

ON THE HISTORY OF THE  
POLITICAL JUDGMENT OF THE JEW

by ISMAR SCHORSCH

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**I**N THE FIELD of historical inquiry, accepted patterns of thought often interfere with new empirical research. The conceptual equipment a historian brings to explore unknown terrain may just be unsuited for the task and serve to distort rather than delineate the contours of his topic. The proper understanding of many a new subject has been long delayed by an instinctive application of well-worn notions that make it difficult to approach the subject at hand without blinders. Should those notions about the past also be in error, the difficulty in studying a new topic is twice compounded. It may thus take sometimes a generation or two before historians are able to free themselves from the strait jacket of earlier conceptualizations in order to conduct their research in terms dictated by the subject itself.

Rarely has a subject appeared to confirm so conclusively a prevailing perception of the past as in the case of the Nazi extermination of European Jewry. The isolation, helplessness, and disorientation experienced by Jews caught in the Nazi maelstrom seem to bear out the contention that in the diaspora Jews were destined to remain the passive victims of historical circumstances beyond their control. At the end of his still overwhelming study of the Final Solution, Raul Hilberg unhesitatingly invoked "a two-thousand-year-old experience" to account for the absence of Jewish resistance.<sup>1</sup>

For the first time in the history of Western civilization the perpetrators had overcome all administrative and moral obstacles to a killing operation. For the first time, also, the Jewish victims- caught in the strait jacket of their history- plunged themselves physically and psychologically into catastrophe. The destruction of the Jews was thus no accident.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, the ultimate explanation for a Jewish response which unwittingly abetted Nazi objectives is to be found in the nature of Jewish history rather than in the nature of the Nazi assault. Jewish behavior during the Holocaust becomes thereby but one instance of a general view of the diaspora experience.

That Hilberg who is neither a Jewish historian nor a Zionist should have recourse to this view is perhaps the most convincing evidence as to the extent of its dominance. And indeed the most cursory historiographical survey will quickly reveal the diverse quarters and variety of forms in which the view is to be found. Like most of the regnant conceptualizations about the Jewish past, this one too has its genesis in the historical creativity of nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft*. Amid the pressure of the emancipation struggle, Jewish advocates and historians divested exilic Judaism of any trace of political history. What survived the final demise of the Jewish state was a religious community with a universal mandate to teach mankind the loftiest known form of ethical monotheism. The lands of the dispersion, and not Palestine, now became the only legitimate arena for the conduct of Jewish life.

WHEREAS THIS PART of the reconstruction of Jewish history was meant to disarm Christian opponents of emancipation as well as to shore up Jewish loyalties to Judaism, the continued emphasis on the unbroken suffering of the exilic experience was intended to strengthen the claim for equality. Contemporary Jewish faults were not evidence of innate depravity but only the scars left by more than a millennium of Christian oppression. It was this exclusive emphasis on the twin themes of persecution and martyrdom that reduced the political history of diaspora Jewry to little more than the passive endurance of endless violence. The deeply engaged scholars of the emancipation era had produced a secularized version of the older religious concept of Galut.<sup>3</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century this perception of the diaspora experience became central to a number of seminal if disparate statements about Jewish history. For example, two men as dissimilar as Max Weber and Franz Rosenzweig arrived independently and simultaneously at very similar formulations. Though Weber's empathetic and value-free sociology summed up the best of the German academic tradition, it did teeter at the brink of relativism, and Rosenzweig, who had mastered that tradition at the feet of Friedrich Meinecke, dared to reject it for a highly subjective mode of theological thought.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of his trenchant study of Israelite religion, Weber offered some observations on the nature of the diaspora Jewish community. Following Wellhausen, he stressed the priestly role in transforming post-exilic Judaism from a national polity into a religious community, while disregarding the potent expressions of national vitality that punctuated the period of the Second Commonwealth. Above all, he designated this self-imposed and ritually effected segregation as the condition of a pariah community. Jewish scholars might carp at what actually had become the prevailing Protestant thesis about the origins of this pariah community, but there can be little doubt about the fact that the resonances of Weber's term accorded perfectly with their own perception of Jewish fate in the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

