“CONTINUITY OF THE CRISIS”

Zionism is the encircling of that crisis point where nationalism gleamed in our lives. The continuity of the crisis is what threatens us.

GERSHOM SCHELEM, OD DAVAR

PART I

HOPE AND DISILLUSION

(1923–1938)
CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Indifference, on the one hand, and, on the other, unlimited glorification of the form, of spoken Hebrew, without any connection to the content of traditional Hebrew culture, even though it was what gave meaning to every word in Hebrew—these are the characteristics of the new Jewish settlement, the yishuv, in this matter, which is of supreme importance. There is apprehension, lest the younger generation of Hebrew speakers, growing up in this atmosphere, might perhaps be Hebraic in an extreme manner, but far less Jewish than its parallels in Germany and America, where outstanding teachers are at work. Though they do not speak and write in Hebrew, they are much closer to the sources of Judaism.

SHMUEL HUGO BERGMANN, “GEISTIGES LEBEN”

Beginnings in Palestine

A Young German Jewish Man Arrives in Palestine

On the morning of September 20, 1923, Yom Kippur, a coastal steamer slowly approached the port of Jaffa in Palestine. The ship, “which bore freight and a few passengers and anchored in various ports between Alexandria and Istanbul,” was arriving from Egypt one day late, after being unexpectedly delayed in Port Said. Among the few passengers on deck were two young men who had been born in Germany, each of whom was to become, in his respective field, a pathfinder in the history of twentieth-century Jewish studies. One of them, the Orientalist Shlomo Dov Goitein, remained on the anchored ship and sailed on to Haifa, the next port. The other, Gershom Scholem—whose fiancée, Escha Burchhardt, had come to greet him—disembarked and arrived, for the first time in his twenty-six years, at his desired destination, in Zion. After spending ten days in Tel Aviv and Ein-Ganim, near Petach-Tikvah, where he spent the Sukkot holiday with friends from his Zionist youth movement in Berlin who had come to Palestine a short time before him, Scholem reached Jerusalem, where he lived until his death. Professionally speaking, Scholem’s absorption into Palestine
was easy and rapid. In his first week in Jerusalem he had two job offers. The first was to serve as a mathematics teacher in the teachers’ college in Jerusalem, and the second was to become a librarian in the Hebrew Department of the National and University Library. The library’s director, Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, was to become a close friend of Scholem. The two had already met in Bern, and Scholem lived in Bergmann’s house immediately after his arrival in Jerusalem. After some hesitation, Scholem chose the librarian’s job, though the salary was lower. In the library he could deal solely with topics that interested him, whereas he had some trepidation about being a teacher: “As a teacher I would have to correct papers in the afternoon as well, and who could say whether my pupils would not laugh at my Berlin-accent Hebrew?” he wrote in his memoirs.\(^3\) Scholem worked in the National Library for about four years, until he received a full-time appointment as a lecturer in Kabbalah at the new Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

From a personal point of view as well it appears that Scholem’s highly successful adaption to life in the Land of Israel took only a short time. On December 5, his birthday, he married his fiancée, Escha Burchhardt, on the roof of the Mizrachi teachers’ seminary in the center of town. Rabbi Simcha Assaf—who later became a professor of Talmud, the rector of the Hebrew University, and a member of the Israeli Supreme Court—officiated at the wedding. (Gershom and Escha’s marriage lasted twelve years. In 1936 they divorced, and Gershom married Fania Freud, his student—a marriage that lasted for the rest of his life.) In December 1924 Gershom and Escha lived in a rented apartment on Ethiopia Street, at the edge of the Meah Shearim neighborhood. At that time Meah Shearim was full of old Hebrew books, including works of Kabbalah, for which there was almost no demand, and they were sold very cheaply. Thus, Scholem, an enthusiastic book collector, was able to explore that “dialectical Paradise,” as he called it, and enlarge his library without interference, at least until other book collectors arrived and expressed interest in esoteric Hebrew literature.\(^4\)

In other ways as well, Scholem adjusted without significant difficulty. His body became used to the local climate without succumbing to any of the many diseases that ordinarily afflicted immigrants,\(^5\) and in his memoirs he described his arrival in Palestine as entering a new social network that lasted for many years. He made friends with immigrants of longer standing, most of whom had come from Eastern Europe, and renewed old friendships, mainly with members of the Zionist youth movement in Germany who were working in agricultural settlements.

Thus Scholem’s immigration and the beginning of his life in the Land of Israel was (at least as he described it retrospectively) a success story from the personal, social, and ideological points of view. Scholem wrote to his friend Werner Kraft
in Germany about his impressions of the Land of Israel and life there about a year after his arrival. In his autobiography, Scholem quotes a Hebrew translation of a portion of this letter (without mentioning that it was addressed to Kraft). There he describes Palestine as an ambiguous place, but one that mainly inspired and excited him. In the second part of the letter, which was published only after his death, Scholem describes the local cultural life in a different tone, and far less enthusiastically:

The waters of my life flow slowly here. I cannot speak at length about the conditions that determine my attitude toward the country. Without doubt I am among those who tend toward the most apocalyptic opinions with regard to the fate of the Zionist movement here. There is no way you can imagine the worlds that meet here. Life here is an open invitation to thinking people to go out of their minds, and in any event it is inevitably necessary to assume that there is a theological background for even the most ridiculous forms of life, if you don’t want “to stand out”—standing out happens here openly, sometimes in the form of the messiah, and sometimes in the form of a labor leader, and sometimes in much more frightening disguises. Indeed one may say everything about the new Land of Israel, if you want to understand me correctly, especially bad things—and how could this not be otherwise—in the indescribable collisions of unrestrained powers of creativity from six continents including the upper world? However, it seems necessary to me to admit one thing, that more things are happening here than in other corners of the universe.6 I personally
suffer in the most catastrophic possible way from the attitudes toward the language [Sprachverhältnisse], about which it is impossible to write in a sober way. If I ever write an essay on this, I won’t hide it from you.

The intellectuals in this country are as bad as anywhere, as [bad as] Jewish intellectuals can be, but they aren’t enigmatic like the ghosts you describe to me! In this country (a phenomenon that only developed completely at the Zionist stage) they are only one thing: stupid. Stupid in a surprising way, I tell you. The phenomenon of primitive, true (not to say original) stupidity of the Jews is apparently completely unknown in the Diaspora. This is one of the strongest impressions of the country. I don’t say this as a joke. In this apocalyptic country, indeed only here, it is possible to encounter Gartenlaube figures in Hebrew, a most exciting phenomenon. One can also meet the last of the kabbalists here.8

Along with the ambivalent feelings of wonder and amazement that his new city and its atmosphere aroused in Scholem, here he presents the cultural situation of the Yishuv (the prestate Jewish community in the Land of Israel) in unequivocally negative terms. In the latter part of the letter—which, as noted above, he chose to omit from his autobiography—one senses Scholem’s disappointment with his encounter with the cultural and intellectual side of the Land of Israel. This disappointment is understandable and natural if we examine the place of Palestine in the world of Jewish culture at that time, especially in comparison to the situation that prevailed in Berlin, where Scholem came from. If the Land of Israel of the 1920s can be placed on the margin of Jewish intellectual life, Berlin can be called its omphalos. Scholem’s passage from this vital center to the margin, even with the purpose of making the latter central, certainly entailed many difficulties and was neither unequivocal nor ideal, as Scholem depicted it years afterward. This process, with the disillusion inherent in it (as expressed in his letter to Kraft), can be better understood by examining Scholem’s Zionist expectations of the Land of Israel, which had taken shape in the circles of Hebrew culture in which he had been involved in his youth. These circles fashioned the Hebrew cultural ideal that he brought with him when he immigrated and made a deep mark on the way he envisioned Zionist achievements in the land of his choice.

Bialik and Agnon

The Germany of Scholem’s youth, during World War I and under the Weimar Republic, saw the renewal and flourishing of Jewish culture. The awakening and organization in the Jewish communities and the immigration of Zionist Jewish intellectuals from Eastern Europe who became active in Germany made a deep
impression on cultural life there and made cities like Berlin, Frankfurt, and Bad-Homburg into vibrant centers of Jewish culture.⁹

For Scholem, as for many German Jews of his generation, the encounter with Jews from Eastern Europe was one of the formative experiences of his youth and had a deep influence on his path in Zionism. These encounters, both through the writings of Martin Buber, which Scholem both admired and criticized, and through his personal acquaintance with Buber, played a critical role in Scholem’s progress on the path that led him to the Land of Israel. Indeed, if one traces the movement of Hebrew Zionist cultural centers from their origins in Eastern Europe through Germany on their way to the Land of Israel, one may say that the time of their flourishing in Germany, especially in Berlin, overlapped with the years when Scholem’s Zionist consciousness was formed. This flourishing was accompanied, mainly among Zionist youth, by a strong feeling of nostalgia for Eastern Europe and its Jews.¹⁰ Years later Scholem explained the essence of the attractive power of the Judaism and Jews of Eastern Europe as part of the process of forming an independent Jewish identity and part of the resistance to the assimilated German identity of his parents’ generation, which was generally representative of German Jewry at that time:

The more we encountered the not at all infrequent rejection of Eastern European Jewry in our own families, a rejection that sometimes assumed flagrant forms, the more strongly we were attracted to this very kind of Jewishness. I am not exaggerating when I say that in those years, particularly during the war and shortly thereafter, there was something like a cult of Eastern Jews among Zionists. All of us read Martin Buber’s first two volumes about Hasidism, The Tales of Rabbi Nachman and The Legend of the Baal Shem, which had appeared a few years earlier and had made Buber very famous. In every Jew we encountered from Russia, Poland, or Galicia we saw something like a reincarnation of the Baal Shem Tov or at any rate of an undistinguished Jewishness that fascinated us. These contacts and friendships with Eastern European Jews have played a great role in my life.¹¹

