Introduction

“Judaism is already dead, and we wish to bring it to a decent burial.” This extreme statement by Moriz Steinschneider, one of the founders of “the science of Judaism” at the beginning of the nineteenth century, can rightly be considered as contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of Jewish historicism known as the Science of Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums or Hokhmat Yisrael).1 This approach contributes both unilaterally and as an attempt to understand the Jewish past objectively and detached from any commitment toward it. No less, this extreme comment aroused a fruitful and complex debate among scholars and intellectuals over this issue, formulated around the question of the relation between the early understanding of the past brought by the historian and the way he deals with the objects of his study. This hermeneutic question, which relates to the scholar’s activity as a subject and interpreter, stands at the center of the present article.

This debate, one of the most famous in Jewish studies, already occupied the founders of ‘The Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews’ (1819) (hereafter: The Society). They vacillated between the understanding of Judaism as a passing phenomenon and historical research as a science which “steps in demanding an account of what has already been sealed away”2 and regarding Judaism not only as a matter of historical interest but also as “an essential need of the Jews themselves,” namely as a living culture.3 This conflict resounded also in the historiography that dealt with the phenomenon of Jewish historicism and its implications for modern Judaism. One can clearly point to two central interpretations. One regarded the project of The Society as evidence of the severance of its establishers from historical Judaism. The radical proponent of this view is Gerschom Scholem, who labeled them as “gravediggers,” but this is also the opinion of Baruch Kurzweil and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. The other interpretation, crystallized as a critique and response to the former, regarded the venture of The Society as a positive landmark in the knotty process of achieving a modern Jewish identity and as an intellectual

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2 Leopold Zunz, “On Rabbinic Literature (1818),” in Paul Mendes-Flour and Jehuda Reinhartz, ed., The Jews in the Modern World: A Documented History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 222. Some regard this view of the historical science as expressing a Hegelian influence (see: ibid., 229, note 2). However, this identification is partial for it catches only the reductionistic aspect of Hegel’s concept of science and history, which reached its full development in The Science of Logic, According to Hegel, alongside the reductionistic process there is in history also a process of preserving the achievements of the human spirit.
endeavor which was motivated mainly by a sincere concern for the future continuation of Judaism. Here the prominent figures are Yitzhak Schorsch and Amos Funkenstein. The analysis offered below focuses on the approaches of the historians Yerushalmi and Funkenstein, as expressed in their direct references to this issue, but the implications of their approaches for the other representatives of the two views is clear. The focus on these two scholars results from the debate between them being direct: Funkenstein responds to Yerushalmi’s opinions, and research literature has treated this debate as a shared dialogue.

The hermeneutic perspective on this issue is necessary, since the debate between Yerushalmi and Funkenstein is based on two interrelated questions: the question of the significance of the perception of the past, and the question of the relations between the past and the present, i.e., what is the connection between a historian’s preconceptions of the Jewish past and the quality of his activity as a researcher and interpreter? Yerushalmi and Funkenstein sought to propose an appropriate interpretation to what they saw as an expression of the self-awareness of the founding historians of the Science of Judaism. This basic assumption invites the hermeneutic discussion to serve as a tool for explicating the opinions of Yerushalmi and Funkenstein regarding the Science of Judaism. Thus, the focus of this article will not be the relation between the present and the past as it was actually perceived in the self-awareness of the founders of the Science of Judaism, but as it was reflected in the interpretation proposed by Yerushalmi and Funkenstein. Thus, the texts of Yerushalmi and Funkenstein dealing with the Science of Judaism are the only object of the proposed critical analysis. This has two implications: the discussion will not refer to the relation between the opinions of the two historians on this issue and their research as a whole, nor shall it discuss the question of the realistic-historical “correctness” of the concept of the Jewish past at the basis of the two historians’ approaches.

The hermeneutic perspective draws inspiration from the hermeneutic theories of Schleiermacher and Gadamer. As we shall see, these two theories provide an

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4 Schorsch dealt especially with Zunz, founder of the Society. For Meir’s criticism of Scholem see the article “They Didn’t Come To Bury,” in Ismar Schorsch, Polarities in Balance (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), 157-160.

5 The references to the two main articles of Yerushalmi and Funkenstein dealing with the Science of Judaism will appear in this article in abbreviated form (Yer, Zakhor; Funk, Perceptions). The emphases in the citations are mine.

6 In his essay Funkenstein clarifies that he did not attempt to refute Yerushalmi’s understanding. See Amos Funkenstein, “Response,” (To Myers), History and Memory 4, no. 1(1992): 147-148. Nevertheless, Funkenstein has usually been understood in this way.


8 The comparison with Schleiermacher in this article refers mainly to his works where he stressed the role of linguistic analysis as a mechanism for revealing meaning. After 1819, a
appropria te analysis tool for understanding the dispute: Schleiermacher helps us understand the position of Yerushalmi and Gadamer aids our understanding of the position of Funkenstein. Using these theories, I shall analyze the concepts of Judaism and History at the root of the positions of these two historians, and reveal their approaches, partly unconscious, regarding the nature of the historian’s work. In this respect, the project I have undertaken is critical, since it aims to make the implicit hermeneutic foundation explicit.

**Breach versus Continuity: The Hermeneutic Viewpoint**

Yerushalmi and Funkenstein’s perceptions of Jewish historiography from the foundation of the *Science of Judaism* and their implications and effects on the formation of modern Judaism differ greatly from each other, and perhaps are even contradictory. Yerushalmi saw the Science of Judaism as an expression of a breach with Jewish existence, while for Funkenstein this phenomenon constitutes a new layer in the continuity of this existence. These two approaches were formulated in the context of a discussion of the two concepts: “collective memory” and “historical awareness,” and the clarification of the relations between them.9 We should note that Yerushalmi—who was the first to present his position—used these terms without defining them, while Funkenstein—who responds critically to Yerushalmi’s position—saw fit to present a distinguishing definition of the terms. This distinction can also illuminate their general approaches: it seems that Yerushalmi assumed the existence of an agreed meaning to the nature of collective memory, an assumption that inevitably minimizes the importance and necessity of historical awareness in interpreting the collective memory. Funkenstein, being aware of the contextuality of collective memory, as rooted in a particular time and place, felt obliged to define in advance the framework of his discussion.

Looking at the debate between Yerushalmi and Funkenstein from a hermeneutic historical point of view reveals an interesting fact. The approaches of the two historians share some central features with the prominent representatives of modern hermeneutics, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Hans-Georg Gadamer. To be sure, the works of the latter two thinkers evolved in a different cultural context, and had different purposes than those of Yerushalmi and Funkenstein, who did not even mention hermeneutics in their discussion of the *Science of Judaism*. However, all four share the basic concern for the status of tradition in an era of changes including some obviously anti-traditional ideologies. The discussion below will

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9 In one place, Funkenstein clarified that the article “Collective Memory and Historical Awareness,” upon which the discussion here focuses, was not an attempt to disprove Yerushalmi’s position toward the *Science of Judaism*. However, as we shall see, although this was not his intention, this is a largely inevitable conclusion of his statements. See Funkenstein, “Response,” 147.
analyze Yerushalmi and Funkenstein’s perceptions of Jewish collective memory in light of the hermeneutic approaches developed by Schleiermacher and Gadamer, and will focus on three basic components typical of hermeneutic theories: the attitude toward method, the status of the datum and the perception of the nature of the interpretative process.

Yerushalmi – Schleiermacher

The Attitude toward Method

One of the main axes of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic theory deals with the problem of understanding Scripture in an era of secularization when the guiding and mediating power of the church is weakened. Schleiermacher conditioned the very possibility of a hermeneutic discipline on discovering the conditions for achieving human understanding. These conditions can be considered transcendental in the sense that they are independent of and not derived from concrete contents. Schleiermacher’s basic project was intended to offer hermeneutics of the Scriptures. However, he believed that the realization of these conditions enables the deciphering of other texts. It is especially important here to note that Schleiermacher assumed that the condition for the existence of a general hermeneutic theory—in other words, for it to be a discipline—is the achievement of a general method external to the text that could guarantee the objectivity of the interpretative act. In Schleiermacher’s approach, hermeneutics is the method through which the individual character of the author is revealed, or more precisely, the intention that motivated the author in writing the text. The hermeneutic method appeared to him as a process of reconstructing the creation of the text by the author. This is achieved by the interpreter reliving the process that gave birth to the text. In other words, the hermeneutic method brings together the interpreter and the intention of the text’s authors. However, since that act of interpretation is a conscious activity, unlike the act of creation that is not primarily conscious, the interpreter ends up understanding the work better than its creator, and can understand the author’s intention better than the author himself.

