

Article

Politics and Theology in the Historical Works of Yitzhak Baer

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Abstract: Of the individuals most commonly associated with the so-called “Jerusalem School” of historiography—the first- and second-generation of scholars of Jewish history that coalesced around the Hebrew University in the first years of its existence—Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer (1888–1980) was probably the least overtly political. Yet, a careful reading of his writings reveals a mind that was heavily engaged with the social and political affairs of the day. Like most members of the Jerusalem School, Baer saw his scholarship as a contribution to the Zionist project—an attempt to influence the character of the nascent Jewish society. Although he did not proclaim or publicize his views as loudly as others, he nonetheless weaved his political views into the fabric of his historical research. By reading his historical works against their immediate political context, we can therefore begin to piece together what amounts to an original and comprehensive worldview.

Keywords: Yitzhak Baer; Gershom Scholem; Martin Buber; Judaism; Zionism; historiography

This is the task that lies before us: the creation of a social order [mishtar hayim; lit.: life regimen] that is consistent with the Hebrew concept of justice. It is possible to prepare for the days of the Messiah. If we do not upbuild the Land [of Israel] with righteousness and justice, all is lost. This is the conclusion to be drawn from our history. Yitzhak Baer 1939¹



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1. Introduction: Yitzhak Baer as Political Thinker

Of the individuals most commonly associated with the so-called “Jerusalem School” of historiography—the first- and second-generation of scholars of Jewish history that coalesced around the Hebrew University in the first years of its existence—Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer (1888–1980) was probably the least overtly political². Unlike, for example, the historian Ben Zion Dinur (1884–1973), who was elected to the First Knesset in 1948 on behalf of the ruling party MAPAI (acronym for the Workers Party of the Land of Israel), and even served as Israel’s Minister of Education between 1951 and 1955; or Joseph Klausner (1874–1958)—professor of Hebrew Literature and Late Antiquity who often attended gatherings of the right-wing Herut Party (although never a party member himself)—Baer generally avoided any active involvement in party politics. And unlike his close friend Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), who seemingly never tired of expressing his views in popular venues on the political, social, and religious developments of the day, Baer rarely wrote for non-scholarly publications. Although Baer officially participated in some of the “trademark” groups of the Jerusalem intelligentsia, such as *Brit Shalom*—the famous coterie of activists and intellectuals who strove for a bi-national solution in the period leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel—and the less-famous, short-lived “Bearers of the Yoke” group (*Chug Ha’ol*), dedicated to the development of a religious, Jewish socialism, he never took on positions of leadership or eminence within either³. In addition, many of those who knew him personally describe him as standoffish and distant, thus cementing his image as an apolitical, bookish professor (see, e.g., [Barnai 2011](#), pp. 185–86, ff).

Yet, a careful reading of his writings reveals a mind that was heavily engaged with the social and political affairs of the day. Like most members of the Jerusalem School, Baer saw his scholarship as a contribution to the Zionist project—an attempt to influence the

character of the nascent Jewish society. Although he did not proclaim or publicize his views as loudly as others, he nonetheless weaved his political views into the fabric of his historical research. By reading his historical works against their immediate political context, we can therefore begin to piece together what amounts to an original and comprehensive worldview.

In many respects, we can divide Baer's career into two distinct phases. From the beginning of his career in 1913—the year he matriculated from the University of Freiburg with a dissertation entitled “Studies in the History of the Jews of the Kingdom of Aragonia in the 13th and 14th Centuries”—to the late 1940s, his area of scholarly focus was the Jews of the Middle Ages, and in particular Medieval Spain. In the late 1940s, however, he virtually ceased writing on the subject which brought him fame and renown, and until his death in 1980, he devoted himself almost exclusively to the study of Jewish life in the Land of Israel in what he, as well as most Zionist thinkers, referred to as the Second Commonwealth Period (*t'kufat bay'it she-ni*)⁴.

This ostensibly dramatic change, however, becomes less remarkable when considering his philosophy of history and views on Zionism. According to Baer, the ideal Jewish society had already existed in the past, among the circles of what he called the “pietist-sages” (*hassidim hachamim*) of the Second Commonwealth Period. These pietist-sages, in his view, established the religious and political norms of Judaism for all times, and he evaluated each subsequent period of Jewish history by the degree to which it either adhered to or strayed from the ancient model. The kind of society Baer hoped would come about as a result of Zionist efforts, therefore, would be one that sought to emulate, and to a large extent implement, the original paradigm.

Baer described the beliefs and ways of lives of the pietist-sages in several of his publications, including most memorably in the Introduction to his magnum opus, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Baer [1945] 1992). But his most elaborate depiction of pietist-sage society is contained in a short book, originally delivered as a series of lectures at the Hebrew University in the Winter Semester of 1953–1954, entitled *Israel Among the Nations: An Essay on the History of the Period of the Second Temple and the Mishna and on the Foundations of the Halacha and Jewish Religion* (Baer [1955] 1969)⁵. In both these texts, Baer portrays pietist-sage society as a religious, ascetic, and agrarian culture, committed to the values of divine worship, community, and what he described as “the path of martyrdom” (*torat kiddush ha-shem*), which to Baer meant not only the willingness to give one's life “For the Sake of Heaven” (see, e.g., Mishna Avot 2:12), but also—and primarily—the complete surrender of all aspects of life to divine rule. As he wrote, for example, in *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, “In its earliest days [. . .],” “Israelite society was founded upon the fundamental qualities of simplicity, brotherhood, and love. [The biblical verse] ‘And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation’ (Ex. 19:6) imposed a regime of pietism upon [the] entire nation” (Baer [1945] 1992, vol. I, pp. 4–5). In *Israel Among the Nations*—which is more elaborate in its descriptions of the institutions of the ancient state—Baer maintained that pietist-sage society was highly influenced by Greek and Roman political thought (particularly by Plato's *Republic*), but always remained faithful to the internal Jewish constitution.

A recurring motif in his writings is the antagonism between the wealthy, educated, largely assimilated Jewish elites, and the poorer, devout Jewish masses. In perhaps the most famous iteration of this thesis in his writings, Baer claimed in *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* that in medieval Spain, there developed two classes: “the backward masses, primitive in their outlook and way of life”, who continued adhering to tradition and “derived their livelihood from the cultivation of fields and orchards, from manufacture and handicraft”, and “an aristocracy pampered by the elegance of wealth and Arabic culture”. These aristocrats, he continued, “enjoyed their life, tasted the pleasures of wine, women, palaces and gardens, and pursued the literary arts and the sciences”. They increasingly came under the sway of Arabic rationalism and science, finding justification for their abhorrent behavior in the new philosophies of Averroes and Maimonides (Baer [1945]

1992, I, pp. 37–38; 96–98; and *im passim*). Eventually, according to Baer’s narrative, the descendants of these “polished aristocrats” would actively betray their people during “the period of great trial” between 1391 and 1415, preferring to side with the Spanish courts and converting to Christianity. It was only through the steadfastness of the lower classes, he argued, along with that of the communities of Ashkenaz (Germany and northern France), that Judaism survived the great trauma of the Spanish expulsion, and the Middle Ages as a whole (*ibid.*; pp. 240–41; *im passim*)⁶.

