The last decade of the twentieth century and the start of the next millennium have introduced widespread changes in many areas of life. Curricula and textbooks are generally thought to be a field which changes after great delay and then only gradually. 'Case study' about Germany will allow us to check the matter through a comparison with textbooks from previous years. But first a few preliminary remarks and a presentation of the central questions to be discussed:

a At the end of the twentieth century, and particularly in that century's last decade, the textbook market in Israel (which in the distant past had been under the full control and direction of the Ministry of Education) has turned into a free and open market. Various competing organizations and institutions are involved in the writing of textbooks, and freelancers are employed (The Educational Curricula Division of the Ministry of Education, Shazar Center, The Educational Technology Center, the publishing firms of Sifri, Maalot, and Reches, etc.). In order to sell books in this competitive market, there has been a marked improvement in graphic design and esthetics. The wide variety of books and, even more, of authors, raises the question: do members of academia, specifically the historians, relate to history in general and to German history in particular in a way different from that of veteran teachers and Education Ministry staff members who specialize in didactics? It is possible, for example, to claim that academics who are exposed to the post-modern intellectual environment will write in a more bold and critical manner, even tending towards revisionism and explicit value judgements, while education professionals will tend to adopt a more cautious and conservative/positivist approach in their writing. We will attempt to deal with this hypothesis below.

b The new history curriculum, which became mandatory in the 2000/2001 school year, incorporates both Jewish and world history 'and tries to overcome the separation between “general” history and

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“Jewish” history'. The innovation is that within the framework of a single learning unit in which the students are tested, they learn something of each discipline. Even so, the strategy is not perfect. Both in the curriculum and in the textbooks the chapters which deal with general history and with Jewish history are divided, and it is difficult for a student to understand the interdependent relationship between them. The question of what, i.e. either Jewish or general history, to emphasize, arises frequently amongst the Israeli public and is also tied to changes in the government. In any case, it is clear that class time devoted to world history, including German history, will be limited.

Old textbooks emphasized political and ideological history. Within this framework particularistic national movements were discussed in depth. On the other hand, in the new curriculum and in the textbooks written for it, a great deal of attention is given to socio-economic processes, everyday life, scientific and technological development, and changes in both elite and popular culture. Simultaneously there is an increased emphasis on the universal and cross-cultural phenomena which characterize ‘Western civilization’ in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and this, of course, also finds expression in the titles of textbook chapters, including: ‘Democracy Put to the Test’, ‘The Great Powers’, ‘The Lands of Western Democracy’, ‘This is Your Life – The European Bourgeoisie’, ‘The World at Cold War’, ‘Trends Toward European Unification’, ‘Bourgeoisie and Proletariat and What Lies In Between’, and ‘Totalitarian Culture’. The question that arises here is: is there room in the framework of Western civilization’s universal outlook to give German history ‘special path’?

In the older textbooks German history is usually, in the wake of the Holocaust, portrayed as a linear, negative process which culminated in the Nazi rise to power and the Holocaust. This approach is familiar as the ‘Bismark to Hitler’ thesis, which emphasizes Prussian militarism, the rigidity and resolve of Bismarck the ‘Iron Chancellor,’ the imperialistic nationalism of Wilhelminic Germany, and which regards the Weimar Republic as a sort of corridor which led to the rise of Nazism and not as a separate period. In the same vein, students also did not learn about German history after 1945.