INTRODUCTION: WAS 70 CE A WATERSHED IN JEWISH HISTORY? THREE STAGES OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP, AND A RENEWED EFFORT

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The overarching issue addressed by the papers in this volume, whether 70 CE should be considered a watershed in Jewish history, has been the object of discussion for more than a century and a half, but the results are still far from unambiguous. In undertaking a project like this it might be well to recall at the outset, as an inspiration but also as a warning, the experience of one of the founding fathers of our profession, Heinrich Graetz.\footnote{For the coming discussion of Graetz, see the details in D.R. Schwartz, “Jews, Judaeans and the Epoch that Disappeared: H. Graetz’s Changing View of the Second Temple Period,” Zion 70 (2004/5): 293–309 (in Hebrew).} First, inspiration: In 1846, before he began publishing his *Geschichte der Juden*, which eventually filled eleven volumes, Graetz published an ambitious programmatic essay on the structure of Jewish history, in which he took the schematic position that all of Jewish history, from the earliest times reflected in the Bible until his own day, divides into three major eras.\footnote{For an easily accessible reprint of this 1846 essay, see H. Graetz, *Die Konstruktion der jüdischen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1936). For an English version, see: H. Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History, and Other Essays* (trans. and ed. I. Schorsch; New York, 1975).} Of these, the first, which ended with the destruction of the First Temple, was that of a people in its land; the second, which ended with the destruction of the Second Temple, was that of a religious community in its land; and the third, which continued from 70 CE until Graetz’s own times, was that of a religious community in exile.

I believe, on the one hand, that especially in our age of specialization we should be inspired by such a daringly broad and elegant view, and challenged by it to try our hands, too, at making sense of the big picture, at trying to find a meaningful forest that unites all of our trees. On the other hand, however, Graetz’s example should also serve as a warning, for it turned out that his grand project fell on its face insofar as our period is concerned. True, things started
out according to plan: When in 1853 Graetz began his grand project with the publication of his first volume, vol. IV, on the post-70 period, he designated it prominently, in accordance with his programmatic scheme, as the first volume of those on the *Dritter Zeitraum der jüdischen Geschichte: Vom Untergange des jüdischen Staates bis auf die neueste Zeit, von 70 bis 1850 nach der üblichen Zeitrechnung.* However, when the hapless but honest Graetz then sat down to write up vol. III, on the Second Temple period, which was supposed to be the second era, he concluded that it was not an era at all. Rather, Graetz concluded that the first four hundred years after the destruction of the First Temple were best handled as a continuation of the first era, and that—more importantly for the present context—he could not really point to what changed in 70. The result was that the second volume he published (vol. III, 1856) was dedicated to the 230 years from the death of Judah Maccabee until 70 CE but not assigned to any era at all, and so things were to remain in all editions of his eleven-volume *Geschichte:* Vols. I–II are labeled prominently as devoted to the first era, down to the Hasmonean revolt, and vols. IV–XI are just as prominently labeled as devoted to the last era(s), but vol. III is not said to deal with any era at all. The second era simply disappeared from the scheme. Graetz’s grand project thus testifies not only to the perils of committing oneself to an a priori conception, and to Graetz’s honesty in abandoning it, but also, and most importantly for us here, it warns us of the difficulty of pinning down the significance of the destruction of the Second Temple.

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3 H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (Leipzig, 1853), 4:1 (the title of the volume’s introduction); see also p. 7, where, correspondingly, he offers an introduction to this particular volume under the rubric: *Erste Periode des dritten Zeitraums: Die talmudische Zeit.* This volume, the fourth of this *Geschichte,* was the first published.

4 Graetz’s difficulty with this period is easily seen by comparison of the introductions of the volume in each of its first three editions: his continual rewriting and waffling tell the story well, and also explain why in the end he gave up and published the fourth edition (1888) without an introduction. See my “Jews, Judaeans,” 305–6.

5 In fact, Graetz eventually decided to end the third era with his vol. X, in the mid-eighteenth century, so as to allow his final volume, optimistically, to open a fourth era—a point that need not detain us here.

6 The only remnant of it seems to be in the concluding sentence of vol. III (p. 457 in the 1856 ed.), where Graetz comments on the comparison of end of the first Zeitraum, in the days of Jeremiah, to the end of the second Zeitraum, in the days of Josephus. This corresponds to the vision of his 1846 *Konstruktion,* not to the *Geschichte* itself, where Jeremiah comes four hundred years before the end of the first Zeitraum.