By the time he came to write *Israel Among the Nations*, Baer mitigated his earlier criticism of philosophy and rationalism, emphasizing, as we noted, the influence of Greek and Roman ideas on the development of Jewish thought. Nonetheless, Baer continued maintaining that a gulf existed between the Jewish elites and the remainder of the population. In one telling section, for example, Baer asserts that it was the “pietist farmers”—and not, as commonly believed, “scribes”, “aristocrats who sit in their houses of study far away from the fields”—who were ultimately responsible for one of the towering achievements of Jewish thought in the Second Commonwealth Period and in general: the codification of the Mishna (Baer [1955] 1969, p. 56). He also never ceased from protesting against the harmful effects of rootlessness, hyper-rationalism, and philosophical cosmopolitanism.

2. History and the State

Baer trained as a historian in Berlin and Freiburg in the years just before the First World War, during the heyday of the “Prussian School” of German historiography, which considered Ranke to be its founder and—in the words of Friederich Meinecke (1862–1954)—“guiding star” (Meinecke [1948] 1954, p. 143)⁷. To the end of his life, he thus adhered to the principles of historical research associated with that School, namely: the commitment to an objective, scientific presentation of the past “as it truly happened” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*); emphasis on the primacy of archival, documentary research; the organicist interpretation of historical developments; and the view of the world as an “inter-national” system. (The title of his final book, *Israel Among the Nations*, could be seen as a nod in the direction of Rankean “inter-nationalism”).

From an early stage of his career, however, Baer rejected the national–political conclusions drawn by Ranke and his heirs: for whereas members of the Prussian School tended, on the whole, to favor a strong yet enlightened bureaucratic state⁸, Baer’s ideological leanings—like others in his German-Jewish milieu, notably Scholem and Martin Buber (1878–1965)—could be described as falling under the rubric of “theocratic anarchism”, at least insofar as the Jews were concerned. To be sure, Baer agreed with the Prussian School that the nation state should be seen as the culmination of the historical process; as he noted in his Inaugural Address at the Hebrew University, “Principles in the Study of Jewish History: An Introduction to the Middle Ages” (1930):

[H]istory has a specific core and foundation, a center, around which all historical life revolves [. . .]. In [world] history, [. . .] it is the state. The state is the organization of national forces, the fulfillment of the nation’s historical life-will [*ratzon ha-hayim*; *Lebenswille*], this mysterious power, which cannot be expressed in abstract words and its substance remains unknown even to its subjects. [The creation of a state] is a natural and teleological tendency [*neti’ya*] which operates whether one admits to it or not, [. . .] an inclination [*neti’ya*] to address the secret of life through a political act. (Baer [1930] 1985, pp. 13–14)

At the same time, however, he denied that Jewish history operated along the same lines. As he claimed in that very same speech:

[Our] nation began its history in the form of a political people [*am medini*] like all nations. But already at its moment of formation, a religious idea began to take possession, which destroyed the [conventional] form of the free state [*medina hofsh’it*] and replaced it with that of a religious community and polity [*kehila ve-medina dat’it*] surrounding a religious sanctuary [*heichal*], enslaved to foreign

monarchs. [. . .]. The Maccabean state was but a [fleeting] episode and does not represent the reigning zeitgeist [*etzem ha-t'kufa*]. (ibid., pp. 16–17)

Baer continued adhering to the ideals of “theocratic anarchism” throughout the 1930s. In 1937, he even dedicated an essay to the historical and political thought of Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508)—perhaps the original Jewish theocratic anarchist (Baer 1937)⁹. In his depiction of Abravanel, one can intimate Baer’s own political attitude at the time:

[. . .] R. Isaac Abravanel displayed in all his books a fierce hatred of autocratic regimes and viewed constitutional frameworks which limit political power as much as possible as the medicine for the diseases of States. [. . .]. As we can infer from his books, he yearned to live as far as possible from the courts of kings, sustaining himself with only the bare necessities, and of living in purity and simplicity like Adam in Eden. (Baer 1937, pp. 242, 245; quoted in Cohen Skalli 2019, pp. 170, 171 [translation modified])

Over the next few years, however, Baer would have something of a change of heart, albeit to some extent temporarily. In the early 1940s, with war raging in Europe and the plight of the Jews becoming ever more desperate, it seems that Baer began considering whether the establishment of an independent Jewish state was not, after all, a political necessity, at least for the time being. His internal debates can be discerned in the Introduction to *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. The first version of the text, originally composed in German, was completed already as early as 1938. At the suggestion, however, of Berl Katznelson (1887–1944), one of the leaders of Labor Zionism and the *Yishuv*, and editor-in-chief of the publishing house ‘Am Oved’, Baer rewrote the work in Hebrew (Ettinger 1980, p. xiii). In those seven years, the British issued the ‘White Paper’ of 1939, effectively outlawing Jewish emigration to the Land of Israel; the Zionist Movement officially adopted the establishment of an independent Jewish state as its goal (“The Biltmore Program”, 1941); and, most importantly, Jewish life in Europe was destroyed in the most brutal ways imaginable. Deeply affected by these developments, Baer seems to have asked himself whether his dreams of “theocratic anarchism” must not now take a back seat to more pragmatic considerations. In the section of the book describing the aftermath of the Hasmonaean war of liberation, we can sense Baer asking what is to be done:

[W]hen it came to implementing [sic] the structure of national life, differences arose in the interpretation of the hallowed traditions and the means of realizing them in life. Was the nation to be organized as a semi-Hellenized state, pursuing a realistic political course, or was it to constitute a theocratic national center under the aegis of foreign powers? [The rule of priests and aristocrats or the imposition of some of the priestly prohibitions on the entire nation?¹⁰] Was it better to yield to the might of Rome or to wage a national war for the establishment of a ‘kingdom of God’? Such are the main outlines [. . .] of the great, tragic, inner conflict which marked that period in our history known as the Second Commonwealth, a period which has come to serve as a symbol and a parable. (Baer [1945] 1992, vol. I, pp. 5–6)

