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Between Peretz Smolenskin and Ahad Ha'am: The Forgotten Historiography of the Jewish National Movement Hibbat Zion

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Abstract

When we study the Jewish-national historiography of the last quarter of the 19th century, there is a tendency to pass directly from Smolenskin's doctrine to the Zionist-cultural approach of Ahad Ha'am and his students, omitting the works written in between. However, even before the emergence of Ahad Ha'am as a cultural icon in the Jewish national movement, some Hibbat Zion activists engaged in Hebrew cultural activities directed at shaping national Jewish consciousness. The main figures in this trend were Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz and Avraham Shalom Friedberg. Their world view was based on education that advocated proto-nationalism: Jewish solidarity, love of the Hebrew language, promoting Hebrew newspapers, and preserving Jewish tradition. To this they added settlement in Eretz Israel as a solution for the harsh conditions of the Jews in Russia. They edited literary and scientific collections in Hebrew and Jewish historiography and wrote historical monographs and biographies. In this way, they sought to introduce national historical protagonists instead of the Hasskala's pantheon of historical characters to vividly illuminate periods of historical "golden ages" suited to the national ideology and teach the lesson of historical history—that Hibbat Zion is the solution to the plight of Jews and Judaism.

Keywords: collective memory; nation-building; national historiography; pantheon of heroes; national golden ages

Introduction

In recent decades the study of modern Jewish historiography has occupied scholars of Jewish history, particularly in the wake of the research carried out by Ismar Schorsch in the 1980s. Since then, many studies have been published on the various schools of modern Jewish historical writing (Reuven 1993; Schorsch 1994; Myers 1995; Brenner 2010; Conforti 2006; Yedidya 2013).

In his book *Hasskalah and History*, Shmuel Feiner specifies the turning point in the consciousness of the past among scholars from Eastern Europe in the last decades of the 19th century—the transition from *Hasskalah* (Enlightened) history to national history. This defining moment occurred around the time of the pogroms in the southern part of the Russian Pale of Settlement and the growth of the national Jewish movement *Hibbat Zion*. Its progenitor was the writer and thinker Peretz Smolenskin (1842–1885), who as early as the 1870s criticized Berlin *Hasskalah* and its heritage and undermined its conception and its pantheon of historical heroes. Smolenskin opposed the optimistic "new age" terminology and emphasized the complexity of modernity. He outlined the basic principles of the study of national history, centered on the Jewish people and its national wealth: the Hebrew language, the Jewish religion, and the national consciousness that

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overrode the loss of territory and sovereignty. According to Smolenskin, such a study would reveal the distinctiveness of national history, the national unity that extended beyond territorial dispersal, and the historical continuity that had endured beyond the vicissitudes of time. He viewed Jewish history as an arena of international struggle for cosmopolitan assimilation and believed that the Berlin *Hasskalah* belonged to the latter. He aimed his arrows at Moses Mendelssohn, who was portrayed in the *Maskilim's* version of the past as the father of the movement and its ultimate success. That same personage had such assimilationist tendencies that his descendants converted. This targeted attack provoked the anger of the Russian intellectuals, who clung to the enlightened picture of the past and the image of its founding father (Feiner 2002, 317–340; Conforti 2019, 32–56).

Although Smolenskin influenced *Hibbat Zion*, he was not one of its leaders or primary activists, and he died three months after its founding conference in the city of Katowice, in the fall of 1884. Jewish scholars and thinkers who belonged to *Hibbat Zion* engaged in historical writing and editing journals for *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as well as promoting national Hebrew cultural writing. They asked the same questions raised by Smolenskin about the inherent or imagined tension between their *Hasskalah* identity and national identity and the historical personalities and movements that the national Jewish movement should either adopt or reject. The most famous of these thinkers was Asher Ginzburg (Ahad Ha'Am).

When we study the cultural nationalism and Jewish-national historiography of the last quarter of the 19th century, there is a tendency to pass directly from Smolenskin's doctrine to the Zionist-cultural approach of Ahad Ha'am and his students, on one hand, and Shimon Dubnov's nationalistic writings in the Diaspora, on the other, omitting the works written in between (Conforti 2006, 80–92; Nathans 2010, 17).¹ Around the time of the Mandate Period and the establishment of the State of Israel, there are comprehensive studies dealing with Zionist historical writing (Myers 1995; Conforti 2006). Thus, our understanding of the historiography of the *Hibbat Zion* period remains incomplete.

The Turn Toward History in the Time of Hibbat Zion

In his seminal research on the formation of national movements among the smaller European nations, Miroslav Hroch distinguished three stages in the development of the national movements of nondominant ethnic groups. Phase A is purely cultural, involving a few scholars who research the cultural, linguistic, social, and historical attributes of the ethnic group to raise awareness of its uniqueness. Phase B is the agitation phase, when a new range of activists emerges and the movement begins to acquire a social character and political program. Phase C is the period of mass mobilization in which the movement is politically diverse and succeeds in establishing a nation state (Hroch 1985). Hroch identified the cultural phase of the evolution of the Jewish national movement with the *Haskalah*, and the phase of national agitation with *Hibbat Zion*. He pointed out that the transition between the stages was also the result of a crisis in the old system of values and identities, although the shaping of national identity was based on extraordinarily strong, religiously based collective memory (Hroch 1998). However, even during the agitation phase, the cultural phase continued and even intensified, according to John Breuilly's general criticism of Hroch's arbitrary dating of each phase (Breuilly 1986). The cultural activity at this stage centered around national historiography, alongside the revival of the national language.

Modern historiography emerged in the 19th century along with the rise of national movements in Europe (Berend 2003). These attributed a central role to the collective past to mobilize the masses for their political goals. At the same time, there arose a spontaneous popular aspiration for collective identity in light of universal trends that were blurring the ethnic uniqueness expressed by reverting to the past (Lawrence 2013). From its very inception, the Jewish National Movement turned to the collective past to advance its goals in the present.

Even before the emergence of Ahad Ha'am as a cultural and political icon in the Jewish national movement, some *Hibbat Zion* activists engaged in Hebrew cultural activities directed at shaping national Jewish consciousness, as a necessary and complementary process to their settlement movement. They edited literary and scientific collections in Hebrew and Jewish historiography, they wrote historical monographs and biographies, historical novels, and literary adaptations of Aggadic (legendary) literature, expanding the Hebrew language and even translating world literary masterpieces into Hebrew. In this way they sought to introduce national historical protagonists instead of the *Hasskalah's* pantheon of historical characters to vividly illuminate periods of historical "golden ages" suited to the national ideology, to reinterpret Jewish holidays and festivals, to elevate the national ethos, and to teach the lesson of historical history—that *Hibbat Zion* is the solution to the plight of Jews and Judaism.

