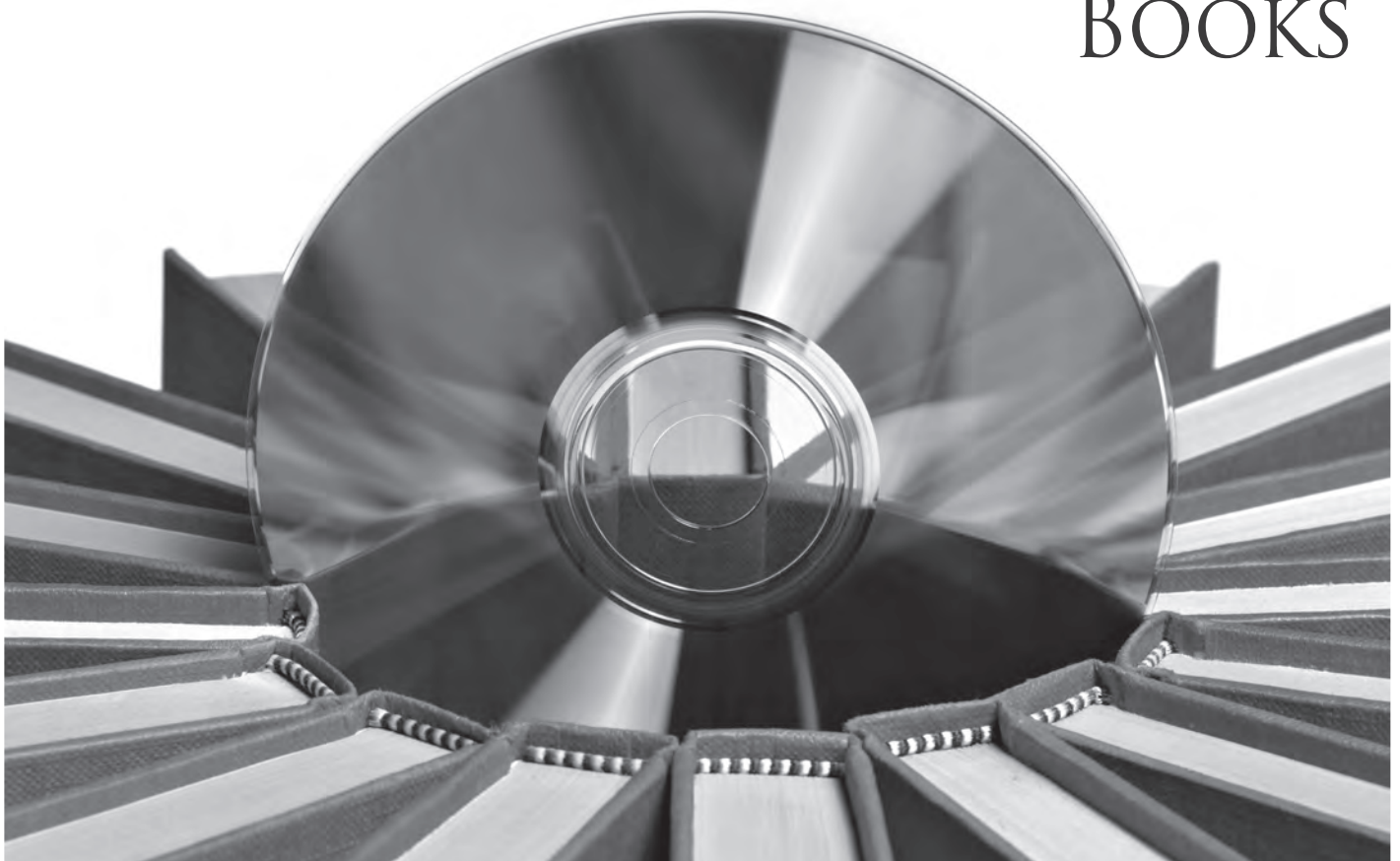


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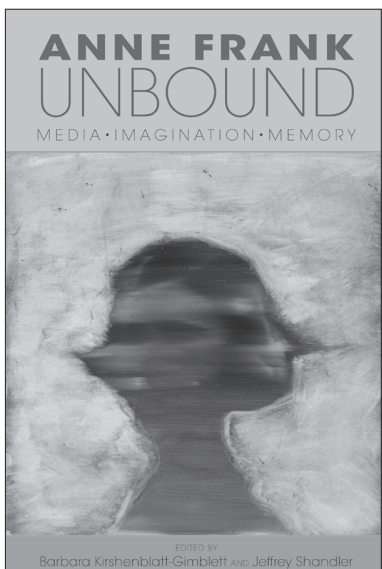
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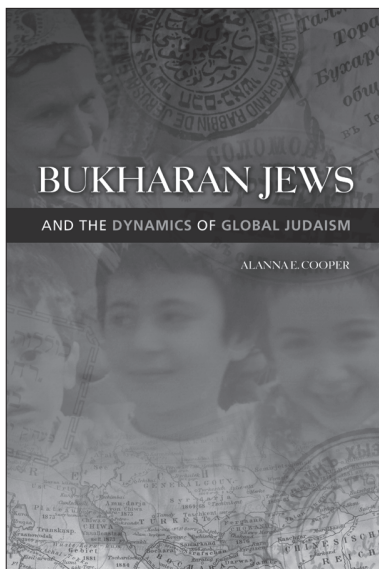
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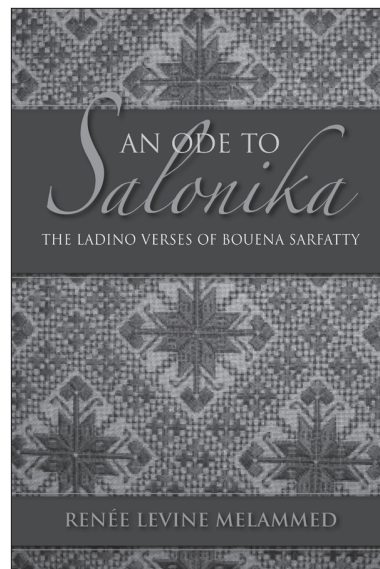
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# Apocalypse Then and Now

Lorenzo DiTommaso

**W**e live in the Age of Apocalypse. Last year, the radio pastor Harold Camping announced that the Rapture would occur on May 21, 2011, followed by the Final Judgment on October 21. This year, the 2012 “Mayan Apocalypse” dominates the eschatological horizon to an extent not seen since the countdown to Y2K.

