

## Digital Humanities Roundtable

# Introduction: *Jewish History Matters*

Jason Lustig

### ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, podcasts have grown into an important global broadcast medium with wide application in a variety of fields. This article introduces the *Jewish History Matters* podcast and situates it in within this broader history of podcasting and the role of aural culture in academia and Jewish studies. It details the origins and aspirations of the project and the possibility of podcasting as a means of scholarly communication, service, and reaching a broader public. Alongside this general introduction to the podcast, the article presents an edited transcript of a conversation on the podcast between Jeffrey Blutinger, Mirjam Thulin, and Jason Lustig reflecting on two centuries of modern Jewish studies, from the emergence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in 1818 to the present. We discuss why studying Jewish history mattered to nineteenth-century scholars of Jewish studies, why it is still significant in the present moment, how the field of Jewish studies has changed over the generations, and why this history of history matters in terms of understanding the modern Jewish experience and the past, present, and future of Jewish studies.

*Keywords:* podcast, modern Jewish history, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Heinrich Graetz, David Kaufmann

In 1923, Franz Rosenzweig painted a pointed accusation of the modern Jewish experience when he wrote that “from Moses Mendelssohn on . . . the Jewishness of every individual has squirmed on the needle point of a ‘why.’”<sup>1</sup> Here, he spoke of explaining one’s continued allegiance to the Mosaic law, expressing an existential crisis from a figure who wanted to make this tradition accessible through teaching and learning with

a broad public. A century later, Rosenzweig's famous phrase and his accompanying call for the fusion of the teacher-scholar resonate deeply as the humanities and social sciences face a crisis in a different key: teachers and scholars are called upon constantly to make the case to students, colleagues, administrators, and society at large why what we do matters. It is not a matter of arguing for the inherent practicality of our intellectual endeavors, but instead facing head-on the fight for the future of the humanities and social sciences when many students see the university as a door to employment and prosperity, not personal enlightenment, and when public figures question the social value of studying history, literature, and other so-called "non-productive" fields. One should neither succumb to a secularized dream of *Torah lishma*, of learning for its own sake with little thought to practicality, nor to the imperative to argue that "history majors get jobs too." Instead, what is required is a holistic argument for the necessity of intensive study that both delves into niche topics and also leads to understanding the most significant issues facing our world. Just as Rosenzweig articulated, scholars must always ask "why" and see themselves as teachers just as much as they are researchers, parsing the minutest footnotes and also communicating the big picture.

Against this backdrop, academic podcasts have come to prominence as a medium of communication among scholars and with the public. They are part of, and benefit from, rapid changes in the media landscape: a renewed "golden age" of radio with the decentralization of its production and consumption alongside the phenomenon of time-shifting across all formats. These possibilities and the broader intellectual climate led us to launch the *Jewish History Matters* podcast in 2018 as an exploration of podcasting for high-level academic and public discussion, highlighting new research and enduring issues in Jewish studies and why they matter. The podcast argues that studying Jewish history contributes to the social and political debates of our time and that the history and culture of the Jews—by all measures a small people on a world scale—is worthwhile and meaningful of investigation. The project seeks concentric audiences of scholars in Jewish studies and adjacent fields as well

as, to the extent possible, a wider public. These audiences call forth a set of aims that are, in some ways, naturally in tension but not necessarily irreconcilable. For a core audience of Jewish studies scholars, the podcast spotlights new research and presents a forum for conversation on pressing issues, including pedagogy and current events. The podcast also highlights how Jewish history matters to intellectual questions facing scholars in other fields, even if they do not study Jews in particular. It seeks to illustrate how Jewish history is a parallel case that provides theoretical tools and approaches, including ideas about diasporic cultures, religion, and the refugee experience to name just a few. And for the wider public, the podcast promotes new scholarship and helps communicate cutting-edge developments in an accessible way, in part by trying to coordinate with presses and publishers to make material open access. In sum, it is clear that Jewish studies scholars do not need to be told that what they do matters, inasmuch as they have dedicated their careers to the study of Jewish history and culture. Nevertheless, the project aims to communicate this message and to help guests, participants, and listeners to think in these terms in a more explicit way, to be constantly asking themselves and communicating—both on the podcast and in their everyday professional lives—why Jewish studies and the humanities at large matter.

Richard Berry traced the origin of the term “podcast” to as early as 2004, when British journalist Ben Hammersley speculated on how portable media players such as Apple’s iPod (introduced in October 2001) and free or low-cost audio software like Audacity (initially released in May 2000) could affect the production and consumption of amateur radio.<sup>2</sup> The term has been closely associated with Apple due to the name of its music player and especially because Apple’s podcast directory (formed in 2005) remains a central database, but some have reinterpreted “pod” as “play on demand,” highlighting consumers’ ability to listen at their leisure.<sup>3</sup> Despite similarities between podcasts and radio broadcasts—and the fact that the top podcasts are often produced by radio industry giants like NPR—it is, as some have argued, “more than ‘VCR for radio.’”<sup>4</sup> Podcasting presents opportunities to people who never could

have had space on the airwaves, allowing amateurs to achieve global reach to niche audiences, and it is fundamentally decentralized. Even with the continued importance of Apple's directory, there is no central body that controls or polices podcasts. A podcast, technically speaking, is just a really simple syndication (RSS) web feed, a computer-readable format listing audio files that can be downloaded; these files, usually in MP3 format, can be hosted anywhere. Consumption, too, is also highly decentralized. Listeners are not limited to any one computer application, platform, or time of broadcast.

At a time when centralized platforms and social networks increasingly dominate the Internet landscape, podcasting remains a bastion of self-publishing. Many podcasts, especially those affiliated with major radio networks, are produced with sizeable budgets, professional staff, and high production value. Still, podcasting retains a theoretical low barrier to entry: anyone with a rudimentary microphone can record audio and post it online, even using their cellphone. Consequently, the podcasting medium has exploded. As of 2019, over 620,000 podcasts were available, of which over one hundred thousand were published regularly, and, according to Edison Research, 51 percent of Americans have ever listened to a podcast, with 32 percent of the US population having listened to a podcast in the past month.<sup>5</sup> Scholars and educators have also recognized the podcast's pedagogical potential as a format for recorded lectures and "flipped classrooms," student projects, assessment, and more.<sup>6</sup> We are at the cusp of what some have termed a "new aural culture" that is "an integral part of the digital media landscape in the early years of the new millennium."<sup>7</sup> Podcasts hold forth an invitation to a new age of radio where anyone can broadcast worldwide, with great possibilities also for the academic sphere and Jewish studies in particular.

In the past few years, an array of podcasts demonstrate the possibilities of this new medium in an academic context. One directory of academic podcasts, by any means a limited selection, links to over 190 items.<sup>8</sup> Some, like the *Ottoman History Podcast*, *Ben Franklin's World*, and the *New Books Network*, are interview programs that deal primarily with recently published books.<sup>9</sup> Other podcasts communicate academic

topics and perspectives to a wide audience, like the *Partially Examined Life*, where three former philosophy PhD students reread and explain figures from Aristotle to Levinas, and the *Fall of Rome* podcast and its sequel *Tides of History*, developed by Patrick Wyman, which present popular historical topics by synthesizing scholarly research.<sup>10</sup> In another mode, many university departments and research centers have posted audio recordings of lectures and other public events or have created a more formal podcast to highlight their faculty and students. Just the same, the British Museum, together with the BBC, has used the podcast medium to syndicate its *History of the World in 100 Objects*, highlighting its collections.<sup>11</sup> Further, but by no means finally, scholars have been producing narrative-based podcasts, which weave together numerous interviews to make a more direct argument, like the *Ottoman History Podcast*'s "Deporting Ottoman Americans" miniseries.<sup>12</sup>

This may be in a "new" medium, but these activities are not particularly novel in the longer history of radio and education, inasmuch as higher education institutions were some of the early innovators in twentieth-century radio.<sup>13</sup> But if educational programming was mostly pushed off the radio dial's limited space, a hundred years later podcasting's "infinite dial" presents a diverse set of opportunities. The continued popularity of history podcasts invites scholars to consider these and other possibilities.<sup>14</sup> One author put it bluntly by asking, "Where is the Radiolab of religious studies?"<sup>15</sup> A similar question could be asked about history at large, or a field like Jewish studies, to consider how one might produce scholarship through audio rather than text.<sup>16</sup> With *Jewish History Matters*, we have also placed emphasis, at the time of writing, on books and other recent projects. But we have also sought to expand the parameters of podcasting by producing edited transcripts and other materials adjacent to the audio. In doing so, we view podcasting as part of a multimedia approach to academic endeavors, where listening to a recording or reading a transcript are just two possibilities of engaging with intellectual activity. Podcasting can be one component of a multimodal scholarly program, tying together museum exhibitions, books, conferences, and more, and the emerging trend of podcast-to-book and

podcast-to-adaptation augurs the possibility of an opposite trajectory, taking monographs, source readers, and other academic outputs and creating audio to accompany them.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, we look closely at a future of using audio to enrich publications and vice versa. Magazines such as the *Atlantic* and the *New Yorker* and purely online publications like *Politico* have experimented with audio versions of articles to be listened to on the go, and the *New Yorker* has long had radio programs accompanying their publications. The *New York Times*' podcast *The Daily*, launched in February 2017, has changed the way “the news should sound” by bringing forward in-depth interviews and analysis of daily news stories.

