CHAPTER SIX

RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT AND EARLY REFORM
JEWISH THOUGHT: SAMUEL HIRSCH
AND DAVID EINHORN

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The use of the newly available data of Religionswissenschaft by early Reform Jewish thinkers has been overlooked by scholarship in the field. Here I will open the subject for research by looking at the work of Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889) and David Einhorn (1809–1879). Their interest in data about ancient religions was at least in part apologetic. The philosophic systems of importance to early Reform, those of Hegel and Schelling, used the data to fortify Christocentric positions and challenged the likes of Einhorn and Hirsch to support Judaism-centered history.

Neither Einhorn nor Hirsch drew from the primary texts of ancient religions, translated or otherwise. Hirsch relied on the scholarship

1 The exception appears to be Geiger; see Abraham Geiger, Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentum aufgenommen? (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); and Jacob Lassner, “Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam,” in The Jewish Discovery of Islam, ed. Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1999), 103–136.

of Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Rhode (1762–1827)—which did include lengthy portions of Johann Friedrich Kleuker’s translation of the Zend Avesta—and Peter Feddersen Stuhr (1787–1851). Einhorn drew from Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858); and both Hirsch and Einhorn drew from Karl Christian Wilhelm Felix Bähr (1801–1874) and most likely (albeit without attribution) from Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860). Einhorn’s treatment was concise, some thirty pages in length. His citations were specific, and he continued his interest in ancient religions after he left Pesth for Baltimore in 1855. Hirsch’s treatment was lengthy, some three hundred pages, and while his citations of rabbinic sources were precise, his citations of Rhode, among others, were vague. He did not continue his interest in the data after he left Luxembourg for Philadelphia in 1866 (where he succeeded Einhorn at Reform Congregation Keneset Israel). They both employed a priori measurements for authentic religiosity, Hirsch from his teacher Karl Immanuel Nitzsch (1787–1868) and Einhorn from Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860). Of the various religions each dealt with, they both dealt with Hinduism, Buddhism, and the religions of Zoroaster and Egypt—and this article will focus on those religions.

A. Hirsch

1. Nitzsch

In introducing his major work, Die Religionsphilosophie der Juden (1841), Hirsch stated that he would be using the terminology of Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, who had introduced him to the Wissenschaft of theology at the University of Bonn.3 In his System der Christlichen Lehre (first edition, 1829), Nitzsch wrote:

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