If 2011 and 2012 are barometers of the current social temper, what do they indicate? It would be easy to regard them as the latest in a series of identical milestones on the long, straight road of apocalyptic doomsdays forecast since biblical times. But this perspective misses several points.

For one thing, the incidence of apocalyptic speculation historically displays more of a peak-and-valley profile than a steady state. The 2011 and 2012 events are part of a broad upswing that began four or five decades ago, in which people across the globe and in every culture have been progressively more inclined to understand the world and their place in it through the lens of the apocalyptic worldview.

The years 2011 and 2012 are also strikingly different in their content and social contexts. In fact, their differences reveal much about the future of apocalyptic speculation, which displays no sign of abating and seems to be heading down two separate paths.

The first path is suggested by the 2011 prediction. Harold Camping’s worldview is full-blown apocalyptic, in its classic biblical mode. For Camping, God is the transcendent reality that defines time, space, and human existence. This reality is disclosed in the divine plan for history, whose imminent climax is expected to resolve the fierce and long-standing conflict between good and evil, and bring salvation and justice to the few.

It is also significant that 2011 is a socially “closed” prediction, again mirroring traditional doomsday prophecies. The designation of 2011 was the product of a single source, Harold Camping. It was transmitted along a restricted channel, namely Camping’s radio broadcasts and other media, including the audio and text messages on his website. It was received by a group that held Camping’s interpretation to be divinely inspired. From transmission to reception, the 2011 prediction was virtually immune to external modification or augmentation.

The year 2011 has its unique features;



Mr. Kilbert and “Tarbell” (possibly Edmund N. Tarbell), *A River Scene: Monongahela River, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*. Shows steamship “General Knox,” wharf operations, a steel superstructure bridge, and numerous smoke stacks. Appeared in the Feb 21, 1857 edition of *Ballou’s Pictorial*. Reprinted from Wikimedia Commons.

every doomsday prediction does. Camping’s timetable works from the date of Noah’s Flood, rather than the figures and images in the book of Daniel or Revelation of John that usually underwrite Christian apocalyptic speculation. Also, he uncovers the divine plan by crunching the biblical numbers, instead of it being revealed to him in a vision, inscribed on golden tablets, or disclosed by a space alien, which is what happened to Dorothy Martin (a.k.a. Marion Keech) in 1954, as recounted in the classic study by Leon Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails*.

But to concentrate on such details is to miss the big picture. In its ideology and sociology, 2011 is identical to the predictions in ancient apocalypses like Daniel and Revelation, and in the thousands of other Jewish, Christian, and Muslim apocalyptic prophecies composed thereafter—up to and including our own time.

This is a staggering thought. We live in the twenty-first century. We are heirs to the Enlightenment and the scientific, political, and social revolutions that it foaled, fostered, or furthered. We cannot board a plane, build a bridge, argue the law, conduct foreign policy, vaccinate against smallpox, or split the atom independent of the principles of scientific rationality and the presumption of the primacy of human intellection.

Yet still the ancient apocalyptic mindset persists. And not just persists, but thrives. For 2011 is the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Its old-school, day-of-wrath predictions are carbon-copied in a contemporary outburst of apocalyptic prophecies of every religious stripe and cultural shape (doubters: search the web). More broadly, the rise of fundamentalism worldwide is integrally informed by the propositions and claims of the apocalyptic worldview. Several factors encourage this symbiosis, the most important of which might be the radical cosmic dualism that is axiomatic to both apocalypticism and fundamentalism, and toxic to modern liberal values. The year 2011 is not a sign, it is a symptom.

The other path along which apocalyptic speculation seems to be heading is suggested by the 2012 phenomenon. It began life about five decades ago in the first scholarly translations of the “long-count” calendar of the Mesoamericans, which forecast the end of a Great Period of 13 *b’ak’tuns* that some authorities translated to a date in late 2012. In the 1980s and 1990s, this date was taken up by a series of cranks, and worked into a scenario that imagined that the pre-Columbian Mayans had predicted a biblical-style end of the world for December 21, 2012.

Although this date remains its core feature, the 2012 phenomenon has grown well beyond its Mayan roots. Many 2012 predictions are secular-apocalyptic in orientation or not apocalyptic at all. Some expect a seismic political change that is correlated to the upcoming American



presidential election and backlit by the present economic crisis. Others anticipate the dawning of a new spiritual age or stage in human consciousness. Still others envision the sudden intrusion of a new celestial body in our solar system. The list goes on.

It is critical to recognize the novelty of 2012. The ability of apocalyptic predictions to derive from data outside Scripture (however defined) is not a modern development. Ancient Jews and Christians composed dozens of apocalyptic texts and attributed them to the classical Sibyls. Nor is it historically exceptional for predictions to be later supplemented or augmented. Byzantine-era Christians regularly assembled new apocalyptic oracles from parts of older ones in order to accommodate changing circumstances.

What is unprecedented is the planetary scale and wide-open nature of these processes. The architecture of Internet technologies—hypertext referencing, user-generated content, social interfacing—coupled with the demands of an online audience, typically with an omnivorous intellectual appetite, have profoundly altered how apocalyptic prophecies are created, transmitted, and received. The year 2012 marks the first public apocalypse. Apocalyptic conjecture can be instantaneously uploaded to freely accessible websites, blogs, and social media, enabling real-time public discussion in a global forum unrestricted by the usual theological firewalls. Some ideas stick, others do not. Syncretism is inevitable.

One result of these processes has been the emergence of a “superflat” appreciation of apocalypticism, the logical if technologically unforeseen culmination of a trend first observed in the 1970s by Harvard theologian Amos Wilder among others. Superflat apocalypticism is marked by a virtually infinite data plane. Individuals are able to access any apocalyptic prediction, past or present, via the Internet. At the same time, the vertical dimension is almost nonexistent, intellectual depth and critical nuance having been sacrificed to unlimited content. Apocalyptic images, symbols, and vocabulary have consequently become unanchored from the traditions from which they once derived, even as they transcend them. The year 2012 is the Internet Apocalypse. So long as we are wired in, there is no going back.