3. The Critique of Ahad Ha’am and the Transformation of Baer’s Zionism in the 1930s and 1940s

The rise of National Socialism in Germany (and later, the Holocaust) also led Baer to revise some of his earlier Zionist convictions. Up until then, like many others in his Central European milieu, Baer generally saw himself as a Cultural Zionist and follower of Ahad Ha’am (Ettinger 1980, p. xii)¹¹. In contrast to Political Zionists—who, following Herzl and Nordau, tended to emphasize more “institutional” measures such as the acquisition of territorial rights, recognition of Jewish rights by other nations, the construction of sovereign institutions, and so forth—Cultural Zionists believed that the Zionist Movement should focus on “the Revival of the Hearts”¹²: fostering Jewish national consciousness and values, and emphasizing cultural values such as the Hebrew language and literature. They also

generally believed that the building of a national home in the Land of Israel need not replace the established Jewish centers in the Diaspora. The task of Zionism, Ahad Ha'am explained, should be, rather, the establishment of a "Spiritual Center" which will serve as a "heart" to the "scattered limbs of the national body" ("Spiritual Center" [1907], in [Ha'am 1922](#), [sic], p. 151, ff)¹³.

After the rise of National Socialism, Baer came to emphatically reject Ahad Ha'am's approach. Although he did not, strictly speaking, become a "Political Zionist", he now denied the possibility that the Jews could continue living in the Diaspora, and saw the benefits of turning to foreign powers. In his short book *Galut* ("Exile", 1936)—a synoptic account of Jewish interpretations of exile from late antiquity to modern times—he thus ruled out the idea of multiple homelands. In between the lines, he seems to also express regret for any allegiance he may have had to Germany, a country for which he had fought during the First World War:

The attempt which has been considered from time to time, to return to an idea of the *Galut* as it existed in the days of the Second Temple—the grouping of the Diaspora around a strong center in Palestine—is today out of the question. There was a short period when the Zionist could feel himself a citizen of two countries [. . .]; for the Zionist was prepared to give up his life for the home in which he had his residence. Now that the Jews have been denied the right to feel at home in Europe, it is the duty of the European nations to redeem the injustice committed by their spiritual and physical ancestors by assisting the Jews in the task of reclaiming Palestine and by recognizing the right of the Jews to the land of their fathers. ([Baer \[1936\] 1947](#), p. 118)

Cultural Zionists, he now came to see—alongside perhaps Reform Jews such as the Hebrew University Chancellor Judah Magnes (1877–1948), and "Territorialists" and "Autonomists" such as Yisrael Zangwill (1864–1921) and Simon Dubnow (1860–1941), respectively—were all guilty of the same denial of the primacy of the physical Land of Israel in Jewish life and history. In the chapter of *Galut* fittingly dedicated to one of Baer's heroes, the medieval anti-rationalist poet-philosopher Judah Halevi (1075–1141), he thus wrote:

[Zion] was the center and heart of the Diaspora, and from north and south and east and west all those who languished in servitude looked to Zion. Palestine was the center and heart of the Diaspora even though the Temple was gone and hardly a Jew remained. It was no 'spiritual center'; nor was it for the Jew, as it was for the Christian and the Mohammedan, only the land of a past revelation, endowed in consequence with a miraculous power of redemption; nor was it merely the Holy Land of tradition and dogma—this desert was home and mother earth for the Jewish people. (*ibid.*, p. 35)

The idea that "until the redemption, every country is as good as Palestine", according to Baer, was no more than "Marrano theology in a modernized and more comfortable form" (*ibid.*, p. 113).

In the years after the publication of *Galut*, Baer even seemingly came close to endorsing the positions associated with the Vitalistic-Nietzschean wing of Zionism, represented above all by Micah Josef Berdyczewski (1865–1921). In contrast to Ahad Ha'am, Berdyczewski claimed that the degradation in Jewish life during the long exile was not merely the result of the prolonged estrangement from the Land of Israel or from the sources of vitality that characterized ancient, pre-exilic Judaism, but rather, the *necessary outcome of rabbinic Judaism* (see, e.g., [Golomb 2008](#), pp. 70–71). Chastising the founder of Rabbinic Judaism Yochanan ben-Zakkai, who escaped Jerusalem during the siege by the Romans in a coffin in order to establish the academy in Yavneh, Berdyczewski averred that "Yavneh and Jerusalem are enemies [. . .] those who fell upon their swords [i.e., the Zealots] were superior to those who escaped the walls hidden in coffins" (quoted in [Luz 2003](#), p. 55 [translation modified])¹⁴. In contrast to the spirit of moderation and rationalism espoused by Ahad

Ha'am, Berdyczewski advocated earthly vigor, physical prowess, and rebellion (see e.g., in [Luz 1985](#), pp. 214–231, ff); in contrast to the veneration of the rabbis, Berdyczewski held up fighting Jews such as the Maccabees and Bar Kochba as role models ([Luz 2003](#), p. 54); and in an attempt to find a new Jewish “counternarrative” to official rabbinic history, he also suggested the adoption of the Jerusalem Talmud—in lieu of the Babylonian—as a work reflecting the authentic, ancient spirit of the Land of Israel ([Holtzman 2008](#), p. 109).

In the Introduction to *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*—written just as the Jewish revolt against the British Mandate began to intensify—Baer now also seemingly took a stance in the name of political independence and the imperative to rebel against foreign rule. Manifestly rejecting the “spirit of ‘Yavne’,” he also maintained that the rabbinic dictums not to take up arms against foreign powers (BT Ketubbot 111a) and to accept “the law of the land” as law unto the Jews ([*dina de-malkhuta dina*] BT Bava Kama 113a; BT Nedarim 28a; elsewhere) were foreign to the authentic, fighting Jewish spirit:

‘I prefer a small conclave in Eretz Yisrael to a large Sanhedrin abroad’ [JT Sanhedrin I, 2]. ‘It is better to dwell in the desert in Eretz Yisrael than in a palace abroad’ [Genesis Rabbah, 39:8]. There could be no compromise between the Jewish nation and the foreign power in this struggle. In the teachings of the Palestinian scholars one does not find the formula, evolved in Babylonia, stating that ‘the law of the government is law unto us’, nor does a prayer for the welfare of the government exist in their liturgy as in that of the western Diaspora. ([Baer \[1945\] 1992](#), I, p. 12)

A few pages later, in a section describing the decline of the political and religious Jewish centers in Israel and the ascendancy of the Babylonian academies, Baer echoes not only Berdyczewski, but also other critics of Jewish life in the Diaspora, such as the writer and literary critic Yosef Haim Brenner (1881–1921). One of Brenner’s strongest criticisms was of Jewish education as it existed in the rabbinic system, especially the Talmudic method of “pilpul”. This method, Brenner contended, may have developed the Jews’ “wit”, but it produced conclusions with no basis in real life ([Schweid 1996](#), p. 139). Repeating the critiques of both Brenner and Berdyczewski, Baer thus suggested that there was something *in the very fabric of the Jewish faith* that produced Jewish weakness and general lack of realism. Describing the development of the Jewish religion after suffering military defeat at the hands of the Romans, he writes:

