

## Toward a History of the Holocaust

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*In Memory of Max Weinreich*

A YEAR AGO, at the beginning of April 1968, a conference was held in Jerusalem to mark the 25th anniversary of the ghetto uprisings against the Nazis in Europe. It was convened by Yad Vashem—the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority—an institute enacted into existence by the Israeli Knesset in 1953. (The name is taken from Isaiah 56:5: "Even unto them will I give in My House/And within My walls a monument and a memorial [*yad vashem*] /Better than sons and daughters;/ I will give them an everlasting memorial/That shall not be cut off.") The purpose of Yad Vashem is to perpetuate the memory of those who died in the Holocaust, their communities and institutions, through a program of research and publication. Housed on a 150-acre tract of land on Har ha-Zikaron (Remembrance Mount), neighboring Mt. Herzl, Yad Vashem overlooks a richly terraced valley just east of Jerusalem. Its Memorial Hall, a square low building, stands on an open, starkly landscaped esplanade. The exterior is made of unhewn basalt topped by brut concrete; the entrance gates are decorated with a grim iron-sheeted embossment evoking ghetto walls, barbed wire, rifles. The total impact is stunning, and compels a response of reverential silence. Within the basalt wall is the crypt, darkly illumined by an eternal flame on the gray mosaic floor, on which twenty-one tablets are placed asymmetrically, their raised Hebrew and Latin letters spelling out the names of concentration and death camps.

The Memorial Hall—the physical Yad Vashem—with its restraint and sophistication, appears completely at variance with the intellectual Yad Vashem housed at a short walking distance in a beehive of offices amid a disorder of books, periodicals, and manuscripts. Funded from moneys paid by West Germany as collective indemnity to the Jews, Yad Vashem is staffed by Holocaust survivors, many of whom were formerly associated with the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw. That Institute had been conceived by a group of

surviving historians and journalists in 1944 to gather documentary evidence of German atrocities against the Jews to be used to indict and prosecute Germans for war crimes. When, some five years later, Poland became Stalinized and Jewish communal life was liquidated, the Institute too fell into party line. Many staff members joined the Jewish exodus from Poland, some going to France and the United States, but most eventually to Israel. Their gravitation toward Yad Vashem was altogether natural.

Yad Vashem is, so far as I know, the last survivor of the folk tradition in East European Jewish historiography. Critical study of East European Jewish history began at a comparatively late date, in the last decade of the 19th century, when Simon Dubnow decided to devote his life to the history of the Jews in Russia and Poland. Dubnow's first step was to collect basic raw data, primary source materials, and—a mammoth task—to construct from these a vast chronology of events in Russian Jewish history. To compensate for the lack of Jewish national or municipal archives, Dubnow started a movement for what may be described as "folk" archives. He sparked an extraordinary popular movement among thousands of Jews in the Tsarist empire—university students as well as plain folk—who, following his guidance and instructions in *Voskhod*, a Russian Jewish periodical, accumulated for him huge amounts of documentary sources. Dubnow's historical efforts, which coincided with the rise of secular national and socialist movements among East European Jews, succeeded in making plain people aware of the national uses of history. For activists in these newly stirring movements, Jewish history became the secular substitute for Judaism.

The Dubnovian tradition was transmitted to the *yivo* Institute for Jewish Research in interbellum Poland and became diffused throughout Poland and other East European countries. It proved serviceable for a community whose access to universities was limited by a system of *numerus clausus*, and whose religious tradition anyway discouraged university training. Nevertheless, Jewish historical writing was becoming professionalized and several notable historians appeared alongside Dubnow—Meir Balaban and Ignacy Schipper, to name the two outstanding examples—as well as many promising ones. But the Holocaust cut off

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further development of Jewish historiography in Eastern Europe and cut down the historians.

Yad Vashem, which is obligated by its contractual arrangements to employ Holocaust survivors, has consequently been somewhat disabled by a critical deficiency of professional historians and by an arrested historiographical tradition. It has unavoidably had to fall back largely on collecting raw data, mostly by and from the plain people, and preparing chronicles or documents in chronological order.

