

**THE HISTORY OF H-JUDAIC
AN INTERNET-BASED NETWORK
FOR POST-SECONDARY JEWISH STUDIES**

by

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Ed.D.
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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Avi Jacob Hyman, Ed.D., 2000
Department of Theory & Policy Studies in Education, OISE/UT
University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a history of **H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network**. H-Judaic is an Internet-based professional organization primarily for those involved in post-secondary Jewish Studies, including professors and instructors, graduate students, librarians, researchers, rabbis involved with post-secondary institutions and independent scholars. As of April 2000, H-Judaic was the largest professional organization in Jewish Studies, either Internet-based or not, with a membership of over 2200 people. Among its services are: a daily discussion forum (the H-Judaic listserv); a regular weekly newsletter with information on positions; conference announcements; calls-for-papers and other professional issues; a book review service; and a website. Although the vast majority of the members are located in the United States, every continent is represented, with significant cohorts from Israel, Canada and Australia. The main body of this thesis is a documentary history of the organization during its first decade of development. That history is situated within the context of a review of the field of Jewish Studies, and a review of listserv-based communication technology in post-secondary education. Finally, the history is complemented by a review of the important discourse trends that occurred among member of the organization during that period.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a history of **H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network**. H-Judaic is an Internet-based professional organization primarily for those involved in post-secondary Jewish Studies, including professors and instructors, graduate students, librarians, researchers, rabbis involved with post-secondary institutions and independent scholars. As of April 2000, H-Judaic was the largest professional organization in Jewish Studies, Internet-based or not, with a membership of over 2200 people. Among its services are: a daily discussion forum (the H-Judaic listserv), a regular weekly newsletter with information on positions, conference announcements, calls-for-papers and other professional issues, a book review service and a website. Although the vast majority of the members are located in the United States, every continent is represented, with significant cohorts from Israel, Canada and Australia.

The exploration of H-Judaic's history begins first with an examination of the Jewish Studies field and then an examination of communication technology in academia, particularly listserv-based scholarly electronic forums (SEFs). In the examination of Jewish Studies, we will see that the field is a relatively modern phenomenon, with the current university-based version emanating from the developments in the ethnic studies movement of the 1960s. However, we will also see that there is debate, even within Jewish Studies itself, when it comes to defining Jewish Studies as a disciplinary field, and that this debate is politically charged. All of these factors played a role in the development of H-Judaic.

In the examination of listserv-based SEFs we will also see that while the Internet and e-mail communication also dates back to the 1960s, e-mailing list SEFs only really emerge

in the 1980s. Furthermore, it was the sciences that led the way in the use of this technology, rather than the humanities and social sciences. Even when Jewish lists did begin to emerge, they were dominated by computer professionals. However, despite their late start, SEFs are seen by participants as providing very valuable venues for social, political and professional interaction, even if they do not directly influence career development in the same way as traditional paper publishing. In reviewing a number of studies on SEFs and related technologies, we see that that role of moderator/facilitator and a shared knowledge base among participants are important factors in the success or failure of an forum. Again, these factors played a role in the development of H-Judaic.

As we move into the main body of the thesis, H-Judaic will be examined from two perspectives. The first part will be a documentary history of the organizational development of H-Judaic. In particular, the role of the moderator and H-Judaic's relationship with other organizations will be emphasized. In the second part, H-Judaic will be examined in terms of the conversational discourse trends among its participants. In particular, the issue of a shared knowledge base is emphasized. Throughout both parts there is an underlying hypothesis that the field of Jewish studies and the use of communication technology in academia had both matured to the point where, in the late 1980s, a viable, Internet-based Jewish studies professional organization could exist. What emerges from both perspectives of this examination is that, for the most part, the hypothesis only holds true when the group discusses the politics of Jewish Studies and the popular culture of Judaism. Specifically, since the membership of H-Judaic comes from a wide spectrum of disciplinary backgrounds (which is consistent with the review of Jewish Studies in general), only politics, and to some extent popular culture (as exemplified by humour), transcend the disciplinary divide and the diversity in religious backgrounds of the membership on a consistent basis.

Finally, I feel obliged to reflect briefly on my own role in this study. Although this thesis is a history of H-Judaic, my background in anthropology is clearly evident. Particularly, there are methodological echoes of my participant-observer status, since I served as moderator/editor from 1993 until 1998 and I continue to sit on the editorial board of the organization. This thesis is not just a dispassionate record of H-Judaic. In many ways it is a journal of participation in the processes, and therefore it seems natural to write in the first person, where appropriate. It also seems natural to venture opinion as a stakeholder, based both on the extant documents and from my own memory of events. Nonetheless, I attempt to record and analyze H-Judaic as objectively as possible.

Jewish Studies

Most scholars¹ now agree that modern academic Jewish Studies, rather than religious or spiritual teaching, originates with the emergence of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment, in Western and Central Europe in the 17th Century. Jews formerly trained in Torah scholarship began to adopt university-based scientific reasoning when examining texts. Over the course of the next century this approach gave rise to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*² movement, largely under the influence of the study of philosophy and historiography in German universities. According to Egon Mayer, "the central questions addressed by the new scholarship themselves grew out of the existential

¹ The most often cited work in this area is Paul Ritterband and Harold Wechsler's *Jewish Learning in American Universities*, 1994, Indiana University Press, Bloomington. Another important work, as a milestone, was edited by Leon Jick, *The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities: The Proceedings of a Colloquium*, 1970, AJS-KTAV. See also the review essays by Rotenstreich, Urbach, and Sidorsky, in Moshe Davis, ed. *Teaching Jewish Civilization: A Global Approach to Higher Education*, 1995. NYU Press, New York.

² Literally the Science of Judaism movement.

quandaries of its practitioners: How and why the Jews and Judaism differ from the nations and religions in whose midst they lived? How does one account for the origins of Jewish beliefs and practices in the light of cultural anthropology and evolutionary theory?"³ *Wissenschaft* applied modern rules of analysis to the ideas and symbols of Judaism without necessarily examining the Jews themselves. As Mayer indicates, the *Wissenschaft* scholars "sought to accomplish in the realm of scholarship what modern Zionism sought to accomplish in international politics: to make Jews unexceptional."⁴ According Robert Seltzer, "the intellectuals [of the *Wissenschaft* movement] wanted Judaism to gain the respect due it as a primary tradition alongside the Greek and Roman classics."⁵

However, despite university influences, the early pioneers wrote mainly for Jewish audiences and had little to do with general universities. Instead they were employed as rabbis, teachers, yeshiva instructors, or, in a few cases, in German rabbinical seminaries. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewish Studies continued to grow, independent of the non-Jewish university. As the humanities and social sciences continued to develop in secular and Christian universities, scholars in Jewish Studies outside the mainstream academic world also adopted these new disciplinary approaches to their scholarly activity, including sociology, demography, ethnography and folklore studies.⁶ An academic approach to the study of Judaism also gradually made its way into Eastern Europe, again, mostly under Jewish auspices, as exemplified by the *Yiddisher*

³ Egon Mayer, "Academia and Community," in *Jewish Studies in the Public University*. Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter, Number 47, Fall 1997. pp. 4-6

⁴ Mayer, 1997.

⁵ Robert Seltzer, "Jewish Studies in the Jewish Community." *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter*, Number 46, Fall 1996. Pp. 1-3

⁶ Seltzer, 1996.

Visenshaftlekher Insitut (YIVO)⁷. And it was these developments that gave rise to the first Jewish Studies institutions in the United States: the Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, Dropsie College, the Jewish Institute of Religion, and later, Yeshiva University and Brandeis University; and in Israel, exemplified by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Prior to the mass migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to America at the turn of the century, a limited number of Jews even began to obtain appointments at Christian and secular universities, most notably in the area of Semitics. American universities were motivated as much (or more) by their desire to tap into the growing affluence of the native Jewish community as by their scholarly interest in things Jewish. But American universities reversed the trend of Jewish Studies and even avoided Jewish hirings as anti-Semitism increased in reaction to the massive wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants from the turn of the century onward.⁸

Full acceptance of academic Jewish Studies within the framework of the non-Jewish university did not occur until the first post-Holocaust generation of American Jews had begun to mature. The mid-1960s characterize a period of change that Robert Seltzer attributes to "changes in American attitudes toward minorities, ethnicity, and non-Christian religions, the dying out of academic anti-Semitism, a fresh respect for the Jewish tradition, and certain awe about the Holocaust."⁹ As a result, there was an increase

⁷ Literally the Jewish Scientific Institute.

⁸ Ritterband and Wechsler, 1994. Pp. X, 33-37, 60-67, 74

⁹ Seltzer, 1996. Here, Seltzer is referring to an era in which minorities were demanding both the recognition of the study of their experiences in the academic sphere, and their emergent identity issues. In addition to Jewish Studies, these demands resulted in the growth of Black Studies, Labour Studies, and soon thereafter, Women's Studies.

in the quantity of courses, publications, articles, monographs and dissertations, and enough of a momentum to form a professional body. Although Hebrew language courses of one kind or another continued to represent in excess of sixty percent of the total curriculum between the 1920s and 1960s, the actual number of Judaic courses grew five fold over the same period. Nonetheless, Jewish learning lacked independent or departmental status until the 1960s, and even then, only sporadically.¹⁰ Furthermore, until the late 1960s and 1970s, this growth in Jewish centered courses and programs did not generally include philosophical studies or fields within the social sciences.¹¹

As Paul Ritterband and Harold Wechsler report, beginning in the late 1960s the ethnic studies movement opened new avenues of university access to achieve a decade of unprecedented growth for the field. In the period after World War II, prime importance was placed on attracting university-trained scholars to Jewish topics, but with the changes of the late 1960s, concern shifted to the inadequacy of Jewish knowledge among Jewish Studies practitioners. There was also a shift from comparisons between Jews and non-Jews to comparisons between the Jewish Diaspora and Jews in Israel as the subject of scholarly research. Judaic scholars with greater ranges of disciplinary orientations and education were applying for the growing number of academic positions and began turning from issues of the inclusion of Jewish Studies in academia to the recognition and self-regulation of the field.¹²

One form of reaction to self-regulation was the establishment of professional, scholarly Jewish Studies associations. The developments of the 1960s in this direction are best

¹⁰ Ritterband and Wechsler, 1994. Pp. 173-174

¹¹ Ritterband and Wechsler, 1994. Pp. 201-202

¹² Ritterband and Wechsler, 1994. Pp. 213-215

exemplified by the emergence of the Association for Jewish Studies. Founded in Boston in 1969, the AJS is an interdisciplinary learned society and professional organization that seeks to promote, maintain, and improve teaching, research, and related endeavors in Jewish Studies, mostly in American colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. The AJS, a constituent society of the American Council of Learned Societies, holds an annual conference in December with sessions devoted to a wide variety of scholarly and professional matters.¹³ While some organizations predated the AJS, many more were to follow.¹⁴

The formation of the Association for Jewish Studies, in the minds of its founders, was necessitated by a desire to facilitate scholarly communication in the 'new' field and to advocate colleges and universities to appoint adequately educated scholars. The field had entered a new period characterized by rapid enrollment increases, subject expansion, and in some cases the establishment of separate Jewish Studies departments. And while the field continued to dwell within disciplines, the emergence of Jewish Studies departments and the creation of the AJS mark practitioner recognition of this turning point.¹⁵ Joseph Blau was one of the participants in the initial meeting that led to the formation of the AJS. Blau later wrote about how there was a consensus among participants at the meeting on the need for a professional organization, regardless of everyone's academic discipline or their personal views on Jewish issues:

¹³ The Association for Jewish Studies Mission: <http://www.brandeis.edu/ajs/ajsmission.html>

¹⁴ American Academy for Jewish Research, 1920; The World Union of Jewish Studies, 1947; Verband der Judaisten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1974; The Association for Canadian Jewish Studies, 1976; The European Association for Jewish Studies, 1981; The Latin American Jewish Studies Association, 1982; China Judaic Studies Association, 1989; The Western Jewish Studies Association, 1995.

¹⁵ Ritterband and Wechsler, 1994. p. 214-217

Our goal might be stated in broadest terms as, to make a place in American higher education for the studies in the life, thought, and culture of Jews, past and present, not only as a means of stimulating the enrichment of educational content now, and as a factor in Jewish survival in time to come, but also because we are convinced that these studies have an intrinsic value that is like and yet unlike comparable studies of other ethnic groups. Each of us might put his own stress on one these phrases; we would all, I think, accept the whole statement.¹⁶

In the mid-1980s, the International Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem published a booklet cataloguing the current state of the Jewish Studies field, the first systematic collection of such information. In 1985, its *World Register of University Studies in Jewish Civilization* had listings for 1042 courses taught between 1975 and 1985. And for courses for which it had information, 35 percent were taught in religion departments, 32 percent in Jewish Studies departments, 22 percent in history departments, 5 percent in humanities, and 2 percent in each of social sciences, Oriental studies, and Middle/Near Eastern departments. North American courses were most often located in religion departments, even if they were 'history' courses, while European universities tended to place their Jewish studies courses in Jewish Studies or Oriental studies departments.¹⁷ A decade later, in 1995, the Register was able to account for 1250 courses in Jewish Studies offered during any given semester at universities, colleges and theological seminaries globally. These courses appear in a variety of disciplines and departments, including archeology, art, biblical studies, Talmud,

¹⁶ Joseph Blau, "A Proposal for a Professional Association," in Jick, ed., *The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities: The Proceedings of a Colloquium*, 1970. Pp. 87-92. AJS-Ktav.

¹⁷ Mervin Verbit, ed., 1985. *World Register of University Studies in Jewish Civilization; Inventory of Holdings* - Number 1. ICUTJC, Jerusalem.

rabbinics, comparative religion, foreign languages, history, Jewish thought, literature, politics, social sciences, sociology, as well as in interdisciplinary programs such as Holocaust studies and Sephardic studies.¹⁸ In 1992, the Association for Jewish Studies published a catalogue listing courses relevant to Jewish Studies in North America and listed 104 known endowed academic positions in Jewish Studies at colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, excluding Jewish denominational institutions¹⁹

From 1970 on, Jewish Studies was subjected to the same forces that shaped academia more generally. These forces included various financial crises, the changing tides in enrolments and an increase in the importance of job training and employability. They also include the relationship of the theoretical and scholarly world to real life and community and the role of women, part of the larger debate on the role of women in Jewish life. There is a certain irony that the maturation of the field also caused a backlash against interdisciplinary or unifying trends, and against what some perceived as a dual role for Jewish Studies, scholarship and continuity. It is important to understand this phenomenon in the development of Jewish Studies. The most notable voice in this discussion was Jacob Neusner, a prolific professor of Judaism in Religious Studies at Brown University for many years. Between 1981 and 1993, Neusner wrote or edited more than a half-dozen full volumes on the place of Jewish studies in academe and he was none too pleased about how Jewish Studies was organized and perceived in the academy.

¹⁸ Sergio DellaPergola and Florinda Goldberg, 1995. "World Register of University Studies in Jewish Civilization" in Moshe Davis, ed. *Teaching Jewish Civilization: A Global Approach to Higher Education*, pp. 187-189. NYU Press, New York.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Vernon, 1992. *Jewish Studies Courses at American and Canadian Universities*. AJS, Cambridge, Mass.

Jewish studies have entered the academy not as a subject treated in accord with academic disciplines but as an arena for Jews to explore their roots, Jews teaching (self-evidently valid) Jewish facts to other Jews. Since this is the state of Jewish studies in many universities, so the academy has treated Jewish learning with contempt, permitting Jewish studies to form a new ghetto. Jews, living in a free society, bring traditions of learning to the campus and then define matters in such a way that only Jews teach self-evidently interesting Jewish facts only to Jews -- a ghetto, which Jews of the third generation are building with their own money.²⁰

And on the Association for Jewish Studies:

A field with no agenda, no cognitive purpose, no disciplined curiosity also nurtures no curriculum. Without a limited program of inquiry, without generally understood (if not universally accepted) standards by which we can tell a bad piece of work from a good one, without a reasoned problematic and a curiosity subject to explanation and transmission, Jewish studies also generate no energy. So we find the source of the lethargy. That is why arguments about why Jewish students are duty-bound to take courses in Jewish studies today circulate as a rationale for the field. It is the usual appeal to guilt. And that explains the intellectual lethargy and academic bankruptcy of the Association for Jewish Studies and other academic learned societies that claim to embody Jewish studies in meetings from year to year and in journals lacking all cogency.²¹

Not everyone agreed. Some even argued that Jewish Studies was not only a legitimate field, it was also duty-bound to feed from the academy to the community. At the 1998 AJS conference, the most widely discussed paper was an impassioned and eloquent polemic by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson. Tirosh-Samuelson argued that the academic enterprise of Jewish studies without a commitment to the transmission of Jewish values is

²⁰ In his introduction: Jacob Neusner, ed., 1993. *The Academy and Traditions of Jewish Learning*, Garland, New York. P. ix. See also his earlier *Judaism in the American Humanities*, Scholars Press, Chico, CA. 1981 and 1983.

a dead-end that would leave students without interest in the field.²² As provocative as these fundamentally opposed arguments are, it is not the purpose of this thesis to either support or refute Neusner's or Tirosh-Samuelson's claims. Their theories are only posited here to give some sense of the breadth of the debate about modern Jewish studies as background to an examination of history of H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network.

Listserv

Although use of a specifically organized international computer network for any kind of communication about Jewish topics did not occur until the mid-1980s, the foundation for such use was laid as early as 1962, during the height of the Cold War.²³ Between 1962 and 1969, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the U.S. Department of Defense, was actively involved in the planning of a network that would interconnect several smaller, localized computer systems - the kind that could be found on a single university campus or research facility. The goal of this project was twofold; first, to create a network that had no single outage point (i.e., decentralized to avoid being destroyed by a nuclear attack at a single centralized location), and second, to maximize the communication facilities and eventually approach real-time (immediate or close to immediate) interaction (what came to be known as "packet-switching").

