
Jonathan Frankel died in May 2008. A young man of 29, already then one of Europe’s most prominent scholars of Jewish Studies, he immigrated to Israel in 1964. He went on to become Professor of Modern Jewish and Russian History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to which he devoted the rest of his life. Among the most prominent figures in his field, Frankel is best known perhaps for his study on the Damascus affair (1997) and his work on Russian Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries. His book *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* was published posthumously, and contains a foreword by his wife and eleven essays, written at various times during the last 25 years.

In the introduction, Frankel responds to criticism from fellow historians on a number of points. His critics have argued that a strong focus on the intelligentsia, the core of Frankel’s work, is one-sided, creating a distorted picture of historical events. Secondly, Frankel’s idea of Russian-Jewish history as characterized by moments of crisis and sharp disjunctures ignores the more subtle forms of historical change, as well as long-term trends. Finally, they pointed out that Frankel’s emphasis on emigrant communities is detrimental to the analysis of the internal dynamics of Russian-Jewish history. Frankel responds by saying that history is made up of both evolutionary and revolutionary factors, and that it proceeds on several layers at once, thus arguing for attention to both everyday life and long-term trends. In acknowledging that a historian’s subject choice is determined by personal factors—for Frankel, the importance of crisis as a formative life experience, i.e. World War II, the many armed conflicts in Israel, and the two Palestinian uprisings—Frankel reveals an honesty that is both refreshing and rare in academia. This recognition of the private motives underlying intellectual passions is what made Jonathan Frankel such a vivid, careful, and genuine writer.

The period he examines in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*, namely the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a time when political culture was still influenced by the idea that mankind was predestined to advance upwards, an idea refuted by the subsequent events of the 20th century, and as such an intellectual climate that now seems remote. The book, which consists of five parts and whose focal point is the Russian revolution of 1905, is made up of microcosmic case studies and broader overviews, exploring the various dimensions in time, thought and experience of the Russian Jewry’s revolutionary politics. It describes its dynamics and the leading role of the intelligentsia as revolutionaries, ideologues, and observers, illustrating that the years of upheaval proved of exceptional importance in the “radical turn” taken by modern Jewish politics from the 1880 onwards. It was at such moments of disruption that “many could conclude that the misbegotten present was doomed and that a future totally transformed was within grasp.” (5) In Part I entitled “New Dynamics?” Frankel elaborates on the notion of crisis as a factor of crucial importance in modern Jewish politics, and he shows how the emergence of the Jewish press, in the mid-19th century, was a pivotal factor in Jewish history, in that it allowed journals to become “public, supra-communal arenas” of debate which transcended national, linguistic, or sectarian divisions. (34) Taking the example of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (1860), what is remarkable is that the reception of the Alliance in the Jewish press did not concern itself with the question of the “dual loyalty” of European Jews or the threats to their assimilation that such a universalist organization might entail. Instead, critics agreed that “the standing
of the Jews in public opinion would only be enhanced by the emergence of an association which fought forcefully for Jewish interests under the banner of the rights of man." (53) Frankel convincingly argues that this response was a result of the fact that the liberal credo enjoyed such high prestige in the Western world at this time.

Part II, called "Revolution and War (1905–1921)", analyses the internal dynamics of the 1905 revolution, concentrating on the role of the youth, its particular demands differing from its predecessors (civil rights in the here and now, versus a more distant idea of auto-emancipation in 1881), and the instant "fictionalization" of politics that ensued in its wake in novels and short stories. Yet the events of 1881 (the pogroms in Russia and the emergence of proto-Zionism), 1905 and 1917, Frankel argues, should be analyzed together as they triggered similar Jewish responses, namely ideological ferment, a remarkable upsurge in political activity, organization and recruitment in youth movements, the creation of a new elite, and mass involvement in the revolutions. Through this argument, Frankel emphasizes the lines of continuity that connect these moments of upheaval. The essay on the author Yosef Haim Brenner, a pioneer of Hebrew literature, stands out as a biographical case study—the depth of analytical interplay between life, work, and afterlife bringing the genre to new heights—the likes of which most intellectual history can only dream of. The last essay, discussing the paradoxical marginality of the Jewish situation in the years 1914–1921, shows how the disruption of Jewish life as a result of World War I amplified their endangered position as a non-territorial people in an age of extremist nationalisms. In addition, their fate was linked to rising Gentile suspicions about Jewish world-domination and "Judeo-Bolshevism," myths detrimental to the Jews’ safety during this period.

The single essay that comprises Part III, called "Ideological Conflict and Continuity", discusses the various strands of socialist opposition to the Zionist ideology, diving deep into the internal dimensions and conflicts of the Jewish Left. In Part IV, "Overseas", Frankel takes a geographical leap to the United States, demonstrating how the Jewish nationalizing process was infused with myths that were as strong in the Diaspora as they were in Palestine. Taking as an example the *Yizkor* (memorial) book of 1911, a popular publication presenting a “pantheon of heroes” from those men killed in combat by Arabs and concerning itself with the correct approach to Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine, Frankel shows how self-sacrifice and bloodshed came to be seen as a natural part of the national endeavor. The current situation in Israel and the occupied territories only further validates Frankel’s claim that mythologies do not work in a vacuum, but that their power depends on “a combination of ideological, organizational, historical, socio-political, and contextual factors.” (214–5) The “Zionist Problem” was also discussed, albeit from a contrary viewpoint, by the many revolutionaries from the Bund, the Jewish Labour Union (1897), who made their way to America and from there discussed it with on-going fervour.

The book’s last Part V, called “History and the Historians”, contains two essays that bring together many of Frankel’s strands and arguments. The first essay meticulously traces the steps in the development of the world-view of historian Simon M. Dubnov. Frankel shows how a vision that supported a secular Jewish nationalism could be combined with a linear belief in the progress of men toward a humane and just society. Dubnov is both exemplary and original in his thought on the diasporic mission of the Jews, resonating with recent commentaries on Jewish nationalism. The historiographical focus of the last essay builds on the analysis of Dubnov’s thought, and discusses the changes in Jewish historiographical trends from the 1860s to the present. The theological perspective, positing Judaism as a religion