What Weber put sociologically, Rosenzweig articulated theologically. In many ways a spokesman for a resurgent German Orthodoxy, Rosenzweig turned his back on nineteenth-century Jewish *Wissenschaft* and its evolutionary model of Judaism. Instead, he ventured a bold nontemporal portrayal of a thoroughly ahistorical Judaism. The key to the survival, essence, and mission of Judaism lay in its existence outside the parameters of history. As a spiritual nation the Jews exhibited a uniquely non-historical relationship to the usual constituent factors of nationality—law, language, and land. By sacrificing its temporal existence, Judaism served to embody for Jews and to hold out for mankind messianic redemption. In regard to our immediate concern what must

be stressed is that in his flight from *Wissenschaft*, Rosenzweig ironically reinforced in a profound way the dominant non-political view of diaspora history.<sup>6</sup>

That view gained still wider currency when it was seized by the ideologues of the Zionist renaissance and turned with devastating effect on the defenders of Western style emancipation. The paradoxical fact is that both Zionists and emancipationists for different reasons shared the same grim perception of the Jewish Middle Ages; what divided them so deeply was rather the question of whether that dark period was over. Against the background of the brutal failure of the Jewish policy of the Czarist regime, Zionism delivered a passionate critique of Jewish powerlessness.

**N**O DOCUMENT states that indictment more radically than the Hebrew short story by Haim Hazaz entitled "The Sermon." When the awkward and inarticulate Yudka overcomes his trepidation to address the central committee of his kibbutz, the Jewish people has at last found one of its own to ventilate its true feelings. The hesitant speech by Yudka is a blunt rejection of all exilic history, a subject that should be expunged from the textbooks of our children.

"Because we didn't make our own history, the goyim made it for us. Just as they used to put out our candles on Sabbath, milk our cows and light our oven on Sabbath, so they made our history for us to suit themselves, and we took it from them as it came."<sup>7</sup>

A closer look at the nature of this imposed history reveals an endless repetition of "oppression, defamation, persecution, and martyrdom . . . That's what's in it, and nothing more! After all, it's . . . it's . . . it bores you to death, it's just plain dull!"<sup>8</sup> By the time he's finished Yudka has repudiated Judaism itself, its paralyzing legalism, its messianic passivity, and its rootless existence. Zionism is no less than a break with the past. "When a man can no longer be a Jew, he becomes a Zionist."<sup>9</sup>

**O**NE OF THE CONDUITS through which this non-political view of Jewish history was diffused in America was the work of Hannah Arendt. As early as 1944 in an essay entitled "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," she applied Max Weber's thesis in an effort to relate at least part of the creativity of four Jewish writers and artists to their personal experience of pariahdom.<sup>10</sup> A year later she moved from the artistic to the political consequences of the pariah legacy. She now turned with vengeance on the Zionist movement in a broad, biting critique of its political judgment and nerve. The upshot of her pungent analysis was that the Zionists were consistently guilty of the very same political obtuseness and timidity for which they roundly condemned their opponents.<sup>11</sup> In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt expanded her charge into a general indictment of all Jewish political sagacity. A two-thousand-year condition of powerlessness had atrophied the political capacity of the Jews. In consequence, Jewish leadership since the emancipation had blindly committed itself to a tragic alliance with the nation-state that would eventually lead to the destruction of both.<sup>12</sup> In sum, a decade before Hilberg's book, Arendt had implicitly put forth the proposition that the victims of the Final Solution were partially responsible for their fate. Jewish history had transformed the descendants of the prophets into pariahs incapable of sound political judgment.<sup>13</sup>

Now the purpose of this excursion into modern Jewish historiography is not to duck the issue whether Jews did or did not resist the Nazis, but rather to emphasize the extent to which our perception and articulation of the problem are conditioned by certain ingrained notions about Jewish history which themselves are not beyond question. Indeed, what I have tried to suggest is that the non-political view of diaspora history was itself conditioned by an identifiable set of historical circumstances and refurbished and redeployed by scholars and ideologues of a later age. Tracing the genesis of the conventional wisdom was meant to challenge its validity. On the factual level, the Hilberg version of the

Arendt thesis has rightly provoked a torrent of research intent on showing the nature and extent of Jewish resistance; on the interpretive level, however, it has yet failed to stimulate a fresh examination of Jewish political history.