The search for a hermeneutic method, and especially the understanding of such a method as independent of the type of text or its subject, has two important

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12 The author’s character interested Schleiermacher throughout his writings. See the discussion in the hermeneutic context, ibid., 52.
implications: First, dealing with the contents of the particular text has become a marginal element, since the contents are no more than a medium through which the individual character of the author as the writer of the text is revealed; a character represented through what Schleiermacher denoted “the author’s intention,” and in the context of the Scriptures—God. Just as the character and intention of the author are extrinsic to the text, so also is the method aimed at uncovering them extrinsic to the text. Both the interpreter’s method and the author and his intention are external to the text and independent of it. Second, Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic method left no room for the discussion of the historical and social contexts of the text, since his interest was in understanding the author’s intention as the writer of the text and not as a concrete historical entity. The concept of self at the basis of his perception of the author drew upon both the rationalistic tradition and the romantic tradition. What these two sources have in common is ignoring the historical and cultural contexts that brought about the self, and the inability to refer to the self as a complete entity.  

It is especially interesting that when Yerushalmi described his historical approach, in an interview with a Jewish History periodical, he claimed: “The author’s intention was something sacred for me. I grew up on the idea that the role of an author or a literary historian is to reach, as much as possible, the original intention… of the author.” However, my argument that Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic theory may illuminate Yerushalmi’s approach is not primarily based on this reference, which probably did not reflect familiarity with Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic theory, but on their shared foundations apparent in the issues that concerned both scholars. The question of the nature of the discipline and the status of method are at the center of Yerushalmi’s discussion of the Science of Judaism. His approach shows that there is a clear connection between the foundation of history as a discipline, its aim to achieve objectivity, and the adoption of the scientific method. As he says:

The term Wissenschaft—“Science”—… [means] specifically the new critical historical spirit and historical methodology that were sweeping Germany and that would soon become one of the hallmarks of nineteenth-century European thought. (Yer, 84)  

13 Despite this similarity between rationalism and romanticism, I do not claim that these two approaches are identical. Indeed, the rationalistic approach attributes universal qualities to the self, while the romantic approach attributes extreme particularity to the self. The meeting between these two approaches occurs on the level of the outcome—denying the social and historical perception of the self. On Schleiermacher’s perception of subjectivity, see Jeffrey L. Hoover, “Appropriating Selfhood: Schleiermacher and Hegel on Subjectivity as Mediated Activity,” in David E. Klemm and Günter Zöller, ed., Figuring the Self, Subject, Absolute, and Others in Classical German Philosophy (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997), 169-190.

14 This citation is from Yerushalmi in an interview conducted by Prof. Shulamit Volkov and Prof. Yosef Kaplan, see Historia 16 (2005): 18-19, in Hebrew.
In his opinion, the historical methodology that influenced the nature of the subject the historian studies, his way of writing and teaching (Yer, 81), helped the founders of the Society to distinguish between “the original from the late addition.” (Yer, 84)\footnote{The words of Emmanuel Wolf, one of the Society’s founders, cited from Mendes-Flour and Reinhartz, ed., The Jews in the Modern World, 79.} Just as in Schleiermacher’s approach the hermeneutic discipline requires an objective and independent method, so also Yerushalmi connected the profession of historian with the objective methodology that guides him; just as Schleiermacher did not perceive the hermeneutician as able to place his personal stamp on his subject and express his personal identity in his interpretation, so also Yerushalmi perceived the founding historians of the Science of Judaism as subject to the authority of the historicistic methodology that left no room for the particular expression of Jewish history. Yerushalmi’s discussion criticizes the features he identifies in the opinions of the founders of the Science of Judaism. However, this criticism itself confirms the close linkage he thought existed between the discipline of history and the objective methodology that guides it.

**The Datum**

There is a clear structural link between the emphasis place on methodology and its perception as independent, and the nature of the datum the methodology is aimed at understanding. The datum of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic theory is the author of the text. To be more precise, the subjective intention of the author in creating the text. The author as a datum has several main characteristics: he is transcendent to the text; he is a particular being, and thus the interpreter’s understanding of the author’s intention cannot be achieved by comparing him with others. These qualities of transcendence and particularity, characteristic of the author’s being, are not attributed to the author by the objective hermeneutic methodology, but are primary to the same extent that the author of the text is primary to the text he created.\footnote{The author’s character interested Schleiermacher throughout his writings, see the discussion in the context of the hermeneutic method, Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript, 52.}

Indeed, there is a gap between the universal method, independent of the contents of the text, in which Schleiermacher chose to anchor his approach, and his understanding of the datum as particular. However, Schleiermacher explained that the hermeneutic methodology was intended to respond to the universal nature of the problem of human understanding, while the characterization of the author and the text’s contents as individual would serve as a barrier against their dogmatic comprehension. Schleiermacher’s increasing awareness of the gap between his understanding of the datum and his methodology led him, mainly in his later writings, to stress the divining component in the interpretative act that enables the transcending from the universal structure to the particular datum.\footnote{Ibid., 150.} We should note that the particular datum is not the historical being fixed in a certain time and place, but the
transcendent human being trapped in his individuality, i.e., the person who can never be fully integrated in a given social context.

The damage in the historical understanding of the datum in Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic approach, resulting from the employed universal method, illuminates also the datum under discussion and reveals additional aspects: First the datum appears as an autonomous element. The greater the autonomy attributed to the datum, the more it appears as independent of the human relations aimed at it. The datum’s autonomy accords with its individuality: the more it is perceived as isolating and particular, the more it is autonomous in relation to its time, so that the historical context cannot help understand the datum. In Schleiermacher’s approach, the transcendent elevation and separateness of the datum from any context and relation block the possibility of blunting the author’s particularity. The inevitable outcome is turning interpretation into an infinite attempt that cannot be completed.18

The characterization of the author as a datum in Schleiermacher’s approach accords with the nature of collective memory in Yerushalmi’s approach. As we have seen, collective memory appears in Yerushalmi’s approach as a particular datum, in two senses: he refers to divine providence regarding Jewish history, and his approach entails a view of the particularity of Jewish history. The presence of this memory is embodied in real human institutions, and as such exists in a certain time and place. However, Yerushalmi’s approach reveals them as representing a transcendent presence independent of, and uninfluenced by, intentions aimed at it.

Like Schleiermacher, Yerushalmi too views the (historicistic) method that served the Science of Judaism people as external to its datum, namely, to the Jewish collective memory. For Schleiermacher, hermeneutics’ infinite mission is focused on the gap between the method and the datum.19 In contrast, Yerushalmi enlarges the gap between the two, so that any real contact between the historicistic method and the datum—Jewish collective memory—is impossible. Yerushalmi raises this argument as a criticism of Jewish historicism, but this criticism reveals his basic understanding of the nature of the method. Yerushalmi does not propose an alternative method for uncovering the Jewish collective memory; in fact he claims there is no such method. In his opinion, if such a method existed, it would inevitably be the sort of method used by the Science of Judaism. Thus, the gap between the datum and the method is more extreme in Yerushalmi’s approach than in Schleiermacher’s. However, while Schleiermacher saw the gap as a hermeneutic

18 Ibid., 246, note 12. In his later works, Schleiermacher proposes empathy as an instrument for overcoming the distance between the interpreter and the author. However, Schleiermacher himself admitted the weakness of empathy as a mechanism for the interpreter to penetrate the author’s meaning. This insight also supports the perception of the interpretative act as an infinite process. In any case, it is worth noting that Schleiermacher did not understand the text as expressing a “private language” of the author, but as a communicative medium. See ibid., 97. Thiselton dealt extensively with the issue of the “private language,” comparing Schleiermacher with Wittgenstein: Antony C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bullmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 385-379.

19 Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript, 246, note 12.
problem founding the interpretative process, Yerushalmi saw this gap as reflecting the nature of the datum and the inability to overcome it indicates one’s having an appropriate disposition toward it. Thus, the only possible relation toward collective memory is one of unqualified surrender and acceptance. This relation demonstrates acceptance aimed at the power of presence rather than at the power of meaning.

Also, as for Schleiermacher, for Yerushalmi recognizing the centrality of the historicistic method on the one hand, and understanding the datum as transcendent and particular on the other hand, reflected the secondary status of the contents component in interpretation. This result is inevitable against the background of the specific understanding Yerushalmi attributed to the historicistic method and the contents of the collective memory.\(^{20}\) He perceived this method as causing a reduction of the contents, subjugating them to merely local and temporal contexts, and thus leaving no room for the contents’ own meaning. This strict understanding of the historicistic method creates a contrast between the historian’s point of view and the contents of the Jewish collective memory, which in Yerushalmi’s approach have an autonomic and transcendent meaning in relation to any historical context. To conclude, for Yerushalmi the historicistic method itself is responsible for the separation of Jewish historiography from its object.