²¹ p. 98. Jacob Neusner, 1990. "Professors or Curators? Universities or Museums? The Case for Jewish Studies," in *Lectures on Judaism in the Academy and in the Humanities*, pp. 87-99. Scholars Press, Atlanta.

²² David Berger, 1999. "From the President," in *AJS Perspectives*. Fall 1999. p. 4

²³ The history of the Internet and the various software applications which make use of it are now part of the public sphere and will be synthesized here over the next few pages. This history appears in most books about the Internet. Two typical sources would be the *Canadian Internet Handbook*, (Carroll and Broadhead, 1995) for print, and the *Hobbes' Internet Timeline*, (Zakon, 1996) for online.

In 1969 this dream was realized and the ARPANet came into existence.

During the following twenty years, development of computer networks concentrated most heavily on improving the method of transmission and the development of tools for creating and transmitting messages. The culmination of this activity led to the standardization of the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) in 1982 for use on the ARPANet system. Throughout the international network's history, the most preferred system of computer communication has been the individual electronic mail message.

Starting in 1979, however, an alternate system of messaging, USENET, came into play. Unlike electronic mail, which transmitted mail between individual accounts on interconnected computers, USENET employed a distributed 'bulletin board'-like system, where messages were stored centrally in a participating computer, and users, via a specialty program called a 'newsreader' accessed the messages. The USENET system was designed foremost for UNIX type computers.

The early 1980s also saw a number of other developments in communication systems between computers. In 1981, BITNET (Because It's Time NETwork) was started. For the next decade, the BITNET network connected university systems (mostly IBM mainframes) and provided the kind of connectability ARPANet provided for computer and technology research centres. In 1983, the ARPANet split into two networks, one for military uses, and the other for research, and by extension, for universities.

In this competitive atmosphere between the proponents of BITNET and ARPANet (research), there arose a demand for non-technical, humanistic uses of the communication

capabilities of the networks. First off the block was the USENET community, whose network system tended almost exclusively to use the ARPANet and UNIX type computers. But despite the more holistic, less job-related nature of the conversations, the USENET community was still made up of research-oriented scientists and computer experts. So even as the USENET community grew, and the topics of conversation evolved away from purely computer science, the participants were still immersed in the computer genre because of the nature of their work. Nonetheless, USENET was fabulously successful, growing very rapidly from a few computers in North Carolina, and soon spreading to hundreds of systems throughout the world, but predominantly in North America.

Not to be outdone, the BITNET people also created a method for group dialogue. Their system, however, was based on the more widespread electronic mail technology, and by 1985 this technology became known by its software, LISTSERV.

LISTSERV was a program that allowed for the creation of a mailing or distribution list, in the classic, non-computer sense of those terms. A list-owner could collect e-mail addresses of interested parties, add them to a list, and instead of individually addressing each note, the list-owner could use the LISTSERV program to distribute the message automatically to every person on the list. Ultimately, the list software was designed to allow anyone (not just the owner) to send messages to all members of a list by simply posting one message to a collective e-mail address, which LISTSERV recognized as meaning 'please re-distribute this to the list of addresses'. By allowing more than just the owner to post, such e-mail distribution lists became virtual discussion groups, in that any member could 'talk' to all other members, or reply to any previous message, all through electronic mail.

One of the earliest non-science scholarly uses of this technology was the list *Humanist*, which, according to its editor, Willard McCarty, "began in May 1987 as a means of communication among a small group of people concerned with the support of humanities computing. At the time e-mail was relatively new among humanists and mechanisms such as LISTSERV almost unknown. *Humanist* grew rapidly and, in response to the community it helped to discover, developed quickly into an international, interdisciplinary forum primarily distinguished by the quality of its discussion. From the example of *Humanist*, many if not most of the current online groups in the humanities were inspired."²⁴

Unfortunately, by the time LISTSERV had been developed, the use of IBM mainframes as central campus computers had started to decline, spelling the early death knell for BITNET. In 1986, the LISTSERV program was adapted for use by UNIX type computers, around the same time that the National Science Foundation Network backbone (NSFNet) of the ARPANet came into existence, improving connectivity of university-based systems to this former military research network. By 1991, this system was no longer the ARPANet, but instead referred to as the Internet. By 1992, the number of hosts (computer systems attached to the Internet) exceeded one million; BITNET was practically dead, and commercial use of the system had begun to rival academic uses.

In commenting on Marshal McLuhan's 'Global Village' vision, researchers in one computer-mediated communication (CMC) study concluded that the global village is neither global nor a village. Instead, the organizing principle is a loosely coupled entity or

²⁴ McCarty, 1996

group (a list) where each list is a virtual neighborhood defined by common interest, not geography.²⁵ I have coined the term Virtual Tribalism to illuminate the existence of these groups, and among them, there is a special version frequented by scholars, often referred to in the literature as Scholarly Electronic Forums (SEFs) or Scholarly Discussion Groups (SDGs).

In his *Humanist* list, for example, McCarty saw a kind of electronic seminar, whose purpose was "not so much to convey facts as to further understanding of its subject, to train the minds of its participants, and so to help create a community of scholars. A pedagogical structure in which every member is both teacher and student."²⁶ McCarty noticed that although the medium of e-mail, being restricted (for the most part²⁷) to verbal expression, favoured a participant with developed rhetorical skills, it nonetheless forced participants into an active mode, even if only to check their e-mail boxes for new, incoming messages.

McCarty's actions as *Humanist*'s first moderator set the groundwork for future operations of his own list, and, by example, other scholarly groups²⁸. Among his main objectives was the easing of what he called "information overload" through well-defined and

²⁵ Rafaeli, et. al., 1994. P. 3

²⁶ McCarty, 1992. Pp. 206-207

²⁷ In electronic mail, a new form of popular culture language, based on normal ascii (text only) characters, has emerged. This language is often referred to as "Smilies," so named because of the use of ascii characters to produce different "faces" that denote emotions, for example, :-) the smile, which might mean "happy." These symbols fall somewhere between the realm of verbal, and graphic.

²⁸ Every list has a moderator/owner, whom the system records as being responsible for the maintenance of the group. The moderator may take a very minor role, only interfering

managed control. This included the grouping of messages with a common theme and the elimination of 'junk mail'²⁹, and later, the incorporation of automated 'digesting'.³⁰ McCarty also vetted membership requests, forcing potential members to "apply." According to McCarty, "respect for the group and the medium, rather than objection to the additional barrier, have tended to follow."³¹ At the same time, McCarty also noted that list members themselves began to develop screening skills which allowed them to cope with increasing quantities of mail as the membership itself grew. Together with digesting, these skills gave his list a more formal feel.

And yet, despite the formalization of the medium, McCarty was still able to detect a sense of impermanent transience among the participatory styles of the members. He ascribed this sense to the commonly held notion that this medium was highly changeable, unlike printed text (even though he had always archived, and therefore made permanent, the record of conversation), and that participants felt that they needed to act upon the messages, lest they disappear. "Information overload originated partially in the desire to preserve the transitory."³² Notwithstanding the social, professional, political, and intellectual uses made of the list, McCarty did not see it as a serious venue for career advancement except indirectly, by assisting research or perhaps bringing a frequent and

when there is a technical problem, or the moderator may take a very active role, serving as an editor, censor and arbitrator.

²⁹ Junk mail can be considered any message not meant to be part of the scholarly discourse in one way or another. For example, advertising of unrelated products or services randomly sent to many lists, or, error messages automatically created that inadvertently end up being sent to the list's address.

³⁰ A listserv digest compiles individual messages into a newsletter-looking format, usually consisting of all the messages sent during one day. It also creates a table of contents at the start of the digest, so that readers can choose which messages to look at.

³¹ McCarty, 1992. p. 210

persuasive contributor to the attention of others. Instead he saw its real usefulness in the opening of channels of communication where nothing remotely similar existed before.³³

SDGs can provide a forum where ideas can be more clearly articulated. The discussion can create shared meaning, a way to try out new ideas and reflect on the observations of others, and a way to discover multiple perspectives on issues of interest. SDGs can work like invisible colleges, professional conventions and journals. They can serve as a venue through which ideas can be proposed in a tentative way and receive feedback from others.³⁴ In some ways, the exchange of correspondence publicly over these networks constitutes a new form of publication. The posting on a list frequently resembles a letter to the editor where someone conveys their opinions on a subject (or suggests a subject for discussion). While often written to be read by a number of anonymous readers, list postings lack both the anonymity of graffiti and the intimacy of private correspondence.³⁵

In the last decade or so there has been a growing volume of research into how these lists work.³⁶ There is little question that the most popular and most important Internet application is electronic mail. One 1997 study found that, on average, scholars who self-select as participants in scholarly discussion groups can spend over 40 percent of their office hours working on the Internet, and the most popular professional uses of the

³² McCarty, 1992. Pp. 211-212

³³ McCarty, 1992. Pp. 212-213

³⁴ Berge, 1994. P. 103

³⁵ Erdt, 1992. P. 170

³⁶ The bulk of this next section is devoted to a review of the current research on the use of lists, and related technology. In particular, the theoretical framework in the works of Linda Harasim, Zane Berge, and Alejandra Rojo are drawn upon.

Internet revolve around sending and receiving electronic mail, both personal and list-mediated.³⁷

The depth of interactivity varies widely among discussion groups. Some groups are like cocktail parties with many conversations (threads) competing. Some, like formal seminars, focus around specific topics. Some are like notice boards in the local grocery store where messages are pinned and left for others to read and comment on. And some groups merely function as newspapers, disseminating electronic journals or computer programs, advertising conferences or job vacancies. Many people are content to just read and listen, even in the most interactive groups, while a relatively few dominate conversations.³⁸

Commentator Kat Nagel outlined a life cycle that every list seems to go through. First there is initial enthusiasm and evangelism (where people complain about the infrequency of postings). This is followed by a period of growth and then community (with lots of threads and information and willingness to help). When the number of messages increases both in volume and in diversity, a certain discomfort arises (often marked by complaints that the list has lost its central purpose). Finally, if a group of purists emerges and is allowed to “flame” (attack *ad hominem*) and act self-righteously, while others leave to form groups of their own, then a complacency develops, or worse stagnation and death. If, however, the self-righteous are minimized and a balance develops between community and diversity, then a list will reach maturity.³⁹

³⁷ Ciolek, 1998. P. 5

³⁸ Rafaeli, et al., 1994. P.3

³⁹ Nagel, 1994.

Another study suggested that participants in lists find that good contributions to a list should be brief, so that anything beyond two screens would need to be exceptionally interesting. Participants also found the subject line to be very critical in decisions regarding reading choice. Instantaneous response to a posting is not an expectation, even though most participants would check for new e-mail at least once a day.⁴⁰

Online scholarly collaboration needs to be carefully designed, and SDGs are most useful as a collaborative medium if the group has a specific task to accomplish, a deadline to meet, and a shared cultural or knowledge base.⁴¹ Analysis indicates that active discussion and interaction is significantly related to the online presence of the moderator. The more active the moderator, the higher the level of activity. When the moderator takes an active role, the rates of participation and user satisfaction are significantly higher.⁴² The dilemma of the SDGs is that the content of the forums is available to all members regardless of whether individuals contribute. Therefore, the incentive to contribute is minimal while the incentive to withhold contributions while enjoying the benefits of others' contributions ('lurk') is great. If everyone adopted this behavior, it would lead to the disappearance of the forum's content.⁴³

McCarty's most interesting observation of his list dealt with the semiotic nature of the actual discourse. Devoid of many of the social context cues and structures available in face-to-face encounters, and the lack of the inhibition usually found when a speaker addresses an audience, participants were free to "construct an electronic persona using the

⁴⁰ Lambirth, 1995.

⁴¹ Harasim and Winkelmanns, 1989. P. 16

⁴² Harasim and Winkelmanns, 1989. P. 9

⁴³ Rojo and Ragsdale, 1997. P. 322

persuasive force of ideas and arguments alone."⁴⁴ In his early evaluation, McCarty sought to define the necessary elements for a successful electronic discussion group paradigm: Interactive conversation with the aim of discovery, not achievement; careful use of language and scholarly care with facts, arguments and organization; moderation/leadership by example and not censure; thematic partition of separate but simultaneous discussions; frequent activity and a critical mass in membership; free or very low-cost e-mail access for members. Conner defined these necessary elements differently. The successful SDG, he argued, would likely need to be established by a small nucleus of scholars in a positive social atmosphere, moving on to encompass both the emergent and dominant groups in the discipline, including the presence of established scholars. All this in an ordered non-frivolous environment.⁴⁵

In commenting on the development of H-Net, a consortium of close to 100 scholarly discussion groups with a collective membership of over 50,000 participants, Peter Knupfer, the organization's associate director explained the value of the SDG. They have brought the information revolution to the desktops of working scholars around the world, wrote Knupfer. They have not only increased the opportunities for scholars to converse with each other, they have pried open previously restricted fields of editing and information management. Through SDGs, the Internet is best exploited as a collective enterprise by academics and teachers who mediate an environment many regard as forbidding and hostile. As an example of this power, H-Net is particularly illustrative of how an international consortium of scholars can use these electronic networks to advance humanities and social science teaching and research.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ McCarty, 1992. pp. 214-215

⁴⁵ Conner, 1992. P. 199

⁴⁶ Knupfer, 1996.

Nonetheless, the costs of disseminating one's best work on an SDG are considerable. Academic success demands that scholars make contributions to the body of knowledge in their research area. However, electronic outlets like SDGs provide little basis upon which to validate this success. They have not been in existence long enough to instill confidence in their institutional permanence. This is further complicated by ambiguous copyright law and citation conventions, making the establishment of one's claim to original ideas unclear. It is also unclear how institutional rewards will be distributed for electronic scholarship, and until they gain more of a scholarly legitimacy, it is likely that little of traditional academic value, or that which can compete with the more traditional forms of scholarly production, will take place electronically.⁴⁷ Furthermore, universal access is crucial to the diffusion of an interactive medium like an SDG within a scholarly community. Unfortunately, universal access does not by itself ensure use of the medium, especially if individuals are likely to encounter disincentives such as the initial investment in acquiring appropriate skills.⁴⁸

Today, it is impossible to know either the total number of discussion groups operating, or even the total number of scholarly discussion groups. The mailing list directory, Liszt, claims a database of over 90,000 mailing lists, with hundreds each on topics in education, humanities, and religion.⁴⁹ Catalist, the official list catalog from LSoft, the manufacturers of ListServ, counts over 33,000 lists that use legal copies of its software. Its search engine returns a list of 34 lists with Jewish topics.⁵⁰ The Kovacs Directory, which specializes in

⁴⁷ Harrison and Stephen, 1992. p. 189

⁴⁸ Harrison and Stephen, 1992. P. 188

⁴⁹ Liszt, 2000.

⁵⁰ LSoft, 2000.

SDGs and SEFs, does not indicate the size of its database, but it does have over 140 different subject categories, with 372 educational sub-categories, 88 history sub-categories, 66 religion sub-categories, and 11 in the field of computing in the humanities. Its search engine returns 31 entries with Jewish subjects.⁵¹ When searched, the Tile.Net list directory,⁵² Neou's list of lists,⁵³ and da Silva's list⁵⁴ return 192, 20, and 53 known lists on Jewish subjects respectively. Between January 1992 and June 1998, the Internet Scout New-List (a mailing list devoted to the promotion of new mailing lists) reported the creation of 58 lists with Jewish subjects, and from July 1998 to the present, an additional 65 have arisen.⁵⁵ Even an early catalog of lists dating back to 1992 records 16 Jewish groups among its 1500 discussion groups and electronic newsletters.⁵⁶ Of particular importance to the subject of this thesis is the state of affairs at H-Net: the Humanities On-Line Consortium, and the Shamash Project. Currently, H-Net has 103 networks. Three, H-Judaic, H-Holocaust, and H-Antisemitism, are built directly around Jewish studies themes. A fourth, H-Ethnic, also carries a certain portion of material related to Jewish

⁵¹ Kovacs, 2000.

⁵² Tile.Net, 2000

⁵³ Neou, 2000.

⁵⁴ da Silva, 2000.

⁵⁵ Sackman, 2000.

studies.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Shamash, the largest consortium of Jewish lists, although not the only one, currently hosts 400 lists.⁵⁸ As part of its operations, H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network organization owns three lists, one each on H-Net and Shamash, and one on the server of this writer.

⁵⁶ Dem, 1994.

⁵⁷ H-Net, 2000.

⁵⁸ Shamash, 2000. Shamash's major competitor, Virtual Jerusalem <www.vjlists.com> has moved away from ListServ technology, opting for a greater web presence. At one time they also hosted hundreds of lists, but through a combination of attrition and a policy of charging for lists, they now only host about 75 lists.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLY HISTORY

Early Jewish Networks

The earliest known uses of the Internet for Jewish topics occurred in the mid-1980s, with the development of a USENET message board (newsgroup) called *net.religion.jewish* (later, *soc.culture.jewish*). This newsgroup served mainly as a place for exchanging notes and ideas on generalist Jewish topics, particularly discussion of Jewish religious issues, among those in the computer and related fields.¹

The earliest Jewish uses of the e-mailing list technology included *mail.jewish*, a distribution list/discussion group that focused on issues of practical Halakhah (Jewish law). The founder, Dovid Chechik, was a computer specialist, reflecting the early make-up of the networked community. His initial letter announcing the formation of the group was sent out in February of 1986 to what was apparently a group of disgruntled users of the *net.religion.jewish* USENET group.² "There was a discussion a while back about splitting *net.religion.jewish* up into various and sundry newsgroups," wrote Chechik. "Most of the proponents argued that the newsgroup has become mostly a battleground between various factions of Judaism. The idea of splitting the newsgroup was yelled down and has not been heard from since. ... Some of the people I've spoken to about the newsgroup have told me that they will not post articles to *n.r.j* for fear of being ridiculed

¹ AH Moderator Papers. E-Mail letters of David Sherman to Avi Hyman, February 1996.