It will be interesting to discover whether the two paths indicated by the 2011 and 2012 events presage the future of apocalyptic speculation as I contend. Prediction is always a risky affair, as eschatological prophets from John the Divine to Joachim of Fiore to Sabbatai Zevi to William Miller to Harold Camping can attest. Every end-time prediction has been wrong. The failure rate is 100 percent. In fact, every new prediction unintentionally depends on the bankruptcy of its predecessors for its own authority. “Apocalypse,” as Frank Kermode observed, “can be disconfirmed without being discredited.”

Even as the 2011 and 2012 events highlight this generation’s fascination with the end of the world, they also mask

the one doomsday prediction that is indisputably accurate. The tragedy of our time is the degree to which people who should know better seek revelation about an imaginary day of doom in ancient writings or archaic calendars, yet overlook the real apocalypse outside their kitchen windows, in the form of the catastrophic degradation of the biosphere. No heavenly vision is required to divulge this future; no ancient tome needs to be deciphered or hidden cosmic design revealed. The ecological destruction is plain to all, and its planetary magnitude and the extent of our personal culpability are equally transparent to anyone with access to the Internet.

With culpability comes responsibility. Eschatological prediction presupposes that an otherworldly agency or force governs history, and that the coming doom cannot be forestalled. It transfers responsibility for the future to something or someone else. This is a perilous stance in light of the current crisis. To consider the looming ecological doomsday in this way, as beyond the reach of human intellection and imagination, is to abrogate our responsibility to the planet. Tomorrow is ours alone to create, as it ever has been.

*Lorenzo DiTommaso is associate professor and chair of the Department of Religion at Concordia University, Montréal. His next book, The Architecture of Apocalypticism, the first volume of a trilogy, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.*



Athabasca glacier and Mount Andromeda in Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada, 2008 by Wikimedia Commons user Kadellar.





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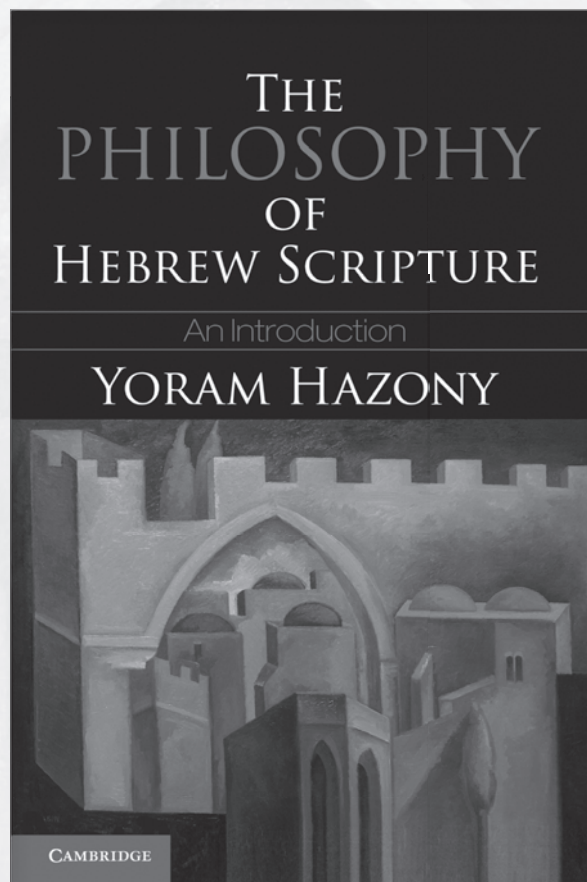
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# The Latest

## The Dictatorship of the Comedian

Edward Portnoy



Still from *The Dictator*. Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution.

It's axiomatic that dictatorship is bad for the Jews, except perhaps, in the movies. Charlie Chaplin's 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*, placed a poor Jewish barber in the shoes of a fascist dictator, leading him to use the position to declaim the value of democracy to the world. Twisting that theme in a part homage, part parody of the former, Sasha Baron Cohen's latest release, *The Dictator*, places the famed star of *Borat* in the role of Admiral General Aladeen, a Middle Eastern dictator of the fictional state of Wadiya. Both films have the intended effect of mocking real dictators, the former, Adolf Hitler, the latter, a melange of Middle Eastern and African dictators.

Wearing a lush, sans-moustache, Islamic fundamentalist-style beard, surrounded by a phalanx of gorgeous female bodyguards and living in a garish palace filled with bigger than life portraits of himself, Admiral General Aladeen's official title is, "Admiral General Aladeen, Supreme Leader, Chief Ophthalmologist, Invincible, All Triumphant, Beloved Oppressor of the People of Wadiya and excellent swimmer, including butterfly." Holding 118 PhD's and a diploma in spray tanning from Qatar Community College, his accomplishments include changing three hundred words in the Wadiyan language to "Aladeen," and, when describing his country to a journalist, he stated, "My country has existed for over 7 million years, ever since the dinosaurs were wiped out by the Zionists,"

and noted that he does "not have a nuclear weapons program, wink wink." When he arrives in New York, he rides up Fifth Avenue on a camel followed by an entourage of a few dozen turquoise Lambourghinis.

It sounds over-the-top, does it not? If so, then consider the following real life exploits of some recent, real life dictators to see where Baron Cohen culled some of his ideas:

The recently deceased Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi, who was also protected by a platoon of attractive female bodyguards, was known to pitch his giant, bulletproof, Bedouin tents on the the Champs Elysée, the Kremlin and in the Villa Doria Pamphili Park in Rome. Idi Amin Dada's official title was "Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Seas and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular." "President for Life" of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, aka *Turkmenbashi*, named cities, schools and a meteorite after himself. He also renamed the months of the year after himself and members of his family. Turkmenbashi ordered all libraries closed after deciding that his people

only needed two books: the Koran and his autobiography. North Korea's Kim Jong Il was said to be able to control the weather with his emotions and to have once made eleven hole-in-ones during a round of golf.

All of the above, like Aladeen, "lovingly oppress[ed] their people." While it's easy to laugh at the ridiculous exploits of Ghaddafi, Amin Dada, Turkmenbashi and others, any possible mirth is immediately tempered by the fact that they tortured and killed thousands. Typically treated as a kind of pathetic and benign ancillary, particularly in light of the actual violence that dictators wreak, these bizarre foibles are a kind of low-hanging fruit of dictatorship, which Baron Cohen serves up in the form of vicious satire.