Yad Vashem has published some forty books in Hebrew (some of these also in Yiddish and English), most of which are eyewitness accounts and diaries. Some are moving personal documents, containing valuable primary source material for historical study and analysis. Several volumes of published documents contain enormously useful material. But regarded as a whole, Yad Vashem's publications, including its journals, are disappointing from both the methodological standpoint and the literary one.

In his classic essay, "On the Historian's Task," Humboldt summed up the two paths the historian needed to pursue simultaneously in his search for historical truth: the first, "the exact, impartial, critical investigation of events"; the second, "the connecting of the events explored and the intuitive understanding of them which could not be reached by the first means." To engage only in the first method, he declared, was "to miss the essence of truth itself." From this perspective, Yad Vashem is in a historiographical predicament, which may in part be ascribed to the fact that its researchers and writers are Holocaust survivors. If it would be absurd to expect them to stand outside their experience, this is nevertheless what their historical function requires of them. In a foreword to one of Yad Vashem's bibliographies, Salo W. Baron observed that "a generation that has gone through that extraordinary traumatic experience cannot completely divorce itself from its own painful recollections and look upon the Holocaust from an Archimedean standpoint."

Having preempted the Holocaust for study, these survivors bring to their work the intensity and authenticity of their experiences; they bring also, however, their personal and political subjectivity. They believe that their first-hand experience has better equipped them to write the history of the Holocaust than those who study it only from the records. In his day, Flavius Josephus decided to write his account of the Jewish war with Rome because he felt that persons without first-hand knowledge had presented garbled versions: "I will state the facts accurately and impartially. At the same time the language in which I record the events will reflect my own feelings and emotions; for I must permit myself to bewail my country's tragedy." Yet for all his extraordinary gifts of observation and eloquence, Josephus's history remains a classic example of a sub-

jective document, colored by his deep personal involvement in the events he describes.

The nature of Yad Vashem's mandate from the Knesset further complicates its historiographical task. The institute is required to discharge two basically incompatible functions: commemoration, which requires eulogy, respect, and love for the dead—a softness of heart—and historical investigation, which requires rigor, distance, and a passion for truth—a hardness of head. Commemoration, of necessity, demands a single-minded focus on Jewish behavior, while Holocaust history demands a wide-angled view which encompasses all the actors in the events under study. Jewish historians have often been faulted for depicting the Jews as an encapsulated community, without disclosing the intricate mesh of relationships which has existed in all times between Jews and non-Jews. The complaint is even more valid in the case of the Holocaust, when Jews had no free hand, no free scope, and no free will to decide their fate.

THESE historiographical problems were painfully exposed in last year's Yad Vashem conference on "Manifestations of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust." The selection of resistance as a subject for the conference was determined, no doubt, by the timing—the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising—and by the exigencies of the commemorative task. Resistance is a subject well suited to commemoration, for it is likely to evoke reverent tributes to heroism, courage, and self-sacrifice, and to stimulate a flow of rhetoric that soothes as it stirs.

As a subject for historical investigation, on the other hand, resistance has considerable inherent fascination, although unfortunately those who study the phenomenon tend to be motivated less by historical or cultural interest than by political and strategic considerations. The late Philip Friedman once observed that interest in resistance as a subject of Holocaust history was a reaction against the martyrological view expressed in the memoirs and historical studies issued just after the war. Those first books, focusing on the inexpressible agonies the Jews endured, were a modern equivalent of medieval martyrologies. They depicted Jews primarily as victims, objects of a program of systematic murder.

This approach was first challenged by veterans of the Jewish underground, most of whom had been affiliated with largely left-wing youth organizations—Zionist as well as socialist—and who were actuated to challenge the martyrological view, not by a wish to write Holocaust history *per se*, but by the need to justify themselves, their party organizations, and their ideologies.\* The

\* This has been true not only in the case of Jews. Soviet historiography has also been exploited to certify that all resistance to the Germans was conceived, initiated, planned, and executed only by Communists.

Jewish underground and the resistance movement became, as the philosophers would put it, historically colligible, the object of an organizing process in which facts were brought together and assembled under a general hypothesis. In the hands of its first chroniclers, resistance became magnified and exalted. Veterans of the underground ideologized resistance as a function of class conflict, anti-fascist politics, and a progressive world view; it was seen by them as individually ennobling and socially purifying.