They were influenced to some extent by Smolenskin, and when Ahad Ha'Am appeared they sought to cooperate with him in the cultural sphere, but they did not accept his leadership. They disagreed with him in matters of religion, continuing to uphold practical Zionism along with notable cultural endeavors. The most prominent of them was Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz (1845–1910).

Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz was born in Russia in 1845. He received his Hebrew and Talmudic education from his father and grandfather, and from 1859 to 1863 he studied in the yeshiva of Rabbi Jacob Barit. He was an autodidact who mastered several languages, including German, Polish, Russian, and French, and joined the Russian circles of *maskilim* in the late 1860s. Like Samuel Joseph Finn, he was a traditional *maskil*. During the 1870s, he contributed to the *Hamaggid* and *Hatzefira* Hebrew newspapers. In 1874, he settled in Warsaw, where, in the 1880s, he became one of the founders and leaders of the *Hovevei Zion* movement. He was also the editor of *Knesset Israel* (1886–1888), the only yearbook that completely identified with *Hibbat Zion*, and in 1895 he published his history of the exiled Spanish Jews and their literature, *Moza'e Golah*. His magnum opus was a translation and adaptation of *Geschichte der Juden* (the History of the Jews), a series of books by the noted Jewish German historian Zvi Graetz. He entitled this work, on which he labored from 1888 to 1899, *Divre ha-Yamim li-Bene Yisrael*. In addition, he authored several biographies of prominent Jewish figures of the new age, among them Adolphe Crémieux (1880), Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1886), Leopold Zunz (1896), Zechariah Frankel (1898), and Josel von Rosheim (1902) (Meisel 1943).

The writings of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz, like those of Peretz Smolenskin, mark the move from Maskilic writing to nationalist writing. They signify a change in the agenda of an eastern European group of intellectuals engaged in repairing the shortcomings of Jewish society to the establishment of a Jewish nationalist movement focused on the settlement of Eretz Israel. Rabinowitz was the first nationalistic intellectual to turn to significant historiography.

Avraham Shalom Friedberg (1838–1902), who was closely associated with Rabinowitz, was also involved in historical writing. He was born in Grodno and received a religious education, but from the age of 16 he began to explore the boundaries of his hometown. He taught himself secular studies and foreign languages, while making a living as a watchman. At the age of 20 he befriended the writer Avraham Mapu and began to engage in writing himself. After the "storms in the Negev," he joined *Hibbat Zion*, and in 1883 he was appointed deputy editor of *Hamelitz* in St. Petersburg. In 1886, he moved to Warsaw to serve as deputy editor of *Hatzefira* (Menda-Levy 2008). There he joined forces with Rabinowitz and helped him to edit *Knesset Israel*. Friedberg regarded Rabinowitz as fully sharing in his nationalist worldview and the only one among *Hovevei Zion* who truly understood him. In a letter written in 1885, he confessed, "You are the only one I can consult with; I will not reveal my heart to any other person in the world," adding that in his opinion, "[a]mong all *Hovevei Zion*, there is no one who gives such excellent advice as you."²

Like Rabinowitz he wrote for the Hebrew newspapers and contributed to their support of *Hibbat Zion*. He also published important articles in *Knesset Israel*. He wrote historical monographs (a history of the Jews in Spain) and historical biographies (on Avraham Mapu and Moses

Montefiore) and translated scientific studies about German Jewry (the book by Moritz Guedemann, a student of Zechariah Frankel and Zvi Graetz, on Ashkenazi Jews in the Middle Ages), but he was also deeply involved in translating into Hebrew and adapting historical novels. His great work *Memoirs of the House of David* presented a national translation and adaptation of the book *Geheimnisse der Juden* by the German Jewish writer Hermann Reckendorf that was written in the context of the German-Jewish historical novel. This essay is a comprehensive historiographical enterprise from the days of the Return to Zion to the Berlin *Hasskalah*. Although written in the form of a novel, it preserves the historical continuum and dwells on the historical background of each period (Ben-Ari 1997, 187–242). Therefore, it should also be examined as part of the historiography of the period.

In a departure from his usual literary-fictional work, in a letter to Jacob Dinezohn in 1893, Friedberg insisted that this essay is of historiographic value, not a novel for youth, and that it was essentially in line with his own thinking rather than that of Reckendorf:

Two aspects of this work disturb me—the publishers wanted to dedicate it “to youth” and this is untrue—its content it is more suited to a book of logic for scholars than for children. They also attributed it to the author, the German Reckendorf, and by so doing they misled the readers into thinking that these stories are all copied from the German, while most of the readers are similar to me. For my part, I would completely remove Reckendorf - because apart from the fact that most of his stories are tasteless, they are also disgusting, due to the missionary smell that emanates from them. (Friedberg 1899a, 140)

Another scholar who collaborated with Rabinowitz was the Orthodox historian Ze'ev Jawitz (1847–1924), whose first historiographic work, *The Tower of the Century* (1886), was published with the encouragement and editorship of Rabinowitz (Yedidya 2021). Jawitz also assisted in editing the *Knesset Israel* yearbook. However, a few years later Rabinowitz began to disapprove of Jawitz's Orthodox writing, claiming that he was “putting in too much salt” (Meisel 1943).

These three scholars lived in Warsaw (actually, they were only there at the same time during 1886–87), and they were all involved in editing the *Knesset Israel* yearbook (1886–88) and its accompanying articles. *Hovevei Zion* in Warsaw was more traditional than their colleagues in Odessa. Their world view was more evolutionary than that of Ahad Ha'am and his followers. Therefore, understanding their historiography is necessary to paint a comprehensive picture of the historiography of that period.

***Knesset Israel*—The Synthesis of *Hasskalah* and Nationalism**

Rabinowitz regarded himself as primarily a lover of Zion as well as a Zionist—both practical and spiritual. He supported the new settlement of Jews in the Land of Israel and Hebrew cultural creation in the spirit of nationalism. To promote the spiritual leanings of *Hibbat Zion*, he initiated and edited the *Yearbook of Knesset Israel* (1–3, 1886–1888), designing it in a distinctly nationalistic format. In a letter to Aharon Kaminka around that time he stated, with reference to *Knesset Israel*, “all its articles go in one direction, to arouse and inspire true love for our nation, and for the first time one can see in print everything about the *Yishuv* and the affairs of the nation gathered together in one place.”³ This is in stark contrast to the two older yearbooks published at the time in Poland: *HaKerem*, edited by Eliezer Atlas, and *HeAssif*, edited by Nachum Sokolov, which did not support *Hibbat Zion*. In the introduction to the first issue of *Knesset Israel*, Rabinowitz declared that the purpose of the yearbook was to promote the spiritual renewal of the Jewish people: “The objective of *Knesset Israel* is to bring to light the greatest of all our desires, to unite all the corners of the nation in the quest for a true renewal of spirit among us, a spirit of our own will to find our salvation within us” (Rabinowitz 1886a, 16). All this would be achieved by way of a synthesis between national values and the basic values of human enlightenment, love of man, and good citizenship “because we will

unite knowledge of the world and Hebrew self-knowledge, the love of humanity, the love of Zion, the love of Jerusalem, and the duty of a citizen to the nation and the state (16).” For him, love for Zion was not an alternative to *Hasskalah* but its complement. The correct way was a combination of both:

We faithfully declare that all those who support Zion are also citizens who are loyal to their country and their homeland. They are the truly enlightened ones, those who make the sentence: *Homo sum et nihil humanum a me alienum* (I am a man and everything that concerns humanity is not alien to me) compatible with the sentence upheld by all those who have maintained peace with us, the truly enlightened: *Judaeus sum et nihil Judaicum a me alienum puto* (I am a Jew and everything that pertains to Judaism is not alien to me). These are the two rules that make us Jews, and we observe them and live by them in all the scattered lands of our Diaspora. (1886a, 16)

The combination proposed by Rabinowitz covers every aspect of life. It is dissimilar from the separation suggested by Y. L. Gordon in his 1863 poem *Hakitzza Ami* (Awake O my Nation), mistakenly attributed to Mendelssohn, who advocated that one should “be a man outside and a Jew at home” (Bacon 1995, 188). Rabinowitz thus did not support the post-*Hasskalah* approach, according to which *Hasskalah* and nationalism are mutually exclusive. He believed in a combination of both.⁴ The emphasis on the synthesis between nationalism and *Hasskalah* was also a response to the critics of *Hibbat Zion*, led by Gordon, for abandoning *Hasskalah* in favor of nationalism. This is also evident in another letter that Rabinowitz sent to Kaminka:

Know that the fundamental essence of the *Knesset* was created only to prove to our dissenters that they lied when they said that we are turning the hearts of the people back from progress. Inculcating the essence of European culture on the soil of Eretz Israel is holy work for the benefit of the nation and its existence.⁵

The trend indicated by Rabinowitz in his letter, which represents liberal nationalism, is reminiscent of the view of Gordon, who came out against Orthodox nationalism. But in contrast to Gordon, who was waging war against the rule of the rabbis as a condition for the success of Zionism, Rabinowitz, like Lilienblum, sought to attain cooperation and unity in the ranks (Feiner 2004, 272–278). Rabinowitz also advocated “true *Hasskalah*” and worked for moderate *Hasskalah* in Eastern Europe during the time of Alexander II, which he supported before joining *Hibbat Zion*. Apart from the values it incorporated, the proposed combination effectively made any division into parties redundant; in the opinion of Rabinowitz, “We are far from any splits in Israel and it is not our desire to be distinguished among the names that have recently appeared in our literature” (Rabinowitz 1886a), strengthening the long-awaited national unity.

This unity also required a positive attitude toward tradition, in contrast to the secular approach of *Ahad Ha’am*, which, according to Rabinowitz, damages national unity (Zipperstein 1993, 108–112). Rabinowitz called *Ahad Ha’am*’s method “the love of Zion, a daughter without religion” and despaired of her husband, who nullifies the soul of Israel, beginning with the Torah.”⁶ Although Rabinowitz joined the Order of Bnei Moshe because he identified with its cultural goals (Salmon 2013, 231–246), he fought from within for the principle of upholding tradition. At the assembly held in the summer of 1890, Rabinowitz demanded “the imposition of well-known religious duties on the members,” such as observing the Sabbath, maintaining the laws of kashrut, and family purity (Meisel 1943, 74).

Rabinowitz regarded himself and the *Hovevei Zion* movement as pursuing the middle ground between two extremes of the Jewish people. He labeled the *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox) who shunned modernity *Ha’omdim*, or “those who stand still,” while members of the Reform Movement and radical *Maskilim* he called *Hameharsim*, or “the destroyers.” But those who followed his path and

that of his moderate, nationalistic intellectual colleagues, those who held fast to the value of national unity, he termed *Haholchim*, “those who go forth.” He believed that only in this way could the Jewish people grow and flourish. Any other path would lead to dissolution and assimilation.

In a letter he wrote to Nahum Slouschz, when he first published *Knesset Israel*, he noted that the insert calling on Jewish writers to contribute an article to the yearbook “should be sent to every German rabbi, and not only rabbis but also to scholars, except for those of the Reform movement.”⁷

Like Rabinowitz, Friedberg regarded himself as pursuing the middle ground between *Haredim* and radical *Masskilim*, as he wrote in one of his articles,

I am not talking about our frozen, mummified, immutable fossils from ancient times, or the ravages of time and its immovable upheavals; I’m not even talking about our traitors, on whom the sun of *Hasskalah* almost shone, its rays almost reaching the ghetto. They breached a gate and those who passed through it on the road will never return. [...] I speak of human beings like us, the intermediate ones who walk the middle path, those who stand among their people and the world and gave their hearts to the world. (Friedberg 1899b, 129)

Like Smolenskin, Rabinowitz regarded the study of Jewish history as a national asset of the first order and gave it pride of place in his yearbook. “And yet we have not lost sight of the greatest thing, which is the soul of the nation, imparting hope and life for the former generations and generations to come, that is the opinion of our time” (Rabinowitz 1886a, 18). Rabinowitz played up the biographical aspect to promote the national worldview of *Hibbat Zion* by turning to the past and making it accessible:

When we embarked on this task, we endeavored to present in *Knesset Israel* the lives of praiseworthy people both from past generations and those living among us today, who bear the flag of pure nationalism (not the fanatical and fake banner that is not the flag of Israel but that of its enemies), the nationalism that was taught according to our understanding, the love that is loyal to our people, expressing its feelings not with words but with actions. We have shown that the bearers of our flag lived and there will be many activists among us to serve [...] an example [...] how to unite and combine the love of Torah and love of the nation in one and the same way (19).

As an editor, Rabinowitz hewed to the middle path between history and memory: between history, the belief in knowing the past for its own sake, and memory, the belief in strengthening the bond of the group, which in this context meant establishing its national identity. Although some scholars from the school of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora disagree on the precise division between “objective history” and “manipulative memory,” all agree that there is still a gap between these spheres (Yerushalmi 1982; Nora 1996).⁸ Whereas Rabinowitz turned to the past to find justification for the present rather than to know “what actually happened,” he also availed himself of the research of professional historians such as Avraham Eliyahu Harkavi and Zvi Graetz.

The Pantheon of Heroes of *Hibbat Zion*

Like many modern ideological movements, *Hibbat Zion* scholars also sought to construct a pantheon of historical heroes to legitimize its new message and to attract many to join its ranks.