Forced to New York at the behest of the United Nations, Aladeen is kidnapped and switched with a double by his nefarious Uncle Tamir, who wants to profit from Wadiya's oil wealth. As the double is set to sign a new democratic constitution for Wadiya, Aladeen escapes and is rescued by Zoe, the ultra-liberal manager of a feminist vegan food coop in Brooklyn, with whom he falls in love. Along



Still from *The Dictator*. Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution.

the way, he finds Nuclear Nadal, the former head of his clandestine nuclear weapons program. Together, they hatch a scheme to get Aladeen, whose signature beard was shaven off by the kidnappers, to the hotel where he must foil the signing of the new constitution.

Throughout all this, there are numerous outrageous diversions that don't necessarily bear discussing here, but what can be noted is that the bizarre antics of Aladeen in New York broach topics ranging from satiric commentary on knee-jerk liberalism to the value of dictatorship to gender issues, racism, and anti-Semitism, among others.

One of the stocks-in-trade of modern dictatorship is anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism, a theme that Baron Cohen also explored in *Borat*. Anti-Semitism in these films functions as a device that exposes Jew-hatred as the ideology of idiots. Both *Borat* and *Aladeen* are severe imbeciles, and their hatred and fear of Jews is a symptom of their stupidity. While *Borat* is meant to be seen as naïve and ignorant, *Aladeen* is malevolent and, although he is temporarily redeemed by the power of love, he is still a complete idiot. The message Baron Cohen wishes to convey to the audience is clear: anti-Semitism and racism are the domains of fools and thugs.

Although this message was understood by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) when *Borat* first appeared in 2008, the organization nonetheless published a press release complaining that the film's audience may not have been "sophisticated enough to get the joke, and that some may even find it reinforcing their bigotry." The very idea that scenes like the ridiculous "running of the Jew," or *Borat*'s fear of "shape-shifting" elderly Jews would be misunderstood as real doesn't place the ADL's assessment in a particularly realistic light. A portion of Baron Cohen's audience may be unsophisticated, but it seems unlikely that they are that dumb. Worse yet, the ADL's Abraham Foxman, who has apparently become the mafia don of anti-Semitism, demanded to sit down with Baron Cohen to "offer him a deal" in which the actor was requested to make advertisements for the ADL in order to assuage Foxman's fears about his comedic method of satirizing prejudice. Cohen was nice enough to discuss the issue with Foxman, but the offer was one that he could refuse and, justifiably, he did.

Just as his unusual treatment of anti-Semitism has had a role to play in a number of his films, Baron Cohen also reserves an unusual function for Hebrew: as a linguistic



Still from *The Dictator*. Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution.

beard for Arabic, or, technically, "Wadiyan." Whenever *Aladeen* is perceived as speaking his own language, just as was done when *Borat* spoke "Kazakh," he is actually speaking a kind of pidgin Hebrew, which Baron Cohen apparently imbibed from his Israeli-born mother and knows from his years in the Habonim-Dror youth movement and time spent as a volunteer on Kibbutz Rosh Hanikra.

The majority of the audience, whom, we assume, are not Hebrew speakers, are not in on the joke, the irony of which becomes evident as the Hebraic element exposes who, exactly, is behind this farce. With overly trilled r's, deeply guttural a's, and lengthy affricative kh's, Baron Cohen creates a linguistically Middle Eastern caricature that is comically offensive. Possibly a bizarre form of politically based, comic revenge, Baron Cohen serves up those perceived to be enemies of the Jews, namely Austrians (Bruno) and Arabs (*Aladeen*), as anti-Semitic buffoons.

What is evident is that Baron Cohen loves playing these imbecilic characters and performs them brilliantly. But what he appears to prefer more than anything is the awkward danger of live broadcast and is at his best when he is performing in character, riffing off the dupes of broadcast media. As a result, some of the best bits can be found in his promotional appearances just prior to the film's release.

Whereas Baron Cohen's three previous films, *Ali G*, *Borat*, and *Bruno*, all mocked the credulous dupes who interacted with the

characters, here, the joke is on the audience, the members of which are trapped between the hammer of political and social satire and the anvil of outrageously vulgar humor. In a clever parody of Chaplin's speech at the end of *The Great Dictator*, he cynically sows confusion by attacking democracy, exposing the many ways it has been exploited. But in a paraphrase of Churchill's pronouncement, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms . . .," *Aladeen* proclaims the value of civil rights and democracy and calls for fair and free elections in his country. However, in a political nod to the rampant dissembling of real dictators, he returns to Wadiya to continue to, as he puts it, "lovingly oppress his people."

That *The Dictator* was written before the advent of last year's Arab Spring wasn't an issue for the improvisational mastery of Baron Cohen. "I think that the Arab Spring is a passing fad," he said (as *Aladeen*) in an interview with *The Forward*, "like the Atkins diet, or human rights. And you'll find that pretty soon it will turn into the Crackdown Summer, Torture Fall and Execution Winter. But you know the Arab Spring could have been avoided. I told Mubarak a thousand times: "If you get Wi-Fi in your palace, put a fucking password on it. The people will start using it."

*Edward Portnoy teaches Jewish Literature and Yiddish Language at Rutgers University.*



# The Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive

Lewis Glinert and Alex Hartov

That rainy day in 2002 when we decided to salvage the earthly audio remains of the Joe Tall Boston Yiddish Hour from a waterlogged basement and place them on the Web for a course on Jewish Humor, we could not envision that within ten years the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive (DJSA) would become possibly the world's largest online scholarly archive of Jewish recordings. Today it hosts more than 40,000 tracks, spanning the predigital era of Jewish folk, *hazanut*, humor, documentary, and you name it—as well as scans of every label, liner, and jacket. Another 100,000 tracks are in the queue. They must be patient; the DJSA is a labor of love.

Our mission is to serve scholars and students of Jewish culture and others with a professional interest in these recordings, from performers and producers to community organizers.

The DJSA is very much an ongoing experiment from which we hope others can learn—and time is running out. Much of Jewish culture is trapped in collections of albums, tapes, and cassettes around the world sitting unused and even facing

the scrapheap because there is no longer the equipment to play them—nor the means to digitize them. Records are fragile, 78s in particular. Have you ever tried requesting an album by interlibrary loan?

We were fortunate with the mix of technical and cultural know-how we brought to the task: One of us is an electronics engineer versed in the history of recording, the other a Hebrew and Yiddish scholar with a passion for the liturgy and Jewish and Israeli music.