[The Jewish] code represented a complete, detailed, and well-ordered world outlook. Their attitude was conceived in an atmosphere of mythological thinking where care was taken not to couch religious ideals in rational terms or to express their relation to the practical world in matter-of-fact language. Therein lay their strength and also their weakness. ([Baer \[1945\] 1992](#), I, p. 14)

Baer, however, did not forfeit his lifelong opposition to rationalism in this text. Further down, he again implied that the methods associated with Babylonian legalism had essentially something ‘un-Jewish’ about them. “The Halakha in Babylonia had developed along pilpulistic lines, foreign even to contemporary Palestinian scholars. [‘He has made me dwell in dark places’ (Lam. 3:6)—that is the Talmud of Babylonia (BT Sanhedrin 24a)]” ([Baer’s references] *ibid.*, I, p. 25). Iterating Berdyczewski’s critique that the rabbis had essentially suffocated the vital spirit of ancient Judaism, he then writes that

“the acceptance of the law of the Babylonian Talmud by the communities of the Diaspora was not due to apathy on their part or the failure of their own creative powers. *It came rather as a result of a planned campaign by the academies of Babylonia to impose the authority of the Babylonian Talmud upon the entire Diaspora*”. (*Ibid.*, I, p. 26 [italics added])¹⁵

The physical return of the Jews to the Land of Israel thus has the potential, according to Baer, to serve as the renewal not only of Jewish political life, but also of a more authentic form of Judaism.

4. The War against the Enlightenment

In 1933, a few months after Hitler's accession to power, and then again in 1938, Baer returned to Germany to inquire after friends and relatives who had stayed behind. According to his acquaintances, these visits, where he witnessed the degradation of Jewish life under National Socialism, left a deep impression on his emotional constitution (Ettinger 1980, p. xii; Myers 1995, pp. 119–20). In particular, however, Baer seems to have been most perturbed by those like Johanna Dessau (wife of Baer's uncle, the famous historian of antiquity Hermann Dessau, 1856–1931)—liberal, assimilated Jews—who refused to leave Germany out of a misguided sense of allegiance and an inability to recognize reality (Ettinger 1980).

Whether or not we can attribute this to biographical circumstances, we nonetheless note that between the early 1930s and the late 1940s, Baer became especially critical of Jewish liberalism, assimilationism, and the values generally associated with the Enlightenment such as “rationalism”, “the open society”, “secularism”, and so forth. Already in the opening pages of *Galut*—in which, importantly, he covers the period of Late Antiquity—Baer suggests that the fulfillment of Jewish aspirations would depend on the establishment of what may be called an “integral”, “closed society”:

Enslaved, contemned [sic] and rejected, all over the world the Jews pray that they may be politically reunited on their own soil—only then will it be possible to fulfil the whole Law. For *politeia* (the order of law and doctrine), nation and soil belong together. (Baer [1936] 1947, p. 9)

Foreshadowing his class analysis in *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, in a chapter of *Galut* devoted to the Late Middle Ages, he became especially critical of the rich, assimilated, upper classes:

Wherever Jewish communities developed to any considerable extent, they fell sick with the diseases characteristic of the cities of the *ancien régime*. [They] split into classes and cliques; the upper classes exploited the lower classes; the city communities tyrannized over the village communities. [. . .]. Rich families separated themselves from the community; in Spain and Italy especially, they gave their children a non-religious education and followed a worldly course of life. (Baer [1936] 1947, p. 47)

Baer's anti-Enlightenment rhetoric was particularly pronounced in his review of the first volume of Salo W. Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (Baron 1937). In contrast to Baron, who sought to show the myriad influences which shaped Jewish existence through the ages, Baer here depicted true Judaism as a “closed” society, seeking to safeguard itself against the continuous onslaught of outside influences. Tying together his class analysis and anti-rationalist views, we see Baer adopting elements of romantic anti-capitalism. Undoubtedly influenced by Scholem, we see him also siding with “mysticism” against “rationalism”:

There is no doubt that the Jews of the Middle Ages were primarily of an urban disposition, but in most cases they were divided into two classes: an upper bourgeoisie and a lower bourgeoisie, and over time the latter group acquired the form of an urban proletariat (artisans, minor moneylenders, merchants, and religious scholars [. . .]). The rationalists belonged mostly to the upper bourgeoisie, which were inclined towards apostasy and conversion, whereas the mystical movements—while they did not always emerge from the lower classes, were close to them by nature, and spread among them. The entire purpose [of these mystical movements] was to lead the people away from the embrace of secular culture, scientific enlightenment [*ha-haskala ha-mada'it*] and external civilization [*ha-tzivilizats'ya ha-hitz'onit*], to leave the nation poor and humble and trusting in God and in Salvation. (Baer 1938, p. 294; italics added)

Echoing to some extent Scholem's famous critique of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circle, Baer posits himself as the inheritor of a long tradition which has sought to defend true Judaism from the attacks of the rationalists and secularizers:

The war against the Enlightenment [*ha-haskala*] which begins in Spain with Yehuda Halevi and gains strength through the influence of Kabbalah, as well as with the movements of Ashkenazi Pietism, [was] an *anti-rationalist, anti-secular, and anti-Capitalist movement, as were the teachings of the Prophets, the Pharisees, and the Tannaim*. [This war] has molded the people into a religious proletariat. The latest results of this inclination became manifest in the year of Sabbatai Zevi's [appearance]. This development may not be to the liking of the European intellectual [*ha-maskil ha'Eropi*], but it is consistent with the immanentist doctrines of Israelite history. It therefore becomes clear that the religious tendency of the Jews in the Middle Ages was ascetic, in spite of the numerous secular forces that sought to break through the fence. (Ibid.; italics added)

Baer continued adhering to this anti-Enlightenment ethos throughout the Second World War, and in many respects to the end of his life, although he softened his critique in later years. As we mentioned above, however, Baer's most memorable attack against the Jewish assimilated elites can be found in the pages of *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. In one particularly memorable passage, he even went on to attack Maimonides—perhaps the symbol of rationalist Judaism, especially in post-Emancipation Germany—although it should be noted that Baer was careful in his writing, making one wonder whether he ultimately blamed Maimonides for the effects of his teaching, or only the 'Maimonideans':

The compromise that Maimonides effected between the popular religion and the demands of reason and science was accepted by the religious Jewish intellectuals of southern Europe as the only solution to their spiritual conflict. It was especially welcome to the learned of southern France [. . .] and to the polished aristocrats of Spain who let their reason and natural instincts guide their lives. *There were many, it would seem, in Spain, who found in Maimonidean philosophy convenient support for their extreme liberalism*. These men accepted only a faith of reason and rejected the popular beliefs. They put rational understanding ahead of the observance of the commandments and denied the value of the Talmudic *aggadot*. (Baer [1945] 1992, I, pp. 96–97; italics added)¹⁶

After the publication of *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*—perhaps due to the intensification of nationalistic trends in the pre-state *Yishuv*—he tamed his critique of 'foreign influences' and returned to his 'Rankean' origins, showing how certain foreign philosophies worked well with, and even inspired, Jewish beliefs. His later writings on the Second Commonwealth Period, in contrast to much of his output on the Middle Ages, could thus be read as a monument to cross-cultural openness and exchange.