In fact, Rabinowitz was proposing a new pantheon of heroes for the *Hibbat Zion* movement, made up of exemplary figures from the past who believed in and even implemented national ideas, at least according to his interpretation. On one hand, this is similar to what the intellectuals of national movements in Europe were doing in the 19th century (Smith 2003, 166–189) and, on the other hand, what Isaac Euchel and his colleagues had been doing for the *Hasskalah* movement in the German-speaking regions in the last decades of the 18th century when they followed the path of

enlightened people in Western Europe and set up their own pantheon of heroes to serve as a model for the values of *Hasskalah*, headed by Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) as the role model from the distant past and Moshe ben Menachem (Mendelssohn) as the founding father who was presented as the direct successor of Maimonides (Feiner 2002, 50–60). Thus, the *Mishne Torah* of Maimonides was presented at one and the same time as a critique of Talmudic casuistry and the symbol of a legal codex characterized by rational thinking, methodicalness, and exemplary order and the “harmony between religion and reason.” His book *Moreh Nevuchim* was presented as a synthesis between Judaism and general philosophy, bringing Judaism out of its restrictions into the realm of external culture. Scholars from the Sephardic Diaspora also entered the pantheon of heroes of the *Hasskalah* movement in German-speaking areas. They combined Torah knowledge with a general knowledge and cultivated friendships with Christian scholars. Among them were Don Yitzhak Abarbanel, Azaria Di-Rossi, Yitzhak Orobio Di Castro, and Manasseh Ben Israel.

Rabinowitz and his colleagues were beginning to construct the historical pantheon of Zionist heroes. Just as the *Hasskalah* movement placed at the head of their pantheon an exemplary figure from the distant past as well as one from recent times, so too did Rabinowitz and his colleagues in the early years of their movement. Following Luzzato, who lauded Rabbi Yehuda Halevi as the ideal of original Jewish creativity in the Middle Ages, instead of the *Hasskalah* movement’s adoption of Maimonides (Yedidya 2009),⁹ Rabinowitz and Friedberg chose Halevi, whom Rabinowitz called “the national poet” and “the great patriot,”¹⁰ as the finest example of a national Jewish philosopher and poet “whose heart was for Zion but who also excelled in his work for the common good” (Rabinowitz 1886b, 36). They did this by publishing Friedberg’s version of a lecture given by the Russian-Jewish historian Avraham Eliyahu Harkavi in St. Petersburg in March 1881. In his lecture, Harkavi extolled Halevi “because justice and reason, pure fear of God and intense national love were combined in him and were not separate” (Friedberg 1886, 83). He ended the article with the following words, which were added to the lecture:

We will yet see that the spirit of the Castilian poet is the spirit of the Hebrew nation that he will revive, and therefore he and his people Israel, whom he loved, also remain eternal. His wondrous poetry will continue forever, like a spring of living water, because it originates from the depths of the source of Israel, which will never fail, among the people whose spirit and heart will never pass away. (87–88)

Friedberg continued to cultivate Halevi’s exceptional national image in his historical work. In his book *Korot HaYehudim B’Sfarad*, he portrayed him as the ultimate national historical hero, who seamlessly embodied Torah and wisdom, love of the nation, and the demand for Zion:

Following the great men of our people who lived in that noble and enlightened period, we come to the special one whose name and memory are inscribed in our soul—the national scholar and poet, Rabbi Yehuda ben Rabbi Shmuel Halevi, a man of God who pleased the Almighty, whose spirit rested upon him and raised him above all other poets in the lands of our exile; A soul who ‘God’s kiss sent to earth’ and with a kiss God gathered him to Him; Torah, wisdom and poetry adorned his head like a crown. All of this he dedicated to his God, his people and the holy country that he loved. (Friedberg 1893, 54–55)

According to him, Halevi’s poetry expressed the hidden yearning buried in the depths of Jewish national consciousness that illuminated the path of *Hovevei Zion* for every generation. “It is true that a true poet is the soul of his people, and with his subtle feeling he sees from afar what the people did not know in his time. [...] One idea arose in him which let him shine from the dawning of the sun—the idea of Israel’s return to the land of their forefathers” (Friedberg 1893, 56). This inspired *Baaley Hatosafot* to make their way to Eretz Israel in the 13th century. “Rabbi Yehuda Halevi’s poems to Jerusalem expressed his heart’s desire, and his journey there at the end of his life showed

them the way to the Holy Land, and more than three hundred rabbis from France and England made their way there” (79).

Friedberg ended by describing him as a fusion of intellectual and nationalistic values, “where purity of heart and holiness of soul met and the love of man and the love of the land were united (Friedberg 1893, 57).” His corresponding description of Maimonides as “the greatest and most respected in Torah and wisdom” (68) emphasized his quantitative advantage over others but did not attribute to him the same qualitative advantage he ascribed to Halevi. This contrasts with Graetz, who, in the wake of the *Hasskalah* movement, regarded Maimonides as the ultimate hero, possessed of unique virtues:

Maimonides appeared, and became the prop of the unity of Judaism, the focus for all the communities in the East and the West, a man whose decisions as rabbinical authority were final. [...] He was spiritual king of the Jews, to whom the most important leaders cheerfully submitted. (Graetz 1894, 264)¹¹

Rabinowitz also discussed Halevi in the fourth volume of his translation of Graetz’s *History of the Jews*, which was published in 1895. Graetz himself had already described Halevi as an extraordinary poet and philosopher who reflected the soul of his people: “Yehuda Halevi was the spiritualized image of the race of Israel, conscious of itself, seeking to display itself, in its past and in its future, in an intellectual and artistic form” (Graetz 1894, 140).¹²

He maintained that the Spanish people should include him in the pantheon of their intellectuals, just as the Jews had done. Not satisfied with Graetz’s work on Halevi, Rabinowitz added some quotations from his letters and a commentary that further glorifies his character. For example, at the beginning of the chapter, he expanded on the following sentence “Surrounded by light he was sent from heaven, and during his life on earth the dust of the earth was not seen,” as follows:

Supreme Providence permitted Yehuda the choice to be an angel clothed with perfection and light, to walk among the people on earth and influence them with an abundance of light; But in all the days that his feet trod the earth, none of the dirt and filth of the world clung to him. When his soul departed from the ugly world, its return was worthy and clean of every trace of reproach. (Graetz 1895, 145)

At the end of the chapter he added, in the spirit of the ideology of *Hibbat Zion*, “[t]he Jewish nation and the Land of Israel were values close to Yehuda Halevi’s heart and soul, and therefore he and no one else represents the nation in appearance and demeanor, and in every vision of its heart, both in the past and in the days of its creation” (Graetz 1895, 181).