## II

**A**T THE OUTSET, two theoretical observations are in order regarding the common view so clearly mirrored in the works of Arendt and Hilberg. First, the Jews in the diaspora do have a political history, for political history is not a function of land, but of legal status and group cohesiveness. For much of their diaspora experience the Jews constituted a state within a state precisely because they were distinguished by both. Furthermore, that status and cohesiveness gave rise to major institutions of self-government whose responsibility it was to administer the internal and external or, if you please, the domestic and foreign affairs of the community. For the purpose of our analysis we shall restrict our use of the term political history to the external affairs of the Jewish community, but even in that limited sense it is not easy to exclude internal matters, for often internal policies were dictated by external considerations. A case in point would be the widespread sumptuary laws of medieval Jewish communities which were designed to control the display of Jewish wealth so as not to excite gentile envy.<sup>14</sup> Jewish leaders clearly sensed that economic grievances often fueled the fires of religious hatred.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the insistence on a political dimension to Jewish history, it should also be observed initially that survival as a dynamic, creative, and cohesive minority evokes a presumption of political sagacity of a fairly high order. The refuse pile of history confirms that national survival is a rare achievement. To be sure, the determination of medieval Jews to persist against all odds was rooted in deep faith, and where that faith weakened, as it did in fourteenth- and fifteenth century Spain, so did the will to persist.<sup>16</sup> But

religious commitment without political sagacity is about as effective as brawn without brain. To depoliticize Jewish history is to make survival either mystifying or fortuitous. In contrast, I would like to argue that studied politically Jews have displayed over time an unusual ability to identify their collective interests, to assess the possibilities for action, to locate allies, to organize and deploy their resources, and to learn from their failures and mistakes. Moreover, Jewish political history evinces the existence of distinct policies for survival carefully formulated and consciously transmitted from generation to generation. While most of my examples will be drawn from the modern period, the nature of the prevailing view dictates that I devote a few remarks first to the political strategy of medieval Jewry.

As we have seen, the perception of diaspora history in terms of powerlessness and passivity rests heavily on the medieval experience. In truth, however, these terms are simply inadequate for understanding medieval political strategy, because they submerge every trace of consciousness and initiative. A more appropriate term for the subject would be political quietism, which is meant to designate a calculated policy of cooperation with established authorities on the basis of utility. What Jews needed most in Christian Europe was protection from the mob, whether driven by greed or bigotry, and they usually managed to acquire it by offering their talents, connections, and resources to the dominant power in the territory they sought to inhabit. The agreement was usually finalized in the form of a written charter which granted Jews communal autonomy and physical protection in return for their economic service.<sup>17</sup> What deserves special emphasis though is the fact that this alliance with authority did not derive solely from an assessment of the unstable conditions of feudal Europe. It was also the political legacy of Rabbinic Judaism worked out in the dark decades following the last of the daring rebellions against Imperial Rome. No matter how justified by Roman provocation, the rebellions proved a disastrous exercise in futility which endangered the status of Jews throughout the empire and

weakened the centrality of Palestinian leadership. In consequence, Rabbinic leadership of the second and third centuries expunged the symbol of Masada from the collective memory and glorified instead the figure of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, whose sober political judgment had been vindicated by the Zealot's crushing defeat. As their power grew, the Rabbis effected a fundamental change in political policy away from military resistance to political quietism. Toward that end, they condemned messianic speculation, inculcated respect for the ruling authorities, and suppressed the example of Maccabean military prowess.<sup>18</sup>

This religiously reinforced political policy, which permeated much of the evolving corpus of Rabbinic literature, was conveniently and cogently summarized early in the Middle Ages in a historical work that was destined to become the major medieval Jewish source of information about the period of the Second Commonwealth. Written in lucid Biblical prose, *Yosephon* was probably composed by a Jew from southern Italy somewhere between the years 900 to 965. The primary source, though not the only one, from which Joseph ben Gurion, the purported author, drew his material seems to have been Latin translations of *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* by Josephus, hence the eventual resemblance in name.<sup>19</sup> In retelling the story of the first great uprising against Rome which ended in the destruction of the Temple, the author fully shared the anti-Zealot bias of his namesake. Coupled with an admiration for the heroism and martyrdom of the Zealots is an intense disapproval of their revolt. The uprising is portrayed as a rejection of God's will. In the hierarchical structure of nature, one part is always subservient to another. The fourth kingdom, like all great empires, is ordained by God, and the mandate of Jewish leadership is to assure survival through submission. Interlaced throughout this political message is also a rich array of religious consolations.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, what stands out is that European Jewry was heir to a political policy forged in the wake of catastrophic failure and perfectly suited to its own precarious minority status in a feudal Christian society.