² There are no conventions regarding grammar, spelling or syntax in e-mail messages. Generally speaking, many people who tend to write e-mail quickly, do so in shorthand, devoid of case or correct spelling. Additionally, given the wide range of e-mail software programs, computer generated gobbledy-gook may also be included in the text of a message. For the most part, I have tried to only clean up quoted email correspondence where it improved the flow and readability of the text. Where it didn't affect the flow of the text, I have left spelling, grammar and other syntax errors in. Given the plethora of potential errors, however, I will not be using the [sic] designation. Furthermore, the use

etc. And since not everyone has the temperament or the desire to fight the world, one can't blame them," he added.

"One idea that has been suggested is to start a moderated mailing list dealing with issues of jewish law and culture. The subject matter of the mailing list will be halachic issues, NOT the validity of halacha."³

At the time, Chechik did all the work that would be done by the automated programming of LISTSERV today. He maintained the list of addresses manually. He received the incoming mail manually, and re-sent them manually. Within four months, *mail.jewish* managed to attract 70 members, and in December of 1986 Chechik moved to Israel, relinquishing control of the list to a new moderator, fellow computer-specialist Avi Feldblum.⁴ Both Feldblum, and Chechik before him, seem to have been much occupied with the task of making sure the e-mail was being delivered properly and trying to get people to make submissions. In October of 1987 the group received its own e-mail address, thereby attaining its first separate identity independent of Feldblum, whose personal e-mail address had served as the list address up until that point.⁵

By June of 1988 the list had only 150 members. But, reflecting the massive growth of the Internet during the period, it grew so rapidly over the subsequent three years that

of square brackets [] in quotes are indicative of items added by the writer, whereas curved brackets () in quotes appeared in the original quote.

³ Feldblum and Chechik, 1986

⁴ Feldblum appears to have taken active control by February of 1987 and is still the modertor of MAIL-JEWISH (Feldblum and Chechik, 1986).

⁵ Feldblum and Chechik, 1986

Feldblum was forced to adopt a digest format.⁶ In March of 1992, the list went "high-tech," when Feldblum began using the LISTSERV software on a computer of the New York State Educational Research Network as part of a consortium of Jewish lists that is now known by the name The Shamash Project. On its tenth anniversary, *mail.jewish* had in excess of 1500 members.

It is during this period (1988-1993) that academic uses of the Internet for Jewish scholarship began to emerge. Prior to this academic emergence, network resources in the area of Judaica only focused on 'personal' use. The exchange of e-mail or USENET posts for the discussion of personal religious practice, personal political philosophy and socio-cultural contact were the norm, especially among users whose field of study or employment predisposed them to computer use (hard scientists and computer scientists, for example).

It is interesting to note that one of the most dominant uses of the Internet in Jewish scholarship, namely Holocaust Studies, emerged out of this personal use. Specifically, in the course of personal exchange, the issue of Holocaust denial (sometimes incorrectly referred to as Holocaust revisionism) became the topic of debate. In a world where the trappings of scholarship weigh heavy in debate, a pseudo-academic discourse denying the Nazi atrocities emerged. In response, a computer specialist located in British Columbia began to use Internet technology as a means of pinpointing and debunking the deniers. In

⁶ A DIGEST is a compilation of several notes, assembled into a single newsletter-like format that is mailed as a whole unit instead of having its constituent parts mailed separately. A digest is most commonly used when the volume of mail via a list exceeds the tolerance level of its users or the capacity of a moderator to handle them individually. Automated digesting has become one of the more popular features of the LISTSERV software package.

the years 1992-1993, Ken McVay's earliest efforts applying this technology proved so successful that his system was overwhelmed by the volume of correspondence.⁷ As a result, in 1993, McVay entered into partnership with a group of historians at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The purpose of the partnership was to increase the academic profile of the discussion group, while at the same time providing it with a more robust system that could handle the volume.

The partnership lasted only a few months, the eventual split occurring over the focus of the group. For McVay, that focus was combating Holocaust denial. For the historians, it quickly became Holocaust education. McVay went on to re-form *HList*, while the historians, chiefly Jim Mott and Richard Jensen, went on to form *Holocaust*, both wildly successful lists in academic Jewish Studies. Ironically, out of both lists emerged more developed network projects, McVay's *Nizkor Project*, and Jensen's *Humanities On-Line Project*, which together and in association with newer projects (including work by the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum) have underscored the staying power of the subject.⁸

More typical of the Jewish Studies field was the development of the Yiddish studies networks. The first Yiddish list was *mail.yiddish*, started in 1988 by a tax lawyer and computer specialist, David Sherman. Sherman had been involved in computer-mediated communication from the earliest days of USENET, and played a central role in the creation of *net.religion.jewish* (later *soc.cultural.jewish*). Like its Halakhah counterpart *mail.jewish*, *mail.yiddish* was not run using LISTSERV or some other automated mailing program. It was maintained by hand.

⁷ His list was called HLIST.

During this formative period *mail.yiddish* consisted of lively dialogue, intermixing some scholarly discourse with mostly cultural and populist material. At its peak, *mail.yiddish* had close to two hundred members, one of whom was a Trinity College professor, Norman "Noyekh" Miller. In 1991, Miller engaged Sherman in a semi-private conversation about the current and future direction of *mail.yiddish*. It was Miller's opinion that while *mail.yiddish* was a worthwhile endeavour, it lacked certain scholarly rigours, particularly in the areas of Yiddish literature and linguistics. For this reason Miller felt Yiddish scholars were not joining the *mail.yiddish* network. Miller's solution was to start a new Yiddish list, which he called *Mendele*. Using Yale University's computing facilities, Miller was able to attract the "scholarly" crowd, and make *Mendele* immediately successful. Although *Mendele* was started with Sherman's blessings, and promoted to the *mail.yiddish* community, it ultimately spelled the end for the older network. Sherman ceased its operations within a year of *Mendele's* inception.⁹

Why was *Mendele* more successful than its forbearer? On the surface, it might appear that its success was due to Miller's ability to attract and siphon off the "academic" crowd. But in reality there was more to it. One of the reasons Miller was able to attract the "academic" crowd was that by 1991 there was an academic crowd to attract. In the earliest phases of computer-mediated group communication, USENET in particular but even e-mail was confined mostly to people who had need for computer access as part of their professional lives. Sherman fit this model perfectly. His Jewish generalist, and later, Yiddish activities, did not have the same pool of potential members that the later *Mendele*

⁸ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Ken McVay, to Avi Hyman. January 1996

⁹ AH Moderator Papers. E-Mail letters from David Sherman to Avi Hyman. February 1996

did. Although *mail.yiddish's* formal period of operation began after the introduction of the Internet to academic circles, its membership was largely drawn from people who had earlier contact with pre-Internet systems. If we remember that computer-mediated group communication in the humanities only really began around the time Sherman formally started his list, it becomes clear that Sherman's networking activity pre-dates widespread use of the Internet in non-computerized academic disciplines. By the time Miller began agitating for a new list, the potential membership pool had broadened to include a massive wave of scholars in the humanities and social sciences. This in turn meant there was a large pool of *mail.yiddish* members who could migrate to the new source of discourse. Furthermore, Miller had access to better technology than Sherman. Through Yale, Miller ran *Mendele* using LISTSERV, which automated many of the procedures Sherman had been doing so laboriously by hand. One obvious change was in the turn-around time needed to re-distribute of list-bound mail. Using manual controls, Sherman would have needed more time to re-send the messages, whereas Miller, using LISTSERV, could have re-distributed the message virtually instantaneously. During the first five years of its existence, *Mendele* grew, stabilizing at a community running over 500.

Ironically, in recent years, there have been occasional calls by some of the membership to again split the group, leaving *Mendele* to the colloquial crowd, while those more interested in "scholarly" Yiddish pursuits go off on their own.¹⁰ Why this evolution? More than technology and the potential membership pool, it is also the way the group is run that ultimately dictates its composition and academic nature. In the parlance of

¹⁰ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from David Sherman to Avi Hyman. February 1996

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), this modality of discourse is called 'moderation', the importance of which was established earlier.

In the ten years since serious discussion on the Jewish experience began in earnest over the Internet, more than forty scholarly discussion groups have emerged on a variety of very specific and generally narrower topics concerning Jews.¹¹ In addition to the ones

¹¹ The known groups were: h-judaic@msu.edu (general Jewish Studies), jewstudies@shamash.org (Jewish Studies Professional Newsletter), acjs-1@oise.utoronto.ca (Canadian Jewish Studies), ashkenaz@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu (Ashkenaz history and culture), B-GREEK@virginia.edu Greek (Bible), B-HEBREW@virginia.edu (Hebrew Bible), altlearn@jerl.co.il (Jewish education), geshernet@shamash.org (Jewish day school pedagogy), inter-jed@shamash.org (Jewish education and technology), eejh@ort.org (Eastern European Jewish history), e-hug@caligari.Dartmouth.EDU (Hebrew computing), rbranch@jerl.co.il (ethics and philosophy), h-ethnic@msu.edu (ethnic studies), jewishgen@shamash.org (Jewish genealogy), heblang@shamash.org (Hebrew language and literature), H-Antis@msu.edu (History of Antisemitism), hasafran@lists.acs.ohio-state.edu (Judaica librarianship & research (AJL)), Holocaust@uicvm.uic.edu (Holocaust Studies), kmcvay@nizkor.almanac.bc.ca (Holocaust Education (Nizkor Project)), 2nd-gen@shamash.org (Holocaust survivor studies), mail-jewish@shamash.org (Halachik studies), ioudaios-1@lehigh.edu (Judaism and early Christianity), Jewish-Africana@shamash.org (Jewish Africana connections), jewishnt@bgvm.bgu.ac.il (Jewish CMC issues and resources), j-seminar@shamash.org (Advanced Tanach), meida@piaget.futuro.usp.br (South America / Latin America), isramed@jerl.co.il (Jewish medical ethics), MEDTEXTL@postoffice.cso.uiuc.edu (Medieval Text List), mifgash@oise.on.ca (Jewish learning with secular academic work), jewish-music@shamash.org (Jewish musicology), orion@pluto.msc.huji.ac.il (Dead Sea Scrolls (Orion Center, HUJI)), persia-1@emvm1.cc.emory.edu (Jewish Literature and History, Persian Period), j-phe@shamash.org (intersection of Jewish and physical culture), jwd@jerl.co.il (political science), pomo@jtsa.edu (PostModern Jewish Philosophy Network), religion@harvard.harvard.edu (general list for academic religion), sefarad@shamash.org (Sephardic Studies), bridges@shamash.org (Jewish feminist studies (Bridges Journal)), pnadell@american.edu (The Women's Caucus of the AJS), NICARDIN@J TSA.EDU (Women Rabbis, Cantors, & students of same), kol-

already discussed, there are a few others that warrant some discussion because of the important historical and current roles they play in Jewish Studies networking.¹²

While the groups related to Halakhah, Yiddish and the Holocaust serve as fine examples of early Jewish Studies networking, none of them could be classified as being strictly scholarly or university-based in nature. One of the first academic lists and still one of the most prominent of this type of list is *Ioudaios*. *Ioudaios* was built directly on the *Humanist* model, and was described by its owners¹³ as, “an electronic seminar devoted to the exploration of first-century Judaism; its special interest is in the writings of Philo of

isha@shamash.org (orthodox feminist studies), mendele@yalevm.ycc.yale.edu (Yiddish language and literature), yiddishnet@shamash.org (Yiddish Studies newsletter). This list was circulated on the list jewstudies@shamash.org in March of 1996 under the title, “Special Issues,” *Jewish Studies Judaica eJournal*, Issue 4.007p1.

¹² The following table (*Table 2.1 Comparison Between Jewish Lists*) gives some further comparative information beyond membership numbers for several of the larger Jewish discussion groups. These rough statistics are as of June, 2000.

| Site name | Year started | Members | Volume (KB) | Notes |
|-------------|--------------|---------|-------------|-------|
| Mail Jewish | 1987 | 3200 | 65000 | 19000 |
| Mendele | 1991 | 3000 | 60000 | 18000 |
| Ioudaios | 1992 | 450* | 34000 | 10000 |
| Bridges | 1992 | 1389** | 28000 | 7000 |
| H-Holocaust | 1993 | 1800 | 43000 | 13000 |
| H-Judaic | 1995 | 1300 | 12000*** | 6500 |

The number of digests, volume in kilobytes and number of notes are best-guess estimates based on a random sampling of each list. *Ioudaios is not digested automatically, rather archives are divided into monthly blocks with 5 parts each. **Bridges actually numbers each digest. ***H-Judaic has a lower volume, due in part, I believe, to the lack of attachments and official announcements found in the discussion group, which consists primarily of short-text personal notes. See each website for details
<www.shamash.org/listarchives/mail-jewish, www2.trincoll.edu/~mendele, ccat.sas.upenn.edu/ioudaios, bridges@shamash.org, www2.h-net.msu.edu/~holoweb, www2-h-net.msu.edu/~judaic>.

¹³ An *owner* is distinguished from a *moderator* in terms of the hands-on involvement the individual takes in affecting the messages being circulated through the service.

Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. The Philonic and Josephan corpora are extensive enough that they invite all sorts of analysis—from literary, historical, and philosophical perspectives, to name a few. There is also considerable interest among participants in the social realities that lie behind these texts. (The discussion assumes a significant background in first-century Judaism and also the ability to read Greek.)”¹⁴ According to Steve Mason, the managing founder of *Ioudaios*, the list got its start directly through activity on the *Humanist* list:

One day (early March 1990??), Robert Kraft of UPenn posted a note to *HUMANIST* in which he said that he would enjoy receiving feedback on two papers of his from any interested members of *HUMANIST*. His papers were on Philo of Alexandria. I guess that about a dozen of us replied to this invitation, and he circulated the papers to us for discussion. Then he set up an "exploding mailbox" (a single address that represents multiple addresses) in order to facilitate discussion of these papers. We would write to him individually, and he would circulate our postings to all, then (when we saw what others wrote) we would respond further. That was such an enjoyable experience that Bob floated the idea of creating a regular discussion group, just like *HUMANIST*, for people interested in such things. But he simply suggested this, allowing that he lacked the time to set up such a group.¹⁵

At the same time, Mason was engaged in setting up an interdisciplinary research group on antiquity at York University in Toronto. It seemed logical enough to Mason that he offer to set up a regular discussion group on Judaism in the Greco-Roman world. That decision required two weeks of training with computer support staff at York University on learning how to set up and manage a discussion group. On April 25, 1990, Mason set up the list and called it *IOUDAIOS*, and enrolled the first members (the original

¹⁴ Reimer and Mason, 1990

¹⁵ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Steve Mason to Avi Hyman, January 1996

discussants of Kraft's paper plus a few other names he had contacted). Mason then wrote a charter statement for advertising the new list on the Internet and a lengthy manual for newcomers (still the basis of the *IOUDAIOS-L* manual). The group immediately began discussing all manner of items related to early Judaism.

I ran the list from a VM machine at York (VM1) using VM Listserv. This enabled us to archive all discussions in weekly logs. We could also archive articles and book reviews that people wanted to make available for critique before publication... It was because of this demand, and the potential for storing articles in formats that I really didn't understand very well at the time (such as zip and binhex) that I asked David Reimer to become Associate Coordinator with me, after less than a year, if I recall rightly. He handled the storage of articles. Within a few months after that, we agreed to Larry Hurtado's suggestion that we set up a regular book review service, which I established as a separate list (*IOUD-REVI/IOUDAIOS REVIEW*) with its own editors (Bill Adler and David Reimer). Although I often thought of switching *IOUDAIOS* to a moderated list format such as *HUMANIST* had used, to avoid all of the nonsensical, rash, and junk-mail postings, the York computer guru convinced me to leave it unmoderated.¹⁶

To this day, *Ioudaios* remains one of the few Jewish Studies-related lists that is unmoderated. This lack of moderation has created a unique cultural environment that continues to influence the discourse on other Judaic lists.

Another important Jewish Studies list that emerged relatively early was a discussion group for Jewish librarianship. Like his counterparts at *Ioudaios*, the founder of *Hasafran*, the Jewish librarianship list, received his networking experience in academic circles rather than on the more populist USENET, like the founders of *mail.jewish*, *mail.yiddish*, and *HList*. In the same way the founders of *Ioudaios* were professionally

involved in academe (rather than being computer professionals with a serious scholarly interest), Joseph Galron, *Hasafran's* originator, was the Automation Librarian at Tel-Aviv University. In this job he "was exposed to the Internet (or Bitnet) in the mid-1980s in Israel ... [and] so became familiar with E-mail, etc."¹⁷ In 1988, when Galron accepted the position of Jewish Studies Catalog Librarian at the Ohio State University, he joined *AUTOCAT*, a very active mailing list of catalog librarians in the US. "I wanted to be in contact with Judaica and Hebraica catalogers and tried to establish an informal mailing list (without a listserv). I posted a message to *AUTOCAT* and got responses from a dozen catalogers. "In 1990, at an AJL (Association of Jewish Librarians) convention in Florida, the issue of a AJL mailing list was raised, and I volunteered to check with the computer center at Ohio State University about the possibility to host such a list on the OSU computers. The response was positive and after a couple of months we had our server ready."¹⁸ Today there are over 500 members of *Hasafran*.