Rather a different strategic consideration affecting the historiography of resistance emerged in 1961 with Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Hilberg maintained not only that Jews did not resist but that they collaborated with the Germans in their own annihilation. Resistance and its obverse, collaboration (through the *Judenraete*), now became inextricably, and occasionally mindlessly, associated.\*

Since the publication of Hilberg's work, resistance as a subject for historical study has unloosed that "anarchy of convictions" which Wilhelm Dilthey feared threatened historical objectivity. The subject of resistance has been exploited by the defenders of the Jews and their denigrators, by the Left and the Right, by psychologists and pseudo-psychologists. But despite the passion, and despite an accumulation over the years of a substantial amount of journalism, great gaps remain in our knowledge of the subject; so far attempts at historical explanation have been sadly inadequate.

IT WAS to be hoped, then, that the Yad Vashem conference would offer the opportunity for a serious examination of resistance in all its ambiguities. Twenty-five papers were presented and discussed. Nearly all the participants—speakers and discussants—were survivors. Israelis outnumbered Americans and Europeans three to one; about half the Israelis were associated with Yad Vashem, Lohamei Hagettaot ("Fighters of the Ghettos," a kibbutz founded in 1949 by Holocaust survivors), and Moreshet (another survivor research institute), while the others taught Holocaust history at one or another of Israel's three universities. Many were associated with political parties, for the most part those to the Left of Mapai—Ahdut Avoda, Hashomer Hatzair, Mapam. Three French participants had past or present associations with the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine of Paris. Henri Michel, secretary-general of the Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, was the only non-Jewish participant.

It soon became apparent at the conference that the word "resistance" was being semantically strained. Resistance, in the context of World War II, has been defined as "an organized underground movement of a conquered country made up of groups of fighters engaged in sabotage and

secret operations to thwart, waylay, and otherwise wear down occupation forces and often also in punishing collaborators among fellow countrymen." Jewish resistance, as we normally use the expression, also has a fairly well-defined character:

Resistance on the part of individuals, as well as on the part of entire organized movements; resistance with primitive weapons—rusty pistols and ancient rifles—as well as with modern arms, including automatic rifles and machine guns which were stolen from the Germans themselves; uprisings within the ghetto walls prior to the liquidation actions, as well as during and after them, and an unceasing struggle against the barbaric enemy—in the forests and on the highways, by small groups and by large bands, with the partisan movement, and independent of it.†

A number of the papers delivered at the conference did in fact chronicle, analyze, and celebrate this kind of resistance; they dealt with Jewish partisans, the Jewish underground in Poland and its relations with the Polish underground, the role of Jews in the French resistance movement, the participation of Jews in the Russian and Allied armies, and, of course, the several ghetto uprisings. These papers were, in the main, workmanlike, a few were competent, though some were outrageously partisan. But many other papers postulated an altogether different concept of resistance, defined not as an active form of warfare but rather as a process familiar in medicine or physics: resistance as the ability of an organism to withstand disease or as an opposing or retarding force to motion or energy. The logic for this definition is simple: since the Germans were determined to destroy all Jews, whatever Jews did to thwart that end and survive may be defined as resistance. Consequently, papers were read on "everyday" resistance, education, relief, and welfare as resistance, even (in a classic case of antiphrasis) martyrdom as resistance:

The importance of the Jewish joke as a means of struggle against the Nazi regime cannot be stressed enough. . . .

. . . writing literature in those days was by itself an act of heroism. . . .

A manifestation of Jewish resistance in day-by-day life [was an] individual's renunciation of a chance to escape. . . .

\* Hannah Arendt's blanket condemnation, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, of all *Judenraete* somehow came to be identified with Hilberg's accusation about the lack of Jewish resistance, even though Miss Arendt held a contrary view on resistance. Non-Jews, she said, behaved no differently from Jews, either under occupation or in concentration camps. Theoretical constructs about a "ghetto mentality," she felt, should be rejected as explanations for a kind of "behavior" which was not at all confined to the Jewish people and which therefore cannot be explained by specifically Jewish factors.

† A. Z. Braun and Dov Levin, "Factors and Motivations in Jewish Resistance," *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, December 1957.

The struggle to give the educational effort a specifically Jewish character. . . .

The documentation activities carried out secretly in the Polish ghetto should be seen as a special form of Jewish civil revolt.