5. The Turn to Second Commonwealth Judaism

Baer's first publication on the Second Commonwealth Period—even if somewhat obliquely—was, perhaps ironically, one of the rare opinion pieces he ever wrote: "The Creation of a Commonwealth [*bayit*] and Judgement Day", published in the daily *Davar*, associated with the ruling party MAPAI, on October 3rd 1948, a few months after the declaration of statehood and at the height of the War of Independence (Baer 1949). Here, Baer suggested that in these times, as the Jews were literally fighting for the reconstitution of their state, it would be advisable to take heed of the lessons taught by Greek political thought, especially in three dialogues by Plato: *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *The Republic*. Most especially, he contended, Jews ought to learn from the Greek masters about the relationship between politics and the afterlife (*diney ne'shama*)—much like the Jews of late antiquity. Baer vacillates in this essay between interpretations of the Platonic dialogues and interpretations of rabbinic texts; throughout the text, however, his intention is clear: the reconstitution of the laws regarding the transmigration of the soul is of the utmost urgency for the creation

of a moral Jewish society. Baer seems to hope that by reading Plato, modern Jews would become inspired to look again to their own sources and re-adopt parts of the metaphysical worldview developed by the sages of yore. This would be a message that he also hoped to convey in *Israel Among the Nations*.

6. Second Commonwealth Judaism and the Zionist Imagination

Since the early days of the national revival movement in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Zionists and other Jewish modernizers looked to antiquity as a possible model for the nascent Hebrew nation, as opposed to contemporary rabbinic Judaism. Antiquity was depicted in Zionist lore as the last great age in which the Hebrew nation was firmly rooted in its own land, cultivating its own soil, speaking its own language, and filled with a proud, healthy, national spirit and devotion to freedom—a counterimage to “Exilic” Judaism: servile, weak, and subjugated to others (Zerubavel 1995, pp. 22–23, ff). Many Zionists emphasized especially the episodes of emphatic “nationalism” that took place during this period, namely the Maccabean war against the Seleucid Greeks, the period of sovereignty under the Hasmonaean dynasty, the valiant but ultimately calamitous stand against the Romans by the zealots of Masada, and the Bar-Kochba Rebellion (Zerubavel 1995; Luz 2003, p. 106, ff). The heroes of these episodes became role models for the early Zionist pioneers, and a source of inspiration for poets and national leaders. In 1912, for example, Ya’akov Zerubavel (1886–1967), one of the leaders of the Second Aliyah and Labor Zionism, wrote that “the Zealots and the weapon-bearers of Bar-Kochba were the last active fighters for national independence and [. . .] free labor in the Land of Israel. Their grandchildren, the Hebrew workers, are the foremost fighters for Jewish independence, a life of labor and creativity in the Land of Israel, the restoration of a national melody” (quoted in Gorny 1996, p. 59).

A somewhat different interpretation was provided by Ahad Ha’am. In his essay “Flesh and Spirit” (1904), Ahad Ha’am examined the idea of “asceticism”, and traced its development in Jewish history. In his discussion, Ahad Ha’am claimed that the Jews were not naturally inclined towards asceticism, and he dismissed any manifestations of asceticism during the course of Jewish history as representative of no more than a small minority. In the section pertaining to the Second Commonwealth Period, Ahad Ha’am identified the Essenes as the party most closely associated with ascetic doctrines. The Essenes, he claimed,

saw corruption eating at the very heart of the Jewish State; they saw its rulers, as in the time of the first Temple, exalting the flesh and disregarding all but physical force; they saw the best minds of the nation spending their strength in a vain effort to uplift the body politic from its internal decay, and once more to breathe the spirit of true Judaism into this corrupt flesh [. . .]. Seeing all this, they gave way to despair, turned their backs on political life altogether, and fled to the wilderness, there to live out their individual lives in holiness and purity, far from this incurable corruption. (Ha’am 1912, p. 154)

According to Ahad Ha’am, however, the Essenes “had no great influence over the popular mind”. In his view, it was not incidental that the Pharisees, with their unique “combination of flesh and spirit”, who became the true “teachers and guides” of the Jews ever after (ibid., pp. 154–55).

In *Israel Among the Nations*, Baer contended with both the earlier, “heroic” images of Second Commonwealth Judaism, as well as with Ahad Ha’am. It seems that Baer agreed with the earlier Zionists’ view that the Jews of the Second Commonwealth Period were “healthy”, “rooted”, “proud”, and so forth. But he rejected the overt anti-theological overtones implicit in the classical Zionist view. Baer, as we have seen, did not believe in a Judaism devoid of a metaphysical component, and in his own presentation of pietist-sage life—as can be discerned from the very emphasis on piety—he highlighted the roles of faith and *Gottesdienst*. As for Ahad Ha’am, *Israel Among the Nations* could be read as a direct refutation of the latter’s views. For whereas Ahad Ha’am depicted asceticism as

something of a fringe doctrine practiced only by a minority of Jews throughout history, Baer made asceticism a—if not *the*—central doctrine of Jewish faith. Similarly, whereas Ahad Ha'am wrote of the Essenes as “inconsequential” to future Jewish developments, Baer elevated them as perhaps the most important of Jewish parties in Late Antiquity, and his descriptions of ancient Essene rituals amount to some of the most poetic passages in the book.

Baer's scholarly reorientation, however, also coincided with something of a revival of interest in the Second Commonwealth Period in the Israeli public sphere following the establishment of the state in 1948. Between 1949 and 1952, the historian Joseph Klausner, Baer's colleague at the Institute for Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University, who had long been preoccupied with this period, published his five-volume study *History of the Second Commonwealth* (Klausner 1949–1951)¹⁷. In 1954—the same year in which Baer delivered the lectures which became *Israel Among the Nations*—he published another collection of writings on this period, *In the Days of the Second Commonwealth* (Klausner 1954)¹⁸. At the time, Klausner was a relatively well-known—if not always well-liked—public intellectual (and was even nominated a few years earlier to the position of President of the State by the Herut Party). As such, his writings were widely discussed within academic circles, if not beyond.