The Shamash Project

The activity on *Ioudaios* and *Hasafran*, as well as the activity on *mail.jewish* and *mail.yiddish/Mendele* represented a formative period in Judaic studies networking. In each case, the technology of LISTSERV was still relatively in its early stages of use by those in the humanities. All of the moderators were probably familiar with LISTSERV when they began their lists, but in each case chose some other, more manual method of creating and running their groups.

¹⁶AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Steve Mason to Avi Hyman. January 1996

¹⁷AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Yossi Galron to Avi Hyman. February 1996

¹⁸ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Yossi Galron to Avi Hyman. February 1996

But by 1992 this situation had changed. When the Sephardic Internet newsletter, *Sefarad*, and the Jewish feminist group *Bridges* started in the fall/winter of 1992-93, LISTSERV technology had already been in wide use across the Internet world. So much was this true that the Shamash Project had transformed its identity from a single-purpose educational technology project into the world's most popular server for Jewish electronic mailing lists and discussion groups.¹⁹

In 1986, the New York Education and Research Network was established as the first regional network of the NSFNet (National Science Foundation). Essentially, it was the Internet in New York State before commercialization of the Internet took place (NYSERNet, 1996). In the mid- and late 1980s Avrum Goodblatt was working as a networking technology consultant, particularly for the GeshetNet Project, a conferencing system connecting Jewish day schools, and for KesherNet, a networking initiative for independent Jewish computer bulletin board systems.²⁰ Goodblatt's main project, however, was ITEX, the Israel Technology Exchange, a networking system that

¹⁹ On June 10, 1992, the American Jewish Information Network, apparently a loose group of Jewish computer professionals interesting in exploiting the Internet for Jewish activity, circulated a letter via e-mail to various recipients. The letter stated, in part, "Everything you ever wanted in Jewish Networking under a single roof! israel.nysernet.org is a project whose purpose is to provide a central location for access to Jewish lists and conferences that originate all over the world and to provide access to text files and programs of interest to Jews everywhere. Israel.nysernet.org currently hosts 11 active public lists plus a number of private lists."

Of the 11 lists at that time, two fell into our category of scholarly forums, *mail.jewish*, and *sefarad*. The remainder were forums for personal Torah study or for the promotion of activities of such organizations as the United Jewish Appeal and Hillel.

²⁰ A bulletin board is a stand-alone computer conferencing system whose technology arose independently of Internet developments. For the most part, bulletin boards have lessened in popularity since the wide-spread use of the Internet. They are, however, still popular with groups of people who wish to maintain a larger degree of privacy.

supported a synthesis of modern communications and information science, allowing Israeli scientists to exploit more effectively research and development results. Although ITEX was started in Israel, Goodblatt was later invited to create a “sister” system using the facilities of NYSERNet. By 1992, Goodblatt’s activities at NYSERNet proved to be so successful that it drew the attention of other interested computer professionals who were seeking to create a larger Jewish communal networking project on the Internet. By making the computer available to various groups, Goodblatt was able to attract a stable of different discussion forums using LISTSERV as the application of choice. Among these early groups was *mail.jewish*, which had been established six years earlier, but run manually until that time, and a newly created forum for Sephardic studies, *Sefarad*. On the Internet, every computer is assigned a name, and the name of the computer used to host these lists was *israel.nysernet.org*. At first, Goodblatt named the Jewish communal networking project after the computer, calling it the Israel Nysernet Project. In 1995 in a desire to create its own identity separate from NYSERNet, the name was changed to the Shamash Project.²¹ Shamash was not, however, Goodblatt’s first foray into the application of communication technology to academic Jewish Studies. That topic will be explored below.

As is now clear, *Sefarad* and *Bridges* were the beneficiaries of several years of pioneering in Jewish Studies computer-mediated communication when they began in 1992 and 1993 respectively. *Sefarad*, more a newsletter on Sephardic studies than a discussion group, was produced and maintained by a professor from Aristotle University in Salonika, Greece, Yitzchak Kerem. Unlike other list moderators, Kerem received his initial networking experience in a pre-existing Jewish Internet world. Kerem’s knowledge

²¹ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Avrum Goodblatt to Avi Hyman. February

came as a result of his participation²² in a number of Jewish lists, including *Ioudaios*, *Hasafran* and Goodblatt's other as-yet unmentioned Jewish Studies list, as well as in the growing number of Jewish USENET groups. Approached by Goodblatt at a conference, Kerem began his list in 1992. From its inception, *Sefarad* used the LISTSERV software.²³

Bridges, although also a beneficiary of early Internet pioneering like *Sefarad*, did bring a new and important element to the scene, namely, sponsorship from a non-electronic organization. The previous groups, including *Sefarad*, had started as independent, uniquely electronic initiatives, usually on the part of an individual or small group of individuals. Only later did some of them become associated with an organization, as in the case of *Hasafran* with its connection to the Association of Jewish Librarians. *Bridges*, the list, was started by the editorial staff of the print-and-paper journal of the same name.²⁴ Although Jewish organizations had previously sponsored discussion lists, this is believed to be the first time there was sponsorship of a Jewish scholarly list from its inception. Writes Clare Kinberg:

At the time we started the list I was working for Tova [Stabin] at the University of Washington's Environmental Health Library where she is the Research Librarian and I was her assistant. I took several classes offered

1996

²² By his own evaluation, Kerem's participation was better described as "lurking," the habit of observing the on-going conversation of the other participants, while only, very occasionally contributing himself. (AH Moderator Papers. E-Mail letters from Yitzhak Kerem to Avi Hyman. June 1996).

²³ AH Moderator Papers. E-Mail letters from Yitzhak Kerem to Avi Hyman. June 1996

²⁴ *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*, a biannual, paper journal of culture and politics. The journal has 1500 subscribers around the world (mostly US and Canada) and its focus is on Jewish women's identities and activism for social justice. The journal aims to be a participant in the multi-ethnic feminist movement and to create bridges between Jewish women of different generations, sexual orientations, nationalities, and interests.

free to university staff people on the internet, on-line searching, using e-mail, etc. Part of our job was to explore the possibilities of the internet. The library was my second "halftime" job, the other was editing *Bridges*. Tova's work as an editor of *Bridges* was volunteer, she is a full time librarian.²⁵

As Kinberg explored the Internet, she found herself reading the newsgroup *soc.jewish.culture* every day and enjoying it. Eventually, she began searching for, and reading, other Jewish and feminist lists and newsgroups. When Kinberg discovered the whole *israel.nysernet.org* project, she was left with the feeling that this was a "center of Jewish culture" that she did not want Jewish feminism to be left out of, "or at least the kind of Jewish feminism that included secular, political discussion. Discussion in which Jewish lesbians are not marginalized." Both Kinberg and Stabin were motivated to see if open on-line discussion of the articles in *Bridges* (the print-and-paper journal) and of the issues raised therein would enhance their editing of the journal.²⁶

We wanted parallel discussions (but unfortunately) this has been the biggest disappointment of the list. We hardly ever actually discuss an article that appeared in print in *Bridges*. We have, however, come into contact with many people who we have solicited for articles and reviews, got new subscribers, got ideas for article topics, etc. from the list. The list quickly developed a life of its own completely separate from the journal, but there is still back and forth in terms of subscribers and ideas.²⁷

Judaica and He'Asif

Returning now to the work of Avrum Goodblatt, it was he, who, along with two colleagues, started the first generalist, academic, post-secondary Jewish Studies list. It

²⁵AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Clare Kinberg to Avi Hyman. June 1996

²⁶AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Clare Kinberg to Avi Hyman. June 1996

²⁷AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Clare Kinberg to Avi Hyman. June 1996

predated *Ioudaios* by over a year; a networking project that pre-dates Shamash; and a list which serves as the main focus group for the major part of the field research in this thesis.

Several factors led Goodblatt to create a Jewish Studies newsletter, where the recipients were also the contributors. As an undergraduate student in Jewish Studies and as a member of a prominent Jewish Studies family, Goodblatt became familiar with a number of scholars whom he helped with various computer problems from time to time. When Goodblatt later entered the computer industry, he was called on even more frequently to help various scholars with their computer problems. Motivated by his continuing engagement with Jewish Studies scholars and scholarship, as well as watching the increasing success of Jewish networking (*mail.jewish*) and scholarly humanities networking (*Humanist*), he, and an associate, Yechiel Greenbaum, (one of the people Goodblatt had helped solve computer problems), with the support of a professor from Hebrew University, Emmanuel Tov, set out to run their list in Jewish Studies.²⁸

Their first posting in 1989 invited participation. "This is the inaugural edition of a weekly newsletter, which we hope will expand into a bulletin board," wrote Greenbaum, on February 1, 1989. "The main idea is communication. Who's doing what and how can they be contacted? Does anyone have information relevant to my work and have I knowledge that can guide anyone else? Computers allow quick, efficient gathering of information which can be accessed and responded to at leisure. We also hope to be a source of information on computer applications in Judaic Studies, such as hebrew word

²⁸ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Avrum Goodblatt to Avi Hyman. February 1996

processing and textual analysis."²⁹ Greenbaum, whose interests in Judaica bibliographies drew him to the project, had access, through Emanuel Tov, to the Hebrew University computer which was part of the BITNET system and used the earlier form of LISTSERV. During its first months of operation, the material, not surprisingly, concentrated on computer applications in Jewish Studies. The service was not an open discussion group but rather a fully-edited newsletter, mixing editorial comments from both Greenbaum and recipients, as well as announcements and 'interesting' facts. Of tremendous significance was the last item Greenbaum included in his second issue on February 8, 1989:

IDEAS- Dr. Robert Kraft stated explicitly an idea that I learned from Avi Feldblum implicitly; don't confine the letter to a regular production schedule. Essentially, I agree that results should be published when they are ready. They should not have to wait for publishing dates nor should they be distorted to meet deadlines (the word "deadlines" tempts me to speculative etymology). What we really want, eventually, is a Bulletin Board. I started this letter as a weekly with the idea of giving the reader a sense of security (so many things do not continue beyond the first issue), as well as an impetus to submit ideas as soon as possible, in order that the letter achieve the broadest possible scope.³⁰

Dr. Robert Kraft, of course, went on to be the mentor and founding father of *Ioudaios*, while Avi Feldblum, was, by this time, the moderator of *mail.jewish*.

²⁹ As the history of H-Judaic unfolds, various quotes and references will be made to the list archives. For many years these archives existed on the computers of the Shamash Project and later, the H-Net Project, primarily in ListProc, Gopher, and Web formats. Because of the fear that these archives will be wiped out at their source, the entire collection that still existed in 1995 was downloaded and put on a CD-ROM, a copy of which will be provided as part of this thesis. The same applies to the archives of the H-Judaic editorial board list. It should be noted that by 1995, several sections of the archival record had already been lost, particularly during the Zahavy period. All these archives are listed in the bibliography as H-Judaic List Archives, 1989-1999.

³⁰ Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, February 8, 1989

From the contents of the early items during the Greenbaum era, it is clear he was quite determined to building the subscriber base of the service, almost to the point of obsession. On March 1, 1989, writes Greenbaum in the lead item:

A quick review of our mailing list shows that we are in contact with a Jewish conference, mailing list, a bulletin board, and various publications. We mail to a number of important libraries here, as well as in the US. We reach a wide range of places in North America, the British Isles and Israel. In the immediate future, we hope to increase contact with the European continent, especially Germany, and to broaden our links with libraries significantly.³¹

Then again, on April 5, 1989, again in the lead item:

Our distribution is growing steadily (just passed seventy in number and spread to a new continent). If there's a Judaic Studies person in your vicinity who isn't yet electrified, perhaps you can spare a bit of time to introduce said person to the keyboard.

We are also seeking JS program information in electronic form. If your program publishes catalogs, course schedules, reading lists and so forth using a computer, or if the typesetter uses one, let us know. We'd like to collect them and post them.

Your beloved editor (I mean, at least my mother believes me) will be in the US in May, and in the UK by the beginning of June. If you want me to speak to people at your institution, let me know (and, if there's a significant amount of travel, help with expenses).³²

And one week later, April 12, 1989:

We are now available as JUDAICA, on `LISTSERV@TAUNIVM`. This opens up a whole new range of possibilities; as soon as I find out what they are, I'll let you know. If anyone has any suggestions, please let me know.

To begin with, please let me know what topics you are interested in hearing about, so that we can group people by interests as the list expands. Of course, we hope that the eventual existence of smaller

³¹ Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, March 1, 1989

³² Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, April 5, 1989

conferences will not vitiate one of our principal aims- communication. In the extreme case, if you do not want your address available to other members of the list at all, let me know that as well. (I've just heard this compared to having an unlisted telephone number.)³³

As far into the project as July 26, 1989, Greenbaum was still devoting space to the promotion of the list:

I'd much rather have a letter full of discussion, and save the announcements for a bulletin board. This depends on people involving themselves in the letter... I'd even like the discussions to be automatically stored and distributed. It is for this reason (among others) that we are seeking a location in North America where we can set up a parallel ListServ. Any suggestions or support will be greatly appreciated.³⁴

Perhaps foreshadowing his growing involvement in the newtork, in that same July 26th issue, two of the four items were submitted by Tzvee Zahavy, at the time a professor at the University of Minnesota. According to Zahavy, he and Avrum Gooblatt had been in correspondence by e-mail prior to meeting at the World Union of Jewish Studies conference in Jerusalem in August of 1989, about seven months after the network had started: "I was eager to help out. He [Goodblatt] had ambitious but a bit nebulous [with] ideas about prospects for the future. I think he saw prospects for funding and a job."³⁵ And help Zahavy apparently did. In the December 20th, 1989 edition, Greenbaum announced that "beginning with this newsletter, we will be distributing from Minnesota in addition to Tel-Aviv, due to the good offices of Tzvee Zahavy. The two lists are currently maintained as separate entities. Once they are "peered"³⁶, i.e. connected, one

³³ Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, April 12, 1989

³⁴ Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, July 26, 1989

³⁵ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Tzvee Zahavy to Avi Hyman, January 1996.

³⁶ The term "peered" is a technical description used when two listserv lists are automatically identical, in their content and their membership, despite being distributed from two different host computers. This was generally done to ease the bandwidth load

review command will send both lists." There is no evidence, however, that the two lists ever did become peered, although they appear to have behaved as sister lists until late 1990. In late 1990, Yehiel Greenbaum would appear to have disappeared from the historical record. In correspondence, Goodblatt indicates that Greenbaum simply ran out of time and resources and gave up the editing-moderating role to pursue employment.³⁷

During the first six months of 1990, after the establishment of the Minnesota version of the list, and while Greenbaum was still active as moderator, the list attracted quite a bit of attention from the relatively small community it had developed. For example, in January 1990 Bob Kraft forwarded a copy of the Philo note that circulated on *Humanist* to the *Judaica* list, recalling that it was this note that led to the eventual development of *Ioudaios*. By March, Lewis Barth and Joseph 'Yossi' Galron were active on the *Judaica* list. Both are current members of the network's editorial board, and Galron went on to establish *Hasafran*. And in May on the *Judaica* list, Steve Mason announced the existence of the new list *Ioudaios*.

The content of Greenbaum's 37th newsletter, dated March 28, 1990, was indicative of the developments and cross-fertilizations occurring over the Internet in Jewish Studies. The issue featured two items: one a note from Robert Kraft and a second on the topic of electronic versions of the Tanach (Bible). In his note, Kraft invited people to ask for an electronic copy of a paper on "Tiberius Julius Alexander and the Crisis in Alexandria according to Josephus: Towards Redating Philo's Literary Activities."

on cross-ocean traffic, i.e., one in Europe (Israel) and one in North American (Minnesota). Sister lists might serve the same function, but not through an automated process.

A few years ago, as I was discussing various computer-oriented aspects of research, an ebullient young interlocutor blurted out (with a mild apology for bluntness) the question: "Are you ever going to become a scholar again?" I think I handled the situation with sufficient good humor, although it hadn't occurred to me at the time that I had stopped being a scholar! In any event, to anyone interested I offer an electronic copy of the new (scholarly) paper described below, which will ultimately appear in some form in hard copy. Comments, corrections, and suggestions are most welcome!³⁸

It was exactly this initiative that gave rise to the *Ioudaios* list almost one month later to the day. And in the same issue as Kraft's note, a Yaakov Kayman, who according to his e-mail address was associated with City University of New York, responded to a request from another list member, Stephan Claassen, who was looking for a copy of the Tanach on disk. That Kayman responded was not unusual, but that his response consisted of notes cross posted from the *soc.culture.jewish* USENET newsgroup is illustrative of how interconnected the Jewish Internet world had become. Furthermore, Hebrew University-based Marc Bregman's note in the next issue, dated April 18, 1990, also showed that the early adopters of this technology in Jewish Studies were users of broader scholarly initiatives on the Internet. His note was a cross-post from the *Humanist* list regarding early Hebrew concordances. As mentioned above, in issue number 41, dated May 9, 1990, Steve Mason invited people to join the newly formed *Ioudaios*:

New members are welcome. The discussion assumes a significant background in first-century Judaism as well as some knowledge of ancient Greek. To subscribe to IOUDAIOS, send an interactive command to `LISTSERV@YORKVMI`³⁹

³⁷ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Avrum Goodblatt to Avi Hyman, February 1996.