An encounter of this kind took place during World War I in Berlin and gave rise to a complex relationship that continued throughout Scholem’s life. This was with a young author who was born in Galicia and named Shmuel Czaczkes—that is, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, who was living in Germany at that time. When Scholem first saw him in the public library of the Berlin Jewish community, at the beginning of the war, Agnon was already a famous writer and a well-known figure among the Zionist youth there. Scholem and Agnon were introduced in 1917 by a mutual friend, Max Strauss. They liked each other, and a friendship grew up between them. Agnon, who was about ten years older than Scholem, charmed
the latter with his personal magnetism and unique style. “The Russian Jews with whom I lived in Pension Struck were by nature and by character intellectuals, basically enlighteners and enlightened people,” Scholem wrote in his memoir. “Agnon, however, had come from quite a distance, as it were, from a world of images in which the springs of imagination flowed profusely. His conversations often enough were altogether secular in nature, but he spoke in the style of his stories’ heroes, and there was something irresistibly magnetic about this rhetorical style of speaking.” Scholem described Agnon’s arrival in Germany as “a great event,” because Agnon was seen as unique in comparison with the other Hebrew authors who were known in Germany at that time. As he was both from Eastern Europe and also from the Second Aliyah (the second wave of secular Zionist immigrants to Ottoman Palestine), his foreign way of talking, the content of his conversation, and his behavior were entirely new, and in the eyes of the Zionist youth of Germany, he glowed with the light of the authentic Judaism of the East.

Agnon was unique in Scholem’s view and in that of his generation because Agnon belonged to foreign worlds they yearned for, and because of the special way that he described those worlds and made them available to the culture of the West—through his stories and tales. The worlds that were rendered visible to Scholem and his generation through Agnon’s stories stood in contrast to the German Jewish bourgeois milieu, with its assimilationist tendencies, to which they belonged. This bourgeoisie, with whose values they had grown up, was alienated from and hostile to the Eastern European Jewry that the youth regarded as authentic.

Scholem’s admiration for Agnon was great, and Agnon’s personality and stories made a deep impression on the younger man. The huge emotional influence he had on the young Scholem is shown in an entry in the latter’s journal from June 23, 1918, in which he described his feelings when he read the story, “Agadat Hasofer” (The tale of the scribe) in the translation by Max Strauss, to his friends Walter and Dora Benjamin: “On Friday evening I read ‘The Tale of the Scribe’ out loud to Walter and Dora. I read it probably for the tenth time, but as I already knew, it touches me more deeply every time. From the very first word such excitement gripped me, that I could only keep my voice stable with great effort. I trembled as if I had to kiss a girl.” With Scholem’s conscription into the army in the summer of 1917 and his wanderings in Jena and Switzerland after his rapid release from military service, the connection between him and Agnon was severed. It was renewed two years later, when Agnon was living in Munich. Agnon met Escha Borchhardt, Scholem’s girlfriend and future wife, by chance. Following that meeting the two men remained in contact. Agnon implored
Scholem to come to Munich to translate his stories from Hebrew to German. And in October 1919 Scholem arrived in the city to study at the university there and to be with his girlfriend.17

The two men were in Munich together for about half a year, until Agnon moved to Leipzig and then Berlin. During their time in Munich, they became close friends and spent a lot of time in conversation and walks together in the city’s streets and parks. Scholem did translate Agnon’s stories, and four of them appeared in later years in Der Jude, the magazine founded by Martin Buber in 1916.18 The many meetings and lively conversations Scholem and Agnon had also made an impression on the older man, and years afterward Agnon described Scholem as a person with insatiable curiosity: “It seemed to me that he saw everyone as though he had come into the world only for him, so he could learn from him, but that didn’t prevent him from disagreeing.”19 Just as Scholem’s view of Agnon was that of a young German Jew looking at someone from Eastern Europe who brought with him a new, authentic Jewish spirit, Agnon’s view of Scholem was that of a man from Galicia and the Land of Israel who had encountered an extraordinary and special product of German Jewry, which he saw as degenerate.

Scholem’s and Agnon’s paths crossed again in 1923, a short time before Scholem’s emigration. At that time Scholem was living in Frankfurt and was reading kabbalistic works in Hebrew with a small group in the framework of the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus (free Jewish study house of learning), which was founded by Franz Rosenzweig and focused on adult education. Agnon was living at the time with his wife in the spa town of Bad-Homburg. In his frequent visits to Agnon, Scholem became acquainted with one of the figures who was to play a very important role in his life, Hayim Nahman Bialik.

Bialik had arrived in Berlin in 1921, and he lived there for two and a half years. During this time he established two publishing houses: Moriah and Devir. His arrival in Berlin and his activities there, perhaps more than any other event, symbolized the emergence of the city as a center of Jewish and Hebrew culture.20 The precarious economic situation of Weimar Germany attracted many Jewish cultural activists from Eastern Europe, who were able to take advantage of the galloping inflation with the foreign currency they possessed and establish important publishing houses such as Jacob Klatzkin’s Eshkol and Simon Rawidowicz’s Ayanot. Other publishing houses such as Stibel and Omanut moved their operations to Germany from Eastern Europe. Bialik’s presence in Germany aroused interest and great enthusiasm among the Zionists, but this enthusiasm did not make Bialik interested in mingling with them.21 In the summer of 1923 Bialik moved to Bad-Homburg, where Agnon had been living for about two years. At that time a lively Jewish cultural circle formed in Bad-Homburg,
centered on figures like Agnon; Joseph and Shoshana Persitz, the owners of the Omanut publishing house; Jacob Fichman; Nathan Birnbaum; and Ahad Haam. Years later Scholem defined these Jewish intellectuals as “a brilliant circle whose like could be found only in prewar Russia and later in the Land of Israel.”22 After his arrival, Bialik became the central figure of this circle, axis around whom everyone else revolved.

Scholem and Bialik became acquainted through Agnon, who took Scholem with him to visit Bialik and Ahad Haam. When they first met, Bialik was drawn to the young Scholem and his interest in Jewish esoterica. In fact, there were two interconnected reasons for this attraction. One was Scholem’s study of Kabbalah, a field that was close to Bialik’s heart and that had a place in his anthologies, which will be discussed below. The second reason was that Scholem was a German Jew. Particularly because in general Bialik had little use for German Jews, he was struck by the young Scholem and “was interested in the phenomenon of a young German Jew who had set his mind on studying, of all things, the neglected and seemingly obscure subject area of Kabbalah.”23 Scholem was different from the people Bialik had met earlier in his exposure to German Jewry, and he made him into “the only Yekke [German Jew] in that circle”24 of Zionist intellectuals from Eastern Europe who were living in Bad-Homburg. Bialik’s fondness for Scholem never faded. He encouraged Scholem in his scholarly work, and he was among those who helped Scholem receive his appointment to the Hebrew University in 1925—the appointment that began his long and prolific academic career. Bialik continued to see Scholem as a German in their meetings in the Land of Israel. After Bialik’s death in 1934, Scholem wrote an entry in his diary about their first meetings in Bad-Homburg, and he mentioned the nature of Bialik’s interest in him: “He related to me, at the age of twenty-five, as though I were a new discovery, that testified to something about German Jewry for him, something he had not yet seen, and thus I remained for him an exceptional German until the very end.”25

Bialik’s name was of course very familiar to Scholem even before they met in 1923, and Scholem’s first encounters with Bialik’s writings made a great impression on him. In a journal entry dated December 25, 1915, Scholem wrote: “Bialik is great, because our hope is great. He honors our hope. As soon as I can, I’ll translate Bialik.”26 Indeed, one of Scholem’s first translations from Hebrew to German was of Bialik’s essay “Halakha and Agada.”27 However, at the time that he translated the essay Scholem’s acquaintance with Bialik’s work was expanding and deepening. His attitude toward Bialik’s poetry and effort to create a single lyrical space (Lyrische Projektionsfläche)—on which it would be possible to project simultaneously both the individual and collective Jewish self—became
more nuanced and critical. In Scholem’s opinion, this duality in meaning, which he called demonic, destroyed Bialik’s poems from within, because the self—the individual element in them—repeatedly entered the semi-allegorical realm that belonged to the collective. Scholem saw Bialik as a victim who had to be sacrificed to the Hebrew language so it could be renewed. In Scholem’s view, Bialik’s poetry was eternally doomed to be the lowest point (Talpunkt) of the Hebrew language’s decline, the point where it turned toward modernism and secularization. Scholem’s view was interesting and problematic because Bialik’s poetry was seen by Scholem’s generation as at the height of Hebrew creativity, not merely at a transitional stage. According to Scholem, Bialik’s effort to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective, national self—a gap that, in Scholem’s opinion was inevitable, and that was an essential part of Jewish existence in exile—was doomed to failure. However, by expressing the national feeling in the Hebrew language (or, in Scholem’s words, by creating a Hebrew lyrical space in his poems), Bialik began to close this gap, though at the cost of the destruction of his poems. In this sense, Bialik was the victim of the renewal of the Hebrew language.