Rabinowitz and his colleagues regarded Moshe Montefiore (1784–1885) as a founding father (Green 2010). In the last year of his life, on the eve of the Katowice Conference Rabinowitz ensured that Montefiore, whose centenary is celebrated in Jewish communities around the world, would remain the forefront of *Hovevei Zion*’s activity. He proposed calling the settlement enterprise in the Land of Israel *Mazkeret Moshe* (remembrance of Moses) and distributing his picture to the general public along with a summons for assistance for this enterprise. He also suggested offering a collective blessing from the Jewish people to Montefiore on his birthday—a blessing inscribed in calligraphy, on parchment, signed by the leaders and dignitaries of Jewish communities around the world. He also founded the Ohel Moshe Synagogue in Warsaw in Montefiore’s honor, which served as a center for *Hovevei Zion* (Meisel 1943, 36–41).

In the *Hamelitz* newspaper Friedberg dedicated a special article to Montefiore on the occasion of his hundredth birthday, describing him as the ultimate national Jewish role model for recent generations, one who charted the way for *Hovevei Zion*. He noted that his hand was open to everyone who asks for help “like the sun of righteousness that shines on the whole universe.” And he was a unique figure who united within himself the love of man and the love of Israel, his religion,

and his country. “There has never been in Israel a man like Moses, who embodied all the virtues which exalt man and elevate him to the height of the sons of gods—above all, his love for his religion and his faith, and his kindness to his people and his homeland, which he loved” (Friedberg 1899a, 89). He emphasized his preservation of tradition, which was an expression of his deep connection with his people, and the fact that he married an Ashkenazi woman, despite being a member of a respectable Sephardic family, clearly indicated his concept of national unity. He saw him as the founding father of the modern-day Yishuv (settlement) of Eretz Israel, imbued with the idea of turning it into a vibrant Jewish center:

As much as he loved his people, he loved his homeland even more. His soul’s desire was for the Holy Land. He traveled there seven times, and each time he sowed righteousness. His fruit was the holiness of praise to G-d and his country. He laid the exalted foundation for the resettlement of Eretz Israel, and he also had the privilege of seeing his good thoughts come to fruition, because many awakened and were willing to go up to the land of their forefathers and turn their efforts towards reviving the holy dust to build up the land from its ruins and raise up its remains. (90–91)

Friedberg called on all those who, in order to pursue success in the countries in which they live deny their Jewish nationality, to take an example from Montefiore, who reached the pinnacle of success and respect in Britain despite maintaining his faith and his deep attachment to his people and Eretz Israel. Finally, he declared that, although Montefiore had no descendants, “we are all your sons. Our brothers, *Hovevei Zion* together, are your descendants who will be called by your name” (93).

Montefiore, who died the year before the first issue of *Knesset Israel* was published, was praised by Ze’ev Jawitz in his article *Migdal HaMeah* (the Century Tower). The article, a compilation of Jewish history from the last century that opens with the death of Mendelssohn, lauds Montefiore who at one and the same time heralded and represented the old-new concept of *Hibbat Zion*. Montefiore was crowned with the title Father of Unity in Israel (Jawitz 1886, 246), and he was upheld as the Godfearing model of universal Jewish brotherhood, love of Torah, sanctification of Hashem in the eyes of the nations, and a burning, practical love of Zion. The awakening of national sentiment and the demand for settlement in Eretz Israel, which Montefiore predicted, embodied the triumph of Judaism over European culture, of nationalism and tradition over imitation and assimilation.

Actually, Rabinowitz, Friedberg, and Jawitz followed David Gordon, who in an article described Montefiore as central to the formation of national Jewish unity, a precondition for national redemption (Gordon 1863, 167).

Montefiore was no regular philanthropist, like the Rothschild family. During the second part of his life, Montefiore functioned like the independent Jewish organizations until the end of the 18th century, maintaining contact with the Jewish Diaspora. His image became the symbol of Jewish solidarity; he was viewed as a link between Jews of Western Europe and those of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, between secular and religious, and between Jews in Eretz Israel and those in the diaspora (Bartal 1994, 209–218).

His frequent visits to the Land of Israel, which were widely reported, had a great influence on his public image and inspired *Hovevei Zion*. However, he did not see eye to eye with the harbingers of Zionism and the members of *Hibbat Zion* on a practical level. He rejected the requests of Rabbis Kalischer and Alkalai for cooperation, nor did he particularly welcome the initiatives of the leaders of *Hibbat Zion*. Rabinowitz and his colleagues had elevated Montefiore to the position of founding father of the movement, just as Isaac Euchel, a century earlier, had elevated the figure of Moses Mendelssohn to be the father of the *Hasskalah* movement, even though the practical initiative and agenda of the Maskilim did not come from him and were only to a certain extent inspired by him (Feiner 1995).

Another figure that Rabinowitz regarded as a role model was Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874) of Thorn (Myers 2003). When Rabinowitz added a biographical section to *Petah Devar*, he cited Kalischer as an example of a “model for rabbis of Israel [...] to combine love of the Torah and love of the Jewish people in perfect unity” (Rabinowitz 1886a, 19). In another edition he devoted an article to him entitled *Rishon Letzion*, with the subheading “First and Foremost among Hovevei Zion” (Rabinowitz 1886c, 837). He followed this up with “the most honorable of the ten leading Hovevei Zion.” Ever-faithful to this practical touchstone, Rabinowitz portrayed Rabbi Kalischer not only as a scholar and national philosopher but also as a “man of many deeds who feels the pain of his people and hastens to provide succor, well-being, and salvation” (838).” He praised his work in the Yishuv of Eretz Israel, his firm stand against his rabbinical critics, and his influence on the *Kol Yisrael Haverim* [Alliance Israélite Universelle] Society (Kiach) for the establishment of the Mikveh Israel agricultural school (843). He also praised his charitable qualities, his great dedication to his mission, and the fact that he “never profited from the Torah, nor did he use it for his own gain. For forty years he instructed the Adat Yeshurun in Thorn for free, supporting himself with very little from the trading house in which his wife was employed” (841).

Rabinowitz described Kalischer as the “first among *Hovevei Zion*” rather than a “harbinger” as Zionist writers and historians described him in the 20th century. It seems that he believed he had some degree of influence on the movement from an ideological and practical point of view but that he was not part of a wider historical phenomenon as others did when they coined the term “harbingers of Zionism.”