**Perception of the Interpretative Process**

The subjective process aimed at the datum has been defined by approaches that were concerned mainly with method, such as Schleiermacher’s, as a “reconstruction” of the process of creation or of the creative attempt that led to the creation of the datum.\(^{21}\) Naturally, Schleiermacher’s approach gave a rather minimal influence to the interpreter’s historical and cultural background.\(^{22}\) The interpreter’s status is derived directly from the perception of the datum as a transcendent and particular element, and as such, elevated above the human relations directed at it. The requirement of the interpreter to reconstruct entails an assumption that the interpreter can deal with the datum without his personality leaving any sign on the end product. The attempt to remove the interpreter’s character from the interpretative work reveals the aim to leave untouched the transcendence of the datum—the

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\(^{22}\) One can find some expressions that describe Schleiermacher’s awareness of historical dimensions that should be considered by the interpreter of the texts, see Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 55; 104; 112-113. Nevertheless, in my opinion the ambiguity of the author as ‘an other’ rather than that of past epoch is his supreme hermeneutic concern. Thiselton proved a different interpretation and consequently observed much continuity between Schleiermacher and Gadamer, see Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 225-226.
author in Schleiermacher’s case—without staining it with immanence stemming from the interpreter or his historical context. It appears that this approach assumes that only the interpreter’s reconstruction work can lead him to the perfect and transcendent character of the datum; a character that the real author of the text was not necessarily aware of while writing the text. Indeed, Schleiermacher believed that the interpreter understood the text better than its author.23 Despite the preferable status of the interpreter compared with the text’s author—a status that apparently stresses the advantage of the interpreting subject—the interpreter is required to reduce his historical and particular being in favor of reconstructing the datum. Only when removed from the interpretative process by means of the method can the interpreter completely understand the datum. The reconstruction of the author’s intention occurs when an ideal interpreter meets an ideal datum.

The fact that Yerushalmi also chose to characterize the work of the historian as “reconstruction” of the Jewish past (Yer, 93), is important to our discussion here.24 Similarly to his approach to the historicistic method and its aims, the opinions he expressed about the historian as reconstructing the past were presented as critical. Yerushalmi expresses mistrust of the historian’s ability to conduct the reconstruction successfully. We shall return to this point later. However, even this criticism does not diminish his primary understanding of the historian’s activity as aiming at reconstruction. This means that the historicistic method does not allow the historian to realize his role due to its reductionistic nature that emphasizes the real context at the expense of the datum’s autonomic meaning. The successful reconstruction by the historian can only be achieved if he is able to compartmentalize his self from his interpretative activity and treat the datum according to its features (autonomy, transcendence, etc.). Indeed, this failure in realizing the historian’s task, which from Yerushalmi’s point of view is inevitable, explains his assessment of the Science of Judaism as an attempt that reflected a break with the Jewish collective memory. The absence of the foundation of theological assumptions that suit the Jewish collective memory in the historiographic writings—an absence reflected first and foremost in the choice of reductionistic research methods—does not enable the act of reconstruction, and the result is a break with the collective memory. Yerushalmi’s words at this point are clear: “if the secularization of Jewish history is a break with the past, the historicizing of Judaism itself has been an equally significant departure. It could hardly be otherwise.” (Yer, 91)

The relation between the requirement of the interpreter to reconstruct and the marginal status awarded him in Yerushalmi’s approach is also reflected in the role he attributes to the historian. As we have seen, the emphasis on the ontological dimension of the datum, i.e., its being transcendent, marginalized its contents dimension. However, Yerushalmi presented the historian with the requirement to re-

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23 Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript, 246, note 12. For further discussion of this issue, see Thiselton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics, 221-228.
24 Yerushalmi adopts the expression from Oygen Rosenstock-Hoysi. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 93, 131, note 25. We shall return to this point later.
construct the datum in a way that would enable its full representation, or to be precise, the presentation of the divine being as portrayed in the collective memory. However, how can one reconstruct the Being or presence of God? This question is raised especially by the marginality of the subjective intent and of the contents component in Yerushalmi’s perception of the Jewish collective memory. At this point, Schleiermacher’s opinion, directing the act of reconstruction to the author’s character, may help understand Yerushalmi’s approach. As we have seen, for Schleiermacher the act of reconstructing the datum is mediated by the text, in other words, the subjective contents in the work serve as a ladder to the transcendent datum. However, once the meeting with the datum has been achieved, there is no longer any need for the ladder, and it is disposed of. Thus, although some reflections of the sought entity may be discovered in the subjective contents, in Yerushalmi’s approach, as in Schleiermacher’s, they do not become central and cannot threaten the status of the entity as the original target of the reconstructing interpretation.

Thus it appears that Yerushalmi’s metaphysical-religious perception of Jewish history, which identified it as an arena of the appearance of a Being, consciously or unconsciously penetrated his understanding of the historian as reconstructing a datum that is a transcendent Being. Yerushalmi’s criticism of the historicism of the Science of Judaism implicitly assumes the ideal target of the historian as reconstructing the datum. As we have seen, for Yerushalmi, connection with the Jewish past can only happen with the acceptance of his two assumptions regarding the Jewish collective memory: divine providence and the uniqueness of Jewish history. When there is no option to accept these two assumptions—due to the removal of the transcendent being through the reductionist method and not due to the difficulty in referring to it with instruments originating in subjective consciousness—the conclusion that modern Jewish historiography cannot connect to the past became inevitable. Thus, Yerushalmi states: “Western man’s discovery of history is not mere interest in the past, which always existed, but a new awareness, a perception of a fluid temporal dimension… The major consequence for Jewish historiography is that it cannot view Judaism as something absolutely given and subject to a priori definition.” (Yer, 91)

Considering the centrality of the entity in Yerushalmi’s approach, we can understand the connection he makes between the inability to “view Judaism as something absolutely given and subject to a priori definition” and “a perception of a fluid temporal dimension of which nothing is exempt.” (Yer, 91) It seems that what fed the fear of relativism is the excessive emphasis granted in Yerushalmi’s approach to the transcendent elements he recognized in Jewish history, and his awareness of the difficulty of guaranteeing them in a modern reality rooted in immanent basic assumptions. However, there is no necessary connection between the awareness of the fluidity of time and the development of a relativistic attitude to history and its contents. Moreover, there are places where Yerushalmi’s opinion encounters some problems. First, Yerushalmi does not recognize the contradiction
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between his awareness that those entrusted with the preservation of the Jewish collective memory are religious organizations and social institutions, in other words, immanent and real bodies of the time, and the permanence and uniformity he attributes to the collective memory. Another problem arises from his saying that “Wissenschaft was still certain that there must be an essential ‘Idea’ of Judaism behind the shifting forms that history casts up to our view.” (Yer, 92) A disposition willing to admit that reality does not encompass existence and is founded on an idea can in principle allow the acceptance of the existence of a transcendent being “existing behind the changing forms,” and perhaps even identify this being with the idea that Yerushalmi himself believed the perception of Jewish history up to the formation of nineteenth century Jewish historiography relied upon. In this respect, the world of the founders of the nineteenth century Science of Judaism is not so distant from the Jewish collective memory as described by Yerushalmi. However, instead of facing this possibility, Yerushalmi preferred to direct his criticism at the ideology that developed in the twentieth century. As he says: “By now that nineteenth-century philosophical idealism has been largely repudiated. Along the way, the very notion of a ‘normative Judaism’ has been seriously and effectively challenged.” (Yer, 92) Not only does Yerushalmi not notice the criticism embodied in this statement about his perception of the historicism of the Science of Judaism, he also had trouble locating historically his criticism of the Science of Judaism. In other words, instead of dealing with the possible implications of the idealism of the nineteenth century on the Science of Judaism, he was mourning the twentieth century’s relativism.