Although Scholem’s opinion of Bialik as a poet was not high, his personal admiration for the man was great and increased over the years, until Bialik’s death in 1934. In a journal entry probably from July 13, 1934, immediately after Bialik’s death, Scholem describes him as an outstanding, charismatic teacher and educator: “He walked about like half a Socrates in the streets of Tel-Aviv.” The secret of Bialik’s charisma was his ability to make his interlocutor share his feelings, and for Scholem this ability made him, unlike other figures in Palestine, an object of expectation: “He belongs to the few in Palestine, to whom I owe something. . . . He was the embodiment of the Oral Law, and the only thing that he lacked to become a great reformer was perhaps the discipline.”

Scholem greatly respected Bialik as a human being and educator but thought less of him as a poet; he saw Agnon in precisely the opposite way. Scholem viewed Agnon as a great author and admired him as an artist but often harbored bad feelings about him as a person and a friend. In Scholem’s opinion, Agnon’s work succeeded in avoiding damage caused by the renewal and secularization of the Hebrew language, but the personal changes that took place in Agnon after he returned to the Land of Israel—chiefly Agnon’s becoming religiously observant—disappointed Scholem greatly. This disappointment is clear in a diary entry dated June 22, 1948, in which Scholem refers to Agnon and “his truly insufferable” speeches about himself: “Often there is truly not a single syllable of truth in his speeches, just a vapor of mad self-reflection disguised as half-innocent modesty, which takes away his listeners’ breath. I have often seen him recently, and, to tell the truth, each time I have also asked myself: What?!”
The ambivalence in his attitude toward Agnon—greatly admiring his work but having problems with his personality—accompanied Scholem all his life. This distinction between Agnon the artist and Agnon the private individual is often expressed in the great gap between Scholem’s public remarks about Agnon and the diary entries about him. As noted above, a similar dichotomy between the man and his work, though in the opposite direction, characterized Scholem’s attitude toward Bialik. Nevertheless, despite his reservations, it appears that there were no Hebrew authors of his generation whom Scholem admired as much as Agnon and Bialik, to whom he attributed a critical role in the renewal of Hebrew culture and, above all, the process of renewing the Hebrew language.

The Renewal of the Hebrew Language

For its Passover edition in 1928, the German-Jewish magazine Jüdische Rundschau published the results of a short survey of the opinions of Jewish intellectuals. The central question was, what was the best and most important Hebrew book published in the past five years?” The survey was not asking for scholarly recommendations of academic books, but personal lists of literary works, explaining that the goal was answers “as someone who read a book that made an impression on him and recommends it to his friend. The survey addressed this question to intellectuals whose literary taste would be most relevant to the Jews of Germany. The magazine published responses by Scholem—his was the longest—as well as Bialik, Buber, Zvi Diesendruck, Zeev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, Joseph Klausner, Klatzkin, Ernst Müller, and others. Writing five and a half years after his immigration to Palestine, Scholem mentioned Agnon’s books and Bialik’s children’s books as the most beautiful and important Hebrew publications of the past years, in his view. In his explanation of this choice, Scholem emphasized the dangers awaiting Hebrew literature and the Jewish people in the process of renewing the Hebrew language and turning it from a holy tongue that existed only in written texts into a living language used every day. The process involved crossing a chasm separating the generations. Here, at this crossroads, lay the importance of Bialik and Agnon in Scholem’s opinion, because in their Hebrew writings they were building a bridge between the world of the past and that of the future:

The world of our fathers and that of our sons are the two great visions which, for those standing in the transition and [whose fate] in the spirit of the great poets is the sole guarantee for the renewal of our language, which has been oppressed by many speakers and has been made idle chatter by many authors, and nevertheless there is a need to retain its healing power (heilende Macht) for our children. . . . This is
a good sign for our people, that the great poets once again draw close to the child’s world: Bialik, who has consciously dedicated his creative power in the past years to the service of children’s literature. And Agnon, in whose unique language and perfect expression and in his deep and exalted goal: to open, in the smallest way possible, the greatest of the greatest, has become a visionary too in the world of the Jewish child.31

The important place given to the world of children in the work of Bialik and Agnon made them, in Scholem’s view, the most important and relevant writers for the present generation. To understand these remarks, written in 1928, in the context of Scholem’s thought at the time—before Bialik’s death and the recognition of Agnon as the greatest Hebrew writer of his generation, and when the process of renewing the Hebrew language in the Land of Israel was at its height—we must examine a contemporary document. I refer to Scholem’s famous letter to Franz Rosenzweig of 1926, written three years after Scholem’s arrival in Palestine. This letter, unlike the passage quoted above, was not published during Scholem’s lifetime but was written as a personal message of congratulation to Rosenzweig on his fortieth birthday. It was published only in 1985 and has been interpreted in many ways.32 As is clear from its heading, the letter is in fact Scholem’s confession regarding the current situation of Hebrew and the great dangers inherent in the inevitable process of its secularization. The letter was written at the height of what Shelomo Morag, a scholar of Hebrew, has called the stage of “the breakthrough” of the Hebrew language, in which Hebrew received official status under the British mandate and its vocabulary grew and gained strength rapidly.33 Scholem’s letter is an analysis of the illusionary character of the language’s secularization and a warning against the dangers inherent in it. In Scholem’s opinion, the essence of the illusion is the belief that it is possible to disentangle the religious element that the Hebrew language has acquired over thousands of years and to make secular use of old words that had sacred meanings for so long: “The secularization of the language is merely empty words, a rhetorical turn of phrase. In reality, it is impossible to empty the words which are filled to bursting with meaning, save at the expense of the language itself.”34

Three generations are central to the letter to Rosenzweig, and what that binds their fates together is their attitude toward the Hebrew language and the way it is used. Hebrew, whose renewal is inevitable in Scholem’s opinion, is the link that simultaneously connects and separates them. The first generation is that of the fathers, whose Hebrew belonged to the age-old Jewish religious tradition, and for whom its use as well as its meanings belonged to the sacred realm. The second generation is that of national renewal, or the transitional generation that,
by rebelling against the older generation, created a rift in the continuity of the Jewish tradition. That generation created a new godless Jewish national world, and as part of that project it tried to make Hebrew into a secular language and to remove the “apocalyptic sting” from it. As noted, in Scholem’s opinion this is not possible, because the language can never lose its religious essence, which has been inherent in it for so many generations. This essence is liable to emerge anew and rebel against those who ignored it: “but if we pass on to our children the language that we have received, if we, the generation of the transition, revive the language of the old books that it may be revealed to them anew—will not the religious power [die religiöse Gewalt] latent therein one day break out against its speakers?”

The third generation, which Scholem’s letter focuses on, is that of the sons, who receive the language in its new secular and quotidian form as it is given to them by the generation of renewal, and with no knowledge of its original context. This generation will be the true victim of the process of secularization and will pay the price for the rebellion and hubris of the transitional generation. The founders of Zionism bequeathed to their children a holy tongue ostensibly bereft of all sanctity but gave the children no ability to cope with what is hidden behind the outer illusion—the language’s religious content, which still exists and will burst forth even more powerfully in the future. The price of this bequest, in Scholem’s view, was demonic courage, and it would be paid by the generation of sons: “This Hebrew language is pregnant with catastrophe (unheilschwer); it cannot remain in its present state—nor will it remain there. Our children will no longer have any other language; truth be told, they, and they alone, will pay the price for this encounter which we have imposed upon them unasked, or without even asking ourselves. One day the language will turn against its own speakers—and there are moments when it does so even now . . .—will we then have a youth who will be able to hold fast against the rebellion of a holy language?”

The generation of renewal bequeathed to its children, by means of the language (and perhaps the language is merely a symbol here) separation from the generation of the fathers. However, in fact this separation is impossible, because the language itself does not comply with it and it is unwilling to divest itself, in Scholem’s words, of the “heavy ballast of historical tones and overtones accumulated through 3,000 years of sacred literature.” The renewed encounter with the tradition, to which the younger generation is doomed because of the continuity of the generations, and from which there is no escape, will be (in the light of present developments) dramatic and fateful, almost apocalyptic: “When the power inherent in the language, when the spoken word—that is, the content of the language—will again resume form, our nation will once more be con-
fronted by the holy tradition as a decisive example. And the people will then need to choose between the two: either to submit to it, or to perish in oblivion.”

Despite this pessimistic prophecy, the parallel reading of the two letters can help us understand more precisely how Scholem saw the place of these two great Hebrew authors in the process of the Zionist renewal of Hebrew culture and language. While he calls the Hebrew language bequeathed by the generation of renewal to the future generation “pregnant with catastrophe” \(\text{unheilschwer}\), a “healing power” \(\text{heilende Macht}\) is present in the language of the works of Bialik and Agnon, which can counteract the catastrophe by presenting the Hebrew language in its traditional form—including its context in the realm of sacredness—to the younger generation.

In these two letters Scholem sees the Hebrew language simultaneously as a connection between the generations of the fathers and of the sons and as a chasm separating them. The depth of this chasm derives from the secularization of the language. In the renewed Hebrew, words were wrested from their old context and placed in a new one, so that the vast religious element living in them was blurred, and ignorance of the original context contains great danger. Agnon and Bialik reduce this danger because they are a link between the generations and a bridge over the chasm. Through their works, the traditional Jewish world remains accessible to the younger generation, mainly because of their success in retaining the original context of the language while placing it in a modern, secular framework. Thus, for many years Scholem regarded Agnon and Bialik as the end of the classical tradition in Hebrew, because they were the last Hebrew authors whose raw material still followed the traditional Jewish patterns.