³⁸Kraft, H-Judaic Archives, March 28, 1990

And despite the relatively small size of the community created in the early days of the list, it was clearly international in scope; take, for example, a note from Pan Guang that appeared on June 7, 1990:

We have the honour to inform you that the first Jewish history research center in China has been established at the Institute of World History, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. Its proper name is Jewish History Research Center of Shanghai (JHCRS)... Our difficulties lie in the lack of books and reference materials and we would highly appreciate that any organization or person provide us whatever books and materials concerning the above-mentioned four subjects. We also hope to establish relations with any organization or person interested in research on Jewish history.⁴⁰

And then something appears to have happened, starting in the summer of 1990. Suddenly the archival record becomes sparse. Greenbaum's issue number 44 is dated June 27, 1990. Then there is an unexplained gap in the extant record skipping forward to August 15, 1990 and an issue numbered 49. In addition to the skip, there is also a change in the masthead of Greenbaum's newsletters. Up until and including issue 44, the masthead read, "Connecting geographically & otherwise disparate groups with a common interest in the study of Judaica," or a variation thereof. After June 1990 until January 1991 (the last known copy of a Greenbaum edited newsletter), the masthead read " Judaic Studies is the newsletter of He'Asif, one of the Saf Projects." Furthermore, only six issues remain after June 1990.

What was this He'Asif project that suddenly appears in the historical record? Although there is only one mention of it in the fragments that remain today (other than in the masthead), it appears that He'Asif was Avrum Goodblatt's early efforts to turn the whole

³⁹ Mason, H-Judaic Archives, May 9 1990.

enterprise into a commercial venture. It was an effort that eventually failed directly, but indirectly lead to the creation of the Shamash Project. The one extant reference supports this contention. In an issue dated March 20, 1990 Greenbaum reported that "From 29 Mar thru 15 Apr, Avrum Goodblatt will be visiting the US (East Coast), London and Paris, under the auspices of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (directed by Daniel Elazar), in order to research the future of Jewish Information and Communication Services. He will also be representing He'Asif, the project which includes this newsletter, now formalising a permanent relationship with an institution which will house it in the US. Among other functions, the institution will become the archive of the texts, information and software collected, and will lend its name to efforts to obtain support. Institutions or individuals who wish to be involved or who have suggestions are invited to contact Avrum and to arrange to speak with him or meet with him."

As it turned out, the result of Goodblatt's quest for an American home became NYSERNet. This is further supported by a series of undated documents that were stored in the Shamash archives of the same period.⁴¹ The content of several of these documents is noteworthy in indicating the direction Goodblatt was trying to move the initiative. In one note aimed at Jewish Studies conference organizers, Goodblatt wrote:

HE'ASIF Judaica Communications will provide the following services:

- * Our archive of software and electronic texts will be available for display and, in many cases, for copying.
- * A computer, connected to between four and nine terminals, will be set up to allow those in attendance to record data about their respective institutions.
- * The computer will also act as a bulletin board for the conference. In addition, the conferees will be able to send and

⁴⁰ Guang, H-Judaic Archives, June 7 1990.

⁴¹ H-Judaic Archives, circa 1990.

receive electronic mail to and from universities, libraries and research facilities.

HE'ASIF further assumes the responsibility of electronic pre-distribution not only of schedules, but abstracts of talks to be given.⁴²

But even more telling is a series of 'articles' entitled *Heasif Judaic Studies Descriptions*, *Heasif proposal for funding purposes*, and *How to participate in Heasif*, in which Goodblatt purports that "He'Asif is introducing the benefits of electronic communication to the Judaic Studies community."⁴³ The full text of these articles appears as an appendix to this study.⁴⁴ In correspondence, Zahavy also recalls "employment" issues served as the incentive for Goodblatt's initiatives:

I do remember meeting Avrum at the World Congress in August, 1989 in Jerusalem and speaking with him about his plans. I was eager to help out. He had ambitious but a bit nebulous ideas about prospects for the future. I think he saw prospects for funding and a job. We collaborated in good spirits for some time.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, from early 1991 until May 1993, the list seems to drift into obscurity. There are appears to be three reasons for this. Greenbaum is reported by Goodblatt to have run out of steam for producing his newsletter (in other words, he moved on to seek stable employment). Goodblatt appears to have begun devoting his energies to his larger and broader Jewish Internet initiative. And, without the labour of Greenbaum producing the newsletter, Zahavy, who was the list-owner at the Minnesota mirror site, appears to have not wanted the responsibility of moderating the list.

⁴² In an electronic file named CONFER.txt in the H-Judaic Archives, circa 1990.

⁴³ In an electronic file named DESCRIB.txt in the H-Judaic Archives, circa 1990.

⁴⁴ On CD-ROM

Although very little written evidence remains to support or contradict the contention, according to Goodblatt, Zahavy let the list become unmoderated after Greenbaum's departure. As a result it became a haven for flame wars⁴⁶ and junk mail. As the membership dropped rapidly, the list ceased to function for all practical purposes.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the automated archives of the listservers at both Tel Aviv University and Minnesota have long been wiped clean. However, even in Greenbaum's newsletters there is circumstantial evidence that the mechanism of the list was used for more than just posting the newsletter. On January 30, 1990, Greenbaum included a note from someone at the address WELFARE@ILNCRD, which read in part, " A few minutes ago I sent to JUDAICA@TAUNIVM notice concerning the establishment of the Jerusalem World Forum on Halachah and Science." Clearly this must be an indication of the possibility that individual notes could be posted to the list, outside the parameters of the newsletter.

Zahavy also supports the theory that there were, in fact, two parts to the list entity: Greenbaum's newsletter and the two listserv lists themselves, and Greenbaum was merely using the lists to distribute the newsletter. However, since he and Goodblatt controlled the Tel Aviv version of the list, and Zahavy controlled the Minnesota list, when Greenbaum ceased compiling the newsletter, the Tel Aviv list ceased posting anything. All the while the Minnesota list allowed individual postings. Several items in Zahavy's correspondence shed some light on this.

Judaica was set up to be an open list. When Avrum joined he accepted that. He was rich with ideas. He was not as good at following through on a regular, predictable basis. No reflection on his contribution. He was a pioneer. The enterprise - his and ours - was not as mature as what we are

⁴⁵AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Tzvee Zahavy to Avi Hyman, January 1996

⁴⁶ People writing to attack one another either legitimately or ad hominem.

⁴⁷ Goodblatt, 1996

doing now. It was in the "early days" and we were rougher around the edges. We did not have any flame wars per se. Just more of a frontier style of discourse. ... I always assumed that we just coincidentally chose the same name. Perhaps Avrum knew about my list prior, but I doubt that. My model was "Humanist". At heart I am more open and in favor of unmoderated speech.⁴⁸

However, the historical record contained in Greenbaum's newsletter does not fully support Zahavy's contentions. While the advent of the TAU version of the listserv was announced in the newsletter in April 1989, recall that it wasn't until the December 20, 1989 edition that a Minnesota list was announced:

Beginning with this newsletter, we will be distributing from Minnesota in addition to Tel-Aviv, due to the good offices of Tzvee Zahavy... The two lists are currently maintained as separate entities. Once they are "peered", i.e. connected, one review command will send both lists.⁴⁹

Finally, and again, in correspondence, Zahavy was also able to produce letters he had received from Goodblatt during the second week of January 1992 which shed some light on the decline of the list post 1991. According to Zahavy, wrote Goodblatt:

I also believe that the job cannot be done correctly without paying someone to moderate. I did not know that the parameters had not been hanged here - you had said that you had been in touch directly and if I remember correctly I had given you the password. Anyway, that account is closed now (the one that had access) because Yehiel has dropped out and I couldn't renew it without his signature. I am happy to participate with the list but I am not sure what to do.⁵⁰

And later:

⁴⁸AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Tzvee Zahavy to Avi Hyman, January 1996.

⁴⁹Greenbaum, H-Judaic Archives, December 20 1989.

⁵⁰AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Tzvee Zahavy to Avi Hyman, January 1996.

Well, I managed to reach the listserv maintainer here in Israel. He is changing the editor locally to be my address. I can then make you the editor if you wish.⁵¹

⁵¹AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Tzvee Zahavy to Avi Hyman, January 1996.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ORGANIZATION MATURES

JewStudies, JSJeJ and H-Judaic

My own affiliation¹ with the list began in late 1992, after it had been lying virtually dormant for almost two and a half years. At the time, I had been moderating a Jewish forum on a local Toronto computer bulletin board (connected to the Internet) called MagicBBS. Having recently enrolled in a doctoral program in Education at the University of Toronto, I came in contact with another graduate student who is now a professor at Florida Atlantic University, Henry Abramson. Abramson discussed with me the uniqueness of the *mail.jewish* list and I began to explore how it worked and what its underlying structure was. This led me to Avrum Goodblatt, who, at the time, was serving as the executive director of the Israel NYSERNet Project (INP). Goodblatt and I discussed reviving the academic Jewish Studies list. Starting a new listserv list from scratch (by promoting it to the members of other INP-based lists), we re-launched the newsletter in May of 1993 using the name *Jewish Studies E-Journal*, and a list address of jewstudies@israel.nysernet.org.

However, at the same time, there were a number of other events happening behind the scenes of the main list that would also greatly affect the course of the list's history. Because of his previous relationship with Zahavy, Goodblatt facilitated communication that led us to officially take over the *Judaica* list. In the third issue in July, 1993, I responded to complaints about the pejorative sound of the address 'jewstudies' by reporting that, "JewStudies is attempting to contact JUDAICA (at Minnesota) to see if we can combine forces in some way." Among the complainers was Norman Noyakh Miller of Mendele fame. Meanwhile, back in April, I had heard a rumour that the H-Net

¹ From this point on, I will be taking the opportunity to speak in the first person, where appropriate, as my relationship to the material becomes personal, which is consistent with the experiential nature of an Ed.D. program.

consortium, then operating out of the University of Illinois at Chicago, was about to start its own Jewish Studies list. I contacted the executive director, Prof. Richard Jensen to inquire:

Hello, my name is Avi Hyman (AJHYMAN@UTorOISE.bitnet). I recently received a post regarding HOLOCAUS and other resources. I am interested in information on H-URBAN, J-STUDY, and H-JEWISH. I am currently in discussion with NYSerNet for the purpose of setting up an academic net to deal with Jewish Studies particularly but not limited to the +19/+20 centuries.

- if you are attempting to do the same, then it would be silly to compete, and instead we should combine efforts.²

To which Jensen responded:

JSTUDY is brand-new (4-15-93) and there is not much to report so far. It will be used as an information and discussion medium among faculty and students at UIC interested in the Jewish Studies program. As we develop material we will send it to you, for your use in the Toronto project. The editors are Jim Mott (JimMott@spss.com) and Leslie Cook (u17018@uicvm).

H-JEWISH will be an international discussion list on Jewish history (ancient to late 20c) pitched at college professors of Jewish History/studies. We hope to get some funding for this project. Let's join forces! We can put you on the H-JEWISH editorial board. If some grants come in :) maybe we can get some money for you to gather materials for H-JEWISH and/or HOLOCAUS.

I am familiar with the NYSerNet operation, and we have been collaborating with Avrum Goodblatt. He offered the use of his LISTSERVE, but as you can see from the H-Net Plan #7.2 (next message), we have elaborate plans to set up a communications center here at the U of Illinois that will provide services to historians. Avrum has done a fine job in cultural studies and contemporary issues; we intend to focus on history.³

²AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Richard Jensen to Avi Hyman, January 1997

The dual negotiations resulted in a single entity that was reported in part one of the August 18, 1993 newsletter:

Two lists have merged into one and the merger is now underway. The former lists were Jewstudies@israel.nysernet.org and JUDAICA@UMINN or @TAUV

The address for this list will be:

Jewstudies@israel.nysernet.org or
H-Judaic@uicvm.uic.edu

This is not an open discussion list, but instead the e-mail access point for the e-journal, JEWISH STUDIES - JUDAICA devoted to the exchange of information on on-going work in Jewish Studies worldwide.

The list now has close to 700 subscribers. Issue 1.004 will be out in a few days. Back issues are available by anonymous ftp from Nysernet.ORG in the Israel directory/lists subdirectory/jewstudies subsubdirectory.

When you have a look at the format, it will become clear that we rely on subscribers to send in submissions of interest to other scholars.⁴

And then again in part two of the August newsletter which was circulated the next day, in which I reported:

This fourth issue of JewStudies-Judaica marks some major advances for our e-journal. First you will notice the name change. Thanks to the good will of Avrum Goodblat at the Israel Project @ Nysernet, we recently merged with the JUDAICA list formerly of UMMIN/TAUNI. The merger more than doubles our numbers, so the value of information exchange through the journal was greatly enhanced. Then we finally got our editorial advisory board together (their names appear below). We are also now going out to historians on the H-Net at UIC.⁵

The first editorial board included Dr. Josh Backon of Jerusalem, chief of cardiology and Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem and a frequent poster to the list; Mark Flumerfelt, at the

³AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Richard Jensen to Avi Hyman, January 1997

⁴ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, August 18, 1993.

⁵ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, August 19, 1993.

time, a graduate student at York University; Benjamin Kite at Indiana State University and moderator of a now-defunct Hebrew academic list; Chana Lajcher, head librarian at the Jerusalem College of Technology; Norman Miller, the Trinity College professor and moderator of Mendele list; and Dr. Leslie Train, a Yiddish instructor at the University of Toronto, under whom I had earlier studied. By September, Norman Miller had been replaced (he quit) by Henry Abramson, Avrum Goodblatt, and Dr. Jim Mott, a recent graduate of Richard Jensen, and moderator of H-Holocaust list. In November 1993, Tzvee Zahavy officially joined the editorial board.

The same month that Zahavy joined the editorial board, the number of subscriptions to the service climbed over 800 for the first time and surged past 1000 by the end of the year. In the December issue of the newsletter there were 34 articles, and Zahavy had been made chair of the editorial board.

Encouraged by the surging interest, the organization began a series of new, short-lived initiatives beyond simply publishing the newsletter in 1994. The first of these occurred in January with the publication of an Abstract Review, in which a series of small abstracts on the contents of five print journals in Jewish Studies was published. While the abstract review service was itself short-lived, it foreshadowed the later establishment of a full-fledged Book Review service by the organization. Also in January, there was a failed attempt to conduct editorial board business live, via a Multi-User Dimension (MUD) at MIT. A month later another venture was similarly announced in the newsletter: a permanent Gopher space containing back issues and assorted other documents and links to other on-line sources of Jewish Studies information.⁶ Again, the Gopher service failed

⁶ Gopherspace was an early text-based form of the World Wide Web

to materialize in the fashion predicted, but unlike the Review service, which did eventually take root, the concept of an on-line repository, whether Gopher-based or Web-based has yet, as of this writing, to bear fruit.⁷ Yet another initiative began in June 1994, when Josh Backon, a member of the editorial board from Jerusalem, offered to take on the responsibility of occasionally providing a referencing service to our readers. "Each month, when possible, he will recommend sources on topics raised in the previous month's issue." This only occurred the once. Later, in September of that year, the organization published a full-length article exclusively written for the list by Lewis Barth, now the Dean of Hebrew Union College.⁸ The discussions that led to the appearance of the article also led to Barth joining the editorial board in December, 1994. Other than one other article by Mira Levine of Hebrew University in December, no further full-length articles appeared on the list.

While the year 1994 might be described as an experimental period, the year 1995 was marked by a number of events that would have a more permanent and monumental effect on the running of the organization. The seeds for these events were sown in December 1994 at the twenty-sixth annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies in Boston. At that conference, Yitzchak Kerem, board member of H-Judaic and moderator of the electronic Sephardic newsletter, *Sefarad*, organized a panel on "Electronic Judaic Studies." Panel participants included me, Kerem, Jim Mott of the H-Holocaust list and another H-Judaic board member, and Sigrid Peterson, a long time member of the list and an active participant in Ioudaios (her paper dealt with Ioudaios). It was this panel which

⁷ The archives of the list are available at its website, but not much else: www.h-net.msu.edu/~judaic

⁸ "Report of CETH Summer Seminar '94 - Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities". H-Judaic's newsletter, issue 2.008 part 2, September 1994.

provided the first exposure of technology efforts within the wider Jewish Studies field. Also in December, as noted above, Lewis Barth joined the editorial board. He was joined on the board that month by Joseph Haberer of Purdue University and editor of the print journal *Shofar*; Howard Joseph of Concordia University; Richard Menkis of the University of British Columbia and editor of the print journal *Canadian Jewish Studies*; and Belarie Zatzman of York University. These members were hand-picked by me, rather than by any process of nomination and election. The appointments were designed to fill the editorial board with interested academics who would provide an increased scholarly profile and provide valuable feedback through the expansion period. And, as it turned out, to serve as a protective buffer in increasingly frequent conflicts with Richard Jensen of H-Net over the future direction of the organization and ownership of the list.

The Jensen Crisis

The first signs of the conflict arose early, with an exchange that was at first private, but then broadcast to the rest of the editorial board August 18, 1993.⁹ Jensen's response to the first joint NYSERNet - H-Net newsletter issue included the following mild criticism: "1. Terminology problems. I thought we decided on H-JUDAIC. "JewStudies" REALLY bothers people. It is likely, for example, to reduce the funding opportunities for H-NET and for H-JUDAIC. You should ask your editorial board about this--it's exactly what such boards are good for! 2. "e-journal" means a refereed scholarly journal that is vastly

⁹ From 1993 on, the editorial board had use of an H-Net listserv for the purposes of conducting its business. Originally called H-J-Edit, it later adopted the name Edboard-Judaic. The complete archives of this list were maintained by the H-Net computers, but are not generally available on the Web. As with the archives of the main H-Judaic list, I downloaded the entire collection of the editorial board archives from 1993 until 1999. All future references to the editorial board list within the body of the thesis text are taken from these archives, which are cited in the references as Edboard-Judaic, 1993.

more complex and expensive than H-JUDAIC. A better term would be "e-magazine". My response was, "If it's all right with you all, I will change the title of our journal to Jewish Studies - Judaica, and JewStudies will remain the nysernet short form while H-Judaic remains the UICVM short form... I would like to continue calling this an e-journal, if that's o.k. with everyone, since the ultimate dream is to become a proper e-journal."