These developments further foreground how audio can enable content in a range of formats and the possibilities of podcasting as an intellectual pursuit. In a way, podcasts can be situated as a parallel to the “auditory turn” or the rise of sonic studies; it is also part of the digital humanities beyond the traditional print-to-PDF transformation.<sup>18</sup> As digital humanities outputs diversify—including mapping projects, annotated sources and archives, and other activities that lack a print analog—podcasts should do more than highlight existing research, a second-order scholarly activity akin to a book review or literature survey. Certainly, audio is a radically different format than the written word, but we must explore how podcasts can become first-order intellectual endeavors on their own merits, serving as a medium for promulgating new ideas through auditory form to complement the written word.<sup>19</sup> One might even say that academic content is uniquely suited for podcasting and audio formats. Certainly, academia is correctly perceived to be dominated by print, but the intellectual discourse of the academy is just as often spoken as it is written down, ranging from oral exams to lecture courses to conference presentations. These aural aspects of academia are more often than not limited to a small audience of participants, raising the important issue of how it can be possible, and fruitful, to capture and document the auditory activities of the life of the mind. Moreover, it raises questions about what might be fruitful directions for disseminating scholarly knowledge among academics and the wider public, beyond the written word, to include podcasts, videos, and more.

If we truly think that history matters, then we should discuss it in public, and podcasting provides one platform among others. It may be that today podcasting represents a bygone day of a more decentralized Internet, and in 2019 podcasting certainly has these same pressures of centralization and venture capital, punctuated by Spotify's multimillion-dollar acquisitions of Gimlet Media and the Anchor podcasting service in February 2019. In fact, as a medium podcasting is increasingly dominated by large networks with large production and marketing budgets. Nevertheless, scholars can still utilize the medium and their particularly well-honed communication skills to spread widely their messages and scholarship, and this is what *Jewish History Matters* aims to accomplish.

We created the *Jewish History Matters* podcast because it provides a unique and underutilized framework to explore the questions of why and how Jewish history matters, as well as a way to expose the latest intellectual endeavors in Jewish studies to the widest possible audience. Academia often operates on that most particular coin of the realm, exclusivity, and from sky-high tuition and exorbitant parking prices to the sequestering of journal articles, the twenty-first-century university is secure behind its paywall. Podcasting allows us to break through barriers to entry and open new avenues for conversation. The interviews and conversations constitute a kind of portable event format or ongoing conference, as scholars around the world and in the public can listen in on new developments and engage big questions about Jewish history, including what we can take away from it for wide-ranging intellectual and social issues. *Jewish History Matters* seeks to be more than a prolific book review: it can provide tools to scholars, a service to the profession, and even serve as a future historical resource, inasmuch as it constitutes an archive of scholars discussing their research and the state of the field. These recordings may prove the foundation for new scholarly investigations into the development and meaning of Jewish studies scholarship in the twenty-first century.

*Jewish History Matters* has been structured to emphasize three issues. First, it argues that studying Jewish history, both in terms of the newest research and teaching in the classroom setting, can provide broad

application to illuminate the history of minorities, the history and meaning of religion, the experience of refugees and persecution, as well as how traditions and cultures are passed down from one generation to the next, to name just a few in a range of issues. Given the global history of the Jews and its tremendous time span and the diverse contexts in which it has taken place, studying and engaging with Jewish studies presents the possibility for comparison and investigation in a way that other histories do not necessarily do. This, of course, is not to say that other histories do not matter. Instead, there is a great irony in the fact that studying a small population group can help us to understand the world in surprising ways. Second, the podcast translates ideas and debates within scholarship for a wider audience, both beyond the subfield of Jewish studies to other academic fields and also toward the general public. There is a critical need for intellectual ideas to gain wider social circulation, ranging from postmodernism to hermeneutics and beyond. Unfortunately, there is often a divide between the way intellectuals and scholars talk among themselves and the public's engagement with issues. On the podcast, we try to understand, through the frame of Jewish history, how a scholar's intellectual toolkit can be utilized to enrich public debate. Third and finally, the podcast produces a space where we encourage scholars to talk about their own work in these ways. If we can help scholars attain a wider audience—in terms of the possibilities of colleagues to read their work and gain something of value, in terms of the kinds of students who might take their classes, and in terms of the possibility to reach the public—then the podcast has achieved an important objective in showcasing how and why Jewish history matters.

*Jewish History Matters* joins an array of other podcasts that highlight Jewish studies research and cultural issues. The success of the *New Books in Jewish Studies* podcast, part of the *New Books Network*, provided one impetus for the formation of this program, and other podcasts in Jewish studies—like Sandra Fox's Yiddish-language feminist podcast *Vaybertaytsh* and the Association for Jewish Studies' *Adventures in Jewish Studies*—illustrate the rich podcast ecosystem in the field.<sup>20</sup> These programs, like podcasting more generally, fall into a much wider history



of radio in Judaism and Jewish culture. Programs like *Message of Israel* (1934–93) and *The Eternal Light* (1944–89), not to mention the widespread phenomenon of Yiddish radio, provided a range of content relating to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish cultures.<sup>21</sup> Radio also has an important history in the State of Israel, where there also have been popular programs on Jewish history like *Sha'ab historit* [*History Hour*] (1983–2013).<sup>22</sup> Notably, these programs ranged across a spectrum of purposes, from spreading knowledge of Judaism and its universal messages to speaking directly to Jews as a part of creating a sense of community. Podcasting can pursue similar lines. In some instances, podcasts invite direct comparisons with radio programs, like when synagogues circulate recordings of sermons.<sup>23</sup> *Vaybertaytsh*, while produced by an academic, can also be tied to a long history of Yiddish public culture in which radio was one important part.<sup>24</sup> This context demands that we consider what is “new” about podcasting’s new medium, and what is the relationship between academic podcasts in Jewish studies and more general programs with cultural content. First, one must distinguish between podcasts that aim, like some former radio shows, to inform or create community around Jewish topics, and academic podcasts that explore the field of Jewish studies. In this fashion, one can identify the nature of new podcasts along this spectrum as they relate to publications or institutions that sponsor them or from which they derive: *Tablet* magazine’s *Unorthodox* podcast, for instance, is clearly a part of the former, whereas the independent *Vaybertaytsh* is tied to the academic sphere. It is certainly the case that some earlier radio programs of Jewish content were never exclusively directed at Jews, but they often were produced in regions with a high concentration of Jewish listeners. By contrast, podcasting allows one to engage a diverse community of listeners without geographical limitations, with the possibility to reach a global niche audience. And if radio is an ephemeral medium that has proven difficult to document, podcasting—while also facing similar challenges—can also be preserved with a website making older episodes available, including transcripts, which, as in the case of the *Vaybertaytsh* podcast, create effective tools for language learners or those who cannot listen to the audio.