THE NATIONAL EXPULSIONS of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries gravely challenged the underlying assumptions of this policy of quietism. A brief aside by Abravanel in the middle of one of his messianic tracts of consolation written after 1492 suggests that at least some contemporary Jewish leaders realized the implications. Abravanel correctly distinguished between persecutions and expulsions in terms of their source rather than size. Persecutions welled up from below. They gave vent to the fury of the mob and usually ran counter to government policy. On the other hand, expulsions derived from above as an official act of state, and signified a repudiation and not a temporary breakdown of the alliance based on mutual interests between the Jewish polity and the central authorities.<sup>21</sup>

That the agony of repeated expulsion did not bring about a fundamental reappraisal of Jewish political strategy in the turbulent two centuries which followed the Spanish expulsion may perhaps best be accounted for by the geographically and economically expanding world into which Jews were thrown. Both sets of circumstances created an ethos of mercantilism freed of religious constraints that granted Jews the mobility and opportunities to relocate with relative ease. And thus despite the military and messianic paroxysms of David Reubeni in the sixteenth and Shabbetai Zevi in the seventeenth century, Jewish leadership preferred to reformulate its medieval argument of economic utility in terms of the new era. Simone Luzzatto's 1638 Italian tract on behalf of the economic utility and religious civility of Venetian Jewry is only the most complete and sophisticated example we have of this refurbished Jewish argument, but there can be little doubt that Jews used the same effective appeal to the economic interests of increasingly secularized governments to gain entry into Holland, England, and the rising absolute states of central Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Thus a proper reading of even medieval Jewish history, I suggest, reveals a conscious political tradition. Jews may

indeed have been pariahs, but never powerless to exert a measure of influence on the forces shaping their destiny. In our preoccupation with the parameters set by the dominant institutions of non-Jewish society, we must not lose sight of the assessments made and initiatives taken by Jewish leadership. That Jews came through the precarious insecurity of extended exile is testimony to the intelligence and effectiveness with which they conducted their foreign affairs.

### III

**I**N COMPARISON WITH the medieval period, modern Jewish history exhibits political as well as religious diversity. What emancipationists and Zionists did share was a common determination to end the state of Galut. By the end of the eighteenth century, that state was no longer marked by recurring waves of persecution and expulsion, but rather by a mountain of suffocating regulations, which undercut the very mercantilist objectives of European absolutism. Innumerable restrictions and excessive taxation had reduced the ever increasing masses of Ashkenazic Jewry to abject poverty. These conditions dictated a major shift in Jewish strategy.

When Mendelssohn eventually rose to speak out publicly on behalf of the adherents of Judaism, he unequivocally sided with the forces for change. Unlike Dohm, he did not plead for an amelioration of Jewish status out of prudential considerations; on the contrary, he demanded the extension of full equality on the basis of principle. The intent of his lengthy excursus into political theory which constitutes the first and more important half of *Jerusalem* is to establish the principle that the state has no theoretical right to demand religious reforms in return for an improvement of status. In effect he set forth an elaborate theoretical argument for the separation of church and state. In the process he totally abandoned the traditional Jewish line of argumentation in

terms of utility. Equality was a right and not a reward. *Jerusalem* is therefore a tract of revolutionary import.<sup>23</sup> Amelioration was perhaps still possible through an alliance with the absolute state; emancipation, however, could become a reality only in a liberal state based on law. Within the context of Jewish political history, the fight for emancipation meant a challenge to established authority not seen since the rebellions against Rome.

The political realignment of the Jews with the forces for change had actually begun a century before in two cases of resettlement. Jews entered both Holland and England by exploiting the occasion of a victorious revolution. In the Low Lands the House of Orange had just thrown off the Spanish yoke and across the Channel Cromwell had driven out the Stuarts. Both groups of insurgents were eager to attract the financial resources at the disposal of Jewish exiles from the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>24</sup> In the broad wake of the French Revolution, that nexus between emancipation and a change in the political order became a European commonplace. The long-delayed emancipation of Russian Jewry in 1917 only underscores the fact that any radical improvement in Jewish status required the overthrow of the *ancien régime*.