Elsewhere Scholem called Agnon’s work a “desperate incantation” and “an appeal to those who would come after him.” Agnon’s appeal to the generation of the sons, according to Scholem, rests exactly on this retention of the continuity of the generations through the Hebrew language: “It is as though he were saying ‘Since you no longer accept the continuity of tradition and its language in their true context, at least take them in the transformation they have undergone in my work; take them from someone who stands at the crossroads and can see in both directions.’”

Despite the significant difference in his attitude toward these two cultural giants and their work, throughout his life Scholem saw Bialik and Agnon as the most important Hebrew authors of the generation—as we see in the passage above. In his view they both stood at a point of critical historical change and played a central role in connection with the Hebrew language: bridging the generations and seeking to make sure that access to the vital source of Hebrew would not be lost for those growing up with the renewed language. By closing
the intergenerational rift in their writing, within the secular Zionist rebellion, Agnon and Bialik helped protect what Scholem many years later called the delicate dialectic between continuity and rebellion—which in his opinion constituted the entire Zionist enterprise—from the danger inherent in falling into absolute secularization and separation from the Jewish tradition.41

Agnon and Bialik were the only contemporary Hebrew authors whose work Scholem translated into German. The attraction Scholem had for these two authors was based on the fact that they (two Jews from Eastern Europe) saw Scholem (a German Jew in the Weimar Republic) as a special type, entirely different from everyone else they had encountered in Germany—but they still regarded him as a Yekke. For Scholem, Agnon and Bialik were representatives of the true Jewish-Zionist tradition, which contrasted so strongly with the bourgeois, assimilated Jewry that he had known in Germany. In addition, Bialik and Agnon were two central figures in the volatile and rich cultural circle to which Scholem also belonged during the months before his immigration to the Land of Israel. Although both Bialik and Agnon moved to Palestine in 1924, not more than a year after Scholem did, a short time after his arrival in Jerusalem the city looked empty to him, devoid of everything he regarded as culture: European culture.

While Scholem himself was part of the process of the renewal of the Hebrew language and, despite the dangers he warned about, regarded it as necessary and unavoidable, he did not restrict himself to writing only in Hebrew. Along with his early translations from Hebrew to German—which testify to his interest in transmitting Jewish-Zionist culture to the Jews of Germany, most of whom could not read Hebrew—in the years after his immigration and almost until the outbreak of World War II, Scholem continued to publish articles and books in Germany, in the German language, along with his Hebrew publications in Palestine. In addition, the fact that the editors of the Jüdische Rundschau regarded the opinion of the thirty-one-year-old Scholem on Hebrew literature as relevant for the Jews of Germany, together with the opinions of the most important Zionist writers of the generation, shows the rather central place accorded to him in the Zionist intellectual life of Weimar Germany.

The return to the Hebrew language, despite the dangers inherent in it, was both a tool and a central goal of the Jewish renaissance that began in Europe and migrated to the Land of Israel. Morag regarded the revival of Hebrew as subordinate to the larger and broader Hebrew cultural renaissance, a process that was “from the outset a selective, eclectic continuation of heritage.”42 Viewed in this manner, the revival of Hebrew was part of the idea of kinus (ingathering or compilation), or the Zionist anthology project, which marked the literary and scholarly
work of the intellectuals of the generation of national revival—in which Bialik, Agnon, and Buber were central pillars. Under their influence, extensive parts of Scholem’s work on Kabbalah are marked by this project, which the following section discusses.

**A Literary and Cultural Project**

As noted above, shortly after his arrival in Palestine, Scholem formed a negative impression of the intellectual situation of the Yishuv, expressing his disappointment in his letter to Kraft of December 17, 1924. Less than a week afterward, on December 22, 1924, the first day of Hanukkah, the Institute for Jewish Studies of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was inaugurated in a ceremony on Mount Scopus. Perhaps more than any other event, the establishment of this institute, together with the inauguration of the Hebrew University itself on April 1, 1925, symbolized the path of Scholem’s life in Mandatory Palestine and, later, the State of Israel. The degree of Scholem’s involvement in the Hebrew University and the interweaving of his biography with its history as the emerging academic and intellectual center of the Jewish people were so great that the paths of his life and the development of the university were often nearly identical.

The Institute for Jewish Studies was the third to be inaugurated at the Hebrew University as it took shape, after the Institutes of Chemistry and Microbiology—which in fact functioned as a single unit. Great hopes were pinned on the Institute for Jewish Studies: the goal was for it to attract well-known Jewish scholars from the whole world and become a world center of Jewish studies. However, as Scholem recalled many years later, “already in the first year of the institute it became clear that the hopes for the arrival of major scholars of the generation in Jewish studies were unfulfilled,” and the institute did not succeed in becoming, immediately after its establishment, a “‘miniature temple’ which, through its academic research, would offer a spiritual message to the Jews and the peoples of other nations of the world.” Some of the scholars who were invited did not want to settle in Jerusalem, and others who were willing to come were rejected for reasons of intramural Jewish politics. Thus an opportunity emerged for young scholars, including Scholem, to receive appointments at the new institution. During the following forty years, until his retirement in 1966, most of Scholem’s activities were in connection with or within the Hebrew University—from the time he was a lecturer and professor until his tenure as dean of the Faculty of Humanities, his two terms as the head of the Institute for Jewish Studies, and his appointment in 1968 as head of the Israeli National Academy of Sciences. Scholem also served the university in other ways at various times,
at times representing it and acting in its name. To a great degree the university was the axis around which Scholem’s life revolved, though in certain circles and various frameworks he sometimes criticized its functioning and tendencies. However, this was always from a position of identification with the university and its faculty.

Scholem’s world at that time can be understood in the context of the university’s consolidation in its early years, the factors that influenced it, the sources on which it drew, and the social and academic circles that formed within its walls or in proximity to it. The establishment of the university and the Institute of Jewish Studies were the first steps in a long effort to make Jerusalem an independent academic, cultural, and intellectual center in the Jewish world and in a struggle to alter the feelings of marginalization of its intellectual residents.

This effort was characterized by the tension between innovation and continuity in the new institution, which affected its character. The desire for innovation derived from the wish to build a new and creative national Jewish society in the Land of Israel, and the quest for continuity involved the use of Central and Western European academic practices, which served as a model for Western scholarship at that time. When it was founded, the Institute of Jewish Studies was intended to act solely as a research institute, following the model of the Academy for Jewish Studies (Die Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums), which belonged to the German philological and historical tradition of Jewish studies and had been founded about five years earlier in Berlin. The influence of the German academic world on the Hebrew University was an established fact in Scholem’s view as well. He regarded the Institute of Jewish Studies and the academic activities pursued in it as a direct extension of the science of Judaism in nineteenth-century Germany, although Jewish studies took a different approach from that of its predecessor. The meaning of this new approach, as Scholem explained in 1937, was to examine Jewish history “by its original and innermost nature, by a proper estimate of the inner forces and movements which have brought about its external manifestations. This method of viewing Jewish history is different from that adopted by Jewish Wissenschaft almost a century ago. The latter was influenced by the attitude of apologetics, and possibly even more by the factors and political considerations involved in the Jewish struggle for political emancipation.”

In fact, the influences of German and German-Jewish scholarship on the character of the Institute of Jewish Studies can be seen from many perspectives, which reflect the various contemporary cultural trends that motivated the founders of the Zionist movement—who brought those trends with them from Europe to the Land of Israel. One of these cultural perspectives was the idea of
kinus. As the discussion below will show, this idea was central to understanding Scholem’s scholarly and cultural activity in its German-Jewish context, as well as the influence of European Jewish culture on the entire Zionist enterprise and on the Hebrew University and the Institute of Jewish studies in particular—institutions whose path and character Scholem played a decisive part in shaping.

The Idea of Kinus

As mentioned, the intention for the Hebrew University in general and the Institute of Jewish Studies in particular was that they would become world centers for Jewish culture and scholarship in the Hebrew language. The cultural roots of this idea reach back into the Jewish and Hebrew milieu of Eastern and Central Europe. It was characteristic of the revival of Hebrew culture in Europe, especially in the centers in Weimar Germany, that the desires for innovation and continuity work in parallel. The most prominent and perhaps the most important example of this, which had a strong effect on the cultural aspects of the Zionist enterprise and on Jewish studies was the idea of kinus.

The essence of this Zionist idea, like parallel romantic and nationalist trends in Europe, was to collect the treasures of Jewish culture and present them in modern editions to create a cultural continuum between the nation’s past and present, in a manner that would serve its national goals in the future. In this ideological framework, at the end of the nineteenth century, Ahad Haam began the project called the Treasury of Judaism in the Hebrew Language. This treasury was intended to be a single encyclopedic volume, educational in nature, that would contain everything that the younger generation of that time had to know about Judaism, exactly as Rabbi Judah the Nasi, Maimonides, and Joseph Karo did in their time: “We need a new book again, which will be written in easy Hebrew and contain information about Judaism in all its specializations, with every special area written by experts in it, so that we can say of it what Maimonides said of his work, that if a person learns to read Hebrew first and then reads this book, he will learn all of Judaism from it.” 49 This book was intended to present and interpret Judaism as a culture, just as Maimonides’s Mishneh Torah summarized and clarified Judaism as Torah in a useful manner.