The physical and emotional heart of the project is the fascination of bringing back to life sounds that were captured long ago. Old recordings, whether on commercial 78 rpm records, or homemade tapes from the 1950s, or “transcriptions” discs cut in radio stations and sometimes in homes, or even wire recorders, present a technical challenge. The enjoyment of hearing these sounds come back to life cannot be described. Restoring recordings requires equipment, knowledge of recording technology, and time.

Users can browse by occasion (Shabbat, Pesach, wedding and so on), language, and genre. They can search by title, performer, composer, textual source, and much more.

Should you wish to sample wedding melodies or compare renditions of the Musaf for Shabbat, you can rest assured that we are gradually entering every *Kvodo Male Olam* or *Asher Bara* by its place in the liturgy. If it's children's stories or Persian Jewish folksongs you're after, we are striving to cross-classify by as many genres as our instincts tell us would work.

We are conscious of how problematic some categories are.

“Folk” is a notorious one.

How should one describe the songs of the Palmach and Israeli or Yiddish art songs (as popular? chansons? or poems?). How this affects the use of such a site is a research topic in itself.

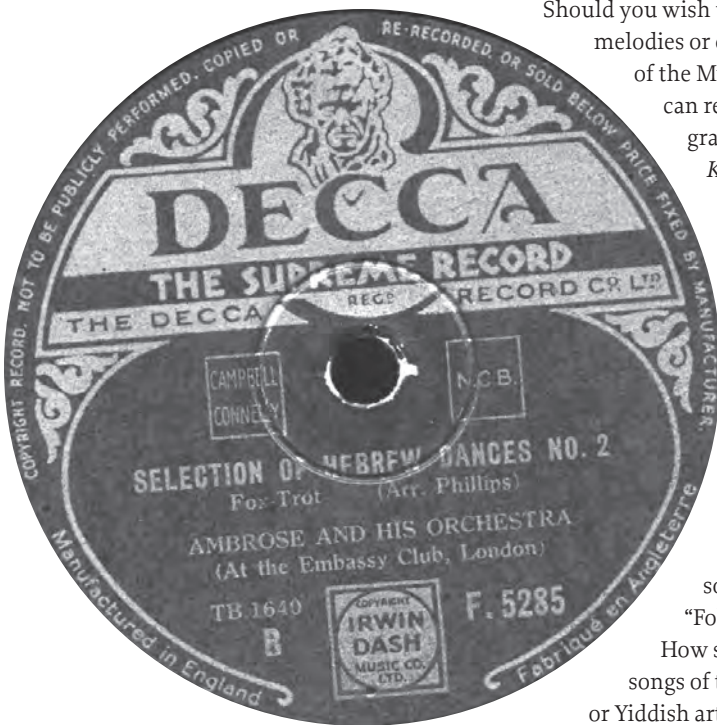
So, where did we get all this stuff? We have never ventured forth to look for it. And

we have never purchased a single item. It just pours in. People hear about it and donate their collections. Occasionally, a Bureau of Jewish Education or the host of an old radio station calls us in. Most significant by far are the collaborative digitization projects with Hebrew College (Boston) and the Jewish Music Institute (London University), with their trove of old Israeli and British recordings.

A confession: We love opening boxes of records and finding a jewel that few may ever have heard, such as Leonard Bernstein's arrangement of “Reenah” on Corinne Chochem's *Collection of Jewish Holiday Dances and Songs* (1947). DJSA has secured many unpublished recordings—twenty years of Al Jolson radio shows, studio tapes from Jan Bart, Martin Davidson, and the Zamir Chorale, sixty reels with the entire Frankfurt *nusach*, the Vistas of Israel broadcasts. And there are the sounds of a past generation that will likely never be reissued, like those holiday albums from the Jewish Education Committee of New York. An echo of the pulse of 1950s American Judaism.

The Indiana Jones spirit led us, courtesy of the Jabotinsky Institute, to possibly the earliest surviving Jewish underground broadcasts, made in 1939 on the Etzel station Kol Tzion HaLohemet, in eloquent response to the Yafo pogrom and the plight of the blockade-busting vessel *Parita*, concluded defiantly with a whistled snatch from Jabotinsky's *Shir Betar*. And a quest for recordings of the first Hebrew radio station, hosted by the British-run Palestine Broadcasting Service, eventually uncovered original acetates deposited with the British Library by the legendary director Rex Keating—of which just one, eight minutes long, was in Hebrew: “Keep Fit and a Daily Tanakh Reading” from 1946. Approaches to all sorts of Israeli, British, and American archives had drawn a blank. The neglect of Israel's audio history must cause concern.

Naturally, much of what we have is what American Jews were able to buy—or, from users overseas, the occasional French or South African or Latin American Jewish choir or cantor. Alas, a vast body of pre-World War II, European Jewish 78 rpm recordings is probably lost forever. Michael Aylward has documented many thousands of such recordings. Did the Nazis archive Jewish



The suavest Hebrew foxtrot ever. Courtesy of the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive.

recordings and did they survive? There is, of course, the Phonoarchive of Jewish Folklore at the Vernadsky National Library in Kiev and other collections at Florida State University. But will they ever be available online?

Sleeves and labels (we scan them all) are a joy in themselves, as Bennett and Kun have demonstrated in *And You Shall Know Us by the Trail of Our Vinyl* (2008). Of course, the text may be longer on fantasy than fact. Why does every cantor or Chasidic rock artist have to be described as an international celebrity? But the LP sleeves—both image and text—were savored and memorized in almost every Diaspora and Israeli home. They were never studied or taught but they were at the core of a visual-textual culture.

The DJSA is a rich mine for contextualization. It's possible to see what was in the collection of some revered Chasidic rabbi. It is possible to gauge what was being issued where and when, by whom, and why. Thus, the American Orthodox musical scene sheds important light on this emergent force in American Jewry. Our assistants have interviewed key figures in the Orthodox music revival of the 1960s

and 1970s, and we would like to see many more field recordings online—interviews, performances, even linguistic fieldwork, confidentiality permitting. Sadly, amateur recordings are often torture to the ears—the fate of so many audience recordings of Carlebach we have been given. Today, of course, YouTube and the like provide for easy sharing of Jewish materials, but where will YouTube be tomorrow? At the DJSA we have an application for worrying.