Given that podcasting has proven a rich arena for experimentation, *Jewish History Matters* has tried to set out on its own path. The *New Books Network* podcasts provide one point of contrast just as much as inspiration. Marshall Poe first created NBN in 2008 as *New Books in History*, and *New Books in Jewish Studies* was one of the first “channels” formed when it transitioned in 2011 into a podcast network, which now has over eighty “channels” ranging from new books in science fiction to public policy. *New Books in Jewish Studies* retroactively included interviews dating as early as January 2009, and it continues to include episodes officially published under other headings including *New Books in Israel Studies* and *New Books in Philosophy*, but NBN only began producing episodes directly under the *Jewish Studies* heading in 2013.<sup>25</sup> Since then, the series has produced over 250 interviews and constitutes by far the largest Jewish studies podcast. Nevertheless, we wanted to create a platform with a different take on how to talk about new books and research. Poe has commented that he wants to “extract” the valuable knowledge in books that are no longer read by the public, a viewpoint underscored in his research on the history of communications and publishing where he has suggested (perhaps correctly) that most scholarly publications are never read.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, *Jewish History Matters* aims to use the books as a jumping-off point for broader discussions about the books’ topics and implications for how we understand the world, with the assumption that at least some of the audience members will read the books in question. Instead of trying to get authors merely to share the content of their books, we structure episodes to push guests to think beyond their published work to its wider context and significance.

*Jewish History Matters* was also created on the basis of an extended debate over the meaning of Jewish scholarship. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, in his landmark *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, argues that in modern times there still exists a strong barrier between Jewish memory and historical scholarship. He suggests, though not without detractors, that in premodern times Jews had been disinterested in history, and argues that in our own age, even with the rise of modern scholarship, historians could not repair the deterioration of communal memory—and

should not try to.<sup>27</sup> In other words, he contends that it is memory and not history that continues to play a primary role in how Jews in modern times engage with their culture and past. This podcast proposes that memory should not reign alone and supreme in popular discourse, and that historians have something to contribute to how the public understands the past. Further, it is produced out of a deep and self-reflective historiographical approach to present-day scholarship; that is to say, Jewish scholars throughout modern times have written to achieve particular aims, ranging from emancipation to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Today, few serious scholars are nakedly partisan, and neither are they openly trying to produce a kind of usable past for political or religious purposes. But they still write within the particular context of the twenty-first century and its pressing problems. Scholars may not try to be “physicians of memory,” but neither are they disinterested in their world.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, this podcast argues that we must attempt to comprehend why leading scholarship matters today and engage our colleagues on this point directly.

This introduction to *Jewish History Matters* is accompanied by a special episode, produced and edited for publication in this issue of *Shofar* and published online as part of the podcast’s regular schedule, that engages with these fundamental issues by focusing on why and how Jewish history has mattered over the past two centuries and why it still does today. In 1818, Leopold Zunz and his colleagues launched the modern study of Jewish history with a programmatic call for its scholarly study, and shortly thereafter with the short-lived *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* [Association for the Culture and Science of Judaism].<sup>29</sup> In the two hundred years since, Jewish scholarship has flourished, with the growth of Jewish studies not just in Germany but throughout Europe and the United States. However, even if the earliest scholars tried to make Jewish studies a “science,” it has always mattered: Zunz and his friends hoped to wrest the study of the Jews from the hands of Christian figures whom they saw, rightly, as trying to missionize to the Jews. They also aimed, despite their call for “scientific” study, to use Jewish studies to advance their own program of emancipation and integration. Throughout the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jewish history has mattered because scholars and the public have looked to the Jewish past in order to justify all kinds of religious and political programs: the study of Jewish history played an important role in debates over religious reforms, inasmuch as historicizing Judaism and the Bible helped to explain and justify the possibility to make changes to ritual, liturgy, and religious practices. Jewish historical narratives, in their various interpretations and presentations, also played critical roles in the development of new nationalist ideologies—whether one looks to Zionism or Diaspora and Yiddish nationalist movements—as well as opposition to nationalism. Heinrich Graetz’s sense of the unity of Jewish history contributed to a popularization of Jewish peoplehood and even “national Judaism,” and networks of scholars around the world saw the work that they were doing as having great import not just in terms of the intellectual endeavor or study “for its own sake,” but also to contribute to the challenges facing Jews around the world.

This conversation brings together Jeffrey Blutinger (California State University, Long Beach), Mirjam Thulin (Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz and Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main), and myself, the founder and host of *Jewish History Matters*, to discuss what Jewish studies in modern times means and how it has contributed to a range of debates. Jeffrey has written widely on nineteenth-century Jewish scholarship and the historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–91), and Mirjam’s work has focused on the international network of scholars around David Kaufmann (1852–99). In the following interview, which has been edited for clarity, we consider the rise of academic scholarship of the Jews, how it has been put to use by both Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, and how it continues to be relevant in terms of Jews’ position in the societies in which they have lived and for our understanding of the contemporary globalized world. We also explore why talking about historians of the past matters, even those who are not widely read today. As Jeffrey, Mirjam, and I discuss, historiography is not simply a topic to be studied on the path toward comprehensive exams, nor is it a kind of navel-gazing. It is a means to comprehend broad cultural and social

trends, which in the case of Jewish history include the rise of historical consciousness and the application of historical narratives and arguments that underpinned the development of modern Jewish culture, religion, and politics.

We wanted to center historiography, and the past and future of Jewish studies, in this roundtable because it provides a window into the issues *Jewish History Matters* engages at large. Figures like Graetz and Kaufmann indicate how the study of the past has changed, leading to the ongoing shifts in Jewish studies today. And Graetz in particular, as a scholar who was highly involved in the public sphere, helps to frame questions about the use and abuse of history. In one sense, these two nineteenth-century historians and their projects are simultaneously outdated and still with us: from 1854 to 1876, Graetz wrote a monumental, comprehensive history of the Jews that today goes mostly unread. Most twenty-first-century historians would say it is impossible to write a single history of the Jews. Still, Graetz's vision of history's value to strengthen Jewish identity continues to speak to the Jewish public, perhaps especially so to many of those who support Jewish studies at the university level. And when scholars teach surveys or introductory courses, it represents an effort to put together all of Jewish history in ten or fifteen weeks. Kaufmann may be a mostly forgotten figure, too. But as a student of Graetz, he represented a next generation that would shift the conversation of Jewish studies with a focus on local communities as well as art history and the role of women in Jewish history and culture. Further, Kaufmann was at the center of an international scholarly network, both in terms of his personal work and as the editor of the *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* [*Monthly for the History and Science of Judaism*] from 1893 until his death in 1899, making him a fascinating personality to consider in light of a project that also aims to construct a scholarly network of communication. Altogether then, these two figures present a useful lens for contextualizing how Jewish history mattered in the nineteenth century and how it continues to do so, and this project highlights the global development of Jewish studies in the twentieth century.

The accompanying transcript emphasizes what *Jewish History Matters* attempts to do in the online episodes, but it also indicates some challenges. For one, it raises the question of what the audio format actually provides as a benefit. Indeed, such a conversation could take place over email, online chat, or social networks. In a way, something intangible is lost by merely reading a transcript; for this reason, the conversation will also be published online as a regular episode. What we have found is that the transcripts are a useful tool, but do not present the entire story; they mask participants' voices, both in terms of the auditory character and their emphases. Still, transcripts are important for translating the audio into an accessible format—the actual physical accessibility—and making the knowledge and ideas easily searchable, transportable, and quotable (and thus citable). In another vein, for a podcast dedicated to the value of widely disseminating Jewish studies knowledge and conversations, it may seem counterproductive to publish in a closed-access journal. Still, we feel it is important to bring these kinds of endeavors into the fold of traditional academic publishing, and work within an existing system in order to produce something that is valued in the current system of scholarly worth.

This particular episode also highlights specific challenges relating to gender, racial, and economic imbalances. If we trace modern Jewish studies, we must consider how every generation has represented different demographics and aims. Today, there is a marked diversity of Jewish studies scholars, but one must ask: Whose voices are truly being heard? The American professoriate, broadly speaking, is still dominated by white cis-males. Podcasting presents one avenue for continued diversification, but it faces an uphill battle. In this podcast, we consciously chose to bring on two people who represent diverse gender, religious, and institutional backgrounds. But as we have found, unfortunately, female voices are consistently limited in almost all technical media; one only has to look so far as Wikipedia, where there are very few female editors and writers, and articles on female figures are markedly shorter than those on males.<sup>30</sup> The field of podcasting, too, is dominated by male voices.<sup>31</sup> What we have noticed consistently is that when we have multiple guests

join us for an episode, female guests speak far less than the men (or alternately, men speak much more). It presents a constant challenge, and an astute reader (or listener) will note it happens in this conversation as well. It presents a challenge with which we are continually working to improve. In fact, we considered rerecording the episode but wanted to share it as is in order to demonstrate the challenge that podcasts face, including our own. Like other media, podcasts provide platforms for highlighting important voices in scholarship and society, and it is our responsibility to do so in a way that represents diversity of all kinds.