As the nineteenth century wore on, the continued denial of emancipation in its varied forms intensified Jewish opposition to those in power. The degree of militancy must be measured by what Jewish leaders did and not what they said, for often they couched a defiant posture in the most conciliatory terms. A prototypical example of this political style was the resistance manifested by the Parisian Assembly of Notables to Napoleon. Of all the questions he foisted on them in his determination to reconsider the wisdom of emancipation, only one really impinged on the future survival of the Jewish community: whether Judaism allowed for intermarriage. Napoleon's intent was clear: emancipation required the dissolution of Jewish group identity. And yet, while the delegates profusely protested their identity with France and their love of Frenchmen, they refused to condone the practice of

intermarriage. On the issue that counted, they stood firm, even against Napoleon.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, when in the early 1840s Frederick William IV of Prussia unveiled the retrogressive idea of reimposing a medieval corporate structure on Prussian Jewry, he was met with such a barrage of petitions and protests from the Jewish community that he soon withdrew his proposal.<sup>26</sup> The departure from the traditional Jewish alliance with those in power marked by these instances of collective action is confirmed by Jacob Toury's analysis of Jewish political behavior in *Vormärz* Germany. According to his rough estimate, by the 1840s some 46% of the Jewish population and about 82% of the Jews active in politics identified with the liberals and those still further to the left.<sup>27</sup>

**I**T MUST BE NOTED, however, that the first figure in particular indicates a still sizable preference for the prevailing political order. Not all Jews recognized as early or as clearly as did Leopold Zunz that Jewish emancipation was predicated on the triumph of political liberalism.<sup>28</sup> Or perhaps precisely because the fight for emancipation had set the Jewish community on a collision course with the guardians of traditional society, many refused to discard the medieval alliance with established authority. The most consistent adherents of the medieval policy in the modern era were the Orthodox. The most traditional sector of the Jewish community also practiced the most conservative politics. For decades its leaders dissociated themselves from the struggle for emancipation for fear of its religious consequences. The historical significance of Samson Raphael Hirsch rests on the political import of his message as much as on its religious content. For the first time, an Orthodox leader not only welcomed the challenge of emancipation, but as the events of 1848 in Austria would show, was willing to fight for it with courage and vigor.<sup>29</sup> But such militancy did not typify the politics of his later followers, who often preferred the Catholic Center to the Protestant liberals and rarely fought the anti-Semites.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most striking instance of Orthodoxy's political

conservatism comes from inter-war Poland where the Agudas Yisroel, the political spokesman for Polish Hasidism, maintained a close alliance with the Polish regime, despite repeated betrayal, until the infamous restriction on Jewish ritual slaughtering in 1936 drove it into furious opposition.<sup>31</sup>

If then the struggle for emancipation radicalized the political strategy of much of the organized Jewish community, the constant need to defend emancipation often called forth bold and imaginative action. The very formation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1860 served to repudiate the passionate renunciation by the Parisian Assembly of Notables of all links of kinship to Jews outside France. Taking advantage of the imperialistic foreign policy of the Second Empire, the founders sought to export emancipation and thereby strengthen its roots at home. The survival of oppression abroad stirred not only deep ancestral ties but also sound political instinct: like a communicable disease, anti-Semitism was highly infectious. In the system of minorities treaties following World War One, emancipated Jewry in the west capped a long diplomatic campaign to secure the freedom and equality of Jews in the east through the force of international law.<sup>32</sup>

Domestically Jews also organized to defend their interests. While the German Centralverein (1893) and the American Jewish Committee (1906) differed in origins, structure, and tactics, they both benefitted in their early stages from intelligent, energetic, and courageous leadership. Men like Maximilian Horwitz, Eugen Fuchs, Jacob Schiff, and Louis Marshall deserve to be included among the great statesmen of Jewish history. None of them held back from challenging their respective governments in order to protect or advance Jewish interests. The early record compiled by the American Jewish Committee on this score is unmatched by that of any other ethnic immigrant group of the time. In addition to effecting the abrogation of the long-standing commerce and navigation treaty with Russia in 1912, its leaders single-handedly blocked the growing body of restrictionists for

nearly a decade from passing a literacy test that would have effectively excluded most Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup> To the same end, namely to keep the gates of America open, Jacob Schiff conceived, implemented, financed, and fought for his Galveston movement, a rare and sophisticated attempt at organized immigration which eventually led in 1910 to an explosive confrontation between Schiff and the Secretary of Commerce and Labor.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV

THE INEVITABLE POLITICAL RESULT of the emancipation struggle, either to attain it or to defend it, was that it committed Jews to a vision of an open society based on law in which men were judged on merit. Moreover, their historical experience had uniquely prepared them to succeed in such a setting. They had no attachment to the political structure of the past with its plethora of oppressive restrictions; they had gained ample economic experience by virtue of constantly proving their economic usefulness; and they harbored a deep reverence for learning, albeit religious. In consequence, even in countries where this vision was only partially realized, Jews displayed an awesome pattern of upward mobility.