The most important contribution to the revival of interest in the Second Commonwealth Period, however, was penned by the novelist Moshe Shamir (1921–2004), arguably the most renowned Israeli writer of his day. Still in that very same year in which Baer delivered his lectures and Klausner published his second collection, 1954, Shamir published the epic historical novel *King of Flesh and Blood* (*melech basar ve-dam*), which focused on the controversial Hasmonaean king Alexander Jannaeus (Shamir 1958)¹⁹. In his account, Shamir portrayed Jannaeus as a cruel and tormented king, who was forced to exercise violence because of the political demands of the day. As many commentators realized at the time, the novel was something of a veiled metaphor for the demands of political sovereignty in the recently established state. Shamir believed that political independence was, overall, a positive development in Jewish history, but he also knew that it came at a price. The figure of the troubled Hasmonaean King thus provided Shamir with a perfect backdrop against which he could express his concerns and made the Second Commonwealth Period “come alive” for a new generation of readers.

Baer's work stood out from Klausner's and Shamir's, however, in at least one important aspect. Klausner and Shamir focused on the role of the institutions and “great men” of the period: the monarchy, the Temple, the Maccabees, and so forth. Baer's work, on the other hand, had much more of a “democratic”, popular, and anarchistic character, as consistent with his social and political views²⁰. In some respects, Baer's account in *Israel Among the Nations* resembles—or, to speak more poetically, has a similar ‘feel’ to—the depiction of ancient Israelite society in Martin Buber's biblical works, notably *The Kingdom of God* (*Königtum Gottes*; 1932), *Moses* (1945), and *The Prophetic Faith* (*Der Glaube der Propheten*; 1950). One could even suggest Baer's pietist-sages practiced what Buber defined as “theopolitics”: “a special kind of politics [. . .] which is concerned to establish a certain people in a certain historical situation under the divine sovereignty, so that this people is brought nearer to the fulfillment of its task, to become the beginning of the kingdom of God” (Buber 2016, pp. 167–68; Cf. Harvey 2009)²¹. The affinity between Baer's writings and Buber's, however, does not stem from the influence of the latter upon the former, but rather, suggests that both were inspired by the same currents of thought prevalent in Germany in the early twentieth century, including religious anarchism and romantic anti-modernism.

7. *Israel among the Nations* and Israel in the 1950s

Baer's argument, however, was not merely historical. For in between the lines of *Israel Among the Nations*, he was also trying to address a very contemporary set of problems. In the years between the conclusion of the War of Independence in 1949 and the Suez War of 1956, Israeli society was suffering from something of a crisis of confidence. Much

like other former colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, Israel was making the difficult transition from the high spiritedness and idealism of the pre-state period to the monotony and bureaucratization of the post-independence period²². Many decried the “loss of idealism” (*ovdan ha-ide’alim*) and yearned for a new spiritual vision²³.

The famous Israeli literary critic Gershon Shaked has shown how this crisis manifested in Hebrew fiction, noting that the two dominant trends in the literature from those years were, on the one hand, deep cynicism towards the present, and nostalgic-elegiac yearnings, on the other (Shaked 1988, p. 259; cf. Luz 2003, pp. 247–73). Yet, it seems that no one has noted that this crisis also affected Hebrew historiography. To take the most pertinent example, Scholem’s landmark study *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah* (1957)—the most important Jewish historical work of that decade—ended on a somber note of confusion and lost purpose:

Its hope had been vain and its claims refuted, and yet the question compounded of pride and sadness persisted: Was it not a great opportunity missed, rather than a big lie? A victory of the hostile powers rather than the collapse of a vain thing? (Scholem [1957] 1973, p. 929)

It seems that Baer shared something of Scholem’s pessimism. But unlike Scholem, he also sought to provide Israelis with this new vision by which to orient their lives. This was ultimately the purpose of *Israel Among the Nations*. The contemporary significance of the book can be gleaned at several points in the course of the text, including the opening and concluding paragraphs, where Baer intimates that his book seeks to address matters beyond just the mere historical interest:

The purpose of these lectures is to give the reader some keys to the history of the People of Israel. [. . .]. A man does not build his house without a particular plan, guided by the peculiarities and principles of his wishes and desires. It is not pure chance which drives our history, but tendencies, which seek to be materialized. (Baer [1955] 1969, p. 11)

At the end, there will remain from the metaphysical-historical building erected by the ancients [only] a few large pillars, which the original pietists thrust in the soil of the Land of Israel[.] They are set in the heart of every man, and upon them there will be determined the future place of Israel among the nations. (Ibid., p. 117)

The clearest example of the book’s relevance to the realities of early-state Zionism, however, could be found in the section where Baer discusses the agrarian nature of pietist-sage society, and the degree to which agrarianism formed part of the pietists’ religious ideology. Agrarianism, to the pietists, was understood as a life in accordance with God’s will, and in devotion to the land which He had promised to His people (cf. Genesis 15:18). During the time of the Maccabean Rebellion and the establishment of the Hasmonaean Kingdom, Baer then adds, “the agrarian population appeared on the historical stage as an active element [*gorem pa’il*], defending the nation’s freedom and its spiritual values in its war against external enemies” (Baer [1955] 1969, p. 56). The idea of being “active” in history—as opposed to the perceived “passivity” of the Jews in the Diaspora—was of course a key element of Zionist ideology of all streams and parties. The view that the Jewish agricultural pioneers were the vanguard of Jewish revival was a staple of Labor Zionist ideology. By using these contemporary tropes, Baer was thus indicating to his readers that they should view the history of the Second Commonwealth Period as more than a matter of identity, but also as a call to action.

Baer’s vision for the Israeli future, however, was also intimately intertwined with his critique of the contemporary Israeli regime. In the years following the establishment of the state, the semi-autonomous network of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* was rapidly abolished, and all authority became concentrated in the centralized state (see more, e.g., in Don-Yehiya 1995). Under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), the country’s premier for most of its early decades, MAPAI—the most dominant political party comprising Labor

Zionism—had been transformed into an organ of statism and *mamlachtiy'ut* (literally: statehood-ness). The very fabric of society had changed, from a voluntaristic association of idealists to a centralized, bureaucratic regime.