This was just a sample of conflicts to come. The core conflicts arose after H-Net began to reorganize itself to meet the organizational and structural demands of various funding agencies to which H-Net was applying for funding. Most particularly, there was the National Endowment for the Humanities. These organizational changes were first announced to the editorial board in a message date March 14, 1994, in which I wrote, "In the coming weeks the H-Net Project at the University of Illinois Chicago will be undergoing some fundamental changes in its governance. A proposed charter will be voted on and certain structures will be put in place as a result of the H-Net receiving funding from grant agencies. We are associated with H-Net (our journal is sent out partly using the mailing list name H-Judaic). In fact, I believe we are the only member of the H-Net to join the project AFTER we were already in existence... However, I must remind you that we have a very strong commitment to the Israel Project of NYSERNET, the founding home institution of our journal and our gopherspace." Both Jensen and Goodblatt responded to the above note with further details. Wrote Jensen,

As the director of H-NET, let me explain that the whole operation has gotten far to big for one person (me) to handle in odd moments. Especially now that we have a large (\$155,000) grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we need some sort of structure. Hence the Charter which creates officers and an executive committee.

To see the Charter, send this message to
Listserv@uicvm.uic.edu
get charter draft

The Charter calls on each of our 28 lists to create an editorial board, and to have each board select a chair every year. Avi is well ahead of most of the lists by having a smoothly functioning editorial board in place -- and this little list for communications. The chair of each board will get a voice and a vote in HNET affairs. The need for that comes from the allegations (widely bandied about, I am sorry to say) that H-NET and its lists are a tightly closed little clique.¹⁰

To which Goodblatt added:

Congratulations on your grant and progress on your project. I will be in the U.S. in next week and will be happy to talk about further cooperation. The Judaica list at nysernet, which is run by Avi Hyman, is actually a combination of a list which I started 5 years ago along with the list he started at nysernet. So, in fact, his list is actually part of 2 separate projects. I do not think that will cause any difficulties, only that I think that we should probably work out the details.¹¹

But for all the talk of smooth transitions, there were problems. The issue was control of the money. Jensen was soon under pressure from other members of the H-Net consortium once money began to flow into the project. Perhaps feeling his control of the project was under attack, Jensen responded by protecting his turf whenever he could. Unfortunately I made the mistake of stepping into the dispute by asking Jensen for access to some of the funds he had raised to defray the cost of attending a conference. And as much as he was protective of his larger H-Net project, I was protective of my smaller one. What follows is a series of notes to the editorial board list, comprising the bulk of the battle, starting in May 1994 and running off and on for over a year. They best demonstrate the veracity of the dispute; a dispute that only ended when the democratic process Jensen set up to get the money led to his ouster from the consortium by a Michigan State University

¹⁰ Jensen, Edboard-Judaic Archives, March 14, 1994

¹¹ Goodblatt, Edboard-judaic Archives, March 14, 1994

professor, Mark Kornbluh. Ironically, or perhaps, strategically and in an effort to get him to ease off, I publicly backed Jensen during the election he ultimately lost in 1996.

Hyman - 1 May 1994:

Last year our journal joined with the H-Net project at UIC. The joining has proven fruitful for us in that we have been able to attract a wider audience and in that H-Net is made up of people who are concerned with the future of electronic communications. They have also provided us with this useful editorial board mailing list. Last week I asked the executive director, Prof. Richard Jensen, (who is subscribed to this list) if he had any funds to pay me if I helped him promote H-Net at the CSS94 conference in June. What has followed is an accromonyous discussiuon regarding the status of our journal in the H-net. Two points of information, the H-net recently approved a new charter and are currently in the process of electing new executive board. I will forward the transcript of mine and Jensen's conversation via email to you for your advice. I am also planning to do the same to the members of the H-Net. Please feel free to comment publicly, since I have nothing to hide from Richard.¹²

I then transmitted to the editorial board a transcript of earlier messages between myself and Jensen recorded between April 25 and May 1, 1994:

From: IN% "CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"
 "H-NET (Richard Jensen)" 25-APR-1994 14:19:49.25
 To: IN% "ajhyman@oise.on.ca"
 Subj: status

J. H-Net may grant affiliated status to existent scholarly lists. The executive committee, in consultation with the H-Net subject-area list moderators, shall determine guidelines for this arrangement and ensure that affiliated lists are represented on the voting staff of H-Net.

The question of course is whether your list was a scholarly list when h-judaic started up.

That will take a lot of proving.

¹² Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, May 1, 1994

Richard

From: OISE1::AJHYMAN 26-APR-1994 12:47:12.02
 To: IN%"CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"
 CC: OISE1::AJHYMAN
 Subj: RE: status

you write:

The question of course is whether your list was a scholarly list when h-judaic started up.

That will take a lot of proving.

I respond:

Under normal circumstances, I would find that comment to be inflammatory, but given our friendly relations to date, I will reserve judgment.

I am a little suprised at the apparent position you have taken on the matter. Namely since that clause was created, in part, by my comments as they pertained specifically to H-Judaic.

I am perfectly happy to keep this conversation between friends here. But, at some point, a decision regarding H-judaic's status will have to come before the board. You should know, therefore, that I have started keeping alog of our correspondance on this issue.

Keep well, and congrats on your acclimation as executive director.

Avi

From: IN%"CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"
 "H-NET (Richard Jensen)" 26-APR-1994 22:06:32.36
 To: IN%"AJHYMAN@oise.on.ca"
 Subj: RE: status

Avi-- the problem is that nobody in H-NET knows what sort of status you are asking for.

we do have affiliated status for 2 lists (ECONHIST and HABSBERG).

--do you want to be inside hnet or outside?

and if inside, then are you willing to abide by all the rules that apply to all theother lists?

Richard

From: OISE1::AJHYMAN 27-APR-1994 08:32:49.38

To: IN%"CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"

CC: OISEI::AJHYMAN

Subj: RE: status

I think a good place to start our discussion is via comparison.

I would be interested in knowing what rules apply to ECONHIST and

HABSBURG, and subsequently, what rights they enjoy in the H-Net.

As for what we want. I would say that being part of H-Net is a healthy

thing for the journal. However, as you may recall, I had concerns over the

issue of ownership. Given the nature of the JEWISH STUDIES JUDAICA

eJOURNAL, I would say it is unreasonable for the H-Net to claim

exclusive ownership of the journal, which is the only thing H-Judaic is

used for. Owning the mailing address is another thing, but not the actual

journal or the names of those who have voluntarily subscribed to it.

I look forward to reading your next note,

with best regards,

Avi

From: IN%"CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"

"H-NET (Richard Jensen)" 30-APR-1994 15:57:41.94

To: IN%"ajhyman@oise.on.ca"

CC: IN%"jimmott@spss.com",

IN%"reiff@NICCO.SSCNET.UCLA.EDU",

IN%"vburton@ncsa.uiuc.edu", IN%"hTeach@artsci.wustl.edu"

Subj: Richard RE: status of H-Judaic

E. April 30, 1994

Richard's reply:

The Econhist list is owned by the Cliometric Society (as their newsletter) and is operated out of Ohio U. The editor, Sam Williamson, does not participate in HNET affairs, but he does receive H-POST. He does not get any funding from HNET.

The Habsburg list was established a couple years ago by Charlie Ingrao, a professor at Purdue, and is operated out of Purdue. The idea is that affiliated status will be temporary and that soon Habsburg will become a regular HNET list (Charlie is nervous about being flooded with too much business, so he's still tentative.) As an affiliated list, HABSBURG gets some technical support but no funding from

HNET.

We have been listing H-Judaic as a "regular" H-list. The H-NET lists, as the Charter explains explicitly, are all owned by H-NET, and the moderators are chosen by, evaluated by--and replaced--by HNET (with suitable consultation). All the regular lists must of course abide the various policies (having to do with ads, security, money, accountability of moderators, etc.). We will not be making exceptions for this or for that list. In our policy statements and grant applications, we have always said H-NET will not publish electronic journals.

H-Judaic in content and style never resembled any of the other lists--in particular it lacks the daily news & discussion element that is so central.

You have strongly hinted that you don't plan to abide by rules you don't like.

So the logic is to change the status to "affiliated."

What that means regarding your vote in elections is problematical--but I can't for the life of me see why you WANT to vote and participate in decision-making when you don't plan to abide by the decisions.

As far as H-NET funding is concerned, in my opinion H-Judaic will have a very low priority as a regular list, and zero priority as an affiliated list.

Richard

From: OISE1::AJHYMAN 1-MAY-1994 11:53:37.19
 To: IN%"CAMPBELLD@LYNX.APSU.EDU"
 CC: IN%"jimmott@spss.com", OISE1::AJHYMAN
 Subj: RE: Richard RE: status of H-Judaic

(1) I noticed the last note was cc'ed to several people including Jim, welcome to our discussion then

(2) H-Judaic in content and style never resembled any of the other lists--in particular it lacks the daily news & discussion element that is so central.

You have strongly hinted that you don't plan to abide by rules you don't like.

So the logic is to change the status to "affiliated."

Fair enough. However, now that we agree on affiliated status - what does affiliated status mean? No where in the charter does it explicitly state what affiliate status means. In fact, what it does say, is that the definition of affiliate status is to be the subject of a negotiated settlement between the Executive and the list in question. That is fine with me too. As soon as the executive is elected, I will be happy to discuss it with them and come to a mutual agreement. What I can't understand is Richard's growing animosity for either me or H-Judaic.

I have not hinted that I don't plan to abide by H-Net rules - I have said that since H-Judaic is in fact run like a journal - certain rules are not appropriate to it and should be altered to accomodate the journal and H-Net. That will be the subject of the negotiations between the executive and the list as it is provided for under the charter.

(3)

What that means regarding your vote in elections is problematical--but I can't for the life of me see why you WANT to vote and participate in decision-making when you don't plan to abide by the decisions.

Given my previous notes on this matter, the answer is obvious. As an affiliated member I naturally have a great interest in the running of H-net particularly as it related to the notion of affiiated status.

(4) As far as H-NET funding is concerned, in my opinion H-Judaic will have a very low priority as a regular list, and zero priority as an affiliated list.

Everything was going along just fine until Richard's last shot. I was perfectly happy to discuss things with him cordially with the understanding that we had different outlooks on this matter. Now, however, he has gone one step to far. I don't want his money. I asked him if he would be interested in a work relationship - perhaps a little stipend if I were to help him promote H-Net at the CSS94 conference - I am not interested in taking money for the list or the journal. But frankly, "zero priority" is not his decision to make regarding the nature of affiliate status - it is the executive's

Fine - agian it is his opinion. However to state that if H-judaic were to agree to abide by all H-Net policies so as to be deemed a regular list- "AS FAR AS H-NET FUNDING IS CONCERNED H-JUDAIC WILL HAVE A VERY LOW PRIORITY AS A REGULAR LIST - is an outright shot at my credibility and that of my list, which I

might add, has a subscription rate 25% bigger than ANY H-Net list. I could care less about the money - Richard has twice called into question the value and quality of my list. The first time I pointed it out to him but let it slide - this time I am not willing to do so. It is a vile and groundless attack that I will make the first order of business of the new executive...¹³

Within 24 hours, several of the members of the editorial board had responded with supportive messages for me, some being highly critical of Jensen. Jensen finally responded to the editorial board on July 7, 1994:

The basic problem regarding full citizenship status for H-JUDAIC is simple. Does H-JUDAIC intend to abide all the terms of the H-Net Charter? Note that the Charter vests ownership of all the lists in H-Net, and gives the Executive Committee control over the moderators and the editorial board. In turn, the moderators get a vote and a seat on H-Staff, and a board delegate gets a seat on H-Staff. (Avi has in fact been voting and participating on H-Staff, and this board now has a delegate on H-Staff.) Please read the Charter again, and make a decision.¹⁴

To which I responded:

I want to thank Richard for sending his note and a copy of the charter to the editorial board. To summarize, I don't believe H-Net has a right to claim "ownership" of the journal - thus the "basic problem."

According to Richard, full citizenship status includes: "abiding by all the terms of the Charter, including vesting ownership of the list in H-Net, and giving control over the moderators and the editorial board to the Executive Committee."

However, if we had read several pages into the Charter, we would have noted section VI.J., which reads: "H-Net may grant affiliated status to existent scholarly lists. The Executive COMMITTEE (emphasis mine) in CONSULTATION with the H-Net subject-area list moderators, shall determine guidelines for this arrangement and ensure that affiliated lists are represented on the voting staff of H-Net."

¹³ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, May 1, 1994

¹⁴ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 7, 1994

Our editorial board chair Tzvee Zahavy and I are on H-Staff. Thus, the answer to Richard's question about our intent is: Yes - we intend to abide by the decision of the Executive COMMITTEE re the nature of affiliated lists once the consultation process is complete. During the Charter vote procedure, it was the opinion of the majority of H-Staff that H-Judaic (Jewish Studies Judaica eJournal) would be a participating member of the H-Net. Thus, any decision to remove H-Judaic from that status WITHOUT consultation and without a decision of the executive COMMITTEE would be in violation of the charter. When Richard released a report on the current status of H-Net lists two weeks ago he removed H-Judaic from the roster, which would appear to go against the charter.

What do we all care for? There are benefits to belonging to H-Net. 1/3 of our subscribers get their copy of the journal from H-Judaic, thereby easing the strain on the jewstudies list (which is over 1000 subscribers). The info that comes via the H-Net is sometimes relevant to us, and third, most of the other list moderators and editors are nice people to know who are always willing to help. Why does H-Net care: They are currently funded to the tune of \$150,000 and therefore justifiably protective. But one would think that our fine journal would enhance their email project.¹⁵

To which Jensen responded:

Affiliated is an arrangement designed for pre-existing lists sponsored by scholarly groups. H-JUDAIC does not fall in that category. Furthermore, affiliated status is NOT first class status.

I take it Avi has decided he does not want H-JUDAIC to be a H-Net lists like all the others. Avi demands H-JUDAIC be a totally separate and independent operation, not subject to the H-NET Charter. Yet at the same time he demands first class treatment equal to all the other lists, which DO abide the Charter. In or out, Avi, get your act together.

Why should H-NET bother providing an affiliated status? What's in it for H-NET? It seems to me that if you folks want to apply for an affiliated status, you have to make a much stronger case than you have done so far. Maybe there's nothing in it for us. Maybe affiliated status would

¹⁵ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 7, 1994

effectively stop us from developing our own general Jewish Studies list. (we already publish HOLOCAUS and an antisemitism list, H-AntiS).¹⁶

And if July 7 was a busy day on the editorial board list, July 8 was apocryphal:

Hyman:

With all due respect to Richard and his fine H-Net project, that is simply bullshit. I have demanded nothing. I wish to abide by the decisions of the executive committee under clause VI.J. of the H-Net Charter, with whatever "class treatment" it entails. Obviously, then, by Richard's comments, it is his opinion that H-Judaic is not eligible under section VI.J. I will be happy to discuss this with the executive committee. Unless it is Richard's intent to make a summary decision without executive committee consultation.

We have heard Richard's opinion on our eligibility under section VI.J. - Here are mine:

- 1) We existed as an electronic forum BEFORE the H-Net
- 2) We have established ties with a number of scholarly bodies, including the CJHS, Purdue and UMN, and with Shamash.
- 3) During the Charter debate, section VI.J. was added to the Charter and approved as a DIRECT response to the unique development of H-Judaic within the H-Net. Thus to now say that section VI.J. does not apply to H-Judaic is to go against the wishes of the H-Net Democratic body.¹⁷

Jensen:

Avi keeps referring to the Executive Committee. That Committee has been discussing the issue and I am the agent for the negotiations. I will be reporting back any agreement to that committee for its ratification/disapproval. In other words, this discussion IS the negotiation with the Executive Committee.

¹⁶ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 7, 1994

¹⁷ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 8 1994

As for affiliated status, it has some consequences: H-Net does NOT publish affiliated lists. Affiliated status would mean we shut down H-JUDAIC and H-J-EDIT. Avi would be free to transfer the subscribers, files and logs to the operation at Israel.Nyservernet or anywhere else, but not UICVM. H-Net PAYS the University of Illinois for its computer services; we will NOT pay for affiliated lists. (They can raise their own funds and pay their own computer center.)

Affiliated status is second class status as far as H-Net is concerned. It was added to the Charter to include EconHist, an affiliated list published by the Cliometric Society. It raises its own money and operates out of another university. Affiliated lists get far fewer benefits than H-JUDAIC has enjoyed.¹⁸

And in a subsequent note, Jensen:

A note on "ownership" in response to Tzvee—
H-Net's Charter says it "owns" all the lists. That is, it makes all final policy decisions. That explicitly includes evaluation of the lists, selecting and firing the comoderators, selecting the editorial boards, and controlling any money the list raises. ALL THE OTHER H-NET LISTS and moderators and editorial boards have agreed to this provision. So what about H-JUDAIC?¹⁹

Three days later, Jensen gave the editorial board of H-Judaic the first of two ultimatums, one in the form of a personal letter sent to the editorial board and the second in the form of what Jensen said was an H-Net Executive Committee resolution, again sent to the editorial board one month later on August 16, 1994. It is important to note that I have yet to see evidence that the executive committee ever met, virtually or otherwise, to agree on such a resolution. Without such proof, I doubted the veracity of the resolution. But Jensen persisted.