Professionalism, it has been said, tells a historian what questions to ask, not what answers to give. The conference planners already had an answer though no one had put the question: resistance in their view was worthier than nonresistance; resisters were nobler than nonresisters. Given the biases and backgrounds of most participants, that answer was predetermined, and, inevitably, the speakers tried to demonstrate that Jews resisted more than they had been given credit for.

The historian's obligation is not the same as the mourner's or the encomiast's, yet even historians, because of the great drama inherent in the theme, have treated resistance with veneration and acclamation, rather than with detachment. Perhaps this is because in our time resistance has become an ultimate value. (Not just among Jews: one Dutch resistance leader asserted that resistance is worth any price, that "in the final analysis even the saving of precious human lives is not the ultimate criterion . . . but the preservation of the eternal values. . . .") This elevation of resistance to a preciousness equal to or above other ultimate virtues—truth, respect for human life—strikes me, however, as alien to Jewish tradition and history.

✓ THE TRUE converse of resistance is not collaboration but martyrdom, nowadays as unfashionable a concept as resistance is modish. Professor Baron has hypothesized that the ideal of religious martyrdom among Jews and Christians was displaced historically by the Roman concept of the supreme sacrifice for patriotic and nationalist causes (*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*) as a consequence of the secularization of society. Contributing to this process was an equally secularized notion of honor, an ethical ideal which had its origins in the blend of military and Christian values that made up feudal Christian chivalry. In Jewish tradition, honor has been something different. A Jew honors his father, his mother, and his teachers. Above all, Jews honor God. To be sure, as modernity overtook Jewish traditional society, the Roman and feudal Christian concept of honor infiltrated Jewish thought as well. Nevertheless it gave me a turn to hear, at the ceremonial opening of the Yad Vashem conference, Yitzhak Cukierman, a commandant in the Warsaw ghetto uprising and founder of Lohamei Hagettaot, employ Nietzschean rhetoric when he apostrophized the Zionists in the ghettos because they chose to die with honor when to live without it was no longer possible.

When Jews have chosen to die "with honor," they have meant for the honor of God's name, *kiddush ha-Shem*. Otherwise, they choose to live: ". . . I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed" (Deut. 30:19). The object of Jewish law is the preservation of life, not its destruction. "Better to extinguish the light on the Sabbath," says the Talmud, "than to extinguish life, which is God's light." The transcendental importance of human life is related, I suppose, to the ultimate survival of Jews and Judaism until that End of Days when the Messiah will come to deliver us all.

Traditionalists, naturally, have favored policies that they believed—if wrongly, at least in innocent good will—would more likely preserve Jewish lives. Hence, they have tended to be accommodationist-minded. Surprisingly, the modernists among the Jews of Europe turned chivalric and romantic; they chose to fight, to kill, to die. Now we know that neither accommodationism nor resistance appreciably affected the outcome of the German war against the Jews. Neither one policy nor the other saved very many Jews, though perhaps some quantification-minded historian might one day investigate how many Jews were saved by the resisters and how many by the accommodationists.

Scholars too are divided between accommodationism and resistance. Historians still debate about the Zealots: who was right from the Jewish point of view—the heroic warriors, led by Eleazer ben Yair, who chose "honorable death" on Masada, or Yohanan ben Zakkai who counseled peace rather than resistance? Of course, disagreement and controversy among historians on historical matters are neither uncommon nor illegitimate. Disputes over textual or factual questions often reflect basic divergences in outlook and personal philosophy, but so long as the historian presents evidence which the reader can evaluate, he is entitled to intellectual confidence. However, when his explanations are derived from his personal views and not from a professional, critical reading of his sources, his audience is justified in regarding his work with skepticism. Historians, sad to say, are just as susceptible to prejudice and propaganda as nonhistorians. German historians were not any different from other Germans: during the Nazi regime only a handful withstood the Nazification of their profession. In the United States New Left historians suffer from the same contemporary political viruses that affect their less experienced and untrained students.