To Baer, once the optimistic anarchist, these changes were difficult to fathom, despite his general enthusiasm for the state. It is against this background that we must understand his diminution—and at times, even forthright criticism—of the Temple and the other central institutions of government in his narrative of the Second Commonwealth Period in *Israel Among the Nations*. The Temple, he there explained, was the vessel that mediated between the-world-below (*olam-shel-mata*) and the-world-above (*olam-shel-mala*). It was also a symbol for the nation's unity, a fact which should not be overlooked. But the people of Israel, organized into circles and communities “that lived and maintained distinctive social-religious tendencies”, did not strictly depend on the Temple for ritual and practice. In his descriptions of the relationship between the ‘people’ and the ‘government’, we see again reflected his own anarchistic position:

[The] autonomous state, as long as it existed, could serve in the eyes of the pietists and sages as an instrument for the realization of their socio-religious tendencies. And indeed, they became its severest critics once it became a secular, semi-pagan, Hellenistic state. But at the end of the day, neither the Temple nor the State served as the basis for the national-religious organization which engulfed the nation as a whole. The decisive factor in the history of the Second Commonwealth Period was that in the Land of Israel there formed a new society, which came to realize [certain] socio-religious ideals [. . .]. This Land of Israel society [*ha-hevra ha-eretz y'israelit ha-zo*] was the center, from which the life force spread to the other organs of the nation, near and far, and lay the foundations for the history of our people to this day. (Baer [1955] 1969, pp. 26–27)

A few years later, in one of those few public op-eds he wrote—published, significantly, in 1961, at the height of the so-called “Lavon Affair”, when criticism of Ben-Gurion was especially high and eventually led to his ousting—Baer was even more candid than usual about the need to look to the Second Commonwealth Period as a political and moral ideal:

The public institutions which have been reestablished in our generation are bound through deep and strong roots to our historic fate. The establishment of a restored society and of a new nation state on the soil of the homeland and on the basis of an ancient tradition—such a great event, and perhaps greater, already took place during the days of the “Second Commonwealth”: through the power of a religious inspiration, at a level which we were not fortunate enough to receive. [. . .]. We cannot today sustain our new state without the sense of responsibility, that the three-thousand-year-old history [of our people] has laid upon this present generation.

In another unusually candid moment, Baer also highlights the role of scholars—academics and intellectuals like himself, especially those whose *métier* is Jewish thought and history—in sustaining the moral character of the new state:

The academic teachers and all those whose craft is “Jewish Studies” (*hokhmat y'isra'el*) are tasked with an even greater and graver responsibility, if they do not participate in contemporary affairs and in the clarification of historical issues, which are the foundation stones for the establishment of our political life. [. . .]. By participating in the public life for the past thirty years, [. . .], by delving into the sources of our historic life, by training teachers and educators who can disseminate our views in public, through all this we have been given the right and the duty to turn to our political leaders with the demand that the glowing achievements of our generation will remain forever standing, and serve as the guiding example for future generations, and that the great political enterprise of this generation does not bring ignominy to our great political heritage. (Baer 1961)

8. Conclusions

Upon its publication, *Israel Among the Nations* garnered a moderate amount of respect in the public sphere. The City of Jerusalem, for example, bestowed upon Baer the David Yellin Prize for this book in 1956, a year or so before he was awarded the Israel Prize in Jewish Thought in 1958 alongside other luminaries such as Scholem, Dinur, Buber, the writer and Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon (1887–1970), and onetime Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog (1888–1959). One commentator, Pinchas Rosenblüth, also praised the book for its originality in *Moznaim*, the important literary journal of the Israeli Hebrew Writers Association (Rosenblüth 1956)²⁴. In scholarly circles, however, the book was ruthlessly scorned. The rabbinic scholar Ephraim Elimelech Urbach (1912–1991), for example, criticized Baer for his misreading of the ancient sources and projecting his own ideas onto the text (Urbach 1960; Urbach 1984; cf. Yuval 1998, p. 85). Others, such as professor of philosophy Jacob Fleischmann, criticized the metahistorical aspects of the book, and in particular the language, which reminded him of the mythical nationalism of Fichte and Schelling (Fleischmann 1958). Even Baer's colleagues at the Hebrew University—including Scholem, to whom Baer dedicated the study—expressed their misgivings, although they were careful to do so only in private (Barnai 2011, pp. 186–87). More recently, the contemporary Israeli historian Israel Yuval expressed Baer's failings using especially disparaging language:

Today, [Baer's] views of the Second Temple period merit little more than a polite nod. [. . .]. [But] Baer's failure was not merely academic. He was also unsuccessful in his efforts to propose a broad historical world-view that would be meaningful to the younger generation in Israel. [. . .]. At the end of his life Baer, the prophet confined to his own country, resumed his earlier role: he became a scholar walled up in his ivory tower, out of touch with the mood of his surroundings. His historiography was suited to the biography of a German immigrant who had settled in Jerusalem, but it had no bearing on the Israeli, non-European experience of pioneer-farmers who, in the meantime, had become bourgeois. (Yuval 1998, pp. 85–86)

In the 1960s and 1970s, Baer continued to publish scholarly essays on the Second Commonwealth Period, but due perhaps to the failed reception of *Israel Among the Nations*—and due, more likely, to plain political realism—his later publications generally lack the fervor and passion which characterize his earlier works. Politically, it seems that Baer made peace with the contemporary Israeli regime and the character of Israeli society. In his heart, he may have still harbored 'revolutionary', anti-statist sentiments, but outwardly, he accepted reality. In what may be considered something of a last testament, a short preface to the Hebrew translation of *Galut*—published in 1980, a mere few months before his death—he even expressed his “pride and utter joy [*simcha shle'ma*]” in the establishment of the State of Israel, and in his grandchildren's completion of their military service (Baer 1980, p. vii [n.p.]). Baer by now seemed to know that his theological–political ideas had no chance for realization in the political constellation that developed in the decades after the establishment of the state, and even more so in the 1970s and 1980s.