With the above discussion serving as background, we can easily notice the presence of the motif of break and separation—or at least the potential for its appearance—structured into Yerushalmi’s perception of the collective memory and Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic approach. We should clarify this first in the context of Schleiermacher. Alongside Schleiermacher’s description of the interpretative act as reconstruction, the interpreter’s position is defined as “transcending” (transzenden); transcending aimed at the transcendent datum and constituting a direct expression of the gap between the datum’s transcendence and the interpreter’s inferior standpoint in relation to it. As we have seen, Schleiermacher argued that when the process of interpretation succeeds, the interpreter’s understanding is better than that of the author, and he credited this achievement to the objective method of the interpreter. He thought that through this method the interpreter was able to uncover unconscious aspects hidden from the author himself. The activity of the interpreter of a text in Schleiermacher’s view is thus opposed to the author’s creative process, since it is aware of what the author is not normally aware of. This contrast is also portrayed in the fact that while the writer believes he is producing content in the text he writes, the interpreter’s activity thematizes the text, and as a result produces not only much more knowledge than the author gave in practice but also
a representation of an entity (that of the author).\textsuperscript{25} The transposition the interpreter performs from his real world to the transcendent datum—i.e., the author’s unconscious intent—is enabled by a leap from the reader to the writer, or what Schleiermacher terms “divining.”\textsuperscript{26} However, this guessing testifies to the gap between the transcendent entity and its immanent representation in the text. According to Schleiermacher, the difficulty in reaching the datum does not result from the historical distance separating the interpreter from the author, but from the concealment of the individual, which even the interpretative process cannot completely remove. Even if Schleiermacher was speaking of a process of infinite approach, the infinite distance between the interpreter and the datum or between the immanent and the transcendent cannot be fully overcome.\textsuperscript{27}

The assumption of a gap between the immanent and the transcendent, grounded in Schleiermacher’s approach, is expressed also in Yerushalmi’s work. He writes: “Many Jews today are in search of a past, but they patently do not want the past that is offered by the historian... They are not prepared to confront it [history] directly, but seem to await a new, metahistorical myth.” (Yer, 97-98) The myth, unlike the historian’s treatment of the past as a research object, is aimed at indicating the existence of an independent and transcendent entity that is not stained by the real historical process. From an epistemological point of view, the difference between the experience of myth and the historian’s experience is the difference between an “experience of presence” and “an experience of representation.” In the former, the subject is passive in relation to the entity (God or the divine providence apparent in history), while in the latter he has an active role that enables the appearance of the entity in the experience, and perhaps even causes it. This means that in an experience of presentation, “God” and “divine providence” are none other than products of Jewish culture in a given place and time. From Yerushalmi’s point of view, the very act of objectification that the historian performs in his study of the past stains its object—collective memory—with an immanent and subjective taint alien to its transcendent nature, since the historian shows a different attitude to that existing in the collective memory. (Yer, 94) In Yerushalmi’s opinion, the historian’s activity eventually creates a break from the collective memory.

Considering the difference between the historian’s attitude to the past and the way the collective memory refers to it, the difference in the resulting pictures of the past become clear. While the past arising from the Jewish collective memory is partial and diluted, the past resulting from the historian’s work is encompassing and aims at undifferentiating totality. Just as the interpreter in Schleiermacher’s approach aims his activity to unconscious elements in the writer’s creative process, so Yerushalmi’s historian is perceived as “the point is that all these features cut against the grain of collective memory which, as we have remarked, is drastically selective,” “he seeks ultimately to recover a total past—in this case the entire

\textsuperscript{25} Schleiermacher, \textit{Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript}, 245.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 150.

\textsuperscript{27} See above, note 25.
Jewish past... No subject is potentially unworthy of his interest, no document, no artifact, beneath his attention.” (Yer, 94)

However, Yerushalmi’s approach raises several essential problems. First, the very fact that the interest in the past is conducted by subjects is in itself insufficient to cause subjectivization of its object or to make it immanent. The influence of reference on its object depends on the nature of the reference and not only on its very occurrence. If a Jewish historian treats the past with respect and allows the voices coming from it to be heard; if the historian performs a careful description and analysis guided by the phenomenon itself, without trying to force his own opinions or preconceptions on it, then the reference itself does not harm the object, it actually enables it to be revealed as it is. The severe contrast between historiography and its object, around which Yerushalmi’s approach crystallized, is based primarily on a false understanding of the very act of objectification. Second, Yerushalmi’s very claim that the figure of the past arising from the Jewish collective memory is partial and diluted compared with the encompassing past the historian aims to represent assumes an external criterion according to which one can evaluate the differences between the two types of past. Yet, if the two types of past are incommensurable, then no external criterion can be applied to them to create a hierarchy between them. Thus, the very ability to apply one criterion to both types of past assumes that they are actually commensurable, i.e., that there is no gap between them of the type that Yerushalmi implies and the collective memory itself transpires as a historiographic term. This conclusion clearly contradicts Yerushalmi’s premise that there is an unbridgeable gap between collective memory and historiography.

Moreover, one of the most central paradoxes arising from Yerushalmi’s approach and dismantling the consistency of his position concerns the status he attributes to the subject in relation to the Jewish collective memory. In principle, Yerushalmi wished to indicate the centrality and primacy of the transcendent being in relation to this memory. The power of this memory regarding the Jews is apparent in its overcoming historical changes originating in events in the real environment or in the subjective dispositions of Jews in various periods and places toward their past. However, his hidden assumptions in his criticism of the Science

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28 From a philosophical-phenomenological point of view we can state that Yerushalmi blurs the difference between an intentional reference to the object, characterizing any conscious occurrence directed frequently at its object see: Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson, vol. 1 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1989), § 36 and the founding approach that the intentional action refers to the founding of the object: by means of this reference the object becomes immanent and its characteristics are fixed by the subject see Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, An Introduction to Phenomenology, trans. Dorion Carins (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), fourth Meditation, 65-88. This is a transition from an epistemological attitude that regards the world as existing ‘for me’ (für mich) to a metaphysical statement determining that the world stems ‘from me’ (aus mir). See: § 11; § 8. For further discussion see also Ricoeur’s treatment of this phenomenon in Husserl’s writing Paul Ricoeur, Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology, trans. Edward G. Ballard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 196), 85-90.

29 For an analysis of the incommensurability argument, see Daniel Statman, Moral Dilemmas (Atlanta, Ga.: Rodopi, 1995), 56-88.
Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation

of Judaism expose the central status he granted the subject in the formation of the memory. He states: “The choice for Jews as for non-Jews, is not whether or not to have a past, but rather—what kind of past shall one have.” (Yer, 99) From this point of view, the Jewish past appears to be subject to the conscious and deliberate decision of the individual, although this individual appears as an autarchic entity raised above any influence of the temporal and historical context. In this spirit, it seems, Yerushalmi understood the origins of Jewish historiography from the foundation of the Science of Judaism as a conscious decision to hold onto a certain past, different from the one that filled the collective memory throughout the existence of Judaism.

Even the “solution” Yerushalmi proposes for the gap he identified between historiographic writing and the collective memory establishes this paradox. In his opinion, the role of modern Jewish historiography is to “reconstruct” the Jewish past—a task he considered appointed to the historian both by himself and “by all of us” and “for all of us.” (Yer, 94) The task of reconstruction involves mental activity performed by the subject and thus receiving a central status. However, this status is contrary to the nature of the Jewish collective memory, which, according to Yerushalmi is founded by the transcendent being. Thus it appears that Yerushalmi appoints the historian a role he cannot perform, since as the subject he is the one acting, he is the reconstructor, but the object of his study—the Jewish collective memory—is supposed to act from the power of the transcendent entity that he thinks makes the immanence redundant and requires its suppression. Earlier I noted Yerushalmi’s slide from intentionality (für mich) to constitution (aus mir). The meaning of this transition in this context is that even if reconstruction as such does not necessarily assume a constitutive act, in Yerushalmi’s approach a reconstruction always means placing the subject as the active entity that consolidates his object.

This paradox makes Yerushalmi’s position tragic, since he reveals the fact that he himself has no trust in the power of the means he proposes for reconstructing the presence of the transcendent entity in history. At this point his words are clear. On the one hand he states: “Yet those who demand of the historian that he be the restorer of Jewish memory attribute to him powers that he may not possess. Intrinsically, modern Jewish historiography cannot replace an eroded group memory which, as we have seen throughout, never depended on historians in the first place.” (Yer, 94) On the other hand, Yerushalmi defines the historian as the “doctor of memory” and “As a physician must act, regardless of medical theories because his patient is ill, so the historian must act under a moral pressure to restore a nation’s memory, or that of mankind.”30 It appears that Yerushalmi recognizes only one format where transcendent power is aimed, external and independent of immanent reality. This format, which was the basis for his perception of Jewish collective memory, echoed clearly in his criticism of the Science of Judaism, and

30 Cited from Rosenstock-Hoysi, see Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, 93.
eventually served as a guide for him when he sought a solution to the breach between modern Jews and their past. The historian, it appears, was also formed as a power and a transcendent entity outside real events, but capable of guiding them using his abstract ideas to return them to their right track where the transcendent entity—this time the God of Jewish history—could rediscover its lost powers and would no longer need an immanent subjective support paradoxically portrayed by the figure of the historian himself.