This sort of personal/political controversy was exposed dramatically at the Yad Vashem conference during a discussion of two papers dealing with the relationships between *Judenraete* and Jewish resistance movements. Both papers were methodical and thoughtful research studies. One, by Isaiah Trunk, of *yivo's* Holocaust Documen-



tation Project, untangled the skein of documentary material concerning the responses of various *Judenraete* to the underground. Mr. Trunck concluded that the historical sources do not support the black-and-white, good-and-evil contrasts which most writers have so far presented. Dr. Zvi A. Bar-On, of the Hebrew University, in his paper on the two kinds of Jewish leadership under the Nazis—the *Judenrat* and the underground—offered the first attempt at periodization and systematization that I have seen in Holocaust historiography. His historical approach to the moral problems was professionally exemplary, though he clearly was on the side of the resisters. Yet despite the scholarly caliber of both papers, the subsequent discussion turned into a brabble. One of the participants, who had worked with the Dutch resistance in London and whose family had been deported from Amsterdam never to return, delivered a diatribe against the *Judenrat* and in ringing tones exhorted the Israelis to conduct themselves in emulation of the resistance movement. He sat down amid an outburst of applause more appropriate to a political rally than to a scholarly forum.

THE VERY WORD *Judenrat* has come to offend the ear. It conjures up nightmarish images of evil Jewish leaders, collaborating with the Germans, betraying millions of Jews into the gas chambers, while they saved their own and their kin's lives. The diabolization of the *Judenrat* has accompanied the apotheosis of resistance in the historiography of the Holocaust. In most early survivors' accounts, the *Judenraete* were portrayed in unrelieved blackness, their leaders totally lacking in redeeming qualities. Then came Hannah Arendt, one of the most politically sophisticated and philosophically subtle minds of our time, who said in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* what the simple souls and the sloganizing Left had been saying all along. (The difference was that she said it in English, while they had said it in Yiddish and Hebrew.)

Before Miss Arendt leveled her sweeping charges against the *Judenrat* as an instrument of Jewish collaboration with the murderers of Jews, the institution had been little studied, or had been treated as a marginal subject in Holocaust historiography. Except for two volumes of documents, just recently published by Yad Vashem, one about the *Judenrat* in Lublin and the other about Bialystok, and aside from some scholarly and not-so-scholarly articles over the years, I know of no major monograph, dissertation, or book on the subject. A book on *Judenraete* in Eastern Europe, by Isaiah Trunck, now nearing completion, was commissioned jointly by vivo and Yad Vashem some years ago. In December 1967 the vivo Institute for Jewish Research held a colloquium on *Judenraete* which, so far as I know, represented the first attempt by a research group to scrutinize this institution using the meth-

ods of critical scholarship. (The proceedings are shortly to be published.)

To a certain extent, serious historical interest in the *Judenrat* was prompted by Jewish defensiveness in response to Miss Arendt's accusation. As a historical field it is subject to the same liabilities as resistance, with some additional ones to boot.

To begin with, the normal succession of research, study, analysis, and generalization has been reversed in the case of the *Judenrat*. Before research was conducted on individual *Judenraete*, before biographies were done of individuals associated with them, before fragmentary bits and pieces could be cumulated for even a modest historical synthesis, the grand generalizations were being drawn. The *Judenrat* was viewed as unitary, almost like a natural phenomenon subject to scientific law. This is not the place to argue whether history is an art or science, but we do know that history, unlike physical science, is the study of individual phenomena. The historical universe contains an infinite variety of people, episodes, and events. The historian investigates specific individuals in specific places at specific times acting under specific conditions.

Passing as historical judgments, the generalizations made about the *Judenrat* were in fact moral judgments. As Norman Podhoretz first pointed out in the pages of this journal, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was in no sense "a work of objective historical research aimed at determining 'the way things really were.'" ("Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance," September 1963.) It was rather a moral tract, whose discussion of good and evil and individual responsibility was directed not so much to understanding the past as to sounding an alarm for the future.

Jews ARE enjoined not to judge their fellow men in extraordinary situations. Hillel says: "Do not judge thy comrade until thou hast stood in his place." Rabbi Jonah, commenting on Hillel, says: "If a person says that a companion of his in high office does not behave justly, let him not say: 'If I occupied his position, I would not do any of the evil things he does.' You don't know. Human beings, one's no better than the next! Perhaps that office would have perverted you too."