Bialik, a central figure in the project of kinus, was influenced by Ahad Haam’s idea of the treasury, but he also criticized the idea and proposed developing and expanding it. Unlike Ahad Haam, Bialik did not envision a single encyclopedic volume composed of articles on various Jewish topics. In his opinion, the Hebrew reader “wants to and must know the divine presence of his people face to face, and not through an agent.” 50 Bialik proposed the collection and “sealing” of those Jewish writings that were needed by the generation of national revival,
along with the burial of all those that were of no use. He was conscious of begin-
ing a new era, which required the summarizing the past and sorting out what was worth being preserved and taken into the future. Here, in his fine style, is his description of the necessary process: “Every act of sealing proclaims the closure of an old period, and at the same time it heralds the beginning of a new era. And none other than the excellent essence of the old, after it has successfully passed through the new atmosphere and emerged from it purified, itself becomes the soil for new plants, offering them moisture and succulence that assist their growth and flourishing.”51 Bialik also called the project of compilation “sealing,” in reference to the earlier sealings of Jewish corpuses— the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud.52 Underlying the process was the same feeling that the times when it was performed were fateful for the Jewish people and its culture. However, unlike earlier “sealings,” here what had to be done was “to go back and make a new ‘collection,’ national of course, not religious, of the best of Hebrew literature of every age.”53

The goal of this project, therefore, was the canonization of the treasures of written Jewish culture of every generation. This new canon was supposed to determine what was marginal—and thus doomed to oblivion—and what was important and could serve as soil for the present and future growth of a new secular Hebrew culture.

In the secular national Zionist framework, which rebelled against the continuity of the Jewish tradition and called for separation from orthodox trends and frameworks as well as from trends toward assimilation, the fruits of kinus served as a bridge to the past, preserving the continuity of the generations within the separation imposed on the younger generation by virtue of the Zionist revolution.54 Each editor determined the character of the continuity in his or her volume, and each compilation was subordinate to the ideological framework of the generation of revival, though its nature was also influenced by its being a contemporary canon—that is, an extension of the earlier sealings in Jewish history. The editors were placed on the same level as the anonymous canonizers of the Bible, Rabbi Judah Hanasi, and Maimonides. The parallel existence of tendencies toward innovation and rebellion and those toward preservation and continuity—which also are evident in the quotation from Bialik above—was one of the principal characteristics of the project of kinus, and it had an effect on what the editors produced.55 The products of the kinus project include many volumes of anthologies, varied in character, that were published in Germany in Hebrew or German and in Mandatory Palestine and later the State of Israel in Hebrew. To a large degree one may see Israeli national cultural institutions like the National Library in Jerusalem as part of this project of kinus. In Israel Bartal’s opinion, the
establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem can also be seen as part of the effort to fulfill this dream.\textsuperscript{56}

Bartal called attention to the fact that the attempt to achieve the goal of compilation by means of the Institute of Jewish Studies was ultimately a disappointment, for it did not become a central factor in this area. Bartal found the explanation for this in the influence of the tradition of the rabbinical seminary in Germany, which demanded scientific distance and rigor. Therefore, most of the collections of Jewish and Hebrew sources were undertaken outside academe both in Palestine and in Europe, though some of the collections had a foothold in the academic world and influenced it over time.

Scholem was an exception. For him the idea of ingathering in Bialik’s spirit was central, and his scholarship in the area of Kabbalah is marked by that project. The best and most important evidence of this is a letter he wrote Bialik, presenting his plans for research into the history of Kabbalah, and the way that he pictured the future of this area of research to himself. The letter was written on July 12, 1925, about three months before his appointment as a lecturer at the Institute of Jewish Studies. In it Scholem presented his view of the way in which research in Kabbalah should be carried out, in the spirit of kinus: “It is absolutely impossible to attain knowledge of the creation and development of Kabbalah as long as seventy percent of all the important texts are still in manuscript, scattered throughout the Diaspora. I am positive that there is no hope for restoring and researching Kabbalah if these manuscripts are not studied: the most important of them (and there are many) must be published in critical, analytical editions, to refine and clarify the truth from them about the development and antiquity of Kabbalah.”

He went on to present his plans for research in Kabbalah, which he divided into two areas. The first was the study and publication of a significant quantity of kabbalistic manuscripts, and the second was the publication of scholarship and monographs from which a picture of the history of Kabbalah as a whole would emerge. “And at the end of such work and during it,” Scholem emphasized to Bialik, “perhaps it would also be possible to prepare a true anthology from kabbalistic books that would not suffer from the randomness of printing.”\textsuperscript{57} Scholem’s proposal received an enthusiastic response from Bialik, who encouraged him and promised to help in any way he could: “You are the man who, at the end of your work, will find the lost key to the locked gate of the palace of Kabbalah, and may it come to pass that I might find people in our camp who will realize how great the fruit is, which is hidden in the depths of this field of research, to which you plan to devote your life.”\textsuperscript{58}

Bialik’s idea of kinus occupied a central place in Scholem’s academic activities in Palestine and the State of Israel throughout his life, and it is possible to
see the influence of this project both in his academic work in Hebrew and in the public positions he accepted. Among his academic works one may point to the editing of many manuscripts in the area of Kabbalah and Sabbateanism, and their publication with commentary in journals identified with the idea of kinus such as Kiryat Sefer (the journal of the National Library, which Scholem founded along with Ben-Zion Dinur) and Kovetz al Yad (the journal of Chevrat Mekitzei Nirdamim [Society of wakers of the slumbering], which was closely connected with the idea of kinus). In addition to these, one may also mention the volumes of an anthology in which manuscripts concerning Sabbateanism were collected and published and the publication of single manuscripts as separate books or pamphlets. Underlying Scholem’s scholarship one can also sense tendencies typical of the idea of kinus, as in his two central works on Sabbateanism. Another research project connected to compilation, to which Scholem contributed a great deal over many years, was the Encyclopaedia Ivrit.

Scholem’s connection with the project of kinus was not limited to the way it marked his scholarship. Along with his many publications in the spirit of ingathering, Scholem also held various public positions in institutions in the Land of Israel that were established in accordance with this idea. For example, in 1943 Scholem served as an honorary member of Chevrat Mekitzei Nirdamim and succeeded Agnon as the society’s chairman in 1970. Though it was founded even earlier, the official date of the establishment of Chevrat Mekitzei Nirdamim was 1863, in the city of Lyck in East Prussia. The first purpose of the society, as its founders declared in the Hebrew newspaper Hamagid, was “to publish precious manuscripts that lie in archives and have never been printed, especially works of the Sages of Spain of blessed memory . . . and to distribute these books among the members of this society.” A decade later the society ceased operations, but they were renewed in 1885 in Berlin, as part of the beginning of the flourishing of Hebrew culture there that was mentioned above. At that time the society’s journal, Kovetz al Yad, also mentioned above, began publication. In 1934 the society transferred its operations to Jerusalem, where it continues to operate. In a ceremony marking the centennial of the society’s establishment, which took place on November 20, 1963, speeches were given by Agnon, its president; Ephraim Urbach, its secretary; and Scholem, a member of its executive board. In his speech Scholem emphasized the aspect of the society that he viewed as central: the preservation of “the golden chain of our fathers’ tradition.” In terms similar to those he used to describe the role of Agnon and Bialik in Jewish history, he said that Chevrat Mekitzei Nirdamim was none other than an assurance of “the continuity of the generations.”

At the inception of his academic work, even before his immigration, Scholem
was already influenced by the idea of kinus, which marked the process of reviving Jewish and Hebrew culture in Germany at that time. A central figure—perhaps the most central—in his youth in Germany with whom Scholem maintained close personal and academic relations all his life was Buber.

**Martin Buber and Der Jude (1916–28)**

When Scholem was a youth in Germany, Buber was a well-known and much admired figure among young German Jews, including Scholem. Throughout his life he accorded a central place to Buber, both as an admired authority figure and as an object of criticism, mainly in the field of Hasidism. Many years later Scholem described Buber’s great influence on him and the rest of his generation:

> Here is Buber’s voice, speaking from “Three Speeches on Judaism” and from his first books about Hasidism. His voice had an enormous echo among us: he promised something, he enchanted, he demanded. To a petrified Jewish world he promised manifestations of revolutionary awakening from within, he promised manifestations of life hidden under the official, petrified forms, manifestations of treasures preserved in his archives, if only we knew how to cross the threshold and enter. He enchanted with his handsomeness and his full voice—Buber’s power of expression was always huge. He demanded connection and identification with the heart of the nation, as he understood it then, he demanded of the youth that they become another link in the chain of hidden life, to be the heirs of an exalted and hidden tradition of uprising and revolt.

This description also shows the spirit of kinus that was embedded in Buber’s work, for his first books about Hasidism—which, as Scholem emphasizes, were highly influential on him and the rest of his generation—were written in that spirit. One of these books was a translation and adaptation of several of the stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, and the other was a collection and translation of selected legends about the Baal Shem Tov. Buber also dedicated a considerable amount of time to editing anthologies of Hasidic tales and legends, which made him very well known. During his career in Germany, Buber participated in a number of efforts to collect and anthologize Hasidic stories.

Scholem and Buber first met at the end of 1915, following a parody and caricature of Buber that were published in the almost-underground periodical Die Blauweisse Brille, whose first three issues were edited and printed by Scholem and his friend Erich Brauer and published in a small edition in the Scholem printing house, unbeknownst to his father. To the great surprise of the young editors, Buber invited them to visit him at home, greeted them warmly, and treated them with great fondness. Buber praised his guests for their work and courage and
invited them to contribute to *Der Jude*, a new magazine he was putting out that was about to begin publication. Scholem and Buber’s cooperation on this magazine led to their long-lasting personal connection.