And our users? They number in the thousands, from Morocco to Melbourne. Many are cantors or perform in Yiddish. Some are in the media. Bavarian Public Radio wanted help with a program on “Jewish singers which were in Germany not very well known, e.g. Mordechai Hershman and Maurice Schwartz.” Then there are teachers and academics.

The requests can be poignant. Someone wrote that his grandfather, a gifted young singer, had perished on an El Al flight shot down in 1955. The DJSA has his only recording. A cultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Kiev e-mailed for access to support his work with the Jewish community. One young American wrote:

I had the pleasure of having dinner this holiday season with Jazz Legend Ornette Coleman and he told me of one of the most amazing voices spiritual or otherwise he had ever heard. The name was Joseph Rosenblatt. He said he lost the recordings he had in a move many years ago and told me if I ever found them that he would love to get them again. If you can help me hear the Cantor and get Ornette a copy it would be much appreciated.

We happily obliged.

*Lewis Glinert is professor of Hebrew Studies and cultural director of the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive at Dartmouth College. His BBC documentaries Tongue of Tongues and Golem: The Making of a Modern Myth can be heard on the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive.*

*Alex Hartov is professor of Engineering and technical director of the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive at Dartmouth College.*

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# The Questionnaire

## As a professor of Jewish Studies, how do you perceive your responsibility to the Jewish community?

### Leora F. Batnitzky

*Professor of Religion, Princeton University*

As a professor of Jewish Studies, I feel responsible to the Jewish community to the same extent that I think any academic ought to feel responsible to the public, not more and not less. It should go without saying that universities and their faculties should be answerable only to themselves since this is our best guarantee of intellectual freedom. At the same time, however, since universities in the United States are part of a larger democratic culture, and contribute to this culture in important ways, I think that professors are obliged to make their work available to the public when appropriate. In my view, the proper relation between professors of Jewish Studies and the Jewish community is not unlike the proper relationship between the establishment and free exercise clauses of the American Constitution. On the one hand, the Jewish community (along with any other community or individuals) does not and should not have any authoritative standing with regard to Jewish Studies. But on the other hand, the Jewish community is and should be free to take an interest in Jewish Studies. When I look at this question from a personal rather than professional point of view, I do hope of course that the Jewish community takes an interest in Jewish Studies. I think that Jews of all stripes (as well as many other people) have lots to learn from the work that is done in Jewish Studies (I include myself here as a learner). I would assume that I speak for many if not most professors of Jewish Studies in saying that I think that more intellectual, critical engagement is always a good thing for the Jewish community.

### Steven Cohen

*Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy, HUC-JIR*

On a personal level, the formulation of this question is troubling in that it conveys the notion that serving the Jewish People

is construed as a byproduct of my service as a professor of Jewish Studies. In point of fact, the reverse is true. My decision to pursue an academic career as a sociologist of American Jewry—taken as an 18-year-old Columbia College junior—took shape as a direct consequence of my strongly held intention to serve the Jewish People. My entire career (except for a four-year interlude as an assistant professor when I wrote articles on ethnicity in pursuit of tenure) has been entirely devoted to exploring issues of policy relevance to Jewish communal life.

Thus, my research has been animated by, and enriched by, the most urgent questions being asked by Jewish communal leaders. These generally revolve around the central issue of the quality of Jewish life and how it can be improved. Accordingly, I've addressed my writings, directly or obliquely, to the most energetic areas of contemporary discourse in Jewish communal life. By way of illustration, I've sought to:

1. Demonstrate that which should be intuitively known (e.g., various forms of intensive Jewish education produce clear positive consequences).
2. Add nuance to our collective murky understanding of emerging trends (e.g., *The Sovereign Jewish Self* and *The Jew Within*).
3. Spark debate about vital issues (distancing of younger American Jews from Israel, largely due to intermarriage).
4. Develop innovative policy responses and rationales (e.g., on intermarriage, presenting myself as an “empirical hawk” and a “policy dove”).
5. Advance thinking on practice and policy for leaders (as in *Sacred Strategies* for congregational leaders).
6. Promote particular ways of thinking about Jewish engagement (e.g., as a culture and nationality rather than a Western religious identity).

I see my “students” as located outside the classroom, with communal professionals,

lay leaders, and philanthropists uppermost in my mind, along with colleagues and other social scientists. And, I've sought collaborative relationships, having co-authored works with at least sixty different colleagues over the years.

In short, contributing to Jewish life is intrinsic to my academic mission.

### John M. Efron

*Koret Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley*

As modern Jewish scholars, all of us, irrespective of our fields, are the heirs to a small band of German-Jewish intellectuals who gathered together in 1822 to found *The Society for the Academic Study of the Jews*. While we would no longer subscribe to the Society's goal of bringing the Jews “to the same point of development reached by the rest of Europe,” we can and should still be guided by Paragraph 3 of the Society's founding statutes: “the society should work from above by promoting significant and rigorous projects, assuring their accessibility and interest to the largest possible audience.” From the very beginning then, the founders recognized, in my opinion quite rightly, that scholars of Jewish Studies have a responsibility to the Jewish community, that the fruit of our labors was not merely to be passed from hand to hand among a small band of academics but that it be shared with the broadest possible audience.

There are several important reasons why this should be so. One of the most important features of Jewish Studies programs is that we take seriously the statute's demand for rigor. By adopting that as a guiding principle, Jewish Studies programs have avoided becoming advocacy programs—I am well aware of increasing pressures, especially when it comes to the subject of Israel—and we remain guided by the goal of producing rigorous scholarship. That pursuit of excellence has endowed Jewish Studies with credibility and has been of incalculable value in assisting with the proliferation of



Jewish Studies programs because donors and university administrators alike wish to be associated with excellence. And it is here that we have a genuine partnership with the Jewish community. No small number among the readers of this piece, owe their positions to the generosity of Jewish philanthropists, whose commitment to Jewish Studies makes our work possible and ensures that will be the case for future scholars.

There is another reason that we should feel a sense of responsibility to the Jewish community and it is that we in Jewish Studies are in the happy position of having a curious and eager audience. In my own field of History, in a department of around sixty faculty, very few would ever have the opportunity to speak to people outside the academy. This is simply not true of Jewish Studies scholars and we should count ourselves as fortunate because of it. And as weak as the publishing market may well be, it is still the case that hardly any ethnic group in the United States purchases scholarly monographs to the extent that members of the Jewish community do. Jews thirst to learn more about their history, their culture, and their sacred texts and call upon us to teach them. I believe it is our responsibility to honor their call. There is no more eloquent testimony to this position than that articulated by Franz Rosenzweig. In his 1920 inaugural address to the *Lehrhaus*, the adult education school he founded in Frankfurt, Rosenzweig declared: “They [the students] have come together in order to ‘learn’—for Jewish ‘learning’ includes Jewish ‘teaching.’”