But political and economic freedom had its victims at both ends of the social ladder, who mourned the passing of medieval society with its stable and secure corporate, hierarchical structure. Losers in the unstoppable transition to modernity, they soon came to fear and despise the Jews who emerged as its primary beneficiaries. Nineteenth-century anti-Semitism certainly continued to be nourished by the subterranean sources of religious animosity but it also assumed all the earmarks of a political and economic backlash. The most direct and sustained attack on Jewish aspirations came from the right as part of its desperate campaign to thwart the creation of a liberal capitalistic society. The Nazi-inspired

Holocaust may thus be seen as the final supreme effort by the right to turn back the clock by annihilating those whom it perceived to be the progenitors of an abhorrent world.<sup>35</sup>

Long before the ultimate Nazi backlash to emancipation, some Jews had already succumbed to despair over the prospects of ever realizing it. Since the creation of a Jewish state *ex nihilo* must count, among other things, as one of the great diplomatic achievements in modern history, we can hardly conclude our reflections without trying to locate the place of Zionist diplomacy within the larger history of Jewish political sagacity. In its rejection of emancipation as the way to end the state of Jewish suffering, the Zionist movement also turned its back on the confrontation politics of the emancipationists. Regardless of the revolutionary significance of the Zionist message within the Jewish community, its political strategy in the national and international arenas entailed cooperation with recognized loci of power. If the political strategy of the emancipationists bore some resemblance to the defiance of authority exhibited by the Jews of antiquity, then Zionist foreign policy heralded a return to the medieval alliance with authority.

At the outset, political Zionism concentrated, to the exclusion of almost every other concern or program, in a frenetic search for allies. While the setting was new, the drama had all the earmarks of a replay of many a medieval scene: a lonely Jewish intercessor pleading for rights of residence for his people before the seat of power. Like his medieval fore-runners, Herzl was in pursuit of a charter, a document which would legally define the rights of settlement and thereby protect Jewish settlers from the capricious mood of the indigenous population. What Herzl could offer in return was not much more than the utilitarian arguments of his predecessors. Depending on his audience, Herzl could expound the benefits of a Jewish homeland as a welcome reduction of domestic unrest, as a means to save the ailing Ottoman Empire and curtail Russian expansion, or as the creation of a cultural and economic sphere of influence in the Middle

East for a deserving European backer. Herzl had intuited what medieval Jews had learned through long experience: that a given constellation of conditions could create a convergence of interests between two disparate polities. In short, because of the Jews' anomalous demographic situation, Zionism was compelled to pursue a conservative political policy.<sup>36</sup>

**T**HE TRICK, of course, was to identify and exploit such a constellation. Herzl had been granted a glimpse of the promised land, but he could not conquer it. That the task was eventually accomplished with supreme skill by one of Herzl's bitterest young critics adds an ironic touch to the history of political Zionism. But the Balfour Declaration reflected merely a temporary convergence of interests. The tragedy of Weizmann's subsequent leadership stemmed at least in part from his reluctance to recognize how contrary to British national interests the Declaration really was and to modify Zionist policy accordingly.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, without the cover of the Declaration and the infusion from the Nazi onslaught, the Yishuv would never have gained the critical mass necessary to defend its fledgling state on the battlefield. Under the leadership of Ben-Gurion, war became an extension of diplomacy and Zionism reverted to the revolutionary politics of the Second Commonwealth.

The similarity between Zionism and the medieval Jewish experience extends even beyond a common political strategy to a common political objective. Underlying the idea of a Jewish homeland was a basic preference for the segregation of the medieval ghetto. The dispiriting resurgence of anti-Semitism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century confirmed the long-unspoken fear of many Jews that a lasting and honorable integration was a bitter illusion. But what was the alternative? In an age of nationalism, it was obviously no longer possible to return to the separate corporate structure of the ghetto. New conditions dictated a new form of segregation. The Jewish state became the functional equivalent of the medieval Kehilla.

Furthermore, what appealed to early Zionists like Moshe Lilienblum in the east and Max Nordau in the west, before Zionism became entangled in a full-scale rebellion against Judaism, was the autonomy of the medieval Jewish community and the sense of dignity which came with independence. Unlike their emancipated progeny, medieval Jews never suffered from pangs of inferiority.<sup>38</sup>

It is no accident, I think, that when the Balfour Declaration came and the Yishuv set about to form its institutions of self-government, what began to emerge was a replica of a medieval Kehilla. At first, in fact, membership in the Knesset Yisrael, the Jewish Community of Palestine, was to be compulsory, as it had once been in the traditional Kehilla, but the British rejected the idea. The major organs of the Community like the Chief Rabbinate and its Council, the Elected Assembly, and the National Council closely paralleled the governing institutions of a Kehilla, not merely because the British sought to impose a religious character on Palestinian Jewry, but also because these were the basic political structures known to the members of both the old indigenous Yishuv and the immigrants from eastern Europe.<sup>39</sup> In sum, a political analysis of Zionist history reveals far more affinity with medieval models than Zionist rhetoric would ever suggest.