Buber founded *Der Jude* at the height of World War I, and he was its editor throughout the magazine’s existence. The goal of the magazine was to provide a Jewish cultural framework for unifying the Jews of Germany and arousing them, following the war, to awareness of their unity and common fate that would overcome internal disputes and lead to the recognition of Jewry as a people and nation. According to Paul Mendes-Flohr, even the name of the magazine was chosen with that goal in mind: “By boldly placing *Der Jude* on the masthead of his journal, he [Buber] sought to restore dignity to the term. From a badge of derision and shame, it would become anew an emblem of pride.” By publishing the work of the best intellectuals of the time, from across the broad religious and political spectrum of Jews in Germany, the magazine also reached non-Jewish readers and became an important intellectual forum in Weimar Germany in general. The founding of magazine also marked the beginning of the extensive correspondence between Scholem and Buber, which is now in Scholem’s archive. Scholem offered Buber a sharp critical article about the Jewish youth movement, which opposed Buber’s Zionist path because it concentrated on Germany and not on the Land of Israel. Their correspondence sheds light on the special relationship that began to form between the young Zionist and the philosopher and intellectual who was nearly two decades older. Buber related to Scholem with respect, admiration, and great sympathy in his letters, and at the beginning of the correspondence one also notes his forgiving and tolerant attitude toward Scholem’s radical and immature declarations. Buber apparently detected the potential in the young scholar, and he encouraged Scholem to continue writing for the magazine despite—perhaps even because of—his approach to Zionism and Hebrew sources, which was different from and even opposed to Buber’s. In that sense Scholem did not fit in very well with the general ideological scope of *Der Jude*, but during the years of its publication he maintained a close connection with Buber and helped him, by regularly contributing articles to the journal and bringing him up to date on the bibliographical details connected with Hasidic literature for his research.

After his immigration to Palestine, Scholem corresponded regularly with Buber, informing him about developments in his research plans, and even asking his help in publishing his work. In early June 1925, Scholem wrote to Buber about the difficulties he had encountered in his efforts to publish his research in the Land of Israel: “I am having no luck with my work; there is no place here, neither Hebrew nor German, where it is possible to publish scholarly research,
neither general surveys nor essays, about Kabbalah. I have to wait a year and a half for the publication of a single work. . . . In Hebrew the situation is even worse, unfortunately. I would be very grateful to you if you could direct me to venues where I can publish my scholarship.”

Buber, an older and more prominent man, was a mentor or spiritual father for Scholem. He promoted and advised him, and at the beginning of his career gave him a venue for expressing his opinions and publishing his scholarship, even if these contained open criticisms of Buber. After Scholem’s immigration, Buber enabled him to publish his articles in German—which was important, given the difficulties Scholem encountered in Palestine and the spiritual poverty to which he testified. Typical of relationships of this kind, Buber occupied a central place in Scholem’s world, and the young intellectual had an ambivalent attitude toward the elder man of letters. “To engage Buber intellectually,” Scholem wrote many years later, “meant to be tossed hither and yon between admiration and rejection, between readiness to listen to his message and disappointment with that message and the impossibility of realizing it.”

Jacob Klatzkin and the Encyclopedia Judaica (1928–34)

As part of his quest for a framework worthy of publishing his scholarship, Scholem took part in another project connected with the idea of kinus, the center of which was in Germany. In 1924 the Eshkol publishing house was established in Berlin by two men from Eastern Europe: Jacob Klatzkin, who was already known at the time as an author and Zionist intellectual, and Nahum Goldmann, who later became the president of the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization. In their plan for their publishing house—whose goal, according to its prospectus, was to publish “classical Hebrew literature in modern scholarly editions”—the founders devoted much room to a series to be edited by Shmuel Abba Horodetsky, in which anthologies and manuscripts from Kabbalah and Hasidism would be published, but the project was never implemented. They also gave a prominent place to Jewish mysticism in the great project that was the glory of the publishing house: the Encyclopedia Judaica, with its Hebrew edition the Entziklopedia Israelit. Originally Klatzkin and Goldmann envisioned a grandiose encyclopedia that was to be comprehensive and appear in German, Hebrew, and English. This plan was never completely carried out because of difficulties in obtaining sufficient funds and because the Nazis came to power. Nevertheless, ten volumes of the Encyclopedia Judaica were published in the period 1928–34, up to the letter L. The Entziklopedia Israelit began publication in 1929, but only two volumes of it were published. The task of preparing the English edition was never begun.
In the preface to the two editions of the encyclopedia, the editor, apparently Klatzkin, presented it as a contribution related to the anthologies, “one link in the long chain of the authors of our literary compendiums, who sought in all its periods to gather our spiritual property and cultural treasures, to preserve them from oblivion, and thus to help them to be mingled with the future.” Under the influence and in the spirit of Ahad Haam’s Treasury of Judaism in the Hebrew Language, the author of the preface regarded former acts of compilation and sealing in Judaism such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, and the Shulhan Arukh by Rabbi Joseph Karo as encyclopedias, in spite of the fact that “most of them [are] not in alphabetical order, though some are in that order.”

In addition to serving as with the historian Ismar Elbogen as editors in chief of the encyclopedia, Klatzkin wrote its article on “Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion; Kabbalah; Hasidism,” and this was the background of his connection with Scholem. As early as 1924, Klatzkin showed Scholem the plan for the encyclopedia and invited him to participate in it, along with contacts regarding the possibility of publishing his doctoral dissertation on Sefer Habahir at Eshkol. In May 1925 Klatzkin asked Scholem to write some shorter entries and “a general monograph about Kabbalah, its essence, and its development for it.” This longer entry was meant to occupy a central place in the encyclopedia and be one of its major articles. However, in the letter he attached to the list of proposed entries, Klatzkin also explained the methodological and practical approach of the encyclopedia to Scholem, as well as its limitations: “Though I do not intend to offer authors a Procrustean bed, it is nevertheless impossible not to set the approximate size of each entry. A column—this means a column in the English Jewish Encyclopedia. . . . I do not want to ignore the articles on Kabbalah in the Encyclopedia Judaica, and we must not slight them, as the other encyclopedias have done. However, encyclopedia articles are things that are limited and their brevity is their merit.”

Once again Klatzkin’s words show the close connection between the encyclopedia and the focus on compilation in Germany at that time, and this connection belongs to the language he and Scholem shared. However, in spite of an understanding that was based on this connection, Scholem’s relationship with the editors of the encyclopedia was not a smooth one. Klatzkin predicted some of the problems the editors would have with their contributors in the passage quoted above. The first rift between the two men opened because of changes the editors made in the first entries Scholem submitted. When Scholem complained, Jacob Naftali Simhoni, Klatzkin’s assistant, answered that “the corrections and additions inserted in your articles were needed for the sake of objectivity, which is the
foundation of our entire encyclopedia. In its original form your article on Abu-
lafia was absolute defense, omitting the ‘opposite side’ . . . completely.”83 Scholem
wrote a sharp letter in reply, protesting against the attitude of the editors and
announcing that he would no longer work for the encyclopedia. Simhoni an-
swered: “There are two kinds of knowledge: objective knowledge and subjective
knowledge, but the encyclopedia can only use the first kind.”84 It is not clear why
Scholem resumed writing for the encyclopedia—perhaps Klatzkin intervened,
perhaps a third party mediated, or perhaps publication in such a venue was an
opportunity for the young scholar that he could not easily forgo. In any event,
after a while Scholem was once again advising the editors and agreed to write
new entries, but on one condition: “From now on I will accept only those articles
in the encyclopedia in which I can scientifically state something new, which can-
not be edited by others from the known literature.”85 This condition contained
the seed of the next disagreement: in his letter Scholem made it clear that in
the few entries he was prepared to write, he could not accept Klatzkin’s earlier
stipulation that the columns of the entries in the encyclopedia be equal to those
of the earlier American encyclopedia. If the editors insisted on cutting his future
articles, Scholem would abandon the project completely.86

Indeed, the second crisis was not long in coming. When Klatzkin received the
manuscript of the article “Bahir, Buch,” in the mail, he wrote Scholem: “I was
very pleased with your article, excellent in its kind, small but containing much,
full to the brim with new research and insights—be that as it may, there is no
room in our encyclopedia for such a long article about the ‘Bahir’.” Fearing that
the project would reach an excessive length of twenty volumes, Klatzkin asked
Scholem to cut the article by half, especially in light of the fact that in his large
article about Kabbalah he would also be discussing the same work (Sefer Habah-
hir).87 Scholem promptly dispatched a reply, containing a closely argued refusal.
Klatzkin rejected this refusal, and after a short exchange of letters, Scholem
asked Klatzkin to mail the entry back to him and once again withdrew from the
project: “I seriously doubt whether in the present state of affairs, as it emerges
from our negotiations, my work [for the encyclopedia] can still be productive.
You can well understand that if we get that far, the fate of my summarizing article
about Kabbalah will be identical to that of the entry on Habahir: you will praise
it, but you will refrain from printing it.”88 A month later Klatzkin sent Scholem
a short letter in which he informed him that, at the last minute, the editors had
decided “to present your article on Habahir in full, since space was vacated in the
volume for reasons that we could not predict in advance.”89

In the following years Scholem continued to write for the encyclopedia,
though to a smaller extent. In addition, the connection between him and Klatz-
kin survived, and he sent critiques of various articles by other authors. In fact, Scholem’s most important contribution to the encyclopedia was his work on the entry “Kabbalah.” After Klatzkin received the manuscript in the mail, he wrote Scholem, “It will be the crown of the following volume.”90 However, in an accompanying letter that was sent with the manuscript, Scholem explained why the entry greatly exceeded the limit he himself had set for it—two folios—exactly twice the length Klatzkin had asked him not to exceed.91 In Scholem’s opinion, the encyclopedia lost by dispersing the various entries relating to the field of Kabbalah in alphabetical order, and it was preferable to discuss them at length in one place: “If you aren’t willing to print the article, I would like to ask you to return it to me as quickly as possible, since in this instance I have another plan for it. There is no way I can agree to have the article sent to any other master for possible editing or adaptation.” In addition, Scholem asked that, as he had initially been promised, the article be printed as a separate booklet, and this was done in the end.