**Funkenstein – Gadamer**

*The Attitude toward Method*

One of the turning points expressed in Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory, compared to his predecessors, is the decline in the status of method within the interpretative process. Gadamer called his book *Truth and Method*, but this is to some extent an ironic title, since Gadamer’s central claim is that there is no method that reaches the truth, but rather the truth is produced anew each time in the real relation between the reader and the text. Method, as an attempt to guide reading and understanding, indicates no more than a particular relation to the text, and has no superior status, since any relation to the text is particular. Method is granted a special status only in a scientific framework due to the nature of the objects involved. However, texts as the objects of hermeneutic activity represent human voices not created by the subjective action of the reader.

The diversion of the question of the right method from the center of the hermeneutic discussion has several far-reaching implications on the perception of both understanding and interpretation. First, this move expresses an attempt to overcome the Cartesian infrastructure out of an awareness of its restrictive influence that denied the subject’s particular character, a character that Gadamer thought necessary for the meeting with the text. Unlike Schleiermacher, who believed that the process of understanding was based on a transposition from the reader’s subjectivity to what was “there,” Gadamer believed that the process of understanding was founded on the real meeting between the reader and his real world, and the text that was “there.” The understanding is the middle ground mediating and merging what arises from the text and what is entailed in the reader’s world. According to this approach, the reader is not a subject existing “here” and the text is not an object “there,” and the act of understanding does not express an act of transcending (*transzendieren*) to a transcendent datum, but that they are both intermingled. Instead of the binary and hierarchical understanding of the subject-object relations that was fundamental to the aspiration to method, objectivity and scientificity, Gadamer proposes the dialogue approach that forms an intermediate space that links them to each other. This space is the area of understanding to which hermeneutics applies itself.
An echo of this attitude toward method can be found indirectly also in Funkenstein’s approach, not devoting special attention to the importance of the historicistic method in the activity of the Science of Judaism. Even if he identified in the approach of the founders of the Society a new understanding of the Jewish past, he did not attribute this to the scientific method they adopted from the German historicistic school. Like Gadamer, Funkenstein proposed turning our attention to the immanent relations formed toward the past object. In fact, understanding method as an immanent mental action does not permit its dissociation from the context in which the object’s interest arose—in our case, the Jewish past. This means that the method itself is historicized, and thus there is no reason to grant it transcendent authority or status independent of its object and context.31 Similarly, Funkenstein’s awareness of the significant differences between the perception of history arising from the Bible and that of the Science of Judaism did not detract from his thesis of continuity. Unlike Yerushalmi, who assumed a contrast between the entity and its representation in the subject’s consciousness, Funkenstein’s immanent position implies no such contrast, since the immanence contains recognition of the entity. This means that the intentional attitude toward the past does not contain the argument regarding the formation of the past by the intending subject. Thus, even if there is a difference between the past at the basis of the collective memory and the past emerging from historians’ work, these two types of past are located on one continuum of constant referring to the past; a referring that does not detract from the completeness of the past that does not exist outside it.

The Datum

One of the most important contributions of Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory is his understanding of the object of the humanities and the complex of contents of tradition. In his opinion, it is not only the text but also the whole tradition that is directed toward the interpreter. As he says: “We always exist within a tradition… We do not think about what tradition says as something else, something alienated. It is always part of us.”32 This attitude toward tradition expresses the datum’s accessibility in principle to the researcher, and touches upon the perception of the datum itself. The datum, which appeared in Schleiermacher’s approach as a transcendent being, is inserted in Gadamer’s view into the same immanent context where the interpreter himself exists and where his mental relations are aimed. In this approach, an immanentization of the datum and a transformation of the transcendent element occur simultaneously. Now the datum is not a being “there,” whose transcendent character is reflected in the change of the interpreter’s disposition toward it. The interpreter designs a passive disposition in which he is

asked by the text and answers it in his interpretation. Transcendence is therefore located in the limits of immanence itself.

We should clarify that the immanent understanding of the datum does not lead Gadamer’s approach to subjectivism. The past datum and the tradition in which the interpreter acts are two factors that limit the interpreter’s subjectivism without restricting his access to the text. The fear of subjectivism is characteristic of hermeneutic theories that, unlike Gadamer’s, placed the effort to achieve method at the center. This effort, aimed first and foremost at removing the interpreter subject from the act of interpretation, is shown in light of Gadamer’s approach as useless, since from his point of view the interpreter’s personal involvement is an essential component without which the interpretation cannot take place at all. Gadamer considers the objectivism a result not of what is “there,” but of the interpretative process itself. The interpreter himself is a product of a historical tradition. He is a historical being and not an abstract subject forming a “pure” relation toward the text. Objectivism is a historical phenomenon in its own right, based on the constant relation between people and the diachronic contexts that form their particular perceptions. So it appears that the datum and the historical tradition exist beyond the interpreting subject. He had access to them in principle, while they do not function as transcendent to him.

The immanentization of the datum has two important implications for our issue: first, in this approach the research object, just like its method, will never be “opposed” to the interpreter or to whoever forms any subjective relation toward it. The possibility of a contrast between the datum and the interpreter, for which Yerushalmi argued, relies first and foremost on the understanding of the datum as a transcendent entity. However, when the datum is perceived as immanent, assuming a fundamental proximity between the datum and the interpreter, this possibility is rejected. Second, the negative attitude toward objectification, demonstrated in the analysis of Yerushalmi’s approach, is also rejected outright. This is an inevitable result of the understanding of the datum as immanent, which assumes its accessibility to the subject. Thus the objectification exists in the immanent field where immanent relations to the datum are constantly enabled.

This is the background for understanding the role of the researcher or interpreter in Gadamer’s approach. He has the frequently renewed task of determining the meaning the datum has in human existence at a given time. The datum itself appears to the interpreter as existing before his subjective relation was directed at it; the interpreter does not create it by having a relation toward it. The primacy of the datum and the interpreter means they have an equal status in the process of formulating the meaning of the text. In this context, Gadamer developed the concept of the “fusion of horizons” (Horizontverschmelzung). Interpretation is a fabric being woven in the meeting between the text and the interpreter. This

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33 Ibid., 265-307.
34 Gadamer discusses the “fusion of horizons” in several contexts. See ibid., 306-307, 374-375, 397, 576.
meeting encompasses various options for interpreting the text, some of which have been exposed throughout history, and also horizon meldings of the previous generations. Other interpretations create a new meeting. However, this meeting does not start from nothing for the interpreter, since he is loaded with horizons beyond his immediate concrete existence while bearing the memory and heritage that form his meeting with the text.

This analysis shows that the interpreter never meets a “pure” datum but is a party to an intergenerational dialogue with the datum, and a multi-generational discourse motivates and causes new investigations. Gadamer believes that observation of the history of research of a particular subject, which is an inseparable part of the formation of a relation toward the datum, always reveals the same pattern: the understanding of the datum preserves the relation of present people to the past datum, a relation that bears within itself the complex of references to the past. Understanding historical research as occurring alongside the historical movement of life itself denies the possibility of obtaining “complete” knowledge about the datum taken from human experience, and does not even enable the identification of such a datum as an object. Eventually, observing the history of the datum and of its research, and more widely human experience itself, uncovers a continuity designed by the constant interpretative relation aimed incessantly at the datum and not referring to particular contents. At the same time, the datum is present as the one the interpretative relation is aimed at.