Jensen, July 11, 1994:

¹⁸ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 8 1994

One LAST time folks, from the H-NET executive committee: H-J-Edit MUST come up with some strong reasons why it will be to H-Net's advantage to have an affiliation with JSJeJ.

What has been lacking so far is convincing evidence that:

- the list has clear long-term and short term goals
- the list has several strong comoderators
- the list has formal ties with scholalrly organizations
- why H-Net should endorse a totally different format from all the other H-lists²⁰

Jensen, August 16, 1994:

Executive Committee Statement on H-Judaic:

1. The executive committee concludes that it is important to resolve the anomalous status of H-Judaic within H-Net. Confusion over this status has caused much conflict. We are sorry for this confusion some of which stemmed from an incomplete understanding of the history of H-Judaic at the time the Charter was drafted.
2. After careful consideration, the executive committee decided that H-Judaic is an H-Net list. It was started by H-Net, run on the UIC mainframe at the request of H-Net, and maintained by the H-Net staff. If H-Judaic is to continue to operate as an H-Net subject-area list, the following conditions must be met:
 - A. H-Judaic moderator and beditorial board must agree to accept the H-Net Charter and abide by all of its provisions. The Moderator and board must agree to work within the H-Net structure and with the H-Net officers and executive committee.
 - B. H-Judaic must take on at least one co-moderator who is a faculty member. As with all H-Net moderators, the new H-Judaic co-moderator must be approved by H-exec.
 - C. H-Judaic co-moderators must subscribe to H-Staff, H-Edit, and H-Post. Co-moderators should contribute to H-Post, esp. job postings, and post relevant H-Post notices on H-Judaic.
 - D. As with all H-Net subject-area lists, the H-Judaic editorial board must present both short and long-term goals for H-Exec approval.

¹⁹ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 8 1994

²⁰ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, July 11 1994

3. If the moderator and editorial board of H-Judaic agree to the above conditions, the executive committee agrees to allow H-Judaic to continue to be mirrored on Jewstudies.

4. If the moderator and editorial board of H-Judaic does not accept the above conditions, the associate director is empowered to close both H-Judaic and H-J-Edit.²¹

And, then, on August 18, 1994, Jensen took control of the list. He locked me out as moderator and took control of the moderator role himself. I immediately notified the editorial board via the board's list:

Today I tried to mail a post to the list I am supposed to moderate: H-Judaic. The message was about upcoming events on the list. This is what I got in response:

From: IN%"LISTSERV@UICVM.UIC.EDU"

"BITNET list server at UICVM" 18-AUG-1994 10:20:46.74

To: IN%"AJHYMAN@oise.on.ca" "avi jacob hyman"

Subj: Message ("Your mailing for H-JUDAIC has been submitted to...")

*Your mailing for H-JUDAIC has been submitted to the list editor:
Richard Jensen <U08946@UICVM.BITNET>.²²*

Somehow, I have been removed as the moderator, and NOT informed of this. I have worked hard to produce a quality list. I have been working with Mark Kornbluh to make H-Judaic a fully-functional list of H-Net. And now I am removed. What have the 300+ subscribers been told. Now I know why I haven't received any posts or subscription requests recently. I thought it was just because the summer was slow. What has gone on. I am NOT trying to be a shit-disturber. I think I deserve to be treated fairly. Please help me to understand what is going on.²³

Then the record goes virtually silent on the debate over who controlled the list. On August 19, there is an appeal from me to editorial board members to vote on accepting

²¹ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, August 16 1994

²² Italics added for emphasis.

²³ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, August 18 1994

the terms of surrender as laid out by Jensen. Only Josh Backon votes publicly. And then in the three days following September 8, 1994, Zahavy becomes, and confirms his role as, a co-moderator of the H-Judaic list in order to meet Jensen's demand that a faculty person serve as moderator of any H-Net list. Meanwhile, it is Jensen who still controlled the list and distributed various issues of the newsletter to members on August 19, August 23, and September 8; issues of the newsletter I had produced but was prevented from distributing. Then on September 11, Jensen writes to the editorial board:

The H-Judaic board -- and Avi-- have agreed to the executive committee terms, without dissent. So the list is back to normal & Avi is restored as owner & editor (along with Professor Tzvee Zahavy, of the U of Minnesota, as coeditor.²⁴

Indeed, I was back in control of the technology (partially) by September 12, when I was again able to distribute issues of the newsletter myself. By then, however, Jensen was further under siege in his own house. As the new year approached, a move to transfer technical operations out of the University of Illinois Chicago computing services and into Michigan State was under way.²⁵

Although Jensen continued to try and interfere in the content of various H-Judaic issues, he remained mostly on the sidelines for the next year. That is, until a debate on running a discussion group as well as a newsletter erupted on the editorial board list in April of 1995 in response to what will shortly be described as the AJS Crisis period in the history

²⁴ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 11 1994

²⁵ As the H-Net Project grew, so did its demands on the technical infrastructure of the University of Illinois's computing services, including its ability to run many more lists, and to store archives. As Kornbluh moved to secure his position within H-Net, he sought and received more support from Michigan State's computing services than was available at UIC. As a result, the organization began shifting its operations to MSU.

of H-Judaic. Jensen's contributions were at times progressive in comparison to other members of the editorial board, and ultimately, he again won the day (when H-Judaic began running a daily discussion forum as well as a newsletter). But his contributions were not always welcomed, as evidenced by a note written to the H-Judaic editorial board by Zahavy on April 28, 1995:

Richard Jensen should not be involved in our internal discussions about where we think we'd like to go. Many things are written as trial balloons, bright ideas, energetic dreams. That is how we go forward in our planning, sometimes. At the end of the go-around we do come up with a consensus, a plan. Then we can bring it forward to h-net. I feel a strong sense of intrusion on a micro-level by Richard J. Avi and I have a great deal of experience between us over several years. Others on the Judaic board have similar know-how. ... Richard J: will you please let us discuss our own affairs a bit more liberally before entering into the debate?
Thanks.²⁶

The AJS Challenge & The Daily Discussion Group

Part of my desire to join Kerem's panel on Jewish Studies and technology at the 1994 Association for Jewish Studies conference was to have an opportunity to promote the list at the largest annual gathering of professionals in Jewish Studies. My conversations with members of the AJS executive and front office at the December 1994 conference, revealed that their organization was seriously considering the use of similar technology, with similar objectives, particularly the dissemination of a professional newsletter electronically. Fresh out of the Jensen wars I was neither prepared to lose the list's momentum or pick a fight with the most important and politically connected organization in the field. A day after my return from Boston, I sent the following note to the editorial board.

²⁶ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 28 1994

The AJS is planning to go into the listserv business, particularly their newsletter type material - that would seriously compete with our current product. With Richard [Menkis]'s guidance I am to officially approach the AJS people to see if like minds can meet.²⁷

The Association for Jewish Studies, the professional organization founded in 1969, already had a number of regular publications, including the *AJS Review*, a scholarly journal, and the AJS Newsletter with a special issue devoted to positions in Jewish Studies. Membership in the AJS is open to individuals whose full-time vocation is teaching, research, or related endeavors in academic Jewish Studies, to other individuals whose intellectual concerns are related to the purposes of the Association, and to graduate students concentrating in an area of Jewish Studies. As of March 2000, membership in the AJS was approximately 1600.²⁸ Membership in H-Judaic was approximately 2200. Many, perhaps the majority, were members of both.

My initial response to the perceived AJS initiative was to coordinate the existing Jewish Studies lists into an association or, more accurately, a protective society, and then, start new lists to fill voids in the field. Zahavy immediately shot down this idea and Abramson was of the mind that if, in fact, the AJS could do a better job at running the newsletter, we might be better off turning over the operation to them and concentrate our efforts on a moderated discussion group. Typically, Jensen wrote that any affiliation with the AJS would require approval of the H-Net executive committee, and that we should seek ten thousand dollars from the AJS for their sponsorship of the list. This was also the position of Jim Mott, who was then serving as editor of H-Holocaust, the associate director of H-

²⁷ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, December 20 1994

²⁸ The AJS Mission Statement: <http://www.brandeis.edu/ajs/ajsmission.html>

Net and a member of the H-Judaic editorial board. On December 29 board member Richard Menkis wrote:

Avi had asked me to help with an approach to the AJS to see how our product and their organization might come together. We met briefly with the new executive secretary, Aaron Katchen and at greater length with the member of the board responsible for publications, Bernard Cooperman. These are the issues arising from those meetings: Most importantly, any publication associated with the AJS would have to be an AJS publication with AJS editorial control. Thus, our publication would lose its present name, and there would have to be a restructuring of the editorial board, etc. The reasons for their insistence on this merger were (i) fear of losing an important source of funding, job postings (ii) they do not want any kind of information going out associated with their name that is not under their control.

There was, however, interest, especially from Cooperman. While Cooperman and Katchen are computer literate, the organization as a whole is not moving quickly on that front. Avi, on the other hand, has great experience and there are about 1500 subscribers and more readers, so here there is a product already in operation. Cooperman has advised Avi to compose a letter stating what he would like to see happen, and has also asked me to write a letter recommending that the AJS pursue this connection. I am willing to do this, but I would like to throw open the discussion to the editorial board.

At present, my major concern is to see our publication become a very useful one, with a wide and influential readership, **AND TO MAKE SURE THAT AVI DOES NOT GET LOST IN THE SHUFFLE, SHOULD THERE BE A MERGER.** I recommend that we explore the relationship with the AJS, but that we simultaneously, of course, push on to make our publication better known and thus to work on the negotiations from a position of increasing strength. Comments, or questions would be appreciated.²⁹

²⁹ Menkis, Edboard-judaic Archives, December 29 1994

Sensing pressure on me to defend the integrity, independence of H-Judaic and my place as moderator, I wrote to the editorial board:

I thought our little list(s) had reached a nice equilibrium - then I went to Boston and found out that the AJS wants to e-publish its newsletter and start a Jewish Studies list.

With all due respect, Richard and Avrum, you are two very skilled and fine people at the head of two great internet projects (H-Net and Shamash) and I am proud to be associated with you both however, the AJS is not going to pay \$10k or hire Shamash employees when they can go to Brandeis and get all the computer listserv service they want for free. They don't care about me (a punk grad student in the wasteland of Canada) or our list(s). (I went to the business meeting and saw their budget - they don't have that much money to spend anyway).

They care about cheapness and editorial control. And they will put us out of business faster than I can say supercalafrajistic - besides, why would I want to work on a professional news list when they'll be doing it too?³⁰

And, in the same note:

For the short term, I would like to make a motion that we merge the two subscriber bases (H-Judaic and JewStudies) and make them identical. We then open one as a regular list of discussion like ioudaios, and use the other to distribute job postings and related things that come in.³¹

The response was quiet. Other than a few more exchanges from Zahavy and Jensen, the editorial board stopped debating the issue. In fact, there is little discourse of significance among editorial board members related to either the AJS challenge or the establishment of a discussion group from the end of December until April 10, 1995. During those three and half months, Herb Basser of Queens University joined the editorial board (February 2) as did Penny Schine Gold of Knox College (March 27). On February 21, Zahavy wrote

³⁰ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, December 29 1994

in support of the H-Net move to Michigan State University, and on March 7, 1995, Zahavy wrote, " I would like some suggestions for a replacement chair. Avi is doing fine and I am just as pleased as could be with the development of the journal. A good time to step aside and let someone else be chair. No pressure here. If we could find a willing e-soul by the end of March that would be dandy." And then on April 10, Jensen re-kindled the debate on the status of H-Judaic, and by extension, the AJS debate:

H-Net has received this request, but I have been unable for 2 weeks to get any response from Avi. So this group should discuss the matter:

Date: Sun, 26 Mar 1995 18:31:20 -0500

Dear Sirs: My name is Guy Haskell and I am editor of the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review, co-chair of the Committee on the Anthropology of Jews and Judaism of the American Anthropological Association and convener of the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology caucus of the Association for Jewish Studies. We have been talking in all of these groups of establishing an electronic form of communication, and perhaps your network would be the right place. How does one go about starting a new group?

The obvious move for H-Judaic is to take Haskell up on the suggestion and enlarge the scope and especially the frequency of H-Judaic. Instead of a monthly newsletter it can -- and I think should -- become a daily interactive forum, just like all the other H-Net lists.³²

The next day I responded with two separate, but related notes:

I have been on-line every day several times a day and received nothing of what Richard sent in - There is no way that email was sent to me and not replied to... none-the-less, I am happy to discuss the matter of the AJS-Jewish Ethnography list...

³¹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, December 29 1994

³² Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 10, 1995.

As you recall, after the last AJS conference in Boston, I wrote that the AJS wants to put us out of business - this may very well be the first salvo in that battle

With your permission, I will contact Prof. Haskell and begin discussions on what services he desires and see if we can bring him under the fold of H-Judaic/JewStudies...³³

And

As most of you know - in the past we have discussed the merits of a newsletter format versus the 'open' discussion format. I think that, so far, I have felt that so long as our lists (since we have two) are general in nature (ie - no specific discipline within Jewish Studies) that the newsletter format is more appropriate. Experience of the two early Jewish studies lists (Judaica@uminn and heasif@nysernet) showed that a general Jewish discussion group did not carry the necessary specificity to survive - and the emergence of some 20 plus specific Jewish studies lists (eg: ioudaios, holocaust, sefarad, and so on) have indicated that scholars want SPECIFIC lists when it comes to discussions. I am not against discussion lists, as both Richard Jensen and Jim have suggested (as well as Penny) - however, a general Jewish studies discussion list has proven to be unsuccessful in the past.

That brings me back to my original suggestion back in January after I heard at the AJS meeting that they wanted to go into the list business. Back then I suggested that we transform our editorial list into a "moderators" list for moderators of academic Jewish studies lists - that we "sell" (or some such thing) our newsletter services to the AJS and we commence creating several new lists to fill niches currently void (the most obvious one is North American Jewish Experience). That way we create a centralized service where moderators of Jewish studies lists can share ideas while at the same time filling the void with scholarly lists. We could, in fact, start this very quickly, even without AJS. We clearly have commitments from both H-Net and Shamash/Boston Hebrew College to support our efforts to create GOOD lists. The H-J-Edit list could become the moderators list and we could cease to distribute the newsletter directly to subscribers - instead, we could distribute it to the moderators who

³³ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

would then re-distribute it on each of their lists -eventually, AJS would step in and take over the production of the newsletter. This would also give us greater access to funding as a group. I would appreciate your comments on this proposal... (from everyone since this is a big proposal) meanwhile, I have sent a letter to Guy Haskell telling him we would be happy to help him with his needs...³⁴

Over the next week, several board members engaged in a discussion regarding the idea of a daily discussion group.

Schine Gold, April 11:

I like [the] idea of doing both the monthly newsletter and a daily interactive format. What would the problems be with this? My own preference would be for a wide-open Jewish Studies discussion list, with encouragement for people to form sub-lists in more specific areas as the need or desire arises.³⁵

Menkis, April 11:

we should not drop the monthly newsletter. It offers a valuable service for those who want to limit their surfing. As for the interactive discussion group, are we not talking about a lot more work--I certainly don't want us to assume that Avi has limitless time for this.³⁶

Schine Gold, April 11:

I'd like to see the newsletter continue to be distributed to subscribers as well as list moderators. Maybe I'm odd, but I tend to go on and off lists as I need them, particularly for help with courses that I'm teaching. I stay on H-Judaic all the time because traffic is low and in manageable clumps.³⁷

Abramson, April 11:

I am against the idea of splitting the list two ways. The newsletter format seems perfectly suited to my personal needs, although this may be shooting ourselves in the foot -- AJS might be a more logical group to

³⁴ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

³⁵ Schine Gold, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

³⁶ Menkis, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

³⁷ Schine Gold, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

organize such a newsletter than we few souls. I have little time for interactive discussion groups, and belong to only the most specialized lists in my field. If someone else wants to start such a list, fine, but I don't think I would subscribe.³⁸

Kerem, April 14:

I am in favor of the newsletter formula instead of the junk conversation list. However, if there are intelligent or profound pieces of arriving mail, they can be listed as letters to the editor, or research questions and can also be responded to in the same or later issue... Keep the Jewish studies list as is. It can be refined or expanded, but shouldn't be disbanded. it will have no replacement... We shouldn't be inhibited by the idea of competing with AJS. The AJS journal appears only rarely, contains only a few articles and several book reviews. The more regular news bulletins of the AJS don't appear that often. Many in the AJS are not on e-mail, and those that read this list may not always comprise mainstream of AJS readers, but the list is functional and worthy of continuing. Don't give up and don't be inhibited by AJS. AJS will not put out its own e-mail publication in near future. AJS has a yearly conf and that essentially is its raison d'etre.³⁹

Jensen, April 15:

H-Net does not operate junk lists; our 50+ daily newsletters have set a new standard for scholarly communications. All the members of this committee should subscribe to a couple of H-Net lists for a week or two to see how rich a resource they can be. (Try, for example, HOLOCAUS or H-URBAN.) All contributions are edited by the co-editors. A daily list will be more work, and proportionally more rewarding for everyone. Research questions can be answered immediately and lead to new insights and communications. The current monthly format, unfortunately, has all the weaknesses of a paper newsletter, and fails to take advantage of the speed and immediacy of Internet. A daily list will require several co-editors to share the workload.⁴⁰

Hyman, April 16:

³⁸ Abramson, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 11 1995.

³⁹ Kerem, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 14 1995.

⁴⁰ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 15 1995.