#### REFLECTIONS ON TWO CENTURIES OF MODERN JEWISH STUDIES: A CONVERSATION

*Note:* This episode can be found at [www.jewishhistory.fm/shofar](http://www.jewishhistory.fm/shofar). The transcript that follows has been edited for clarity and concision.

**Jason Lustig:** It's been two hundred years since the founding of modern Jewish studies, usually associated with *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the so-called "science of Judaism." It provides, perhaps, an opportunity for us to talk about two centuries of modern Jewish studies: a lot has changed over the past two hundred years. Today, I want us to think a bit about why Jewish studies mattered then, why it matters now, where we've come, and where we're going as a field.

**Jeffrey Blutinger (California State University, Long Beach):** When I think of Jewish studies or modern Jewish studies, what makes it modern, why this new emergence, I think it comes out of this sort of crisis of the end of the loss of autonomy: that what Jews are now doing is having to define themselves in modernity, and that Jewish studies is an effort, an attempt by Jewish scholars to define Jews for themselves. We haven't reached an answer yet. And I think that's part of what drives Jewish studies is the need to try to figure out who we are. I mean, (if) you think about what's going on with Jewish studies, trying to figure out who is a Jew, what is the subject of Jewish studies, is the subject of Jewish studies

the history of Judaism or the history of Jews, who are these people, what are these beliefs, what is this culture, (it's an attempt to do that) in a way that's separate from either the religious authorities that preceded the nineteenth century, whether they're Jewish or Christian or a secular Christian, to create a secular understanding of Jewishness.

**Mirjam Thulin (Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz, and Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main):** I think I speak for another side, or another part of Jewish studies, teaching Jewish studies to non-Jews, to Christians, (and) to Muslims in Germany, being myself non-Jewish. When I think of two hundred years of Jewish studies, I first of all think, of course . . . it's very European, it's very German, according to German *Wissenschaft* of the nineteenth century. And for me, of course, if I think of Jewish studies and the long term, I think of the general history of science (*Wissenschaft*) and how you may understand how scientists and academic disciplines developed and what were the motivations of the people doing that until today: you should go to a classroom here in the university and ask the people why you're sitting here. You could take another course and not Jewish studies. Most people would say, "Of course, we would like to understand the catastrophe of the Holocaust and I want to get another perspective on the history of Second World War." And I think that adds much to the general academic discipline, to history itself.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I agree, absolutely, with everything you just said. And I think it's interesting, because a lot of my recent research has been on the fringes of Holocaust studies. And I go to conferences on Holocaust studies, and you have a large number of non-Jewish scholars (who) come and participate; first German, and now increasingly Polish scholars. And it's interesting to me when I see Poles, in particular, who are really fascinated with all things Jewish. Of course, not all Poles are, but many are. There is this (interest in) Jewishness or the history of Jews or Jewish culture—not simply the Holocaust itself, but the fact that there used to be this multiethnic, multireligious, diverse cultures in



these countries, in Germany and in France and Poland and Hungary. I think for non-Jewish scholars, what attracts them to this past is this idea of trying to recover for their country something that used to be there which was destroyed. Not entirely, but mostly.

So, I think part of what attracts people to the study of Jewish studies is the way Jews were a part of that culture. But also, Heinrich Heine supposedly said that Jews are like everyone else, only more so. And if you want to understand the way our society is changing, you look at the marginal groups because that's where it's going to change the most and the fastest, and Jews help you do that.

**Jason Lustig:** I think you're touching on a lot of issues I hope that we can talk about, which is that the reasons why people studied the Jews have changed dramatically over the course of the past two hundred years. Clearly, the Holocaust changed everything in so many ways, whether we're talking about, obviously, the destruction of the Jews in Europe, the loss of the diverse Jewish cultures for the people who are themselves still living there—all sorts of issues have changed from 1818 with Leopold Zunz until the present.

So, this really raises for me a question: Is what we are doing now as scholars in Jewish studies really at all the same thing that people were doing two hundred years ago? I think it's easy for us to try to say, it's been two hundred years, this is so fantastic, and we can draw this line from 1818 to 2018 or beyond. But I'm not really quite sure that what scholars are doing today or even in just the past fifty or seventy years, in general, is at all the same as what people were doing in the 1820s or the 1850s or the 1890s.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I'm just trying to imagine how Leopold Zunz would react to a set of articles in Jewish studies today, let alone what he would do with modern Israeli Hebrew poetry. I think the issues that drove the scholars two hundred years ago are radically different from what drive us today. The questions that they're asking, their goals in asking the questions, and their methods of answering them are all radically

different from what we do today. And I'm not sure they would be comfortable or conversant, necessarily, with the way we do things.

**Mirjam Thulin:** But they would be happy that Jewish studies is part of the university now.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** Yes. It only took what, 180 years, and you get a position at a German university? I think they might be a little depressed, though, in how long it took, and what happened to get there.

**Jason Lustig:** Before we delve into thinking about the ways in which Jewish history has mattered for all these different people and up to, again, the late twentieth century, for instance, when ultimately Jewish studies enters into the German university—why it becomes so important that they need it there now—I think it might be useful for us to sketch out a little bit why is it that all of this matters. When we're talking about the history of modern Jewish studies, this is part of the overarching field of historiography, how people have written about the past and talked about the past. I'm curious—I have my own take on this set of issues, and I'll chime in on it myself—but I'm curious what you guys think is the importance of talking about historiography as a whole. What do we learn from studying it? Do we teach about it? When we talk about modern Jewish history with our students, do these historians, people like Leopold Zunz, Heinrich Graetz, David Kaufmann, Simon Dubnow, even more modern figures, in what ways do they matter? Why do we study them or why do we talk about them with our students? Or why not, as the case may be?

**Mirjam Thulin:** First of all, if I think of historiography, I think it's a kind of an art to do that. It's also a hardcore historical tool. You have to tell a story, and it shows the *sitz-im-leben*, the "setting in life." Of course, this is reflected in historiography. And this brings us to the question, what were the motivations then and now? And I must say that in my courses, I must admit at least that I do not teach much historiography, because I'm

busy with explaining the history itself. It's really sad. But the perspective would be too much.

Sometimes I teach the students that with Leopold Zunz, he wrote about that; what do you see if you read now, Simon Dubnow? There is a difference. But it's too much for them, at least (at) an undergraduate level. But I myself, I love thinking about these questions and trying to compare, for example, Heinrich Graetz and David Kaufmann, just to compare the two. They seem to be so close but they are not, sometimes. And at the same time, they are very close because Graetz was the teacher of David Kaufmann, and you see in every line his handwriting.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I do teach some historiography; when I teach the history of the Holocaust I have a whole historiography assignment where the students are supposed to take two historians arguing about a single point and critique it. And in our core curriculum, we have a whole semester course (that) undergraduates have to take on modern historiography, in the theory of history. And I've just been explaining to the students in my methods class how important historiography is as part of their research project.

So I think most people outside the field of history, the consumers of history—the students, the people that buy books at Barnes and Nobles—tend to think of history as just the story of what happened. It's Leopold von Ranke's history, the past “wie es eigentlich gewesen war,” as it actually was. And the idea that in fact, history is something that historians create, that we compose it, we construct narratives, we argue over it . . . I'm not sure how much people outside our field really understand that. And I think that's why it's so important for students who are taking history classes to understand that history isn't “the past.” It's an argument about the past. It's a narrative that historians create. And historiography is trying to understand why and how narratives of the past were constructed the way were. And by doing that, then now we demythologize history and we begin to understand why these stories were put together the way they were doesn't make them false.

Also, the other Leopold von Ranke phrase, each epoch is immediate to God—the fact that they had these approaches doesn't make them any less valid than ours. We have our approaches. It makes us more humbled, (it makes us) understand that we're all shaped by the cultures we live in. So I see historiography as essential to understanding history, because without it then you don't understand how it's put together.