National Golden Ages in the Historiography of *Hibbat Zion*

Anthony Smith, the scholar of modern nationalism, insisted on the importance of mobilizing the golden age of ethnic groups to structure the history and consciousness of national identity. The golden age, whether real or mythical, teaches about the national potential and motivates the attempt to realize it. A golden age can be a heroic era of political and military prosperity or a period of extraordinary creativity and sometimes even a period of mutual self-sacrifice, even if it is followed by failure (Smith 2003, 174–175). Intellectuals of national movements “rediscovered the past” which, according to their understanding, expressed the nation’s authenticity, and looked forward to its revival. “The golden ages began to provide ‘maps’ of the road to national goals and ‘proper measurements’ for the tasks that are necessary to conduct themselves on that auspicious path, through which the members of the community could realize their authentic being” (217). The sages saw the era of David and Solomon, with the unity of the tribes and its political success, as the golden age of Jewish history and called it *sihara b’shlemuta* [full moon]. The Jewish messianic vision regards the kingdom of the House of David as the longed-for political model. Ze’ev Jawitz, the national Orthodox historian, adopted the view of the sages. In his work *Toledot Israel*, he described the period of King David as a national-religious golden age. A large portion of the second volume is devoted to the kingdom of David. Jawitz portrayed him an enlightened monarch who established a modern bureaucratic system, was opposed to granting excessive power to the military, ensured the independence of the courts, and remained at all times attuned to the needs of the people (Jawitz 1954, 20–23). Jawitz describes the life of the Israelites, their agriculture, crafts, clothes, home utensils and food, aesthetics and hygiene, their love of freedom, their hospitality, their heroism, their love of the nation and tribal loyalty, their holidays and days of mourning, and their respect for the Torah, the prophets, and the priests (34–58). He clearly considers this to be the model for the future Jewish state.

Zionist historians recalled the Jewish revolts against the Seleucid and Roman empires to bring historical justification for the principle of collective sacrifice for political freedom (Klausner 1944). The Haskalah movement and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* pointed to the Jews in Spain under Muslim rule as a Jewish golden age, which, although it was not national in the political sense, was what historian Ismar Schorsch called “the myth of Spanish supremacy.” It was an era of prosperity

and well-being, extensive and diverse intellectual creation, philosophical thinking, appreciation of the aesthetic, cultural openness, and integration into the surrounding environment (Schorsch 1994, 71–92).

Friedberg adopted a national version of the myth of Spanish superiority. In his work *The Jews in Spain* (1893), which was written to mark the 400th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain (1492–1892), he claimed that although the Jews of Spain were influenced by the Arab philosophy and poetry of their neighbors, this did not lead to assimilation into the surrounding society and the loss of their national identity but to a synthesis between Judaism and high culture, which enhanced the Jewish faith and the national Hebrew language:

Their spirit soared on the wings of poetry alongside that of their Christian neighbors, but in this they differed from them, because they (the Christians) assimilated with the Arabs to the extent that they forsook their language, abandoned the books of their religion, and were even ashamed of their faith. Whereas the Jews, as their education increased, so too did their love for their sacred language and the faith of their ancestors. They also had the Arabic culture which they loved, like a pleasant garden from which they plucked choice flowers and placed them in sacred vessels, to glorify their national heritage and renew its days as of old. And so they prospered until in the extent of their Torah and wisdom they surpassed the sages of their brethren in Babylon. For centuries they shed their light over all their people who dwelt in darkness in lands both near and far. (Friedberg 1893, 27)

When writing about the notable Jews in Spain, he emphasized their deep attachment to the Land of Israel, as we saw with Yehuda Halevi, whom he regarded as the harbinger of *Hibbat Zion*. He wrote of the poet Shlomo Ibn Gavirol that “Zion was the delight of his heart and his nation—the beloved of his soul” (Friedberg 1893, 35). He described Nachmanides as the successor of Halevi in his yearnings for the Land of Israel and the obligation to fulfill them:

Although it was easy for him to remain in a country nearby, close to his loved ones, he chose another land, far away but close to his heart, for which he left his two sons, his great yeshiva, his many students, and all those he loved and respected, setting his sights on the Holy Land for which his soul longed. His love grew to the point where he thought that living in the Land of Israel was a Torah commandment to which Jews are eternally obligated. (100)

Rabinowitz took a different tack. He pointed to the Sephardic Diaspora in the 16th century in general and the history of the Jews of Safed in particular as a national golden age in miniature and a model of national unity both in theory and in practice. In 1894, he published his first research monograph, dealing with the Spanish Diaspora: Italy, the Ottoman Empire, and North Africa in the 16th century. It was originally intended as part of an anthology to be published by Bnei Moshe on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain. However, its three initiators—Ahad Ha’am, Avraham Shalom Friedberg, and Rabinowitz—could not agree on the form it should take. In the end, Friedberg published his abovementioned book and Rabinowitz published his essay on the period after the expulsion from Spain. In this he was greatly helped by Graetz’s essay and the research of Meyer Kayserling, Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport, David Cassel, and numerous other sources.

In his introduction, Rabinowitz explained why he chose to write about Sephardi Jews rather than Ashkenazi Jews. Like Friedberg, he too adopted a national version of the myth of Sephardi superiority. Referring to the period after the expulsion from Spain, Rabinowitz emphasized the self-respect and overall public political leadership of this group:

A few of our greatest Sephardi brothers were at all times careful in the face of the many, and the heads of those who deal with general affairs and the leaders of the generation who stood with Israel for the last three hundred years were mostly Sephardim. It is enough for us to

mention the names of Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel and Rabbi Menashe ben Israel in earlier generations and Rabbi Moshe Montefiore and Rabbi Yitzhak Cremieux in the last generation, and so on and so forth, heroes of the Jewish people, heroes of wisdom and charity and righteousness. (Rabinowitz 1894, 13)

Don Yitzhak Abarbanel and Menashe ben Israel were also exemplary figures in the pantheon of heroes of the *Hasskalah* movement, but they were included because of their general education and their connections with Christian scholars, whereas Rabinowitz chose them because of their supra-communal public leadership.

Key discussions in this book are devoted to the activities of the Spanish exiles who settled in Safed after the Ottoman occupation of the Land of Israel in 1517. Unlike Graetz, Rabinowitz believed that the spiritual and religious unrest that characterized the Jews of Safed at that time was national unrest, and he played down the mystical aspects of this agitation, which he saw as a negative and dangerous force.

When the wretched martyrs departed from the dire straits, heartsore and broken in spirit, to the life of freedom, religion, and nationality, they dwelt among their people, in the land of their forefathers. The idea arose of the return of sons to their borders, the idea of a revival of the Jewish people, a political revival or a spiritual national revival, that would come about by strengthening unity. In the hearts of many was born the idea of strength in the Land of Israel. Perhaps the great thought and the idea might come to fruition, capturing hearts with its beauty and the pleasantness of its hope. (Rabinowitz 1894, 214)

Rabinowitz believed that the concept of national revival was reflected in the religious enterprise of the time. He praised the initiative that originated in Safed to renew ordination, thus creating a religious/national center in the Land of Israel to prepare for the redemption of Israel and to advance it “because the unity of the nation, the Torah, and the purity of national opinion was the foundation and root of this great act.” He maintained that

All the Talmud sages of those days, especially the Sephardim who immigrated to the Holy Land, felt the need for a Sanhedrin or a Knesset Gedolah, from which the Torah would emanate to all of Israel. They felt in their souls that without unity of action in Halakha, there would be no national unity, to which they aspired. (Rabinowitz 1894, 222)

Rabinowitz attributed to Rabbi Ya’akov Berev, the head of the sages of Safed and the initiator of renewed ordination, the idea that “to the national or messianic feature of ordination should be added the statement that religious unity in deeds and beliefs must precede national unity.” Rabinowitz felt that the failure to renew ordination in Safed was a missed opportunity. He blamed it on Berev, whom he accused of arrogance and forceful behavior, as well as on his rival Rabbi Levi ben Habib of Jerusalem, whom he accused of excessive strictness (Rabinowitz 1894, 230).¹³ Graetz, on the other hand, attributed the failure of the initiative to the weakness of the latter’s character.