The relation between Gadamer’s ideas and Funkenstein’s assessment of the actions of the Science of Judaism is clear. Like Gadamer’s datum, so Funkenstein’s datum—the Jewish collective memory—is immanent. The datum is the object of reference of the members of the collective in a particular time and context, and real history is the field where people form their memory of the past, as Funkenstein says: “The past is the remembered present.” (Funk, 7)

The immanent framework, including the datum and the subject referring to it, essentially disproves Yerushalmi’s argument that there is an opposition between modern Jewish historiography since the foundation of the Science of Judaism and its object. (Yer, 89) Funkenstein is clear on this point: “historical consciousness, throughout the ages, does not contradict collective memory, but is rather a developed and organized form of it.” (Funk, 18-19)


Funkenstein, like Gadamer, does not perceive the individual as forming the datum in isolation from the social and historical context of the individual himself. He believes one cannot detach the relation of the individual toward the data of the past from the social context in which it occurs, since “Even the very fact of self-consciousness is far from being isolated from society.” (Funk, 4)

Funkenstein accepts the approach that rejects the Cartesian tradition that saw the subject as an autonomic entity, since he believes that the subject is never merely subjective, and is formed by the cultural, social and historical context surrounding him. Thus, the datum toward which the relation of the present people is directed already bears the past relations toward it; the relation of the present individual toward the datum also contains other relations to this datum originating in a different time and different subjects. In his words: “No memory, not even the most intimate and personal, can be isolated from the social context, from the language and the symbolic system molded by the society over centuries.” (Funk, 5)

The collective memory combines the real dimension, that is the fact of its being formed in a particular present, and the conscious dimension limited by the relations of other present subjects. In Funkenstein’s approach, the immanence characterizing Jewish collective memory does not lead to a particular formulation of its contents. Moreover, for him the case of the Science of Judaism provides a vivid example of this: “In the nineteenth century, this consciousness [“Israel has no guiding star”] had been turned upside down; for the generations of gradually emancipated and secularized Jews, the uniqueness of Israel came to mean its universality.” (Funk, 20)

Thus, the very recognition of the immanent fixation of the datum by the relation toward it does not involve distance from the fixed and unchanging (substantive) basis of the datum. The differences between the various relations toward the Jewish past depend on different interpretations of a naturally substantive element: whether it is particular to Jewish tradition or universal. In every reference, including that of the historian, the relation toward the datum exceed the individuality of the subject. As Funkenstein says: “The learned studies of historians reflected the desire of their community and at times even shaped the ‘language’ itself.” (Funk, 20)

Indeed, the immanent relations toward the datum change for different subjects and at different times, but since the subjective experience is not limited to its own boundaries, it too preserves the substantive dimension that exceeds the individual boundaries of the individual’s reference. Thus, Funkenstein states that:

Normative Judaism did not preserve a continuous record of political events in the form of chronicles or historical studies. It did, however, preserve a continuous and chronological record of legal innovations, and until the nineteenth century, Jews view the raison d’être of their nation in the halakha.

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38 Funkenstein’s approach is undoubtedly influenced by Hegel. This thesis is the basis for Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. 
Innovations in the halakha were genuine “historical” happenings, and the term “Innovation” (chidush) itself indicated that every halakhic ruling had to have historical, even if fictitious, legitimation. (Funk, 18)

It eventually becomes apparent that in Funkenstein’s approach the constant presence of an unchanging element in the various appearances of references to it is the element of the continuity of collective memory. The structural continuity between the present and the past and between the relation and its datum, existing in Gadamer’s approach, finds equivalent expression in Funkenstein, who presented Jewish collective memory as a sequence of intentions bearing with them the particular contents of the time. Indeed, these contents are candidates for constant change as the time and place where relations toward them are formed allow. The fact that immanence in Funkenstein’s approach, as in Gadamer’s, is portrayed in a pattern and not in a closed and sealed content defined as tradition,39 protects the collective memory from identification with any particular contents. Thus, the changes in the contents formed within the limits of the relations toward the past datum cannot detract from its being given as a significant element to people of the present; the datum is not constituted by the relation toward it, quite the opposite, the very relation recognizes and declares the fact that it is already given.

The comparison of Funkenstein’s approach to Yerushalmi’s reveals the depth of the significance of the protection from arbitrary subjectification of the collective memory enabled in Funkenstein’s approach. As we have seen, in Yerushalmi’s approach, the transcendent nature of the datum led to its being portrayed in particular contents—the uniqueness of Jewish history and divine providence—which was not perceived as being formed within the limits of contemporary relations. The existence of this datum depended upon faith, i.e., accepting this particular content as an external fact independent of concrete consciousness. In the absence of faith, a breach and detachment from Jewish collective memory occurred. In contrast, in Funkenstein’s immanent approach, as the most basic pattern of the collective memory, confirms its existence and at the same time formulates its continuity.

Perception of the Interpretative Process

Gadamer admits that the reconstruction of the context from which the work originated is essential for its understanding.40 However, in his opinion the reconstruction cannot be considered the final destination of the hermeneutic activity, or even a key to the understanding of its object, since the meaning of the work is largely determined by the questions the interpreter directs at it. This insight led Gadamer to place the interpreter’s present at the center of the interpretative activity. However, along with the emphasis on the present, Gadamer states that the current

40 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 177.
modes of awareness are formed by the past. Gadamer’s argument is that the past should not be treated as an accumulation of finished facts, which the consciousness treats as given objects. It would be more correct to treat the past as a current in which we move and a movement in which we participate. From this point of view it would be incorrect to describe tradition or history as an experience we face, instead it is one we are formed by and without which we have no existence. Thus the past is not presented as a closed and sealed entity that we approach from the outside. The past belongs to people of the present who are incorporated into it, and thus the act of understanding it takes place from within their world.

Gadamer’s critical position toward the value of methods as an interpretative instrument can now be accurately understood. Gadamer rejects method precisely because it is founded on the aim to overcome the interpreter’s present, as a temporal and cultural context, while he believes that the present (like the past) is the most basic infrastructure for understanding the interpretation. In addition, Gadamer rejects the argument, typical of methodical approaches like Schleiermacher’s, that reconstructed understanding would always be better than the author’s own understanding. Gadamer believes that the difference between the two understandings is first and foremost an expression of the difference between the times when they were created and the traditions in which they were saturated; the author does not need to know the full meaning of what he wrote, and thus the interpreter can and must know more than him. For this reason understanding is not only a reconstruction or reproduction, but is also productive. This means that there is not, and cannot be, a hierarchy between the datum and the person who forms an interpretative relation toward it. The hierarchy, which in Schleiermacher’s approach is supported by the transcendence of the datum and of the interpretative method, is rejected by Gadamer in favor of a mutual relationship in which the interpretation contributes to the comprehension of the past datum and at the same time to the self-understanding of the interpreter as belonging both to tradition and to his own time. Each period explains a text in its own way, and the understanding achieved constitutes a result of the particular issue in which members of a given present were interested, and at the same time expresses their self-understanding. Thus, reproductive understanding should not be seen as preferable to a previous understanding, since any understanding is first and foremost a product of its time. The reproductive meaning of an understanding is then that the past object and the interpreter loaded with the cultural associations of his time participate in the interpretative process, and together create one sequence.


42 Gadamer’s approach in this context is directly influenced by Heidegger, who rejected any advantage of the past over the present. See Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), §73, 379.

43 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 296.
We should note that apart from a few references Funkenstein does not directly describe or attempt to clarify the interpretative process performed by the historian. However, Funkenstein’s text contains some phrases from which we can see the thematic similarity between him and Gadamer. Funkenstein stresses that the individual is not a Cartesian entity that starts from zero, but is already acting within a historical heritage and consciousness. Thus, after explicitly rejecting Yerushalmi’s thesis of opposition, he stated that in the western historical consciousness and in the historiosophic work that fed off it, the collective mentality reaches expression always located with the mentioned and expressing individual. As he said:

> While it is true that during the nineteenth century historiography became professionalized and, therefore, less accessible to the reading public… Historical studies, even the most technical, often reflected the problems of the identity of the nation state and other wishes and aspirations of the society in which the historian was embedded. (Funk, 19)

Not only does the past penetrate the consciousness of the present people and their perception of the collective memory, the present too has a central role in the formation of historical awareness. This centrality is preserved not only in the collective historical awareness of the present people but also in the historian’s approach to the past.

Indeed, even if the national awareness of a particular group relied on elements taken from its past, then: “In the nation-state of the nineteenth century, ‘collective memory’ was in part constructed by historians and found its way into society through textbooks, speeches, lectures and symbols.” (Funk, 19) In his opinion, the meta-theoretical arguments about the nature of the historical recognition of the past were founded on the premise “writing history can be best done from the inside.” (Funk, 19) So it seems that Funkenstein, like Gadamer, links the understanding of the past and the self-awareness of the present people. In contrast to Yerushalmi, who saw the uniqueness of Jewish history as a founding component of the Jewish collective memory, Funkenstein indicated the universality of constructing a historical awareness and collective memory. Thus, he stated that:

> Even if we grant that the majority of traditional Jews in France, Austria and Germany were not aware of the full scope of the achievements of the Wissenschaft, its results nevertheless faithfully reflected the desires and self-image of nineteenth-century Jews craving for emancipation, the mood of the perplexed of the times. (Funk, 19)

Regarding Yerushalmi’s argument that the radical historization of Judaism distanced the nineteenth century Science of Judaism people from the Jewish

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44 On this basis, Funkenstein links the crisis of the nation state during the First World War with the crisis of historicism. (Funk, 19)
collective memory, Funkenstein stated the following: “I doubt it. The collective memory of the community in which the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was embedded shows a high degree of consonance in their fears and aspirations.” (Funk, 19) Funkenstein proposes examining the Science of Judaism not in light of an ideal picture of the Jewish past, such as the one at the basis of Yerushalmi’s approach, but in relation to the present and the context in which it was formed.