**Jason Lustig:** Well, I think there are two aspects to this whole question. The first one is, how is it that we explain to students or to the public why is it that studying history matters, which as, Jeff, you were pointing out I think rightly, a lot of it has to do with understanding that what we know about the past is not what actually happened, but (represents) the narratives or the stories that we tell each other. And it doesn't make it false. It doesn't make it wrong. It's also the same thing about the present, that on a fundamental level the narrative that we tell ourselves, the narrative that society tells, or that we read in the newspaper, it's not necessarily false, but it props up political ideologies, it props up worldviews; and this, to me, is why historiography is so important and why I try to integrate it into my classes, though it's not always successful—because as, Miriam, you pointed out, the students need to know what happened first in a certain way before we can say, well, how have various people told the story differently? But, anyway, I think in a certain way this is a core challenge when we talk about teaching about history and teaching about the idea of history in and of itself, is that historiography—yeah, maybe we can say this is something that graduate students and PhDs and scholars really focus on much more than we can do in our classes or with the public—but this is a core idea about what it is that we do.

At the same time, I think looking at the history of Jewish studies, the other half of this in that context is that I think it is important to talk about historiography in talking about modern Jewish history as a whole. (When) we talk about Leopold Zunz or any of these other figures, it's part of this broad idea of what Ismar Schorsch and others have talked about, the idea of a “turn to history” in modern Jewish culture. If we don't understand that as a concept, then it's really difficult

to understand, for instance, the development of religious reforms or of Zionism or any other number of movements. And so I think that even though we might not be talking about all of the historians, there's this historical consciousness that plays such an important role in the development of so much of modern Jewish history and culture.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** And also I think that these historians have shaped the way Jews—regular Jews—have thought about themselves and understood their past. So historiography matters if you're trying to understand the way Jews in the nineteenth or twentieth or twenty-first centuries understand themselves because it's shaped by the people they're reading, the people who are speaking to them. And even if they're not reading Zunz or reading Graetz or reading Kaufmann, their rabbi is giving a sermon based on what he read from them, or how she read from them. And so it does filter out, and it does have a long-term effect on the community as a whole, even if they're unaware of where it's coming from.

So, one of the things I deal with when I deal with members of the Jewish community, because I run a Jewish studies program, is people are always shocked when I tell them that most of the students that we have aren't Jewish. Most of the Jewish studies majors aren't Jewish, most of the Jewish studies minors, most of the students who take Holocaust, they're not Jewish. Community members are always shocked, because they imagined that the main function of Jewish studies is to strengthen the Jewish identity of Jewish students. Right? If you're worried about your child not being sufficiently Jewish, have them take a Jewish studies class and that will strengthen their identity. It's sort of like an academic "Birthright." And where does that come from? That comes from Heinrich Graetz. That comes from the idea that you write history to strengthen the identity of the reader.

Now, as a modern historian, I'd say no, you don't want to take my class if you want to be strengthened in your Jewish identity. Because if I'm teaching a survey of Jewish history, the first two weeks I have to explain why there's no evidence for the Exodus. So it's sort of counterintuitive, the idea that you should be taking a Jewish history class to

become a better, more conscious Jew. But that comes out of the nineteenth century. We have these ideas of what Jewish history is that have filtered into the wider community.

**Mirjam Thulin:** Right. And it's very different in Germany, I must say. I'm wondering always why there are so many Muslim students sitting in my courses. And I think they try to identify with the same minority position the Jews felt then. And, actually, I designed, now, the courses also according to their needs, so that they maybe try to connect to that experience, to this minority experience: emancipation, acculturation, and all these things. So that's very interesting, how they then identify with it. I usually go with them to Jewish museums and then we try to get a practical approach to Jews, and I had two girls last time who cried because they felt so much with them. So it was really impressive, I must say.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** The last time I took students to Europe on a Holocaust trip, in Berlin we did the opposite: I had a Syrian refugee come talk to my class and give us a tour of downtown Berlin, tying places of modern German history in Berlin to the Syrian Civil War and his experience as a refugee. And the students actually loved it. Just sort of getting them to see that the issues that we're studying in the Holocaust are not restricted to that period of time, and reverberate outward, that the prejudices against Jews continue, just in shifted form.

**Jason Lustig:** I think what's coming out here, from what we're talking about, is the way in which Jewish studies and Jewish history matter today. Clearly, the history of Jews as a minority is something that speaks to the Jews and also to other minority groups. And there are so many other aspects of this as well. But again, it's so different, in a certain way, from the way in which scholars and just Jews in general in, say, the nineteenth century or the early twentieth century looked at studying Jewish history. They did it for different reasons. One of the issues that animated the early scholars of Jewish studies, for instance, was a struggle to wrest the field of Jewish studies from non-Jews. There was

the American historian Hannah Adams from the 1810s, or the French Huguenot historian Jacques Basnage, or others; there was a long history of Christian Hebraism or otherwise people studying Jews who were not themselves Jews. And some of these people, like Adams (in particular), were animated by a fundamental missionizing impulse, to try to convert the Jews to Christianity. So I think that when we talk about modern Jewish studies in the nineteenth century, a lot of this has to do with Jews trying to take control of their own history. So if we think about, for instance, Sam Kassow's book *Who Will Write Our History?*, which was about the Warsaw Ghetto archive (Emanuel Ringelblum and Oyneg Shabes), well, that same question—who will write our history?—it sort of goes throughout all of modern Jewish studies from the beginning more or less up until the present.

In terms of my own work (on the history of Jewish archives), I think a lot about this question of who owns Jewish history. But I think that when we look at the various eras of modern Jewish studies, there are so many reasons why people are writing about and studying Jewish history. And one of them is this question of trying to take control of Jewish history. Anyway, I'll let you jump in.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** What's interesting is that I think the scholars two hundred years ago, what they wanted to do was remove it (Jewish history) from two groups: they wanted to free Jewish studies from the Christian scholars who saw Judaism, Jewish history, and Jews as something to be superseded, or fossilized, or (made) a curiosity; and from the rabbis who only limited it within the traditional understanding. So, they wanted to liberate it from both. And yet, I think at the same time, while they (the nineteenth-century scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*) would be shocked at how long it took, I think they would be delighted at the idea of non-Jewish scholars treating Jewish studies as a legitimate academic subject, using modern tools in an objective—using the postmodern critique of objectivity—approach. Because that's what they wanted. They wanted it to be part of the modern academic environment, which means not restricted to Jews, not ghettoized.

I think the tragedy of Jewish studies for the first century is that Jewish studies remained almost entirely ghettoized within the Jewish community; it was only Jewish scholars. And it was the great struggle to get a position. And it wasn't that they wanted a position at the university so the Jews would be teaching at universities. They wanted the subject to be taught. And I think it's in the last fifty years that we've seen emerging non-Jewish scholars approaching the subject. And I think that would have delighted them, that finally Jewish studies is breaking out of its ghetto.

**Mirjam Thulin:** I agree completely. And I think so, too, for people like Graetz, it was also a specific religious understanding of the Jewish nation and trying to fill these modern concepts with Jewish history and Jewish historiography. I mean, this is what my feeling was: a Jewish nation, but still rooted in the European or German culture. That was maybe the aim, I think, in the second generation of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and the religious fights Graetz opposing (Ludwig) Geiger and all these people.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** One of my teachers at UCLA, Arnie Band, liked to say that Graetz was the great Jewish romantic novelist of the nineteenth century. There were all these great romantic historical novelists, and for the Jews it was Graetz. That's what he was doing. And that's, of course, why (Moritz) Steinschneider and (Ludwig) Geiger hated him, because he wasn't writing their "science." He was writing for a public, and he was writing from a national perspective.

**Jason Lustig:** So, we've talked about some of these nineteenth-century figures, people like Heinrich Graetz, Moritz Steinschneider, and so on. I know, Jeff, that so much of your work has focused on Graetz, and Miriam, on Graetz's student David Kaufmann. I'm curious for your perspective, as people who have really focused so much on these two particular individuals, why you think that Jewish history mattered to them? And in what ways do you think that their perspectives on Jewish



history have something to contribute today, or that they do contribute today to a wider consciousness that people may not be familiar with? You mentioned, Jeff, this idea that maybe the idea of Jewish history from Graetz still percolates down to the present. What did Jewish history mean for these people in the nineteenth century? And, especially as we think about what has changed over the past 150 years, for instance, is there a connection between the way that they thought about Jewish history and why it mattered for them to the present?

