

AJS AND ITS PUBLICATIONS

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For many years, the *AJS Review*, the academic journal of this organization, was published as a maroon hardcover and distributed by KTAV Publishing House, a family shop and an altogether familiar, blustery, second-generation American Jewish business. This longstanding relationship with AJS was indicative of how, at the time the organization first emerged, Jewish academic publishing was still a new, mostly untested enterprise. The move a few years ago to Cambridge University Press was a happy, eminently sensible choice, much akin to someone well beyond the bloom of adolescence compelled, finally, to move out of the house.

Here, as is so often the case, the first definite steps taken by Jewish studies as a field in the direction of academic institutionalization are, essentially, within memory. So much of what we tend to take for granted was so recently stitched together—the expansion of the field beyond the classic arenas of religion and history and language, the impact of interdisciplinary studies, the influence of anthropology on history, the intrusion of history into literature and, in general, the passage of Jewish studies beyond expressly Jewish scholarly and rabbinic institutions and into the contemporary American university.

In a field like ours that has altered so rapidly and so dramatically in such a relatively brief period, its publications might respond to such changes in one of a variety of ways. I'll propose just two: They might seek to act as a dike against (what some might feel) unnecessary, excessive, or diversionary

misdirection, as an arbiter in determining what it is that remains central and what does not. Or—as I think our organization's two splendid publications have managed to do so well—they can seek to walk a rather more subtle, complicated line, striving to serve as signposts for the fullest range of offerings in Jewish studies, while also providing self-critical guidance as to where things might best, most intelligibly move. Such balance is difficult to maintain. But the prospect that our “house organs” can function as wry but active participants in the field, as periodicals that maintain sufficient distance so as to remain critical—but with sufficient engagement as to care deeply and think seriously about all salient aspects of Jewish studies—remain, as I see, exemplary goals.

Perhaps the most acute challenge likely to confront both of our publications in the coming years, in rather different ways—arguably, the most central one facing the field of Jewish studies, as a whole—is the extent to which Jewish studies still constitutes a field in any but the most schematic of ways. Across the academic map comparable questions have been asked about once seemingly coherent fields that are now, in some cases, being pulled in so many different directions, inundated by so many disparate, often mutually contradictory voices. In Jewish studies, as elsewhere, this is a sign of vitality. It remains, at the same time, a cause for concern for anyone committed to the belief that one can truly master Jewish knowledge in ways that promise that one might speak to a wide range of scholars with interests and predilections not identical to one's own. To be sure, long gone are the days when Jewish studies was a cozy (albeit, often cozily antagonistic) cousinhood, a cluster of mostly East Coast schools bound by a

reasonably clear, if rarely articulated, set of common presumptions, hierarchies, and, of course, a rich but more or less consensual medley of dislikes. Such clarity will not likely again recur, nor should it, but to the extent to which we can and should rely on our academic organs to clarify what can now be clarified, we should be able to turn to this periodical and to the *AJS Review*.

For some seven years, I've served as AJS vice president of publications, which provided me with the opportunity to do what I could to oversee and, perhaps, also to improve the organization's periodicals, which are, as I see it, in as good hands as anyone might hope for. (This publication has now been renamed “Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies” consistent with its expanding goals.) Much has changed in this organization in recent years, and to a large extent for the better. A cousinhood AJS is no longer; a merely convenient magnet for job replacement or professional enhancement it should never acquiesce to become. How to chart the middle ground between a mechanical professionalism and a warm, but inevitably exclusionary *landsmanschaft*-like existence will figure presumably among the tasks of its future leadership, and to the extent to which there will be public voice given to these struggles—and, if confronted directly, struggles they almost certainly must be—one would like to believe that they will be found, in ample supply, in the pages of its periodicals.

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