### **Ayala Fader**

*Associate Professor of Anthropology,  
Fordham University*

Although I am not a Jewish Studies professor, all of my research as a cultural and linguistic anthropologist has been about contemporary North American Jews. My responsibility, as I see it, to the Jewish community is to have anthropology and research on Jews inform each other. The Jewish experience has much to offer anthropological theory building, and anthropology can make Jewish Studies relevant to a wider audience. I aim to put the study of Jews in a comparative framework, so that those who study religious life, for example, or language, or race might easily include Jews too. My responsibility is to clarify these points of intersection, where the Jewish community and others can have conversations.

An anthropological lens forces us beyond Jewish particularism, posing broader questions about difference and cultural relativism. Ethnography requires scholars to make their own positioning explicit, placing the politics of representation center stage. The Jewish experience pushes social theory building as well. For example, considerations of Jews reveal alternative models of modernity located in the heart of western urban centers; Jewish languages offer surprising counterexamples to assumptions about the relationship between language and identity; and the recent Jewish experience asks questions of how diasporas change over time.

I hope that my commitment to creating new conversations between Jews and anthropology challenges us, as academics and humans, to continue to struggle with all kinds of responsibilities to all kinds of communities.

### **Paul Mendes-Flohr**

*Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Modern Jewish History and Thought in the Divinity School, The University of Chicago and Professor Emeritus of Jewish Thought, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

The question posed by this symposium has haunted the proponents of the academic study of Jewish Studies ever since the founding of the discipline in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The overarching objective of the early generations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which is technically a field of study rather than a specific discipline, sought to have the study of Judaism included in the university curriculum, where it would be acknowledged as an integral component of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of educated humanity. As such, the academic study of Judaism and Jewish civilization should be open to all, Jews and non-Jews alike. Just as there are Jews who are scholars of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and, indeed, of Christianity, there should be non-Jews who study Judaism. This vision of course is in accord with the cultural and axiological premise of the modern university. To be sure, the pursuit of this objective met resistance on the part of the custodians of the German universities, and it was not until after the Shoah that the academic study of Judaism took firm root in Germany, and elsewhere in Europe and North America.

It is in the shadow of Auschwitz that Jewish Studies has found an honored place within the discourse of the humanities. The

question posed by the symposium cannot be readily extricated from this existential context. On the one hand, as an academic discipline Jewish Studies is beholden solely to the Owl of Minerva, whose sapient gaze transcends specific ethnic and religious concerns. On the other hand, one cannot ignore the existential reality that in its present historical configuration, Jewish Studies is intricately bound with Jewish memory and hence a responsibility to the Jewish community.

I fear I have no easy prescription to deal with the attendant dilemma. As an academic I am a member of a universal community bound by an uncompromising allegiance to rigorous codes of scholarly inquiry. At the same time, the imperatives of Jewish memory—as well as abiding cultural and social commitments to the people of my birth—do not allow me to maintain a studied detachment from the Jewish community. To the degree that I am involved in the life of the community, I am hesitant to do so under the mantle of a *professor of Jewish Studies*. Without elaborating here, I am not certain whether my academic learning constitutes the type of authority needed by the community. I am willing to share my knowledge, of course, but not as a sage who speaks *ex cathedra*, and certainly not in order to undermine the normative authority of the rabbinate.

### **Jonathan D. Sarna**

*Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University*

Years ago, when extremists claimed that Jews bore disproportionate responsibility for American slavery, I was one of the academics who sought to set the record straight. A Jewish communal leader, knowing of my work, contacted me for an essay. “Can you send me 5,000 words proving that Jews had nothing to do with the slave trade,” he asked. When I refused, protesting that that would be a lie, since some Jews were indeed involved in the nefarious trade even though their impact upon the history of slavery was miniscule, the leader exploded. “What good are you professors for the Jewish community,” he shouted at me. “On the rare occasions when I need you, you disappoint me.”

The episode helped to clarify for me my responsibilities as a Jewish Studies professor who is simultaneously a proud member of the Jewish community. I cannot, under any circumstances, compromise my professional integrity for the community (if I did, what

good would I be?). But I can, if I choose, serve as a communal resource and activist. As such, I may inform, instruct, inspire, influence, innovate, incite, irritate, infuriate, and otherwise impact upon the Jewish community (restricting myself here only to verbs beginning with the letter “i”). I might do the same, as a citizen, on behalf of my country.

But I am in no way required to do so.

With the globalization of the academy and the normalization of Jewish Studies, there are many professors in the United States today who are not citizens of the United States, and likewise many members of the Association for Jewish Studies who are not themselves Jewish. They may well make other decisions than I do concerning their roles as community resources and activists. But if a Jewish communal professional asked them to lie on behalf of the Jewish community, I hope that they would still say no.

### Devorah Schoenfeld

*Assistant Professor of Theology (Judaism), Loyola University Chicago*

I teach Judaism at Loyola University, a Jesuit Catholic institution. I teach primarily courses that count for the Core requirement in Theology, and the vast majority of my students are not Jewish. As the first Jew that many of them have encountered, I have a responsibility to challenge any anti-Jewish preconceptions they have been taught. Many of them, for example, see Jews as “legalistic,” which they see as the opposite of “spiritual.” Others don’t understand how Jews can have any concept of forgiveness without Christ. Part of my responsibility to the Jewish community is to interrupt anti-Jewish ways of thinking so they don’t continue into the next generation of the Catholic world and to replace them with a more nuanced

picture. I think this is my responsibility to the Catholic community as well.

I also believe that I am responsible for representing the Jewish world in all its diversity, including aspects of it that may be more challenging to my students. Students need to know about secular Judaism, for example, even though by not being faith-centered it challenges their ideas of what Judaism (or any religion) should be, because it is a form of Judaism that they are likely to encounter. I am similarly responsible for teaching the variety of Jewish denominations. Otherwise, students may simply take their anti-Jewish projections and apply them to a variety of Judaism to which they feel less connected. It is important to me, therefore, to expose them to a wide range of Jewish ideas. I am careful to never disclose what kind of Judaism I practice or where I stand on any of the debates, lest the students think that is the “right” answer, or the only one they need to know for the final exam, because as the only person teaching Judaism at Loyola I feel responsible to the entire Jewish community.