Even though the initiative failed, it served as an inspiration for the compilation of the *Shulkhan Arukh*—the halakhic enterprise of Rabbi Yosef Karo, “the enterprise which stamped the seal of religious and national unity on all parts of the nation.” The only figure to whom Rabinowitz devoted an entire chapter of his book is Karo, “the inhabitant of *Eretz Hatzvi* from those expelled from Spain [...] the owner of the enterprise that stamped the seal of religious unity on all parts of the nation” (Rabinowitz 1894, 230). Rabinowitz attempted to entrench Karo as an exemplary historical figure for traditional Judaism rather than place him in the new pantheon he was building. His justification was twofold: on one hand he defended Karo, who was also involved in Kabbalah, from Jewish scholars, including Graetz, who regarded Kabbalah as a dangerous, antirational delusion and a distortion of true Judaism (Roemer 2005, 64)—in principle Rabinowitz agreed with this position—while on the other hand he defended him from his *Hasskalah* critics, who declared that the

Shulkhan Arukh represented the halachic-rabbinic stagnation of their generation (Feiner 2002, 295–306). For example, he maintained that the very fact that Karo was a man of Halakha and a great Talmudic sage was a buffer against the negative effects of the Kabbalah in which he was involved (Rabinowitz 1894, 233).

Rabinowitz claimed that this buffer was the result of a conscious choice by Karo, who had “placed a border between the revealed Torah and the secret Torah, lest the latter prevail over the former” (Rabinowitz 1894, 242)¹⁴ and who ultimately behaved rationally, like “a man whose head rules over his heart, and whose intellect holds sway over his feelings” (249). The buffer is reflected in his halachic writings—for “in his books on halakha there are no traces of fantasy, nor does he insist on asceticism” (250). Furthermore, he does not rule on halachic law according to the Book of Zohar and even considers the practice of *kapparot* (atonement) to be nonsensical.¹⁵

Regarding the claim that halakhic stagnation was engendered by the *Shulkhan Arukh*, Rabinowitz wrote that this was not Karo’s intention. In his great treatise *Beit Yosef*, he left halakhic decisions to the scholars, “The *Beit Yosef* does not compel one to say: This is Torah and so you shall do! And from my words you shall not deviate [...] but you have the authority to diverge from his words and decide differently, since his teachings do not bear a seal” (236).

According to Rabinowitz, the main reason for turning the *Shulkhan Arukh* into a legal codex that unites all the people of the nation is the author’s place of residence. “He dwelt in Safed, which at that time took the place of Jerusalem, the holy city, and was full of Torah scholars studying both the visible and the hidden Torah” (Rabinowitz 1894, 253). Unlike Rabinowitz, who extolled the halakhic enterprises issuing from Safed as potential harbingers of a national revival, Gershom Scholem, some 50 years later, regarded the dramatic development of Kabbalah in the city and its spread to many other communities, as the central arena of spiritual agitation heralding a national-spiritual revival (Scholem 1941).

Another episode from the same time, one that pointed to the potential for national revival, according to Rabinowitz, was the activity of Shlomo Molcho (Diego Pierce, 1500–1532), the son of Marranos, who returned to Judaism and concocted a messianic plan for the redemption of Israel but ultimately died a martyr’s death (Benmelech 2017). This messianic figure had the potential to become a national ideal, as happened in the first half of the 20th century among Zionist writers and poets who adopted him as a historical hero in their work (340–356). However, unlike those who lauded his mysticism, Rabinowitz shied away from this central facet of his personality and viewed him as a historical missed opportunity:

Truly this wonderful man was summoned to be the father of new opinions, because all the attributes and virtues of spirit, strength and faith, which history planted in each generation, were gathered in him. He had a pure heart, a precious soul, and a flawless nature. He was also possessed of a very great talent and a strong imagination. His spirit was like a flowing stream and his tongue was a consuming fire. Such a man deserved to be a father and a benefactor in Israel, had he not strayed from the path of right understanding and had he not jumped into the raging sea, to the waters that have no end: Kabbalah and the secret doctrine. (Rabinowitz 1894, 174)

Rabinowitz was convinced that Molcho had great leadership potential but was influenced by the messianic delusions of David Reuveni and became completely caught up in the teachings of Kabbalah, with no buffer against the revealed teachings, as was the case with Karo, and in the end he acted irrationally and misled the Jews of his generation. Nevertheless, the attitude of Rabinowitz toward Molcho was nothing like his attitude toward Shabtai Zvi and even more severe than Graetz’s harsh opinion of him. He insisted that Molcho’s death served as an example to his people because he was killed for sanctifying the Almighty. In summing up, he wrote, “[t]his man will always remain a riddle without solutions in the annals of history until the very end” (Rabinowitz 1894, 174). In contrast, the character of Shabtai Zvi is not at all enigmatic. It is all illusion and

deception, and the influence of Kabbalah plays a major role here: “The actions of Shabtai Zvi and the other sects [...] which suckled at the breast of Kabbalah and were raised on its knees” (13). This comes in stark contrast to 20th-century Zionist thinkers, who were sympathetic to Shabtai Zvi due to his messianic and antinomian leanings (Miron 2003, 125; Zadoff 2022, 148).

Friedberg, too, disapproved of Shabtai Zvi, irrespective of his act of conversion at the end of his life. He criticized the mystical method according to which “the Talmud’s value for Kabbalah is that of a slave over her mistress” (Friedberg 1966, 370) and described him as “a man who errs in most of his delusions and misleads many, both knowingly and unwittingly” (391). However, Friedberg viewed David Alroy’s messianic movement in a positive light as an expression of the yearning of generations with the potential of redemption through nature (266–272).

Both Rabinowitz and Friedberg praised the collective immigration of the 300 *tosafists* to Eretz Israel in the 13th century. Rabinowitz commissioned the article “Immigrants in Exile at the End of the Fifth Millennium” by Aaron Kaminka for *Knesset Israel*. The article described the immigration of the 300 rabbis (*tosafists*) from England and France to Eretz Israel in the 13th century. For Rabinowitz, this was a national event, and he criticized the scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany because they omitted such national episodes in their historical writing: “The death of the national spirit among our people in Ashkenaz is the fault of the writers who embalmed the chronicles of Israel as the chronicles of a dead nation, and will only draw attention to them to describe their assimilation in other nations” (Kaminka 1887, 128).