V

**A**S IF you haven't already suspected it, my lecture this evening does have a hidden agenda. Put boldly, I have been bent on challenging the notions that the condition of Jewish powerlessness ended only in 1948 or that Jewish political sagacity emerged first in 1897 not only because they are a distortion of the past, but also because they are a disservice to the present. The millennial record of the Jews is a vast repository of political experience and wisdom acquired under the most divergent and adverse conditions. Unfortunately, in a highly politicized, volatile, and cynical world, Jewish survival continues to hang in the balance as precariously as

ever. To deny or debunk the political dimension of Jewish history is to discard a potential resource, a luxury we can ill afford.

I am fully conscious that it is no longer fashionable to study history for pragmatic reasons. When Machiavelli wrote on Livy, he was so preoccupied with the political lessons for his own day that he never sensed how unreliable a source on early Roman history Livy actually was. And yet contemporary students of Jewish history, with all their lip service to critical and dispassionate scholarship, often write on Jewish political history in undisguised judgmental terms. Ideological presuppositions and outmoded conceptualizations continue to blur their vision.<sup>40</sup> But the subject is too important for such flawed treatment. The objective study of Jewish political history is no longer just an end in itself; its results must also serve as a source of instruction and stimulation for Jewish civil servants, communal leaders, politicians, and statesmen in the diaspora and Israel whose awesome responsibility it is to secure the Jewish future.

## FOOTNOTES

- I should like to express my gratitude to my mentor and friend, Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen, for enhancing this paper with his learning and wisdom.
- 1. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago, 1961), p. 666.
- 2. *Ibid.*, p. 669.
- 3. Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," *The Menorah Journal*, XIV (June 1928), pp. 515-526; Ismar Schorsch, "Ideology and History in the Age of Emancipation," in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, edited by I. Schorsch (New York, 1975), pp. 1-62.
- 4. Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1953), pp. 94-98.
- 5. Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, Illinois, 1952), pp. 336-355. On the ideological overtones of this scholarly debate, see Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914* (New York, 1972), pp. 169-177 and Uriel Tal, "Theologische Debatte um das 'Wesen' des Judentums," in *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890-1914*, edited by Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 599-632.
- 6. See, for example, Franz Rosenzweig, "Geist und Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte," in his *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 12-25; also Alexander Altmann, "Franz Rosenzweig on History," in his *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (London, 1969), pp. 275-291.
- 7. Haim Hazaz, "The Sermon," in *Israeli Stories: A Selection of the Best Contemporary Hebrew Writing*, edited by Joel Blocker (New York, 1962), p. 69.
- 8. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 9. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 10. Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," *Jewish Social Studies*, VI (1944), pp. 99-122.
- 11. *Idem*, "Zionism Reconsidered," *The Menorah Journal*, XXXIII (1945), pp. 162-196.
- 12. *Idem*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (Meridian Books, New York, 1958), pp. 3-120.
- 13. The proposition was subsequently made explicitly in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (The Viking Press, New York, 1968), pp. 112-134. But it is important to recognize that indictment as an extension and specification of her own general theory of Jewish political obtuseness and not merely as the consequence of Hilberg's influence.
- 14. Salo W. Baron, *The Jewish Community*, II (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 301-307.
- 15. See, for example, the high degree of awareness reflected in the works