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I think for Graetz, his major motivation was the fight with Reform over whether or not Jews remained a people. The reformers were saying, Jews are a religion, only. What they were saying was that Jewish history is the history of Judaism, the history of the Jewish religion. People like Isaac Markus Jost, the first Jewish author of a comprehensive history of the Jews, argued that the Jewish nation died when the Romans burned the Temple, and transformed Jews from the Jewish people into the Jewish religion. Graetz opposed that and wanted to argue that Jewish history was the history of Jews. And I think he won that fight. I mean, today I think you do have people who do the history of Judaism, but that's a subset within Jewish history. We tend to think of Jewish history in terms of peoplehood and ethnicity, and less in terms of religion.

**Jason Lustig:** I think that what you bring up here about the difference between, for instance, Jost in the 1820s and Graetz in the 1850s, as kind of a first and a second generation of modern Jewish studies, is kind of the political differences in terms of what people were trying to achieve with modern Jewish studies.

**Mirjam Thulin:** And it was actually Leopold Zunz (as a member of the first generation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*) who wrote in his famous essay "Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur," that as long as *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is not accepted in the university, Jews won't be accepted in the society. So they made a connection between *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the academic discipline, and the acceptance of Jews in society.

There was a constant fight for freedom, civil rights, emancipation. Now, David Kaufmann (in the late nineteenth century) was in a way continuing Graetz's work (from the mid-nineteenth century), but he was open. He was in the third generation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*; (by) then, religious conflicts—for example, Reform and Conservative conflicts—were settling down. And everybody said, okay, we all have the same problems. We're still fighting for emancipation and all the rest of it. And unfortunately, he couldn't finish his Jewish history because he died too early. He had an accident at forty-seven years (of age); he was the wunderkind of his time.

**Jason Lustig:** I think one of the things that is so interesting about Graetz and about Kaufmann in particular is that there might be something to learn from what they were doing, or at least to reflect on, in terms of their projects. Because they, on the one hand, are so different from what people are doing today, but I think that there is this kind of resonance: for instance, Graetz's effort was to construct a monumental or monolithic history of the Jews, which is what we still do, kind of, when we teach a survey course. Right? Or even construct the idea of Jewish studies and Jewish history, to say that this is all under one umbrella. Also, Miriam, you've written a lot about David Kaufmann's scholarly network, about this idea of focusing on the international connections and especially the development of Jewish studies throughout the world, or at least throughout Europe and the United States. So, I'm curious, especially as we reflect on two hundred years of modern Jewish studies, what you both think is their legacy, both of these figures, for the development of modern Jewish studies entering into the twentieth century and coming up toward our present.

**Mirjam Thulin:** I think David Kaufmann's significance was his positive approach and clear thinking. I mean, he was really trying to fight antisemitism with arguments (which were) very clear, and sometimes he also was silent in conflicts. And I think these are two things you can really learn from him, apart from the fact that he was really building a

network. He was a very modern scholar, doing that; he was trying to get all this information from everywhere. This is what we do today as well, writing e-mails to everybody.

**Jason Lustig:** Or even being on a conference call between Los Angeles, Boston, and Berlin—this tremendous international network.

**Mirjam Thulin:** Yes, it's Kaufmann in practice.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I think there's a reason that no one reads Graetz today. Think about it: yeah, scholars do. But do you read Graetz because you want to know some fact about the Jewish past? Or are you reading Graetz because you want to know how he was presenting the Jewish past? Graetz is interesting as he's a major figure in modern Jewish historiography. He shapes Jewish culture, and his way of telling the story of the Jews is enormously influential on the generation of Jewish national historians who follow him. People like Dubnow and Scholem get their start (with Graetz), they begin Jewish history with Graetz. Dubnow does a Russian translation of Graetz, which is burned by the Tsar, and Scholem got Graetz's history as a bar mitzvah present. So he's the foundation on which they begin.

But the idea that we could somehow write a comprehensive, monumental history of the Jews . . . I don't think that's possible. And I don't think that it's looked on as even a credible project among contemporary Jewish scholars. I mean, we have these little short histories that come out, and that are used as textbooks in classrooms. I use them when I teach my survey of Jewish history; I teach a one semester survey of Jewish history class from Adam to Netanyahu. It's my least favorite class to teach. It's a terrible class, in a way. It's impossible. The issue, as a postmodernist, is there's no single narrative that covers all of Jewish history. There's no way to create a single story, but when you're putting together a monumental history of anything, it's bound by a narrative, and there's no way to do that for Jewish history as a whole. You're going to have a Eurocentric version. You're going to exclude minority Jewish

communities. You have to cut out too many. The rabbis would call it a bed of Sodom or non-rabbis would call it a procrustean bed. You're going to stretch and you're going to chop to make it fit. That's not acceptable anymore (in writing histories).

We still have people who write comprehensive histories of the Jews for public consumption. After Graetz, there was Grayzel, and then Max Dimont's, and now we have Paul Johnson, a reporter. . . . (As scholars) we don't look for monumental histories. We don't want a monumental, comprehensive history. It's not possible. I mean, I think Graetz fell out of favor, not just because we don't want a monumental history now, we recognize you can't write them. But also because he wrote before the Holocaust, and he wrote before the State of Israel. And those two events were so cataclysmic in modern Jewish history that it's impossible to conceive of a Jewish history that doesn't in some way incorporate them within it. And I think that's why he fell out of favor also.

**Jason Lustig:** Clearly, who's going to read any history that was written 150 years ago, in general? It's not going to happen, across the board, for all sorts of reasons. I think part of my point was not to say that we should be reading Graetz, but I think that, similar to what you said, is that we still try to tell this story of Jewish history when we teach classes or even when we conceive of the field of Jewish history. Not just Graetz, but all of these figures, all of these people who try to write sort of overarching histories of the Jews from Jost to Salo Baron, even up to the 1980s, I think this is something that people won't do as much today, for all sorts of reasons, one of which is just that Jewish studies finds itself in an entirely different context today than it did one hundred years ago or more.

**Mirjam Thulin:** Also, Kaufmann stands already for the next generation, being part of historians of local histories. So Graetz set the field, but then the students worked in local history. And Kaufmann was also interested in Jewish art. This was his main contribution, I believe, that he invented, so to speak, Jewish art history.

**Jason Lustig:** I think this is a great point, Mirjam, that when we look at Kaufmann as a “next generation” of Jewish studies beyond Graetz, he represents part of this movement toward history on a smaller scale. There were people like Simon Dubnow and others who were still writing these monumental histories of the Jews even in the twentieth century, but there were more and more people focusing on the local level instead. And also the range of topics which people were examining just exploded: art history, cultural history, also women in Jewish history. These were all things that Kaufmann was engaging with, like if you think of Kaufmann as the publisher of the first edition of the memoirs of Glückel of Hameln. So, this is all just to say that you’re right, that the field has changed dramatically since and over the course of the twentieth century.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** So, I’m curious: one of the issues I have on my campus is the feeling that Jewish studies is still somewhat ghettoized from my colleagues, that they don’t see that the Jewish experience and Jewish history and Jewish studies has anything to tell them about borderlands or diasporas or minorities. And I’m often frustrated with the fact that I feel that in some ways Jewish studies are still ghettoized in academia. I mean, the great desire of people of Zunz’s age was to have Jewish studies on the modern academic university campus, like any other modern academic subject like Greek studies or Chinese studies or “Oriental studies,” and it wouldn’t only be Jews studying it and writing it.

The great triumph for Jewish studies in the twentieth century is that we finally get Jewish scholars appointed to the modern secular university, first in the United States (in the early twentieth century), sixty years later in Germany. And we have Jewish studies programs. Most of my students are not Jewish. And yet, I feel that within the academic environment, Jewish studies is still somewhat ghettoized. I have a fight right now with the other ethnic studies programs on my campus who do not see Jewish studies as an ethnic studies program. We have Africana Studies, we have Asian American studies, we have Chicano and Latino Studies, American Indian Studies, and those are the ethnic

studies programs. Jewish studies is on its own. We're housed within the History department. We're not religious enough to be religious studies, but we're not ethnic enough to be ethnic studies. So, we're outside, and I don't know to what extent scholars working in other fields recognize that Jewish studies has something of value to them. I don't know what your experience has been.