The collaboration between Scholem and Klatzkin ended at the end of 1932. In the wake of the world crisis of the early 1930s, the Eshkol publishing house encountered economic difficulties and was unable to pay the writers. At the end of December 1932 Scholem wrote his last letter to Klatzkin and the editorial board of the encyclopedia, announcing that, following the delays in paying him for the earlier entries that he had written, he could not continue working for the project.92 Not long afterward the publishing house went bankrupt, and its offices closed.

In the years when he worked on the encyclopedia, Scholem wrote fifteen entries for the German edition and nine for the Hebrew edition. Although those numbers are not high, the entries that he wrote are important—especially the article on Kabbalah, which was the high point of Scholem’s participation in the project—since this was the first time he discussed separately and comprehensively the area of scholarship he had chosen as his life’s work. In the opinion of Michael Brenner, publication of the article on Kabbalah, which was the length of a book and the third largest entry in the entire encyclopedia, reflected “the will of the editors to allot to the new discipline of Kabbalah a prominent place in the project.”93 Scholem’s character, his approach to his scientific scholarship, and his uncompromising attitude toward the publisher also explain the prominence accorded to his work. His refusal to accept changes or cuts in his work, along with his repeated threats to prevent publication of the article on Kabbalah, might have been what finally led to its publication at greater length than was planned by the editors of the encyclopedia. It is also important to emphasize that the editors’ acquiescence to Scholem’s demands points to the great importance they
attributed to research on Kabbalah and to the fact that Scholem was the only academic dealing with that field as a scientific discipline.

For Scholem, it was very important to publish an encyclopedia article of this kind to establish his status and academic authority in the field of Kabbalah, thus laying the foundations and setting the boundaries of the field of research in a scholarly publication in the German language that attracted attention and was widely read. Within the framework of the ambitious kinus project of the encyclopedia in Berlin, Scholem was given the rare opportunity to establish a small canon of his own, and by means of it both to set the future pattern of research in Kabbalah—which was to develop and become a discipline in its own right—and to create his own image as the founder of this discipline, ex nihilo.95

Salman Schocken and the Schocken Publishing House (1933–39)

Salman Schocken, who became one of the most important and influential figures in Scholem’s life, was a wealthy merchant, man of culture, and patron. Born in Posen, Schocken was a Jewish businessman who owned a chain of department stores that bore his name, and from which his vast fortune came. Schocken had been interested in German literature and philosophy in his youth, and later he began to collect rare books in those fields. At the end of the 1910s, after reading Buber’s adaption of the stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, a change took place in Schoken’s life, leading him to focus on the Zionist renewal of Jewish culture and to invest considerable amounts of energy and money to that renewal. His activity in this area continued for the rest of his life, and through it he became one of the most central and influential figures in the world of Jewish culture in his time.96

Schocken’s Zionist activity began in 1912 with the establishment of a local branch of the German Zionist Organization in the city of Zwickau, which was also the center of his business. Four years later he revealed his Zionist worldview in public, in a speech at a special convention of delegates to the Zionist Organization in the Savoy Hotel in Berlin. According to Schocken, the problem of Jewish existence was not political but cultural, and to return to the true soul of Judaism, it was necessary to rummage in the past and recover from it, by means of science, the treasures of Jewish culture hidden in ancient books.97

This Jewish cultural work (jüdische Kulturarbeit) had to be done by Zionist men, and its goal was to present the Jewish past in the perspective of the present by recounting Jewish history to the Jewish people once again. In addition, an institution had to be created that would provide financial support for the scholars who were engaged in this research and for publications. However, the work did
not have to be done only in the halls of academe. There must be the publication of scholarly works, but also those of popular nature: “Our work will begin to be influential only when it is possible to place in the hands of every Jewish reader a report on the past of his nation and its present situation in the light of future developments.”

The first contact between Scholem and Schocken was occasioned by Scholem’s reply to a general invitation sent to educated Zionist youth to take part in the activities of the Committee for Jewish Cultural Work, which Schocken established to implement his plan, and which he headed. In his letter, Scholem expressed hesitation about participating in Schocken’s project, and in a meeting between the two at Schocken’s home in January 1918, Scholem explained that the reasons for his hesitation were his studies and his plan to travel to Switzerland very soon. “In any event,” Scholem later wrote, “I went out with a strong impression that I had met a man of high standing.” Schocken was also impressed by the young scholar and offered to hire him as his full-time private expert in Hebrew, an offer that Scholem apparently rejected. In fact the collaboration between the two men began only in 1931, when Schocken founded Schocken Verlag, his publishing house. Much of Scholem’s research was published there.

Schocken’s cultural activities before the establishment of the publishing house were varied, but for the most part they were aligned with the Zionist idea of kinus. Thus, for example, anthologies occupied a central place in one of his best-known and most important activities, as Agnon’s patron. Another project in the spirit of compilation was first thought of in the framework of the activities of the Committee for Jewish Cultural Work. This project was an anthology of Jewish writing that was meant to offer the reader German translations of short items that reflected the essence of Judaism and Jewish life in various periods and fields. In 1931 this volume was published with the title Sendung und Schicksal (Mission and fate), and it was the first book produced by the Schocken publishing house, which had just been established. In fact, when Schocken Verlag was established in 1931, Schocken had a number of literary projects in hand. The first was the publication of an edition of Agnon’s writing. Another project established by Schocken was the Forschungsinstitut für hebräische Dichtung (Institute for Research in Hebrew Poetry), whose goal was to publish sources from the Hebrew literature of medieval Spain in an accessible manner, in particular using a collection of about three thousand manuscript fragments from the Cairo Geniza, which Schocken had bought in 1928. In 1933 the institute transferred its activities to Jerusalem. Another important project was Buber and Rosenzweig’s translation of the Bible into German, a project that Schocken acquired from the Lambert Schneider publishing house, which had fallen into financial difficul-
ties. Thus began Schocken's collaboration with Schneider, whom he hired as the administrative director of Schocken Verlag. Along with the Indologist, Moshe Spitzer, who was publishing house's chief editor, Schneider became one of its central pillars from the time of its establishment until the Nazis closed it at the end of 1938.  

A reprint of Scholem’s doctoral dissertation was one of the first thirty-five publications of Schocken Verlag, as was a bibliography of scholarship in the field of Kabbalah that he compiled. It soon became clear that Schocken planned to give Scholem a major role as an author in the publishing house. At the end of January 1933, Schneider wrote Scholem that with Buber’s intervention and recommendation, Schocken had become highly interested in Scholem’s research. Scholem told Schneider he was interested in writing a comprehensive monograph on the field of Kabbalah as a long-range project, noting, “The composition of a comprehensive work of this kind is the main scientific goal of my life’s work.” Thus began the productive collaboration between Scholem and Schocken Verlag that lasted for many years—though, as was the case with Scholem’s relationship with the Encyclopedia Judaica, there were ups and downs that were connected with Scholem’s temperament, among other things. The correspondence between Scholem and representatives of Schocken Verlag in Berlin, which is now housed in the Scholem Archive, shows the nature of this professional and personal relationship. Only part of the extensive preliminary plans of the collaboration were realized, given the times and Scholem’s character. However, this part was considerable, and it laid the foundations for some of Scholem’s large-scale future scholarship.

The first contacts between Schneider and Scholem solidified with the establishment of the Almanach des Schocken Verlags (the Schocken publishing almanac), which was published toward Rosh Hashana for six years, beginning in 1933. It was an anthology of various Jewish sources from various periods together with works by contemporary intellectuals. Its purpose was to describe Jewish life over the generations by presenting old and new texts of current significance and collect them in a single volume. In June 1933 Spitzer invited Scholem to contribute a historical or theological essay on a subject of his choice to the first volume of the almanac, which Spitzer was editing along with Martin Buber, on one condition: “In choosing the subject I wish you to pay attention only to the fact that the almanac and all the articles in it must express—of course indirectly—something innovative or original or at least by allusion (Anzügliches) about the present situation, the distress involved in it, and the hidden possibility that with some turning point it will end well.”