### Anna Shternshis

*Al and Malka Green Associate Professor of Yiddish, University of Toronto*

Like many colleagues in Jewish Studies, I hold a named position at the university. My e-mail signature reminds me every day that members of the Jewish community donated incredibly large sums of money so that I can have my job. While technically my title only means that the funds will always be there for my field of study, I assume that the named chair also suggests some level of responsibility to the Jewish community.

Jewish Studies would not be where it is today without the generosity of North

American Jewish donors. They are the reason that scholars can indulge in discovering the details of Jewish lives in eastern Europe of the nineteenth century, study, and teach Yiddish language (which, some people say, survives in a secular Jewish world largely because of academia), and scrutinize Jewish philosophy. If not for the support of the community, Jewish Studies outside of Israel would probably be reduced to the fields of the Bible, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and maybe the Holocaust. (And even then, these subjects would not be taught at today’s scope.) That is why I fight my initial inclination to dismiss any community responsibility. Instead I think about the ways to give back. Jewish scholars are blessed with an audience outside of their universities that is excited to hear about their work. We are invited to speak at synagogues, community centers, and book clubs. Community members come to the conferences that we organize. Local Jewish newspapers are eager to review and promote our books. Not many scholars in the humanities have a chance of getting detailed (sometimes, too detailed) feedback to their ideas outside of the ivory tower and their immediate family. Giving back, thus, is our privilege, not only our responsibility. If we are lucky (and smart enough), we might even have a chance to influence the way the Jewish community understands itself and its politics. Surely, our audience might disagree or sometimes even get angry with rather than inspired by us. But it is a responsibility of a Jewish Studies scholar to not give up trying.

### Ilan Stavans

*Lewis-Sebring Professor in Latin American and Latino Culture, Amherst College*

I understand the classroom as a collective brain, one made of smaller thinking engines that, in their interaction, enhance its aggregate

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capacity. This brain doesn't live in isolation. It is part of a larger body we call society with which it exists in communication. What happens in the classroom is a reflection of the patterns of society at large and vice versa. My responsibility as the driving force of that brain is, thus, a responsibility for society as a whole. Another way of answering this question is by saying that my Jewishness defines everything I do, including what I write and how I teach. It is never a database or an agenda; it's a sensibility. Teaching and writing, writing and teaching—the two go hand in hand.

But I'm not a professor of Jewish Studies or, for that matter, of any other discipline. Disciplines might be useful tools to understand the world but they are obnoxiously constraining, especially when it comes to articulating knowledge in the classroom. I don't even like to be called a professor; the noun is too pompous for me. It often serves as an excuse to falsify and pontificate. I'm simply a teacher. My obligation as a teacher is to inspire students, to make them think broadly, to deepen their curiosity. That obligation is done by erasing the borders of disciplines. What I hope students get isn't information but pleasure—intellectual pleasure. And the capacity to articulate questions.

### **Steven Weitzman**

*Daniel E. Koshland Professor of Jewish Culture and Religion, Stanford University*

I have staked the meaning of my professional life on the hope that my activities as a scholar will somehow be helpful to the larger community, even if what I study is not immediately relevant or useful to present-day concerns. Some of my colleagues stress the role of the scholar as critic, the modern day prophet whose role is to speak truth to power. I admire such scholars and see the importance of their efforts, but for me personally, what is more essential is the role of the scholar as a teacher, one who helps to open up the world to others, supports people in becoming more self-aware and self-determining, and helps them to understand their connections to others. However inept I may be in acting on this conviction, it has shaped how I operate as a scholar, the audience I imagine for my work, and the constituencies I try to serve in my role as a Jewish Studies program director.

The communities I most often work with are Jewish communities because, as it happens, they are the ones most interested in Jewish Studies, but I want and am ready to play such a role for any community or

individual who feels they have something to learn from me. The people easiest for me to reach are either in college or are post-retirement (the latter, the truest of students). I'd love to figure out how to reach people in between, and those who might not think themselves able to comprehend what scholarship teaches.

At this moment in history, however—a time when our society is backing away from public investment in educational institutions—I find myself preoccupied by another question: As a scholar, I know I have a responsibility to the community, but does the community, however that is defined, feel a sense of responsibility in return? Does it see anything of value in scholarship that isn't immediately useful or easily digested, that may not tell people what they want to hear or reaffirm what they already think they know? There is much at stake for the future in how communities answer this question, and not just for Jewish Studies but for academia in general. I hope that Jews will be outspoken in advocating for the idea that scholarship is indeed a good that the entire community—the scholar, students, and the rest of society as well—has a responsibility to support.



### **AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH Graduate Research Funding Opportunities**

AAJR announces a new grant for graduate student summer research funding. We will provide several stipends of no more than \$4,000 to graduate students in any field of Jewish Studies whose department does not provide funds for travel to archives, libraries, or other research sites abroad. The funds are not intended for language study or purchase of equipment.

**Eligibility:** Graduate students in any field of Jewish studies at a North American university who have submitted their prospectus and can demonstrate a need to travel to collections may apply for funding.

#### **Required for Application:**

1. A copy of the thesis prospectus including a chapter outline, and a one page statement, including a budget, about the necessity for travel (i.e. collections to be consulted, sites to be visited).
2. A letter of recommendation from the dissertation advisor. The advisor must affirm the need for travel and the letter must state that the institution does not provide summer or travel funds.

All materials should be submitted online to Cheri Thompson at [cheriphompson@gmail.com](mailto:cheriphompson@gmail.com) by February 3, 2013. For questions and further information, please contact Professor Ephraim Kanarfogel, Chair of the committee at [Kanarfog@yu.edu](mailto:Kanarfog@yu.edu). Awards will be announced in mid-April 2013.



# ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES

## 44TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**DECEMBER 16–18, 2012**

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- *New!* Digital Media Workshop with the latest online and digital resources for Jewish Studies scholars, Monday, December 17, 10:30 am–12:00 pm
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- Book Exhibit featuring more than forty leading publishers of Jewish Studies and related scholarship
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