Against the background of the establishment of the status of the present in understanding the past, we can examine the nature of the interpretative process in his approach. The paradigm he proposes for the Jewish historical awareness is the halakhic innovations in the traditional houses of learning. The basic understanding that “the halakha originates in a particular place and time” (Funk, 18) enables the statement that the halakhic innovation expresses the reproduction of the present people of raw materials from the past. This is one of the direct expressions of the distancing from the Cartesian infrastructure discussed above, since the innovation reveals the interpretative activity as not controlled by a-priori decisions or principles. Taking into account the presentation of the interpretative process by Gadamer, we can state more accurately the meaning and importance of the concept of halakhic “innovation” in Funkenstein’s approach. The halakhic innovation is an expression of the fact that each period explains the past sources in its own way, with a relation to the context in which the halakha was discussed, and in order to provide a response to the particular present needs. In addition, we can see the halakhic innovations as expressing the self-understanding of Jews at a given time. Thus for example, the study method at a given time, the method of the Tosefta authors or the method of the later halakha authors reflect the self-awareness of Jews against the background of their period. The halakhic innovation, just like the continuity itself, expresses a structural argument—a continuous relation toward past contents—and not an argument regarding the nature of the particular content produced by the reference itself. Since there is no transcendent factor that organizes he subjective intentions, and thus no guarantee to the preservation of any particular content in the collective memory, the intention provides a double protection against two types of predetermined fixation or control: the first precedes the intention and the second regards the particular outcome of a halakhic interpretation.

Apparently, we have a paradox: in principle we would have expected that an immanent framework of relations, which by their very nature change frequently, would empty the very idea of innovation from its contents, since an innovation can only be understood against a stable setting. In contrast, an approach like Yerushalmi’s, positively defining the contents around which it forms, could apparently serve as a better background for innovation. Nevertheless, the suggested hermeneutic analysis of Funkenstein’s position shows that it is the immanent approach that can enable the appearance of an innovation due to its being grounded in the constantly changing attitudes of the present people to their past. Conversely, Yerushalmi’s approach, assuming a fixed concept of Judaism and grounding it in a transcendent-being infrastructure, became sealed by its own boundaries and in any case closed its doors.
to any possible innovation. If God is the establisher of the collective memory, there is no room for the innovating halakhic process based on the idea that “it is not in heaven.” (Baba Mezi’a, 59b)

The full meaning of what I called a paradox become apparent when we reveal the concepts of truth at the foundation of the two historians’ approaches. As we have seen, Yerushalmi assumed a split between a-priori, non-experiential transcendent elements on the one hand, and the particular and real human reality on the other hand. The concept of truth suiting this split system is of the matching between the transcendent elements and human reality. This is a dichotomic concept of truth that does not enable dialectic tension between its two components. This approach can easily lead to the identification of the truth with a particular content, as indeed happened in Yerushalmi’s approach. Thus, any deviation from, or change in the character of the transcendent element is translated to a breach and a contrast, thus preventing the possibility of innovation. Differently, in Funkenstein’s approach the meaning formed every time through relations to the past object is granted the status of truth. This truth expresses a discovery or revelation of a possibility existing in the immanent relation between the present and the past and by no means reflects an accord between the past events and a transcendent and super-temporal datum.\footnote{This concept of truth is closer to the concept of “primary truth” as analyzed by Heidegger. See Heidegger, \textit{Sein und Zeit}, §44.}

The unrestricted anchor of Funkenstein’s approach in immanence raises the question of subjectivism, a problem also mentioned in our discussion of Gadamer. Do the various references to the past object subjectivize it? Funkenstein was aware of this problem, and even stressed the central role of the subject as an essential part without which no human experience can take place. As he said: “Any attempt to completely destroy the status of the subject contains a philosophical deception. A careful examination will show that he always inherently assumes another subject: there is no escaping from subject in epistemology, in history or in life.”\footnote{Amos Funkenstein, “History of Israel among the Thorns,” \textit{Zion} 60, no. 3 (1995): 346, in Hebrew. For further discussion on the essentiality of individuality see also Frank’s important work to which Funkenstein refers in ibid., 346, note 33.}

The problem of subjectivism only arises when one identifies the subject as a private individual arbitrarily and freely creating systems of meaning. However, if one assumes, like Funkenstein, another perception of the subject, the problem is removed. Indeed, Funkenstein, with clear Hegelian influence, describes the subject as the epistemological basis for every area of life, i.e., there is no possibility of awareness and knowledge without a knowing subject. But the subject is not the creator or former of the consciousness, since he is himself formed by the conscious activity in which he is engaged. The subject is his actions and deeds throughout history and he does not appear from nowhere or transcend his own area of activity.\footnote{See ibid., 336.} This historical-cultural view of the subject rescues him from subjectivism.
This perception of the subject leaves room for a transcendent element interpreted as the dimension beyond the awareness of the members of the collective at a given time. This is true even if the very recognition of this element itself relies on an immanent understanding of history. This approach does not entail surrendering substance as a real element in historical events. Moreover, the grounding of historical awareness in the present does not involve a negation of the element of cumulative history, since the subject himself is historical and does not exist as an entity transcendent to history. Even when historical consciousness is formed as a “master narrative” perceived by members of the collective as a subjective, external and sometime transcendent element, this does not detract from the status of the subject in forming the collective memory. The subject functions as a dominant element in the history of the group. As he says:

Since the master narrative is the identifier of the subject and is the subject himself... every individual lives the master narrative he forms not only in his words but also in his actions and life—then the attempt to give up the master narrative is an illusion. The authentic story does not try to smooth over contrasts and even contradictions in self-identity, but there is an authentic story of the past even if the criteria for its construction and identification are ad hoc and cannot be phrased algorithmically. Reality and its image in the narrative are not examined in a constant relation of representation but in a very complex dialectic relation of mutual formation.48

Funkenstein was aware of the postmodernist trends and especially of the deconstructionism that flourished in the second half of the twentieth century, which annihilated the presence of the subject.49 Against this background he sought, so it seems, to guarantee that the central status he granted to the subject in his perception of history—both as part of its immanent structure and especially as an essential element in the formation of conscious relations toward the past—would not affiliate his approach with these trends.50 Thus, Funkenstein’s approach unified the subject, the substance, the collective memory and the historical consciousness, the Jewish past and its historization into one, where the primary contact with the ancient beginning does not preclude the possibility for vital and renewing continuity in the present and future.

48 Ibid., 346.
The hermeneutic analysis of the perception of memory in Yerushalmi and Funkenstein enables us to see the perceptions of the Jewish past of the two historians as representing two hermeneutic paradigms. The first, presented using Schleiermacher’s approach, supports the formulation of a fixed, independent method that enables accessibility to a datum perceived as transcendent. This approach sees the art of interpretation as a reconstruction of the creative process or the experience that led to the formation of the datum. The second approach, presented through Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory, perceives the datum as an immanent element. Here the interpretative attempt is expressed as responding to the datum and its appearances in history. This understanding of the datum serves as a basis and justification for avoiding the effort to achieve a method external to the interpretative practice itself. Just like the datum, so also the interpretative process aimed at understanding it is perceived as a formation of meaning by the interpreting subject, an interpretation through which self-understanding of the reality in which he lives and acts is also achieved.

This framework enables us to discover the cohesion existing between the building blocks on which Yerushalmi and Funkenstein’s approaches rest. Yerushalmi’s understanding of the datum as transcendent accorded with the hermeneutic approach that granted significant importance to the method as an instrument for accessing the datum. As for Schleiermacher, for Yerushalmi too, the interpretative process was perceived as a reconstruction of the datum, although the understanding of the datum itself as transcendent contained a tragic and insurmountable element, leading Yerushalmi to see historical interpretation as expressing a breach with the Jewish collective memory. In contrast, Funkenstein’s approach perceived the datum as immanent and did not give significant weight to the possible contribution of method in accessing it. Accordingly, interpretation was perceived as a meaning-forming process. Here access to the datum does not transcend it. Quite the contrary, the discovery of the datum and the approach that suits it are formed in the same immanent process of interpretation. Although the meaning granted to the datum and the methods of accessing it are perceived in this approach as changing frequently, for different subjects and in different periods, the very reference to the datum was presented as enabling the continuity of Jewish memory.