Thus, the first volume of the almanac contained an article by Scholem titled...
“Nach der Vertreibung aus Spanien: Zur Geschichte der Kabbala” (After the expulsion from Spain: toward a history of Kabbalah), as well as a revised version of “Hakhshara,” an article by Abraham Kalisker that had appeared in Buber’s Der Jude.¹⁰⁸ The almanac was a great commercial success, and during the six years of its existence Scholem published another three articles in it: a translation of a poem by Nachmanides for Rosh Hashana, an article about Sabbateanism, and another one about Hasidei Ashkenaz.¹⁰⁹

In September 1933 Spitzer announced a new project to Scholem: the inauguration of a series of books to be known as Bücherei des Schocken Verlags, which would be a Jewish parallel to the famous series published by Insel: “small volumes at a low price, intended for the widest circulation, which will include literary documents from every period in the history of the Jewish people, as well as non-Jewish works, which for some special reason deserve a place in a series of books intended for Jews.”¹¹⁰ This series continued the approach Schocken Verlag had taken with the almanac, though on a larger scale. The Jewish anthology here was not a collection of short texts collected in a single volume, but rather longer sources, dispersed over an entire series, in which each volume presented one type of source from various periods and fields to show the diversity of Judaism. In accordance with the principles of the idea of compilation, all volumes in the series had to be relevant to building a new Jewish culture in the present, in Nazi Germany, and both the content and the price had to make them accessible to a large readership.¹¹¹

Scholem responded enthusiastically to Spitzer’s invitation to include in the series Kabbalistic sources in German translation and proposed a number of possibilities. After consulting with Buber, Spitzer decided that the most appropriate option would be a kabbalistic-messianic anthology and selections from the Zohar.¹¹² Scholem took it upon himself to prepare the volumes and a broad anthology of kabbalistic sources with his scholarly notes. In the end only two books by Scholem appeared during the time that Schocken Verlag was in Berlin: a German translation of the first two chapters of the Zohar with an introduction, which appeared as volume 40 in the Schocken series, and the publication in Hebrew of a Sabbatean manuscript from Salman Schocken’s collection, with a long and detailed introduction.¹¹³ The first book was greeted by Salman Schocken with so much enthusiasm that he personally took charge of preparing it for printing and even republished it a year later in a private bibliophile edition of 150 copies.¹¹⁴ The second volume was also published in this private series, and it was one of the few books that Schocken Verlag published in Hebrew during the time of its activity in Germany.

The reasons why Scholem was less productive than promised for Schocken
Verlag during those years can only be surmised. His correspondence reveals a number of points of tension, at least some of which could have been part of the cause. For example, Scholem and Spitzer’s relationship had some of the same problems—related to Scholem’s character—that had plagued the relationship between Scholem and Klatzkin. In November 1934 Spitzer heard from someone else that Scholem was angry at the publishing house and at Spitzer personally because he had been invited only at the last minute and by means of a telegram to participate in the second volume of the almanac, which did not give him enough time to prepare and submit an article, and this was why he had not responded to Spitzer’s letters. In the same month Spitzer reported to Schocken about the many difficulties the editors had had in their relations with Scholem: “Scholem is one of the most difficult to deal with of all the authors with whom we are in contact. He always answers positively, but when things get serious, he cuts off all contact. Therefore we must try to renew relations every time. . . . In a personal way it is very hard for me to form a connection with him time after time. One gradually enters into the undesirable situation of someone asking a favor.”

This rough spot in their relationship was smoothed over after Spitzer wrote directly to Scholem and asked him what was the matter. Scholem admitted his anger in his conciliatory reply, and their relations were restored to normal.

Another possible reason for the relatively small number of Scholem’s works published by Schocken Verlag at that time is connected to the relationship between the Hebrew and German languages during the Nazi regime. Throughout these years, as we find in various letters, Scholem sought to have the work that he sent to Germany published in Hebrew, or at least in both German and Hebrew. At the end of 1934 Scholem wrote to Spitzer about the language of publication of his planned monograph on Kabbalah: “As you can easily understand, in this period, and under the present conditions, I have great psychological impediments, as a professor at the Hebrew University, to seeing a comprehensive book on the field of my research published first in German. . . . I would be exposed to the accusation of disloyalty, if I published such a book in German, if there was available some opportunity to publish it first, or at the same time, in Hebrew.”

Scholem’s position is understandable. To publish a monograph of this kind only in German would place him in the middle between Nazi Germany, the enemy, represented in the Yishuv by the German language, and the Yishuv itself, of which Scholem was a part, whose language was Hebrew. However, another factor may be more important than all of those mentioned above in explaining why many projects that Scholem proposed were not completed: the nature of academic work is such that, no matter how great one’s desire or how ambitious one’s projects may be, the daily life of a university professor contains

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other obligations that result in projects being set aside until they are forgotten or consciously abandoned. In addition, it was only six years after its founding that Schocken Verlag was closed by the Nazis, at the end of 1938. Despite its impressive achievements, many unfinished projects came to an end with the closing of the publishing house. For example, the Schocken series was meant to contain a hundred volumes. In the end, ninety-two volumes of the series did appear—an impressive achievement, given the circumstances in which the publishing house was functioning. Furthermore, many of the ideas that arose in the first years of Schocken Verlag in Berlin eventually came to fruition after the publishing house opened new branches in New York and Jerusalem, and Scholem’s contribution played a central role in the process of renewal of the Schocken publishing house.

In 1934 Salman Schocken left Nazi Germany and transferred his official residence to Jerusalem. He settled in the Rehavia neighborhood, where the well-known architect Erich Mendelssohn designed his house, with a separate building for his library. The closeness between Schocken and Scholem at that time was a result of their being neighbors, as well as of Schocken’s serving as head of the Board of Trustees of the Hebrew University from 1935 until he left the Land of Israel in 1940. In addition to Schocken’s friendship for Scholem, he provided financial support for Scholem’s research. To supplement the honorariums and other fees Scholem received for his lectures, articles, and books, Schocken established the Schocken Institute for Kabbalah in 1939, which was headed by Scholem. The institute provided financial support for Scholem and his students Chaim Wirszubski, Isaiah Tishby, and Joseph Weiss and gave them free access to Schocken’s private library and manuscript collection, where they could research Kabbalah and the history of the Sabbatean movement.

Schocken spent the last years of his life wandering between the United States, Europe, and Israel in increasing isolation, and the writings of Rabbi Nachman—which, in Buber’s adaptation, had opened the door to Judaism and Zionism for him—accompanied him in his last days. In August 1959 Schocken was found dead in a hotel room in Switzerland. That summer Scholem wrote in his diary a kind of summary of his personal relations with Schocken and the complexity of the publisher’s personality. Scholem felt that Schocken possessed “an absolutely unique combination of huge talents, sometimes simply impressive intuition, with greatness (and sometimes generosity) with which he himself could not entirely cope. Among few people dwells a Satan more bitter than in this man, who managed, by means of sadism, to make an enemy out of everyone he wished to benefit. And at the same time, a kind of insatiable desire to become well-liked and admired (more than esteemed, and that is all he achieved in the end).”
Many years after writing this entry, Scholem wrote to his brother that in his view a very important part of the success and character of Schocken Verlag in Berlin derived from the anarchistic figures of the old Schocken and the young Spitzer. According to this interpretation, it is possible to understand how Scholem saw himself as belonging to this enterprise, which flourished on the soil of Nazi Germany and in which he played a considerable part, both in its publications in the short term and in preparing the ground for his future research. Years later Scholem described the activities and significance of Schocken Verlag as part of the renewal of Jewish culture in Germany: “German Jewry never benefited from a summation of Jewish values in the broadest sense during all the years of its greatness, such as it received at the time of its destruction.”

Concluding Remarks

From Scholem’s scholarship, translations, and bibliographical work the figure of a collector emerges, a man seeking to assemble and expose remote aspects of Jewish history that in his view were its very heart, and using academic tools in scholarly venues. The goal of his scholarship was, as he declared many times, “to raise up again, from the remnants of destruction that cover the field of our work, the image of the original structure of Jewish mysticism and to determine its changes and metamorphoses.” However, to understand fully the meaning of compilation for Scholem, it is not sufficient to consult his scholarship and the bibliographies. Perhaps more than any writing or scholarship of his, this ideal was fulfilled in his private collection of books, a task at which he labored for more than sixty-five years. The collection contained 25,000 titles at the time of his death. Scholem sold it to the National and University Library while he was still alive.

In many respects one may view his library as the ideal embodiment of compilation in the field of Kabbalah, according to Scholem. The documents are lined up one after the other, testifying to the continuity of the cultural existence of Judaism, without any work of an editor or an intermediary, yet sometimes with Scholem’s own annotations in the margins of the pages, and in any event after they were examined by the discerning eye of the library’s owner. Books that did not survive Scholem’s weeding-out process were not included in the collection, and he usually passed them on to his students as gifts. Scholem’s special relationship with his library and the conscious and selective principles that guided him in building the collection were already expressed in his youth, when he had just begun collecting books. While he was staying in Munich in August 1916, he wrote in his diary: “I feel a strong yearning for my library. It is my best friend.
Although it is not decent to give one’s love not to life but to Torah. My library is Torah, in all its breadth. Everything that is not Torah is doomed to remain outside. The writings of the anarchists also belong to it. Oh, when will I sit at my desk again and let my gaze wander over the rows of books?"128

An examination of various documents suggests two central needs that contributed to Scholem’s desire to collect books: a personal need and a public need. Underlying the personal need was, on the one hand, the goal of the collector to combat dispersal by striving for the general completeness of the collection and, on the other hand, the effort to view every single item in the collection as a world in itself. Scholem’s close friend, Walter Benjamin, wrote of the latter need of the collector: “The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought,
everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.”

Here, in his quest for a world order within the items themselves, Scholem’s personal desire to collect books combined with a great public project, which was the national purpose of his library—the public aspect of his collecting. Here is how Joseph Dan phrased it: “It is very evident that the collection of books was not simply a personal project in Scholem’s view, but a foundation stone of spiritual resurrection in the framework of his Zionist faith, and despite his zeal for his private library, he did not raise a barrier between it and the process of the development of Hebrew scholarship and creativity in the 1920s and 1930s.”

Perhaps the most conspicuous expression of the mingling of Scholem’s public and private areas in Israel was the sale of his library in 1965 to the National and University Library. After his death it was transferred to the Givat Ram campus, where it was given a separate room. This action, which touched directly on the area of compilation, was also Scholem’s final act in his involvement in the activities of the library over many years: “He saw the assembly of all the written records of Jewish culture at the National Library in Jerusalem as a way of ensuring Jewish continuity, and he devoted himself fervently to that goal.”