Friedberg also alludes to this historical episode, attributing their urge to immigrate to Christian persecution and the poetry of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, which influenced their nascent yearnings for Zion:

In the days of Pope Innocent III, the persecutor of the Jews who lived in the West, their rabbis in France and England were afraid for their positions, and about three hundred of them came together to leave their homes and direct their steps to the East, to go up to the Holy Land and take hold of it, because God commanded his people to find rest in the shadow of the ‘Kingdom of Ishmael’. The hatred of the peoples and their persecution in the lands of their wanderings forcibly displaced them from their places. Their concern and fear of the future awakened in their hearts the memory of the past. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi’s songs rang in their ears like the sound of the drum in the camp. They awakened in them the ancient love of the land that bears the name of our ancestors, their souls yearned to embrace its stones until they were gathered in peace into her bosom. (Friedberg 1966, 278)

Nevertheless, he criticized the conduct of the immigrants after their arrival in the Land of Israel in the spirit of criticism with which the national thinkers viewed the people of the old Yishuv (Bartal 1994, 74–89)—“Because there were no craftsmen and laborers among them, not even a single man who could hold a spade and a plow, work the land and produce bread with the work of his hands.” Ultimately, their arrival was tainted by passivity, “not to restore the soul to the land, but to weep for its ruins; not to live on the land of our ancestors, to eat from its fruit and be satiated from its goodness, but to die on it and be buried in it and be hidden in its dust” (Friedberg 1966, 278).

For Rabinowitz and Friedberg, the transition from *Hasskalah* history to national history was linked to a greater awareness of continuity than an awareness of revolution. They sought to combine the agenda of moderate *Hasskalah* with the new agenda of a nationalist Eretz Israel. For them it represented an additional stratum to the proto-nationalist values they upheld. Their world view was based on education that advocated proto-nationalism: Jewish solidarity, love of the Hebrew language, promoting Hebrew newspapers, and preserving Jewish tradition. To this they added settlement in Eretz Israel as a solution for the harsh conditions of the Jews in Russia. Religiously they did not support Orthodoxy, but they also rejected Reform and the secular nationalism of Ahad Ha’am. They advocated traditional Judaism and were influenced by the Breslau school of thought. Like the *maskilim*, and unlike the historical textbook of Eliezer ben Yehuda and many of those who

shaped Zionist memory, they focused mainly on the Diaspora period, wherein they found the national interpretation of Jewish history. They set up a pantheon of national heroes, historical figures noted for their national values that at one and the same time advocated *Hasskalah*, general education, love of mankind, an affinity for Eretz Israel and the Hebrew language, knowledge of Jewish law, and a practical grasp of Jewish solidarity, to mirror the pantheon of the *Hasskalah* and that of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. They uncovered golden ages of Jewish history that suited their national ideology, nationalized the myth of Sephardi superiority, and point to historical omissions for national revival.

Finally, they learned a national historical lesson from their studies of the Jewish past, as did Friedberg when analyzing the reasons why the immigration of the three hundred rabbis failed in the 13th century. Another example is found in Friedberg's writing about the fate of the Muslims in Portugal at the end of the 15th century, compared with the fate of the Jews who were forced to convert:

At that time, the decree of expulsion was also extended to the Arabs who lived in Portugal, but they were left to their own devices and no one opposed them when they left the country—it was feared that their kings in Africa would hear of this and vent their wrath on the Christians living in their countries. It was only with the unfortunate Jews that the king was furious—because it was his opinion that no nation or kingdom in the land will fight their battle. Therefore they are always enslaved and torn apart without justice, because those who devour them will not be blamed and their blood flows like water. (Friedberg 1893, 290)

In the same vein, Rabinowitz explained why the attempted Jewish settlement in Tiberias, initiated by Don Yosef Nasi, failed in the 16th century. Contrary to Graetz, Rabinowitz argued that the blame does not lie with the initiator but with the potential settlers, who were influenced by Kabbalah but were not conceptually and practically trained for this mission:

It is not Hanassi Yosef who is to blame for this. The generation in the Land of Israel were not yet worthy of it. And this is the Law that also comes to us, the members of the last generation of this great test that was made three hundred and thirty years ago by a great minister in the king's court; a test that clearly states that all the actions of men and their plots will be of no use, if the hearts have not yet been prepared for this great and mighty act. Because plain work, complete and honest faith, a simple life in which Torah and manual work and whole-heartedness are the main foundations, will not be transmitted through illusions and day-dreams. (Rabinowitz 1894, 359)

Rabinowitz and Friedberg sought to prepare them through the *Knesset Israel* journal and their historiography, which represented a unique and forgotten school of thought among the various Jewish historiographic schools of the last two hundred years.

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Notes

- 1 One exception is Yaakov Shavit's article on the historical analogy drawn by the early members of *Hibbat Zion* between their time and the Return to Zion in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, but it relied only on official documents and personal letters, not on publicist writings and historiographical essays (Shavit 1984).
- 2 A letter of Avraham Shalom Friedberg to Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz, The National Library Archives, Friedberg Collection, V898 2 138/95.
- 3 Letter of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz to Aaron Kaminka, December 15, 1886, *Genazim* 3 (1969): 113.

- 4 On post-Hasskalah and its critics at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, see (Feiner 2010, 298–335).
- 5 Letter of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz to Aaron Kaminka, March 26, 1886, *Genazim* 3 (1969): 108.
- 6 Letter of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz to Mordechai Ben-Hillel, June 29, 1897, In Meisel (1943, 138).
- 7 Letter of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz to Nahum Slouschz, December 23, 1885, *Genazim* 3 (1969): 107.
- 8 On the tension between history and memory in Zionist historiography see (Conforti 2006; Miron 2013).
- 9 On the acceptance of Yehuda Halevi in the modern era, see (Shear 2008, 209–292).
- 10 Letter of Saul Pinchas Rabinowitz to Aaron Kaminka, June 22, 1887, *Genazim* 3 (1969): 116. In a comment on Kaminka's article he wrote, with reference to Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and Nachmanides, "When these two luminaries came to the Holy Land, the love of Zion was rekindled in the hearts of its children" (Kaminka 1887, 132).
- 11 Translated in Graetz 1956, 447.
- 12 Translated in *History of the Jews*, 343.
- 13 On this controversy, see (Katz 1951; Meir 1960).
- 14 Zvi Werblowsky drew a similar conclusion to that of Rabinowitz (Werblowsky 1977, 169–188). On the other hand, Jacob Katz claimed that Karo was influenced by Kabbalah in the ruling of Halakha (Katz 1984, 69).
- 15 On traces of the *Zohar* in Karo's halachic writings, see (Ta-Shma 2001, 88–104; Pely 2012).

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