Yerushalmi’s approach is ultimately rooted in the past, where a transcendent element formed that is largely inaccessible to modern Jews. In contrast, for Funkenstein the present serves as a starting point from which one faces both the past and the future. Naturally, the phenomenon of the Science of Judaism appears in Yerushalmi’s approach as a forming event in Jewish history after which nothing remains as before. His criticism of Jewish historiography attacks mainly what he views as an attempt to obtain an objective understanding of it. However, eventually his approach, that mourns the “vanished Jewish past” (Yer, 97), presents a past with a much more objective and inclusive nature, to the extent that it is raised above real human experience. Conversely, in Funkenstein’s approach the Science of Judaism is one of a sequence of different attempts of modern Jews to achieve self-
understanding. Within this framework, no perception of past not formed by human experience can have any meaning. So this perception of past is formulated without a separation between subjectivity and objectivity, immanence and transcendence, the changing and the substantive. Thus, there is no point criticizing the Jewish historian for what he as a human cannot achieve—a breach from his collective memory. To the degree that the subject sees the Jewish past as his past, he inevitably ties himself to it as a member of the present and as facing the future.

Epilogue

In this article I propose a hermeneutic basis for an integrative discussion of Jewish historiographic writing. This basis enables us to re-evaluate the project of Yerushalmi and Funkenstein. Yerushalmi’s approach is founded on an important intuition: he identified the decisive role of revelation in the consciousness of Jews over the generations. Moreover, he understood appropriately the founding status attributed to the past; in the religious awareness of Jews the historical periodization distinguished sharply between the authoritative past and the present subject to it, and as a result inferior to it. The unreserved importance of the past formed in the religious consciousness of Jews as bearing a transcendent significance. However, from a hermeneutic point of view, Yerushalmi is mistaken not only in understanding the nature of the relation between the past or tradition and the human experience of its interpretation. His perception of the past and of the Jewish collective memory does not accord with Jewish tradition even regarding those components that were perceived as transcendent to human experience. Yerushalmi, as we have seen, grounded the continuity of Jewish tradition in its transcendent elements, which fixated it as static. Indeed, this tradition was portrayed by the Jews’ maintaining a lifestyle of transcendent origin, i.e., from God.

This approach led Yerushalmi to link the conscious efforts of Jewish historians to understand their past, due to the interpretative activity this entails, and the breach of modern Jews from their past. Yerushalmi saw as proof of this breach the lessening in the commitment of modern Jews to the Jewish Halakha. The image of Judaism arising from this approach is uniform, monolithic and strict, and it is presented with the definite article—the Judaism—implying that there is only one fixed and unchanging Judaism. However, this understanding of Judaism separates it from the real life world and denies its historical nature as a phenomenon that changes and develops over time. Moreover, this approach is particularly unsuited to Judaism as a textual culture forming in a continuous process of interpretation and midrash of past texts by the present people. It is this dynamic process, rather than static commitment assuming a stable image of the past, that reflects the present day commitment to the past.\(^5\) Additionally, Yerushalmi’s understanding of Judaism

\(^5\) The Midrash scholar Daniel Boyarin showed that in Midrashic literature the citation from the Biblical source indicates the fixed object, although the meaning given to the source
does not accord with it being a culture of disagreement. The disagreement does not express a distortion of “authentic” Judaism, but is actually the engine that generates Halakhic work itself.\(^{52}\)

Presenting the Halakhic work as a process of innovation and change and at the same time as occurring within the binding limits of “Halakha to Moses from Sinai,”\(^ {53}\) disproves the approach that sees the historical effort to understand and interpret the contents of tradition as a breach with or isolation from them. This false approach relies, as Sagi showed in a different context, on two premises: ontological and epistemological. As he says:

The ontological premise is that this entity called Judaism exists without any connection to the believer’s viewpoint. This premise reflects an essentialist perception of Judaism, and is based on the general assumption that normative systems located in history and culture portray entities... The epistemological premise is that this entity [Judaism] can be known independently of the observer’s viewpoint. The epistemology suiting the essentialist perception of Judaism is the realistic epistemology that assumes that the believer can know Judaism as it is.\(^ {54}\)

The linking in Yerushalmi’s approach of Jewish collective memory to the essentialistic philosophical worldview grounded in these premises is clear. A completely random glance at Halakhic literature, not to mention its research literature, disproves the image of Judaism from which Yerushalmi believes modern historiography represents a breach.

Funkenstein, unlike Yerushalmi, avoided assuming a contrast between real human experience and the presence of transcendent elements in this experience. Funkenstein’s approach, which limited itself in advance within an immanent framework organizes around the interpretative references of subjects to their past, relied on the continuous relation of these subjects toward a fixed datum—what I have termed “substance.” The meaning of substance is the permanent past axis serving as a reference for people of a given period.

In fact, Funkenstein’s approach does not unambiguously distinguish between two options arising from it: first, that from immanence it is possible to experience the presence of a transcendent entity, so that the historical viewing of the Jewish past does not contradict the experience of God’s presence in Jewish history, nor the

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\(^{52}\) For a discussion of the significance of disagreement in Jewish culture, see Avi Sagi, ‘Elu-va-Elu ’A Study on the Meaning of Halakhic Discourse (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996), 73-86, 174-190.

\(^{53}\) See B. Menahot 29b.

\(^{54}\) Avi Sagi, A Challenge: Returning to Tradition (Jerusalem: Hartman Institute and Bar-Ilan University, 2003), 282, in Hebrew.
possibility of identifying what is unique about it. Second, assimilating the transcendent being into the conscious and interpretative experience where it appears analogically. In Funkenstein’s approach it is possible to observe the Jewish past and give it meaning and significance, whether perceived as transcendent or as a stable and permanent axis in an immanent experience. The observer of Jewish history does not necessarily experience God’s presence, but rather the significance it has been granted over the generations. Thus, while in Yerushalmi’s approach Jewish history appears as a choice of one exclusive option, in Funkenstein’s approach this history is viewed as a type of communication between people in a concrete context; while the rules of communication are agreed upon, there is not necessarily any agreement regarding the particular contents or meaning of the communication.55

The impression the reader may gain, that Funkenstein’s thesis is more reasonable, or easier to defend, at least with the hermeneutic tools proposed, is not incorrect. Yerushalmi’s approach is very difficult to defend, or at least is revealed as “inefficient” from a hermeneutic point of view, in Gadamer’s meaning of this term, i.e., he does not enable us to recognize and understand the way the past exists in perceptions existing in the present.56 Thus, it is no coincidence that his approach was unable to progress beyond its starting point. The past as a transcendent datum did not become clarified by his discussion, and significant discrepancies were even discovered in his approach. This result may testify in general to the hermeneutic difficulties typical of approaches where the transcendent datum at their heart is perceived rigidly. It seemed that looking at Yerushalmi’s approach through Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic theory could help, since he formed a method of “listening” and stepping “out of one's own frame of mind,”57 to the transcendent datum. However, in contrast to Schleiermacher, Yerushalmi’s approach not only does not offer ways to access its datum, it even contains a severe ideology about the contrast between the very existence of a methodological approach and a transcendent datum. Thus, the criticism of Yerushalmi’s approach becomes even more severe when viewed from Schleiermacher’s perspective. Moreover, the use of Gadamer’s perspective to analyze Funkenstein’s approach can be considered as another layer in the criticism of Yerushalmi’s approach. Following Gadamer’s approach, we can argue that Yerushalmi criticized the founders of the Science of Judaism for something they were unable to do: standing in contrast to Jewish history. But the most important requirement raised by Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory, exposing the way the past exists in the consciousness of people in the present, is also not properly answered in Funkenstein’s approach.58 Funkenstein did

55 On tradition as a communication event, see Boyer Pascal, Tradition As Truth And Communication: A Cognitive Description Of Traditional Discourse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
56 For Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutic productivity, see Gadamer, Truth and Method, 277-300.
57 Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript, 42 and 109.
not show how the Jewish past actually exists in the awareness of the Jewish historians who founded the Science of Judaism. His approach only indicated the way this phenomenon should be observed and examined, but he himself did not perform the program whose logic he implied very generally and without having conducted a real discussion of its premises. Since the test of this approach is practical and occurs in its application, it cannot be defended, nor can its faults be discovered until it is applied in practice to the various components of the Jewish collective memory, including the texts of the Science of Judaism.