- of two keen sixteenth-century observers, Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, trans. by Martin A. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 168, 177, 185, 192, and 198 and Solomon ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehudah*, edited by Ezriel Shohet (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 30-31.
16. Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, VIII, 4th ed. (Leipzig, n.d.), pp. 424-425; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, II (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 253-259.
  17. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 16 vols. (New York & Philadelphia, 1952-1976), IV, pp. 3-88.
  18. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 89-128; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* (New York, 1976), pp. 64-71; Jonathan A. Goldstein, "The Hasmonaens: The Dynasty of God's Resisters," *Harvard Theological Review*, LXI (1975), pp. 53-58.
  19. David Flusser, "The Author of the Book of Yosephon: his Personality and his Age" (Hebrew), *Zion* XVIII (1953), pp. 109-126.
  20. Yitzhak Baer, "The Hebrew Yosephon" (Hebrew), in *Sefer Dinaburg*, edited by Y. Baer et al. (Jerusalem, 1949), pp. 178-205.
  21. Isaac Abravanel, *Sefer Yeshuot Meshilko* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 46.
  22. Simha Luzzatto, *Ma' amar al Yehudei Venetia*, trans. by Dan Latis (Jerusalem, 1951). Actually in the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice, Jews skillfully employed the argument of economic utility in the context of a declining economic power. (See Ben Ravid, "The Establishment of the Ghetto Vecchio of Venice, 1541," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, II [Jerusalem, 1975], pp. 153-167 and *idem*, "The First Charter of the Jewish Merchants of Venice, 1589," in *A.J.S. Review*, I [1976], pp. 187-222.) For other examples from the age of early capitalism when Jews couched their appeals for settlement in strictly economic terms, see Menasseh ben Israel, *The Humble Addresses*, in *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell*, edited by Lucien Wolf (London, 1901), pp. 75-89 and Hermann Kellenbenz, *Sephardim an der unteren Elbe* (Wiesbaden, 1958), pp. 30-32. The importance of the Jewish role in the economic history of the period is refreshingly argued by Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, II (New York, 1973), pp. 802-826.
  23. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, trans. by Alfred Jospe (New York, 1969); Alexander Altmann, "The Philosophical Roots of Moses Mendelssohn's Plea for Emancipation," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXVI (1974), pp. 191-202.
  24. Herbert I. Bloom, *The Economic Activities of the Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Reprinted New York, 1969) pp. xi-xviii, 5, 8, 21; Menna Prestwich, "Diplomacy and Trade in the Protectorate," *The Journal of Modern History*, XXII (1950), p. 116.
  25. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 140-141.
  26. Horst Fischer, *Judentum, Staat und Heer in Preussen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1968), pp. 151-166.
  27. Jacob Toury, *Die politischen Orientierungen der Juden in Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1966), p. 27.
  28. See the preface to his *Die gottensdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Berlin, 1832).
  29. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel*, trans. by Bernard Drachman (New York, 1942), pp. 85, 164-170; Salo W. Baron, "The Revolution of 1848 and Jewish Scholarship," in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, XX (1951), pp. 34-42.
  30. Toury, pp. 246-261.
  31. Ezra Mendelsohn, "The Dilemma of Jewish Politics in Poland: Four Responses," in *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918-1945*, edited by Bela Vago and George L. Mosse (New York & Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 209-214.
  32. André Chouraqui, *Cent Ans d'histoire: L'alliance Israélite Universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine, 1860-1960* (Paris, 1965); Oscar Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights, 1898-1919* (New York, 1933).
  33. On the history of the Centralverein before 1914, see Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914*, pp. 103 ff. and Arnold Paucker, "Zur Problematik einer jüdischen Abwehrstrategie in der deutschen Gesellschaft," in *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890-1914*, pp. 479-548. On the history of the Committee, see Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist* (Philadelphia, 1972). The fight against the restrictionists is told in depth by Judith Goldstein, "The Politics of Ethnic Pressure: The American Jewish Committee as Lobbyist, 1906-1917" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1972).
  34. Bernard Marinbach, "The Galveston Movement" (unpublished D.H.L. dissertation, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1976), especially pp. 155-158.
  35. George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1964); Peter G. J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York, 1964); Werner Jochmann, "Die Ausbreitung des Antisemitismus," in *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution, 1916-1923*, edited by Werner E. Mosse & Arnold Paucker (Tübingen, 1971), pp. 409-510.
  36. Alex Bein, *Theodor Herzl* (Philadelphia, 1956).
  37. Barnett Litvinoff, *Weizmann, Last of the Patriarchs* (New York, 1976).
  38. Moses Lilienblum, *Kol Kitvei Moshe Lilienblum*, IV (Odessa, 1913), pp. 48, 92; Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), pp. 237-238.
  39. Moshé Burstein, *Self-Government of the Jews in Palestine since 1900* (Tel Aviv, 1934); Gerson D. Cohen, *Aliyah* (New York, 1968), p. 17.
  40. See, for instance, Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation* (Oxford, 1971); Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1975); Sidney M. Bolkosky, *The Distorted Image* (New York, 1973).