**Mirjam Thulin:** I teach at the department in Frankfurt am Main, in Germany, and the interesting thing is that I connect to two minorities. I'm a woman and I teach Jewish history, so they like to have me every year teach Jewish history of any kind. I can do whatever I want, or whatever I'm interested in, but they want to have something Jewish in the curriculum, which is nice because I can teach whatever interests me. But it's a different setting, I guess, completely different, in that I'm also only a byproduct, I feel. Whenever historians at departments in Germany do a conference on nineteenth-century history, they say, "Oh my god, we need to have some Jewish perspective. Let's ask her, so maybe she can contribute something." You're always adding a perspective to the general historians.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** Well, let me give you an example. A couple years ago, I had a colleague who taught ancient history, and he had a summer book club, and one of the books they were reading was on applying colonial theory to understanding the Roman Empire. And the historian they were reading said, I'm going to look at the various Roman colonies and colonial administrations, but I'm not going to talk about Judea because that's a whole other thing. It really hit me, the way scholars working in fields that should naturally speak to Jewish studies don't, or don't often enough. And I don't know to what extent you've encountered that, where you're reading scholarship by colleagues in fields that would relate to Jewish studies, and yet they don't seem to see a connection.

**Jason Lustig:** I think it raises this question of the extent to which we're still, perhaps, dealing with the same kinds of issues or struggles that

some of the earliest scholars in modern Jewish studies were dealing with, when they aspired to having Jewish studies be part of the university. Well, now we have Jewish studies departments. We have Jewish studies chairs, we have lecture series, all of these things. But the question is, to what extent is it integrated into the wider intellectual community, or isn't ghettoized? I'm not sure I like that term, for all sorts of reasons.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** (I use it) in the early modern sense, not the Nazi sense. I mean, I wonder to what extent my colleagues working outside of Jewish studies recognize that Jewish studies has something to teach them, that they could learn from in their own scholarship. If it were any other subject, they would see that. But they don't see that with Jews. I think, to some extent, people still view Jewish studies as something not relevant to them, or not academic. We're on the university, but I don't know how integrated into the university we are.

**Jason Lustig:** So you're asking to what extent would somebody who studies the ancient Roman Empire, for instance, the same way that they would look to postcolonial theory to analyze, you know, their time period or their subject that they might also look to Jewish studies or to Jewish history for intellectual tools to also engage with their subject that might be totally divorced from Jewish history. In the case of the Roman Empire, it's not divorced from Jewish history, but let's say for instance, the history of the Han Empire in China, the extent to which they might utilize the intellectual tools from Jewish history to study their own subject.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** To look at issues of diaspora, relations to minority-majority relations . . .

**Mirjam Thulin:** Transnationalism, stuff like that.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** We can look at the whole issue of a literary culture. And I just wonder to what extent people see that. I don't know.

That's something I struggle with a bit, how much we're still isolated academically.

**Jason Lustig:** I don't know. It raises some interesting questions about what really has changed. For instance, it's been fifty years now since the founding of the AJS, the Association for Jewish Studies. So in the same way, I think that modern Jewish studies itself arose in its own particular intellectual and political context, the AJS and the issues that were happening in the '60s in terms of ethnic studies and so on in the US. It was also part of this context of the rise of contemporary Jewish studies, the concern that you're talking about, Jeff, the place of Jewish studies in the American academic environment. And also in the international sense, Jewish studies has flourished in places like Germany, for instance. What really has changed over the past couple of generations, that we find ourselves now in the beginning parts of the twenty-first century thinking about where Jewish studies is going both in the US and also in Europe. I think it raises important questions about what really has changed and where we're going.

**Mirjam Thulin:** Very much, at least in Germany, I must say. I mean, you know, that Jewish studies has been politically instilled in Germany and the Federal Republic (since) the '50s or '60s. And since this institutionalization, a lot has changed, especially in the last decade. Because, first of all, in the 1990s there was a separation between Judaic studies, *Judaistik*, and Jewish studies. So for Jewish studies in Germany, it's more important not to speak Hebrew well but to engage with literature, film, be more open to look at topics like Judaism from a broader perspective. And that was a big, big change. And now, since a decade or so, a new subject evolved in Germany, Jewish theology, following Abraham Geiger and all these people. And that's very interesting. And now these people are fighting for positions, for programs, for money, everything. And that's an open-ended (question), so far.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** So one of the things I see when I go to the AJS—I've been going to the AJS now since about 2000 or 2001—is that I've



noticed sort of a demographic split. If there's a panel on something I'll call "secularized rabbinics," something involving Jewish thought or rabbinical thought or Talmud, you know immediately the panel and the audience is going to be overwhelmingly male. And if you go to a panel on, say—I went to one once on the growing influence of Jewish religious imagery in Israeli popular music, which was a fantastic panel, of which the audience and the panel were overwhelmingly female or gay men. Actually, I went to a workshop a couple of years ago on feminism and Jewish studies, and there were no straight men in the room. And there is this kind of demographic split within Jewish studies, between the kind of "traditional" fields, which are more masculine, and the emerging cultural and social histories and feminism and sexuality, which are less masculine. And it's an interesting split within Jewish studies. At least that's my experience when I go to the AJS.

**Mirjam Thulin:** And I think the Europeans are more present in the AJS now. This is what I feel. Many, many Europeans: Polish, German, and Hungarian.

**Jason Lustig:** Do you think that that's a reflection of the growth of Jewish studies in Europe, or of cheaper airfare to come to the US?

**Mirjam Thulin:** Both, I guess. But the first is Jewish studies, definitely. People engaging and wanting to be understood and read also in America.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** When I go to "Lessons and Legacies," which is a Holocaust studies conference every two years, (it's) really striking the number of scholars who are from Germany and Poland and doing really, really interesting work. (Scholars in) Germany, Poland, Ukraine (are writing) on the Polish experience, what was happening on the ground in Poland, what was happening on the ground in Germany. The German and Polish scholars of the Holocaust are asking really different questions than the type of questions that Jewish Holocaust scholars ask. Particularly in Germany, that's been going on now for four decades.

Really, the generation of historians that emerged after '68. And I'm thinking of people like Hans Biesold. His book, *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany*, on the persecution (of) deaf (people) in Nazi Germany, looks at the role of medicine, the role of eugenics. The pathbreaking work there was done by German scholars, and then was later—about five years, ten years later—translated into English. And so I think the European scholars are really doing interesting stuff, and they're coming at it from a different perspective. That's coming into the AJS as well.

**Mirjam Thulin:** And with a different language package. I mean, I can read Leopold Zunz (easily). For me, it's very easy to access. And I know how difficult it must be if other people read this and (are) trying to translate or get a sense of this speech.

**Jason Lustig:** I mean, I think when we talk about the developments in Jewish studies over the past twenty, thirty years or more, what you've been highlighting, the flourishing of the field in the way in which it has become much more diverse, is true I think in a number of ways: in terms of the growing participation of non-Jews, which I think is really a positive thing; the increasing involvement of Europeans in Jewish studies in the US and also vice versa, which really represents, I think, a growing international network of scholars in a way that's really enabled by the Internet and by, again (just practically speaking), cheap flights and so on; and then also we can talk about the whole gender issue. If we talk about the early scholars of modern Jewish studies throughout the nineteenth century, this is almost exclusively men. Even throughout the twentieth century, women were a minority among Jewish studies scholars. I mean, there were a number of very significant figures, but it's over the past fifty years that this has really grown, that we have this gender diversity as well within Jewish studies and also academia as a whole. Even though, of course, as anybody will tell you who just looks around, academia is still dominated by men. So, I think it's interesting to ask: How has the growth of Jewish studies in terms of numbers, in terms of diversity, how

has it has changed the field over the past few decades? How it changes the way in which Jewish studies and Jewish history matters, whether in the US, or Germany, France, or elsewhere.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** If the first generation was trying to liberate Jewish studies from Christian supersessionists and rabbis, our task is to liberate it from straight Jewish men. How's that for the nonpolitically correct version? Think about it, to some extent I look at the older form of the AJS and I see a kind of secularized rabbinate. They're all professors, not rabbis; they have PhDs, not semicha, though some have both. But they're kind of playing at rabbinics outside the seminary. And what's coming is these fields which are being pushed by people who aren't traditional *yeshiva bochers*. They're pushing issues of culture. They're pushing issues of narrative. They're pushing issues of sex and gender. They're pushing issues of race. They're pushing issues of color and power and privilege and colonialism. And these are all topics that challenge a prior generation of Jewish scholars. And I think that's where a lot of the energy right now is in Jewish studies.

