



Shredded Identities

A Book of Revelation

“*Wissenschaft des Judentums* is not only still relevant, but is the central force shaping Jewish identities”, contends Shakhar Pelled in a seminal new book on the acculturating and socializing role of *WdJ*.

From Methodology to Meta-Narrative

A new analysis of the impacts of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* on Jewish Identities

According to Pelled’s book, the methodology of *WdJ* is the basis of a powerful meta-narrative that provides *WdJ* with a far deeper cultural influence than it is usually credited for.

WdJ’s careful methodology and positivist objectivism have shaped it into the major driving force, albeit generally unacknowledged, of contemporary Jewish identities.

A close look at *WdJ* self-discourse reveals that the well-known trans-generational tendency of *WdJ* scholars to blame previous generations for making ideological use of *WdJ* findings, is only the surface story.

The debate never touches the core construct of the findings themselves: how they were obtained, what was the methodology used, were they the products of “*Wissenschaft*” or of “*Verstehen*”?

These issues are mostly silenced in *WdJ*.

Wissenschaft des Judentums as a Socializing Force

As an intellectual movement, *WdJ* became the central meta-narrative influencing all streams of Judaism - a meta-narrative deriving its main force and pretensions to objectivity from its methodological discourse, yet, as Myers¹ testifies, when compared to its recurring appearance within historical research in Europe and in America, the “question of objectivity” almost never comes up in the context of Jewish historical research.

Ever since its founding, *WdJ* methodology is seemingly transparent—it is rarely discussed. Yet, it is a methodology that enables discourse: becomes the discourse itself.

WdJ methodology is ideology, for it is what makes it a “*Wissenschaft*” and thus credible.

¹See Myers, David. (1994). “Was there a “Jerusalem School”?” in. Frankel’s *Reshaping the Past: Jewish History and the Historians*.

Applying Philosophy of Science Scholarship to the Science of Judaism

Analyzing *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a science provides fresh insights into the workings of the discipline. Based on the work of such philosophers of science as Popper, Kuhn, Carnap and Shapin, Pelled analyzes the sources of *WdJ* validity and veracity and arrives at far reaching conclusions.

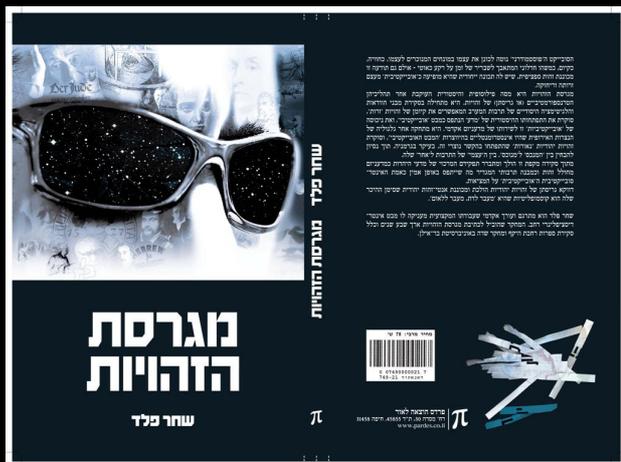
Jewish Identities are Constructed by *WdJ*

The impact of *WdJ* on Jewish identities is rooted in its construction as “*Wissenschaft*”. A Scientoistic Meta-Narrative creates the basis for the myriad impacts of *WdJ* on Jewish identities.

Some of these impacts are:

1. The reform movement appropriates *WdJ* as its scientific basis.
2. Assimilationist theories embrace *WdJ* as justification for leaving the fold.
3. Secular Jews adopt *WdJ* as an objective historical description of Judaism which contextualizes Judaism and removes it from its sacred context (i.e., the Kurzweil protest).
4. The Ultra-Orthodox flight from academia and general intellectual discourse also relates to *WdJ* as a science. It seems that the devout must flee from reason - and prefer *Credo quia absurdum est* over the cold verdicts of the scientist who would sound the death knoll of their faith. (See Yerushalmy’s particularly poignant discussion of such death knolls in *Zakhor* (1989).
5. Zionist Jews uphold *WdJ* as an ethos.
6. Modern Jews encounter Jewish learning and heritage through the prism of *WdJ*.
7. Jews and people involved with Jews everywhere turn to the academic study of Judaism for knowledge and information.

The Book



The Cover:

The cover design symbolizes the stretch of modern Jewish identities beyond religion and beyond national boundaries, while embedded features include many of the founders of modernity and of *WdJ*, indicating that the seeming non-identity of the modern Jew is in fact firmly rooted in an academic meta-narrative.

Book Contents:

Systems of Trust: Identities; Science and Prestige; The Social value of Knowledge; From Science to Scientoism.

The Context of Christianity: The rise of science within Christendom; the Crisis of Biblical Criticism; the German Aufklärung and the rise of historicism.

Hebraic Interfaces: Bildung; Buber.

Wissenschaft des Judentums: *WdJ* centrality in the transformation of modern Jewish identities; the move to the U.S.; the return to Zion and the Hebrew University; the Crisis of Historicism and its absent aftermath; Bar-Ilan at the forefront of *WdJ*; some specific scholarship methodologies.

WdJ impact on life: The current position; a central paradigm of Jewish education; transformations of religious identities.

Appendix: Illustrative Methodology: Sample analyses of *WdJ* articles.

An Id worthy of a Yid: Wissenschaft!

Contra to Meyer's claim that *WdJ* was 'predominantly a religious enterprise'. Pelled claims that *WdJ* is the foundation of all modern Jewish identities, not as a religion, but as a Science. The essential perception of *WdJ* as a "science" is the basis of its true cultural impact, not the self-image of its practitioners as somehow replacing Judaism. Rather than Super-Ego, *WdJ* is the Id of the modern Jew....

1. Meyer M.A. (2004). Two persistent tensions within Wissenschaft des Judentums. *Modern Judaism*. Oxford University Press Vol. 24 (2).

About the Author



Shachar Pelled is a freelance researcher and translator who is deeply engaged in the cultural implications of learning and academia. As a freelance scholar he seems to enjoys the outsider's perspective so characteristic of the modern Jew...

15th World Congress Discount

Pelled's Book is available to Congress participants at a discount. Call: 0528119610.

Shachar Pelled is lecturing at the Fifteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, on Sunday, 12th Av, 5769, 2 August 2009, at the 17:00-19:00 Moshav "Jewish Studies and the Study of Judaism" on "The Crisis of Historicism - Hidden Parameters". Room 5818. He can be contacted by email: espelled@gmail.com; Phone: 972-52-8119610 or blog: <http://espelled.wordpress.com>.

Methodology becomes the assurance of veracity: If it cannot be a science, it is meaningless! But if it is, then the Thomas Theorem holds true: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences!"