Consider in this regard the case of Leo Baeck. A revered rabbi of the Jewish community of Berlin, he has also been characterized as a villain. From 1933 until 1939, Baeck presided over the *Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden* and, from 1939 until 1943, over the German-imposed *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*. In 1943 he was taken to Theresienstadt. Though he had had to deal with the Germans in his capacity as head of the *Reichsvertretung* and its successor organization, Baeck did not learn about the final destination to which Jews were being deported until he was in Theresienstadt.

One day in August of 1943, as he himself relates, a fellow inmate named Grünberg came to him. Having bound Baeck to silence, Grünberg said that his best friend had visited him in the middle of the night and informed him about Auschwitz—that everyone knew the Jews were being gassed to death at Auschwitz, except those assigned to slave labor. "So it was not just a rumor," Baeck commented, "or, as I had hoped, the illusion of a diseased imagination." He had to decide what to do:

I went through a hard struggle debating whether it was my duty to convince Grünberg that he must repeat what he had heard before the Council of Elders, of which I was an honorary member. I finally decided that no one should know it. If the Council of Elders were informed, the whole camp would know within a few hours. Living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder and this death was not certain at all: there was selection for slave labor; perhaps not all transports went to Auschwitz. So I came to the grave decision to tell no one.\*

How does one judge Baeck's silence? Was it akin to Plato's noble lie, undertaken for the public good? The most sympathetic, yet hardheaded, caution on how to deal with such problems has been given by Herbert Butterfield, professor of modern history at Cambridge:

The historian can never quite know men from the inside—never quite learn the last secret of the workings of inspiration in a poet or of piety in a devout religious leader. For the same reason he can never quite carry his enquiries to that innermost region where the final play of motive and the point of responsibility can be decided.

What is essential to the whole task is the realization that a special effort is needed to comprehend the men who are not like-minded with oneself. . . .

This cautionary attitude was missing at the Yad Vashem conference. With few demurrers, the participants reiterated the familiar tale of the glory that was resistance and the disgrace that was the *Judenrat*. Most of them, to my mind, were sooner prepared to pass moral judgments than to search for historical explanations. "When the passions of the past blend with the prejudices of the present," wrote Marc Bloch, "human reality is reduced to a picture in black and white."

\* Eric H. Boehm, ed., *We Survived: The Stories of Fourteen of the Hidden and the Hunted of Nazi Germany*, New Haven, 1949, p.293.

STILL, though Yad Vashem's performance has not been up to expectation, Holocaust history will, I believe, be written in Israel. The younger Israeli historians, some associated with the Hebrew University, whose work is now beginning to be published, have impeccable academic credentials, sound historical training, and a professionalism that has sensitized them to the pitfalls of subjectivism. Furthermore, Israeli Jews have in abundance two qualities which American Jews lack but which Holocaust historiography requires. One is the ability to face death—its idea and its reality—and the other is a wholesome sense of Jewish identity. Handling the historical data requires both physical stamina and a heart strong enough to bear the anguish, endure the degradation, and transcend the defilement. It means being able to resist the natural desire to escape the victim's fate.

Few American Jews, I fear, can meet these standards. No American-born Jewish historian that I know of has undertaken any study of the Holocaust, though in the United States at least 1500 Jews have doctoral degrees in history. Jewish educators have taken twenty-five years to prepare a systematic teaching guide to instruct Jewish children about the Holocaust. For all their generosity to the survivors, most American Jews cannot confront the Holocaust. They have not responded with even the normal reactions—mourning, commemoration, remembrance. That they leave to the foreign-born Jews. Native American Jews evade, suppress, deny, escape from the very thought or articulation of the Holocaust.

History, it has often been asserted, educates us, makes us wise, helps us understand ourselves and our society: "There is no future without a past and no past without a future." Simon Dubnow once thought that Jewish history would one day contribute to erasing intolerance, while Y. L. Peretz believed that progress was possible only through memory and history. Hegel was less hopeful: "Peoples and governments never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." The Holocaust has made us despair that history can teach us anything that we might want to learn. To study it, however, can expand our self-knowledge, show us what we are capable of being and doing, for good or evil, under stress, in shock or trauma. For the Jewish historian, there is an added consideration: writing the history of the Holocaust, or of a fragment of it, can become a secular act of bearing witness to Auschwitz and to the mystery of Jewish survival.