**Mirjam Thulin:** So, I think the place of Jewish studies in Germany, first of all is—I told you about three subjects now, Jewish studies, Judaic Studies, theology, and about the competition for funding. That's mainly the reality now. This is inside the community, the most important thing, I think. At the same time, all these subjects are accepted at the university obviously, and people are changing. So, one year they are in the Jewish theology department, the next year they are in the Judaic studies department. It's not a big issue. And I think the same is true for all Europe, but it depends on the field. What is now a growing field in Jewish studies in Europe is early modern history, I think. And this is mostly female. It's interesting, I don't know why. It's because it's more cultural history or, I can't say. But it's interesting. I organized a panel for this year's AJS. We are all females, and all early modernists. That's funny.

**Jason Lustig:** For me, it's just so exciting to see what's happening across the board, that there is this diversity of topics, of people. So, I think as we start to conclude it's useful for us to think about the future. We've talked about the past two hundred years of Jewish studies, thinking about the nineteenth century and also what's happened over the past few decades. But I think it might be useful for us to think about the ways in which studying and teaching Jewish history matters today, in our own particular context, in the same way that two hundred years ago Leopold Zunz and his colleagues saw that studying Jewish history mattered for them, or Jewish literature as they would put it, how do we talk about it today? Do we talk about it in different terms within our own particular context of our present? And also, how do we make the case to our students, that they should take our courses in Jewish studies? I think that as we look forward, there are a lot of questions that we need to answer, about how we think about Jewish studies and Jewish history and why it matters—which is not to say that it doesn't matter, but that I think is important for us to articulate it, which is in a certain way part of what this whole project is kind of about.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I'm trying to think of how to answer that question. I think the question is going to be answered very differently by each of us, because when we talk about what's important in Jewish studies, it's going to be shaped by our own needs and fears and interests. When I think about why I tell students they should study Jewish studies in (a department of) history, it's because, I think, I mean if you were doing European history and you don't study the Jews, it's like studying American history without studying African Americans. Jews are the great Other in European history against which the European majority defined itself. So you need to understand that if you're going to understand European history, Jews are often the way we work through issues of what it means to be a minority, how minorities are understood within a majority culture. And I think that's something that anyone can take from Jewish studies regardless of their background.

**Mirjam Thulin:** I completely agree. Just to say maybe the same thing with different words, I try to teach Jewish history as a general history, or part of general history, and try to show the students that Jews were often the test case. For example, to what extent in the nineteenth century was emancipation really granted? You can see the borders exactly with the Jews, and the practice of it. I think, too, that one important observation is that Jewish studies is being done by Jews and non-Jews. So I think it's also a different perspective, and I think it works together very well. You just see the whole picture of it, as we discussed.

**Jeffrey Blutinger:** I was thinking, just a minute ago, of Aomar Boum's new book on studying in Morocco (*Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco*), where Jews are no longer, and going back to the non-Jewish neighbors of Jews who had left, and talking about the memory of absence. Part of what drives the experience of Jewish studies in the last seventy years is trauma, a collective trauma that both the Jewish community is coping with and the communities in which Jews used to live are coping with. In Morocco, it's not the Holocaust. In Morocco, it's the creation of the State of Israel and the Jews emigrating (and) leaving Morocco for Israel. But throughout the world, we have these places in which we've had this intense trauma of loss, and I think Jewish studies is one of the places where that's being worked through.

**Jason Lustig:** Yeah. I mean, I think when we talk about why and how Jewish studies and Jewish history matter perhaps differently now than it did in the past, it's just for these very reasons that you guys are talking about, that it should matter to more than just Jews and that when we talk about Jewish studies, not just for Jews, it changes the kind of questions that we ask and it changes the objectives. I don't really think that scholars today should be writing and talking about Jewish history for the same reasons that Graetz or others did, as a kind of a way to fortify people's identities. This, I think, is still the case for many students who come to our classes who themselves happened to be Jewish; even sometimes for non-Jews, they might come to a class because if they're

a religious Christian, for instance, they want to learn about Jewish history in order to understand the origins of Christianity. But there's this tension, I think, in a lot of subjects, and not just within Jewish studies, between students who come for the purposes of strengthening or investigating their own identity or their own history and what we talk about and what we do as scholars. And I think that especially with the growing number of non-Jewish students and non-Jewish scholars who are involved in Jewish studies, this is a really positive thing because it forces us to move beyond that and to think, especially in the twenty-first century, how we think about Jewish history, when Jews are not studying Jewish studies (specifically) for the purposes of achieving emancipation but for understanding the place of Jews within a new global context.

## NOTES

1. Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, 78.
2. Berry, "Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star?"
3. See, for instance: "What is Podcasting?"; Graves, "The Affordances of Blogging."
4. Cwynar, "More Than a 'VCR for Radio'"; Llinares, Fox, and Berry, *Podcasting*, 4–5.
5. Lewis, "What New Data Suggests"; Edison Research, "The Infinite Dial 2019."
6. Vess, "History to Go"; Copley, "Audio and Video Podcasts"; Dale, "Strategies for Using Podcasting"; Altvater, "Words on the Wadsworth"; Lazzari, "Creative Use of Podcasting"; O'Bannon et al., "Using Podcasts to Replace"; McSwiggan and Campbell, "Can Podcasts for Assessment Guidance"; Kwon and Woo, "The Impact of Flipped Learning."
7. Llinares, Fox, and Berry, *Podcasting*; Bottomley, "Podcasting."
8. "Academic Podcast Roundup."
9. Gratien, Polczyński, and Shafir, "Digital Frontiers of Ottoman Studies"; Poe, *New Books Network*; Gratien and Shafir, *Ottoman History Podcast*; Altman, "Podcasting Religious Studies"; Covart, *Ben Franklin's World*.
10. Lisenmayer et al., *Partially Examined Life*; Wyman, *Fall of Rome*; Wyman, *Tides of History*.

11. See, for instance: Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, University of Michigan, *Frankely Judaic*; BBC Radio 4, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, 100.
12. Gratien, *Deporting Ottoman Americans*. Also see Hamza, *Ventricles Podcast*; Shere, *Adventures in Jewish Studies*.
13. Covart, “The History Of Audio Education.”
14. Salvati, “Podcasting the Past”; Covart, “Writing Early American History with Sound.”
15. Altman, “Podcasting Religious Studies,” 579.
16. Covart, “Writing Early American History with Sound.”
17. See MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*; Locke, “Where Is Hollywood Looking for the Next Hit?”
18. Szendy, “The Auditory Re-Turn (The Point of Listening).”
19. Galarza, “A Call to Redefine Historical Scholarship in the Digital Turn.”
20. Shere, *Adventures in Jewish Studies*; Fox, *Vaybertaytsh*.
21. Kelman, *Station Identification*; Kopp, “Radio and Television”; Shandler and Katz, “Broadcasting American Judaism.”
22. Penslar, “Transmitting Jewish Culture.”
23. IKAR, *IKAR Los Angeles*; Kehillat Israel, Pacific Palisades, CA, *Kehillat Israel Podcasts*.
24. Fox, *Vaybertaytsh*; Fox, “Laboratories of Yiddishkayt.”
25. Of the earliest episodes now listed under the *New Books in Jewish Studies* series, the first twenty-three were produced for the series *New Books in History, Public Policy, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Language, and Genocide Studies*, before the first episode where the host announced it as *New Books in Jewish Studies*, from July 12, 2013. See “New Books Network.”
26. Personal conversation with Poe on October 25, 2017. Also see Poe, *A History of Communications*; Poe, *How to Read a History Book*; Stark, “Can New Media Save the Book?”
27. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 81–103.
28. Cf. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 93–94.
29. Zunz, “Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur.”
30. Eckert and Steiner, “Wikipedia’s Gender Gap.”
31. Shapiro, “Women Hosted Podcasts”; Locke, “Podcasts’ Biggest Problem Isn’t Discovery, It’s Diversity.”

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