This view was also shared by others. By the time of his death, Baer was seen as an important and revered figure, but also as something of a man out of his time. When one reads, for example, the obituary penned by Baer's student-turned-colleague Shmuel Ettinger (1919–1988), one cannot help but sense the duality in which his younger colleagues viewed him: as a great teacher on the one hand, but as someone hopelessly outdated, on the other (Ettinger 1980). At the same time, however, we must also remember that this younger generation was itself a product of a particular time and place. The latter half of the twentieth century was a moment of triumphalism for the liberal nation state. Ideas such as Baer's, which patently challenged the reigning perspectives on the 'march of history' were seen as retrograde at best, if not outright reactionary. (In fact, not just Baer, but all founding members of the 'Jerusalem School' came under scrutiny to some extent by their students for what one scholar has called their “neo-romantic, organistic outlook [which contained from the beginning] irrational, and even totalitarian tendencies”; Gutwein 1993, p. 119). And

yet, today, as these lines are being written, the age of the liberal nation state may itself be drawing to its close. In the scholarly literature, many have recently remarked that the liberal international order seems to be giving way to new, post-liberal modes and constellations. Some have suggested that we are now passing towards a world governed by what has been termed the “civilizational state” (see, e.g., [Pabst 2019](#)). Others—perhaps more relevant to our discussion of Baer—predict that the coming age will see a resurgence of small, local communities (see, e.g., [Peters and Mitchell 2018](#)). Accordingly, Baer’s prognostications—themselves written in an age of historic revolutions and cataclysms—sound remarkably current, whereas those of his critics appear to us as quaint and even anachronistic. Perhaps this would not have surprised Baer, for it is doubtful that someone as sensitive as he was to the twists and turns of historical fate did not entertain something of the idea that his writings may still one day enjoy a revival, and even serve as a normative political program. If such a time indeed has come to pass, then perhaps this present essay could serve as something of a guide to the works of this twentieth century intellectual giant. But if not, then the least we could hope for is to restore Baer’s status as a foremost theological–political thinker of the age of Jewish revival.

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Notes

- ¹ Remarks at a meeting of *Chug Ha’Ol* on 13 July 1939, in reproduced and translated by Paul Mendes-Flohr in ([Mendes-Flohr 1991](#), p. 346) [translation modified]. I discuss this group below.
- ² The literature on the “Jerusalem School” is by now quite extensive. The definitive scholarly account in English remains ([Myers 1995](#)). I discuss the literature on this group in my doctoral dissertation: ([Ofek 2021](#), pp. 12–17, ff).
- ³ On these groups, see ([Mendes-Flohr 1991](#); [Ratzabi 2002](#)).
- ⁴ I use the designation “Second Commonwealth” rather than the more ubiquitous “Second Temple” since the former is more accepted in Hebrew (as well as by Baer himself). The word “*bayit*”, translated here as “Commonwealth” literally means “Home” or “House”. “Second Commonwealth” is used by Hebrew scholars more frequently since it is generally believed that this period lasted longer than the physical structure of Second Temple in Jerusalem. At the same time, it is also important to note that this designation diminishes the importance of the “religious” Temple in favor of other aspects of “national” sovereignty. On the meaning of these various designations and terminology, see ([Zerubavel 1995](#), p. 23, ff).
- ⁵ This book had never been translated, and all subsequent translations hereby are my own.
- ⁶ Cf. ([Cohen Skalli 2019](#)), esp. 166 onwards.
- ⁷ For more on Baer’s association with the Prussian School see ([Myers 1995](#), pp. 113–15, ff; [Ofek 2021](#), pp. 26–27). On the Prussian School more generally, see the relevant chapters in Iggers 1968.
- ⁸ Ranke’s political ideals, in the words of Georg Iggers, were “those of a moderate conservative of the Restoration period” ([Iggers 1968](#), p. 90). His immediate successors, in the main, leaned towards liberalism, favoring a constitutional state (a *Rechtstaat*), while his later successors, moved by the imperialist atmosphere of the late Wilhelmine Reich, believed rather in a strong state (a *Machtstaat*), and shifted their emphasis to *Weltpolitik* and the demands of foreign policy (*Ibid.*, pp. 93, 130; ff). The classic exploration of the relationship between German historicism and political thought is of course Meinecke’s *Weltburgertum und Nationalstaat* ([Meinecke \[1907\] 1970](#)).
- ⁹ This essay was beautifully and meticulously explored in ([Cohen Skalli 2019](#)).
- ¹⁰ This line appeared in the original Hebrew text but was omitted from the English translation. The translation of this line was my own.
- ¹¹ Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that Baer was never entirely without criticism of Ahad Ha’am. In 1930, for example, he criticized him for his “insufferable rationalism [*ratziyonalismus*]” ([Baer 1930](#), pp. 310–11). For more on the influence and reception of Ahad Ha’am among German-Jews, see, inter alia, ([Reinharz 1983](#)).
- ¹² The expression “Revival of the Hearts” [*tchiv’at ha-lev’av’ot*] appears in Ahad Ha’am’s essay “The Wrong Way” [*lo ze ha-derech*] from 1889 ([Ha’am 1922](#), [sic], p. 40). The English translation unfortunately renders this expression as mere “revival” (omitting “the hearts”).
- ¹³ See also Ahad Ha’am’s essay “The Negation of the Diaspora” [*sheli’lat ha-galut*] (1909), which seems not to have been translated into English.

- 14 For more on the “‘Jerusalem’ versus ‘Yavneh’” dichotomy, see (Luz 2003, pp. 52–56).
- 15 This section also echoes the poet Shaul Tchernichovsky’s famous line from the poem “Before the Statue of Apollo” (1899), in which he describes how the rabbis sought to quell the true, vital aspects of Judaism by “strapping Him [i.e., the Hebrew God, in His full, original glory] in phylacteries” (my translation). On the influence of the Babylonian Talmud on medieval Jews, see (Marcus 2010, p. 248).
- 16 It should be noted that the expression “extreme liberalism” was not chosen arbitrarily. In the 1945 Hebrew edition of the book, by contrast, the expression used was “radical conclusion[s]” (*maskanatam ha-kitson’it*), (Baer 1945, vol. I, p. 68). In other words, Baer’s critique seems to have *intensified* over the years rather than abetted.
- 17 Usually translated as *History of the Second Temple* (*Historiyah shel ha-Bayit ha-Sheni*).
- 18 For a helpful summary of Klausner’s views on this period and their relation to Zionism, see (Berger 2011).
- 19 For more on the scholarly interpretations of the Second Commonwealth Period in modern Israel, see (Schafier 1973).
- 20 It should be noted that Klausner also gave some attention to the Jewish *hassidim* and their lifestyle (see Berger 2011, p. 320); the difference lies primarily in the general emphasis and direction of the work. Myers also points to differences between Baer and Klausner, but does not develop this point (Myers 1995, p. 126).
- 21 For more on Buber’s religious anarchism, see (Brody 2018; Ratzabi 2011). See also (Shapira 2015, pp. 325–85).
- 22 On this transition between pre- and post-independence in the period of decolonization, see the excellent essay by (Geertz 1973).
- 23 For more on the crisis of Israel in the 1950s, see (Ben Dov 1959; Don-Yehiya 1995, p. 185, ff).
- 24 It should be noted, however, that Rosenblüth somewhat mitigated his former enthusiasm in an essay published in English two decades later: (Rosenblüth 1977).

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