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Prof. *Chaim Tchernowitz*, Founder and Editor (1939-1949)
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SELECTED ABSTRACTS

A Half Century of Ugaritic Research

Cyrus H. Gordon
New York University

Since the first discovery of Ugaritic tablets in 1929, these documents have revolutionized biblical studies.

The oldest known form of the ABC, with the letters arranged in virtually the same order as in the Hebrew alphabet, comes from Ugarit. Also the poetry from Ugarit has the same basic structure as biblical poetry.

The light shed by Ugarit on the grammar and vocabulary of Hebrew is startling at every level: phonetics, morphology, syntax and as regards both rare and common words.

It is in the realm of values that Ugarit and Bible differ. Ugarit was materialistic and attributed covetousness to their gods. The Hebrews reacted with the commandment "Thou shalt not covet." the Ugaritians ascribed sexual excesses (including bestiality) to their gods, and doubtless reflected such excesses in cultic practice. The Hebrews consciously banned this as depravity abhorrent to God.

Ugarit was an intellectual center embodying what is tantamount to a university that fostered all the known arts and sciences. Philology was highly developed and the scholars there composed sophisticated textbooks including quadrilingual vocabularies.

It is the high intellectual level of Ugarit that explains why Israel never went through a primitive stage. The Hebrews, on conquering the Land, found a literate, advanced culture which they absorbed and used for creating their own original values that have endured as the principle legacy of the ancient Near East to World Civilization.

Daniel Persky — Dean of the Hebrew Movement in America

Jacob Kabakoff
Professor Emeritus, Lehman College

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the death of Daniel Persky and the 100th anniversary of his birth his exemplary devotion to the Hebrew language and literature is reviewed. Upon settling in the United States, Persky distinguished himself as a Hebrew activist and was among the organizers in 1909 of the Ahiever society. Its members were active in disseminating Hebrew publications but soon decided to issue their own monthly magazine *Hatoren*. As secretary of Ahiever, Persky turned to various writers to solicit their help in making *Hatoren* a modern magazine that would match the calibre of European Hebrew publications. Persky's

letter to Dr. David Neumark of May 23, 1913, in which he appealed to the noted authority on Jewish thought to contribute to *Hatoren*, is written with his characteristic fervor and enthusiasm. The letter is reproduced here.

U.Z. Greenberg as Poet-Prophet of the Zionist Idea

Orzion Bartani
Bar-Ilan University

Expressionistic influences and autobiographical elements contribute to the ethos of Uri Zvi Greenberg's poetry. Greenberg is an ideational poet who aspired to occupy the position in Hebrew letters held by Bialik, but unlike the foremost exponent of Jewish national rebirth, Greenberg was not guided by the thinking of Ahad Haam, the father of "Spiritual Zionism."

In his early poetic works, Greenberg presented himself as a poet-prophet, who is the harbinger of national redemption. The melody-motif in his poem *Terrestrial Jerusalem* is an expressionistic realization of the Zionist idea of national rebirth.

The myth of rebirth is expressed in Greenberg's poetry in secular modes. He relinquishes the enchantments of the diaspora, with its verdant landscape and fertile soil. He focused on the rock-strewn desert of Eretz Israel and transforms it together with its distinguishing properties, such as the yellow color of the wasteland, into a symbol of redemption and fertility.

In the process of creating the poem *Terrestrial Jerusalem*, U.Z. Greenberg recasts his early Yiddish expressionism into a new Zionist expressionism. The Yiddish, revolutionary poet-vagabond is thus transformed into a pioneer-poet-vagabond, expounding the Zionist vision of national sovereignty.

The Function of Zionism in S.J. Agnon's Works

Gershon Shaked
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

S.J. Agnon was an existential Zionist. His Zionism was not idle ideology. He emigrated from Galicia (in the Austro-Hungarian Empire) to Palestine in 1908 during the second Aliyah. Whatever his critical approach to Zionism, he dedicated his life to the Zionist idea and lived in Israel until his death, leaving it only between the years 1913-1924, the time he spent in Germany.

In one of his essays on the Zionist labor leader, Berl Katzenelson, Agnon endorsed the ideals of the pioneers, namely, political moderation and loyalty to the soil of Israel. The cooperative settlements seemed to Agnon the realization of the Arcadian ideal.

Agnon's major concern was that the newcomers to Eretz Israel could not strike roots in the land because they had never severed their ties with the diaspora. This

polarity constitutes a major theme in most of his Eretz Israel novels such as *Betrothed* and *Just Yesteryear*. In the latter novel the voices of scepticism and belief function as ideological point and counterpoints.

After World War Two and the Holocaust, a note of pessimism went through Agnon's writings. The most foreboding of his stories is the novella *Cover up the Blood* in which one finds a negative interpretation of the Jewish experience from World War One to Israeli independence, as well as a dark prophecy for the future.

Agnon came a long way in his interpretation of Zionism since the early days of his career, when he described the frailties of the young pioneers and the irony of their destinies, but believed in the future of Jewish existence in the Holy Land. In his last years his scepticism dominated his writings, although in real life Agnon identified himself with the movement advocating the right of the Jews to possess all of the land of Eretz Israel.

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