

SELECTED ABSTRACTS

Natan Alterman and the Judenrat Controversy

Avner Holzman

For the last 30 years of his life, the holocaust has been a central theme in Alterman's works. During 1954 and 1955 he focused on the issue of Martyrdom vs Judenrat. Speaking through the dead, he suggested that it is difficult to pass absolute judgement on the guilt of the leaders of the Judenrat who tried to mediate with the Nazis in a desperate effort to save Jewish lives. He was severely criticized by leaders of the leftist faction of Kibbutz movement, some of whom had participated in the ghetto uprising (Bozikovsky and Zukerman). They objected to his position that heroic resistance was not the only legitimate option.

In his response, Alterman cited records in which heroes of the uprising doubted its outcome and did not automatically discount negotiations with the Germans should they result in the saving of Jewish lives. His primary message was not, however, to argue for one way or another. He asked that a lesson be learned from the horrors of the holocaust, which affected all Jews. He pointed to the loneliness, helplessness and constant threat to life in the Diaspora, and restated the only solution, goal and ideal: An independent Jewish nation in its own land.

The Attitude Toward Tradition in Bialik's Poetry

Aharon Mirsky

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

In his poetry dealing with Jewish life, Bialik's attitude toward tradition has ambivalent overtones. Trained in the Talmud, and coming from the declining shtetl, he writes of the problematic aspects of Jewish existence and calls to task its traditional ways, values and goals. His own passage from the world of Beth Hamidrash (House of Study) to that of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) is the main theme of these poems. With the exception of the poem "*Hamatmid*," (The Diligent Student) which reflects the poet's critical and negative feelings towards a childhood lost in a crumbling, cloistered world, Beth Hamidrash is rendered as a lyrical symbol of historical Judasim. In "*On the Threshold of the Beth Hamidrash*," Bialik laments the destruction of the world of the forefathers, its failure to sustain the new generation, while he reinforces its timeless strength as a symbol of cultural heritage. Beth Hamidrash remains however a remembrance of past glory to be replaced by new cultural centers synonymous with the ideas of Achad-Haam on national-spiritual revival.

Moses Ibn Ezra's garden poem and Bialik's poem on New York

Sarah Katz

Bar Ilan University

A strong affinity exists between Bialik's urban poem, "*Let the city's sound reverberate at will...*", written in New York in 1926, and Ibn Ezra's beautiful verse, "*The garden put on a coat of many colors...*", written in the twelfth century. The coincidence is explained in Bialik's correspondence of the period. Having refused in the past to go to New York, a city whose noise and customs he detested, he could no longer avoid the call to enlist the support of its Jewish community for the national home in Eretz Israel. He was surprised and inspired by the vitality of Jewish life he encountered here. Still repelled by the city's commotion and twentieth century technology, he was lured by its libraries, which housed material he needed for his editorial work on the collections of Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Ezra's poetry. It was under these contradictory circumstances, that he broke a decade of poetic silence and wrote his New York Poem, whose central image is a sapling, sprouting through the iron and stone walls of the city. A metaphor for eternal youth and renewal, it is drawn from the image of the rose-king among the new blossoms, in Ibn Ezra's (whom he viewed as a "modernist") spring poem. The sapling, moreover, is a symbol of the community's ability to sink roots in a strange land and the poet's faith in Jewish continuity and renewal.

Contemporary Conflicts Between Cultural Trends in Jewish Life

Efraim Shmuely

Haifa University

The Rabbinic authority succeeded to maintain and perpetuate a religious community which lived within the confines of the Law. Unlike other national groups which have used their heritage to press forward to a new future, the Jewish people remained immersed in its past. In Rabbinic culture the prohibition to hasten the coming of the Messiah was more pronounced than the belief of "*Daily I wait for his coming*".

The scholar and thinker, Moshe Maisels-Amishai, does not make any distinction between Talmudic and Rabbinic Cultures. The main difference is between the period of the First Temple and the Second. During the First Temple when questions of conduct or ritual arose, one asked God through an intermediary, the prophet or priest, while during the Second Temple, the authority to decide in matters pertaining to religious Law was vested in the Torah. In truth, there is a distinct difference between the two cultures. The Talmudic scholars

interpreted the Torah and their interpretation became Law. The Rabbinic Culture, on the other hand, had no authority and relied completely on the decisions of the Talmudic scholars.

According to Maisels, Talmudic-Rabbinic Jewry lived beyond history. From the Talmudic academy Pumbeditha, in Babylonia, to the Yeshiva of Volozhin in Lithuania is one long day. Other nations determined our history. The Jewish people were circumscribed by the Torah from within and by persecution from without.

The Zionist idea, in contradistinction to the Rabbinic, aims to create a new national life by which the Jewish people will again enter the stream of historical existence and development.

(Part II will deal with the views of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik)

From Jerusalem to Brunswick: The Metamorphosis of *Dina De-Malkhuta Dina*

Gil Graff

Between the appearance of Moses Mendelsson's *Jerusalem* (1783) and the first of the mid-nineteenth century reform rabbinical conferences, at Brunswick (1844), the Talmudic dictum *dina de-malkhuta dina* was invoked with increasing elasticity by Jewish religious reformers. This legal principle, which has served as a basis for limited accommodation to state commercial law (*mamona*, as distinct from *issura*), became a rationale for the abandonment of traditional religious practices among the more radical reformers. Both the reformers and the traditionalists, who continued to assert the force of the *issura-mamona* distinction in the application of *dina de-malkhuta dina*, cited Mendelssohn's work in support of their positions. Similarly, the pronouncements of the Assembly of Notables and Paris Sanhedrin were variously interpreted. While religious reformers understood them as an unequivocal call for the accommodation of Jewish practice to the norms of the state, traditionalists regarded the "doctrinal decisions" as no more than a reaffirmation of the *issura-mamona* jurisdictional classification.

By the time of the Brunswick conference, the theoreticians of reform had completely set *dina de-malkhuta dina* "on its head." Rather than representing a formula for accommodation to a narrowly defined (by rabbinic authority) set of state laws, the principle had been expanded to include the full range of "civil" matters upon which the state legislated. Thus, for example, school attendance on Shabbat would be encompassed by *dina de-malkhuta dina*. It was the abnegation of traditional legal norms under the guise of compliance with such a basic principle of Jewish law which so infuriated the orthodox leadership of the time. The different interpretations and applications of *dina de-malkhuta dina* by reformers and traditionalists during the first half of the nineteenth century reflect an irreparable breach in Jewish ideology, knowledge of which is critical to an understanding of Jewish life in the present day.