I agree that a daily serves to network colleagues better than a newsletter - however, there is no doubt that everyone on this list will agree that a daily list on general Jewish Studies is inappropriate (that is why Jim's Holocaust list, Yitzchak's Sefarad list, the Ioudaios list, and so on, are successful as daily lists - they serve specific elements of Jewish Studies)⁴¹

Hyman, April 17:

If we are to change the system we currently use (ie from monthly to daily), then we should go to a poll of the users directly.⁴²

Jensen, April 18:

[The] ballot idea is a good one, but let's drop [the] open unmoderated list [option]. Unmoderated lists are prone to many forms of disaster, and H-Net will NOT approve that option. The ballot might also ask a more open-ended question: What functions would you like to see H-JUDAIC serve in the next year?⁴³

Schine Gold, April 18:

I agree with Richard's suggestions. Also, rather than just ask if people want to go with a discussion list or not, shouldn't we ask what specific areas they'd like to see lists in? The arguments against a wide-open "Jewish Studies" list seemed convincing to me.⁴⁴

Menkis, April 18:

I agree with Penny's suggestions, and also endorse her wariness of an wide-open Jewish studies list.⁴⁵

Kerem, April 20:

At any rate, I hope that the newsletter format will continue. If people want a list they can also have that. Sometimes it's a hassle to monitor a talk list - especially when it gets abusive.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 16 1995.

⁴² Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 17 1995.

⁴³ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 18 1995.

⁴⁴ Schine Gold Edboard-judaic Archives, April 18 1995.

⁴⁵ Menkis, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 18 1995.

In the midst of all this, Tzvee Zahavy, chair of the editorial board, former moderator of the list, and the faculty representative of H-Judaic in the H-Net governing structure, lost his job at the University of Minnesota. Although not directly connected to the on-going saga of H-Judaic, it did represent a unique historical milestone. Apparently, Zahavy began working at the University of North Carolina without informing, or officially quitting, the University of Minnesota, in 1992. In proceedings that lasted three years, the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents finally terminated his appointment of 19 years on April 7, and denied him access to several resources, including e-mail. His absence from the discussion resulted from his being locked out of his account. He resurfaced April 20, using his son's e-mail account, and made his first contribution to the ongoing round of the discussion on April 23:

I have received numerous positive comments of late from around the country on the usefulness of the monthly journal format. I think we must continue it with Avi as editor. If we do open a moderated interactive list, we would need additional editors for that purpose. That means virtually daily attention must be given to the list. The most logical place to seek such editorial talent would be our own board. Thus and hence... would any members of the board like to step forward and volunteer for such a hypothetical responsibility??? If not, then the poll of subscribers about the issue is mainly mooted. If yes, then we can actively seek out the public sentiment. Does this make sense?⁴⁷

The conversation proceeded along these lines until the end of the month. Various members of the editorial board shared their thoughts, back and forth, over and over. Three notes stand out during this period. On April 27, board member Leslie Train wrote a scathing rebuke of the idea of daily discussion group. " I am NOT interested enough in all

⁴⁶ Kerem, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 20 1995.

⁴⁷ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 23 1995.

areas of Jewish studies to join regular lists never mind a generalist one. It wouldn't be focused enough to be very scholarly or worthwhile. I think the fact that you already split Holocaust and some other one off as separate lists shows clearly that a general list in Jewish studies is not viable. The whole concept of 'Jewish studies' is falsely created by those wishing to ghettoize Jews anyway (but that's a whole other megillah). (and what would be our relationship to the Sephardic list and Mendele and Ioudaios and Persia-L and heblang and so on and so on?) There are spots to fill, but a generalist regular list isn't one of them."⁴⁸ And the next day Zahavy wrote his note critical of Jensen's interference. "Richard Jensen should not be involved in our internal discussions about where we think we'd like to go. Many things are written as trial balloons, bright ideas, energetic dreams. That is how we go forward in our planning, sometimes. At the end of the go-around we do come up with a consensus, a plan. Then we can bring it forward to h-net. I feel a strong sense of intrusion on a micro-level by Richard J."⁴⁹ Later that day Jensen responded:

Sorry if I seem to be so intrusive. But as we decided last year, this is an H-Net operation, and I am in charge of starting up new lists, which has been the main topic of discussion. The function of H-J-Edit is primarily to advise on the contents of H-Judaic, and NOT to develop policies for H-Net new lists. Furthermore I am responsible for relations with other groups, specifically the Association for Jewish Studies. The main issue before H-J-Edit is that raised by prof Haskell: How should H-Judaic relate to the Association for Jewish Studies. I wish people would use their expertise and experience to focus more on the larger target audience for H-Judaic and what their needs are.⁵⁰

By the end of the day, April 28, 1995, the thread on starting a daily discussion group was dead. There would be no further discussion of the topic among editorial board members

⁴⁸ Train, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 27 1995.

⁴⁹ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 28 1995.

until the following July. Discussion on the editorial board list returned to the regular topics of editing individual issues of the newsletter, and to the broader issues of whether the newsletter should feature apartment exchange notices and the initiation of a book review service.

On July 2, Guy Haskell, then of Emory University, joined the editorial board. The same day, the editorial board was asked to look over a letter of intent I wrote to send to the members of H-Judaic announcing the establishment of a daily discussion group, in addition to the newsletter.⁵¹ Only Chana Lajcher publically continued to object to the idea, so that on Monday, August 21, 1995, the following note was sent to all 1500 subscribers:

Dear Subscribers,

In recent months, the editorial office of the JEWISH STUDIES JUDAICA ELECTRONIC JOURNAL (JSJeJ) has received a number of requests for an open discussion forum in academic Jewish Studies.

After much debate at the editorial board level, and with our publishers, H-Net: Humanities-on-Line and Shamash@NYSERNet, we have decided to introduce such a service.

Our plan is to offer both the open-but-moderated discussion format for frank and timely exchange of ideas and personal notes among scholars in Jewish Studies and to continue to publish the semi-monthly newsletter of current events (including conference announcements and job postings). Our current roster of over 1500 subscribers will receive both services and individual members may choose to drop one or the other as they see fit.

⁵⁰ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, April 28 1995.

⁵¹ Although there was no further debate about a discussion group on the editorial board list, and there is no extant record of correspondence directly from Richard Jensen, it is my recollection that I received several inquiries from members regarding a discussion group format that prompted me to act unilaterally in July 1995.

Both services will continue to be archived among the growing library we are developing on Gopher and the Web.

Both lists will be managed by our current international editorial board, consisting of Henry Abramson, Josh Backon, Lewis Barth, Herb Basser, Mark Flumerfelt, Penny Schine Gold, Avrum Goodblat, Joseph Haberer, Guy Haskell, Howard Joseph, Yitzchak Kerem, Chana Lajcher, Richard Menkis, Jim Mott, Leslie Train, Tzvee Zahavy, and Belarie Zatzman; all acclaimed academics in a wide range of Jewish Studies disciplines from Bible & Rabbinics to Language & Fine Arts.

The address of the discussion group will be: H-Judaic@msu.edu
While the address of the newsletter will be:
JewStudies@Shamash.nysernet.org

As many of you already know, there are currently close to 30 specialty lists devoted to specific fields within Jewish Studies, including, but not limited to, Holocaust Studies, Yiddish Studies, 1st Century Judaism, Biblical Studies, Hebrew Language, Jewish Religion, Jewish Feminist Studies, Jewish Education, etc. We expect that this number will grow and we fully support the efforts of our colleague lists. In addition to our new discussion list, several of the people involved in this electronic newsletter have recently started a North American and Canadian Jewish Studies discussion list (cjhs-1@oise.on.ca) which will, no doubt, fill a current void in the field.

Therefore, we recommend that our new discussion group (H-Judaic@msu.edu), be viewed as a forum for the exchange of dialogue on academic Jewish Studies as a field. For example, issues concerning the debate over independent departments of Jewish Studies versus interdepartmental programs would be most appropriate. Requests for, and recommendations vis-a-vis, syllabi would also be appropriate.

As always, we welcome all professional notices, book announcements, job offerings and so on. With the advent of the two-service system, you can expect to see the newsletter streamlined efficiently. The JSJeJ is the largest single source for contacting Jewish Studies scholars in ANY

medium. Our estimated readership via e-mail, gopher and the Web exceeds 6000 individuals.

If all goes according to schedule, you should experience a seamless and comfortable transition to the two-service system sometime near the end of the summer. With best wishes for a meaningful summer,
 on behalf of the editorial board,
 Avi Jacob Hyman, Managing Editor⁵²

Then the list went dormant for two months. And so did the editorial board discussion list, expect for the occasional update I sent during September informing board members of the technical matters I was working on, such as merging two physical lists into one,⁵³ eliminating duplicate addresses, and uploading the combined list into each computer. On October 17, 1995, I posted the following note to the newly reconstituted H-Judaic daily discussion list:

You may have noticed that the JEWISH STUDIES list has been quiet for a couple of months - no longer - the list is back! We spent the time off cleaning up our "house" - we now have over 1500 subscribers around the world.

But mostly, we have been preparing to offer NEW services. You'll still receive the "industry newsletter" you've come to expect for Jewish Studies. However, now you'll also be members of the world's largest "discussion group" for academic Jewish Studies.⁵⁴

A new era had begun, and the first notes posted to the daily discussion group were illustrative of this new era. Philip Trauring of Brandeis was looking for an old English copy of the Talmud, and Lita Goldflam of the University of Western Australia inquired

⁵² Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, August 21 1995.

⁵³ The two lists were the ones on the Shamash computer and the one on the H-Net computer. Of the 1500 subscribers, about two-thirds were on the Shamash list, and the other third on the H-Net list.

about English-language Jewish newspapers. On October 20 I informed the editorial board that we had lost nearly 200 subscribers in the first three days due to the format change, and on October 21 Nathan Ehrlich of Boston Hebrew College joined the editorial board. BHC would later take over the Shamash Project after the departure of Avrum Goodblatt as director.

Sarna Joins the Board

November 1995 marked the beginning of a new, more stable, more academically-sanctioned era for H-Judaic. There is a certain irony that the turbulence of the Jensen wars and the AJS challenge gave rise to this calm period in the history of the organization, but perhaps stability would not have been possible without these earlier bumps on the road. Nonetheless, the era is best characterized by the emergence on the scene of a new member of the editorial board - a scholar whose academic profile would enhance the entire group and a member of the executive of the Association for Jewish Studies. On November 1, 1995, Jonathan Sarna, professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University, joined the editorial board. Wrote Sarna,

I know a great deal more about this subject [Jewish Studies] than I do about computers, but I have been impressed by the ability of this and other groups to foster research and promote communication, and so when Avi asked me to join the board, I was pleased to agree. I look forward to communicating with you.⁵⁵

Sarna's introduction to the inner workings of the organization came quickly. At the end of November, Chana Lajcher, one of the original editorial board members quit in a dispute with Tzvee Zahavy over Israeli politics. Simultaneously, a member posted a note

⁵⁴ Hyman, H-Judaic Archive, October 17 1995.

⁵⁵ Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, November 1 1995.

requesting a list of Jewish Studies scholarships and fellowships. Two days later, another member sent a note referencing a 1992 edition of the AJS Newsletter that contained such a list. The respondent, Howard Adelman of Smith College, privately offered me a copy of the edition so I could post the information to the list. As an editorial comment to Adelman's note, I told members as much. Unfortunately, that elicited an immediate legalistic response from Aaron Katchen, the executive secretary of the AJS, who warned me that if I were to post the information contained in the newsletter, I would be in violation of their copyright. I wrote to Katchen, with a copy to the editorial board, assuring him I had not intended to violate AJS copyright, and in an effort to win his cooperation and that of the AJS, I invited him to sit as an ex-officio member of the editorial board. He declined, and he asked us to drop the use of the terms "Academic Jewish Studies" on the masthead of our newsletter, as it conflicted with his organization's acronym.

While the exchange was disconcerting, I continued my pursuit of AJS sanction. Indeed, H-Judaic began a new tradition. We invited members who were giving papers at the upcoming AJS conference to post short abstracts of their talks on H-Judaic. This was well received by the H-Judaic's membership, even if there was no official comment by the AJS. The practice continues until this day. But the series of exchanges that took place on the editorial board list in the few weeks after the Katchen letter represented the last flurry of activity in the AJS crisis. Thereafter, H-Judaic was well-served by the presence of three members of the AJS executive on the editorial board. In addition to Sarna, Bernard Cooperman, the then Director of the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland - College Park, and chair of the AJS publications committee, joined the editorial board on December 3, 1995. Ten days later, Judith Baskin, chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Albany and another AJS executive member, joined

the list. Baskin would later go on to be Program Chair of the 31st Annual AJS conference. Both were suggested for the editorial board by me, in consultation with Jonathan Sarna.

The notes that followed the Katchen letter foreshadowed the end of Zahavy's chairperson's role on the H-Judaic editorial board. He would shortly be replaced by Jonathan Sarna. However, before he stepped down, Zahavy contributed to the discussion then underway:

After looking at Mr. Katchen's memo, I believe that the AJS will probably be better served by its own list and gopher and www sites. We can surely help them distribute information when and if they want to use our good services. They appear, at this stage of development, to be protective and independent. Other thoughts?⁵⁶

Hyman, November 26:

Regarding Tzvee's message below. I think the AJS cannot be better served by their own list etc. - it would be a complete duplication of services. To that end, I have invited both Aaron Katchen and Bernie Cooperman to sit on our board and to give input into how we might work together to meet our common goals of Jewish Studies networking.⁵⁷

Sarna, November 27:

I agree with Avi. Judaic Studies and this list will only benefit from close cooperation with the AJS.⁵⁸

Cooperman, December 12:

As for working with the AJS, I shall indeed pass the word and make it clear that I do not think the AJS needs create a list since H-Judaic exists. Moreover, I doubt that you want the AJS looking over your shoulder.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, November 26 1995.

⁵⁷ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, November 26 1995.

⁵⁸ Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, November 27 1995.

⁵⁹ Cooperman, Edboard-judaic Archives, December 12 1995.

The new year began uneventfully for H-Judaic. Discussions among editorial board members tended towards regular editing matters, long postings, inappropriate postings and the like. On February 13, 1996, Reena Zeidman, then Chair of Jewish Studies at Queens University, joined the editorial board. On February 26, Yossi Galron, Jewish Studies librarian at Ohio State University and moderator of Hasafran joined the editorial board. It would not be long before they were both fully immersed in the next controversy to hit the group.

The Anonim Affair

It was quite remarkable that there was very little by way of controversy involving an actual member of the list in the first three years since its re-awakening. The quiet was broken by an unfortunate confrontation with list member Abe Anonim.⁶⁰ This confrontation would constitute the only serious dispute between a moderator of the Jewish Studies Network and a member of the organization.

Abe Anonim is the director of research of a private educational foundation. A physicist by training, Anonim has spent the last twenty-five years researching the mathematical structure underlying the sequence of letters of the Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis. He believes that he has discovered an unexpected geometric metaphor in the letter-sequence of the Hebrew text of Genesis that "underlies and is held in common by the spiritual traditions of the ancient world." Through his project, Anonim seeks to

⁶⁰ Abe Anonim and Sarah Anonim are pseudonyms for the people to be discussed in this next section and elsewhere. Although it is theoretically possible for another researcher to establish the true identity of these individuals because of the public nature of the list

demonstrate "the relationship between physical theory and consciousness, expressed in explicit geometric metaphor," and that this metaphor was developed several thousand years ago.⁶¹

Without making any suggestions as to the validity of his work, it is reasonable to assert that this kind of research did not fall into the mainstream of Jewish Studies in January 1996, when Anonim made his first contribution to the discussion list. In fact, Anonim allowed that his work was outside the mainstream in the preamble to his first ever post during a discussion on the role of academics in Jewish communal life on January 10, 1996. Wrote Anonim, "Please take this as the view of somewhat of an outsider and please do not be personally offended by my frank, and possibly undiplomatic language." The post was quite a bit longer than the average post and addressed both Jewish Studies academia and rabbinics as "playing with half-decks." Anonim then proceeded to illuminate the reader on what he believed to be the correct way to examine Judaism:

Academia studies the "bath water" (Jewish history and traditions) after it has removed the "baby" (HaShem.) Any scientist knows that this sort of procedure is doomed to provide partial, enigmatic and unconvincing results. But what [my foundation] has found changes the terms of the discussion and should force a reappraisal from both camps.

We believe that it is possible to demonstrate to the highest academic and rabbinic standards that the Hebrew alphabet and the text of B'Reshit are exactly what they claim to be - but in a highly unexpected way.

We can show that when the letters of (the beginning of) B'Reshit are paired-off, the text string of B'Reshit folds itself (topologically) onto a Tefillin strap in the form of a model human hand (intended to be bound on the hand.) When various gestures are made, the 2-dimensional outline of

archives, nonetheless, it was felt that the use of aliases as a measure of protection was warranted.

⁶¹ Taken from the website of Anonim's foundation. The URL is not provided here to protect his identity.

the model hand looks like different (Meruba Ashurit) Hebrew letters. The gesture that displays the letter has the same natural meaning as the name of the letter: You can only see a Pe when you point towards your mouth; Pe means "mouth", and etc.⁶²

The response to the Anonim posting from the editorial board was swift and explicit. Cooperman wrote two days later to the editorial board list: "I certainly wondered why in heaven's name you included the much lengthier and far less relevant posting by Abe Anonim. It strikes me that such stuff trivializes the list and tempts readers to unsub." The next day I apologized for allowing the post to get out to the list. "I am very very sorry to report that it was NOT my intention to release that Anonim piece to the list, I was intending to send it to the board and I obviously made a serious mistake. Please accept my apologies. I hope this will not adversely affect your collective assessment of my moderating abilities too much. Again, my sincere apologies (oy)." Nothing more happened for a month.

Anonim's next contributions to the list came in the form of three long messages containing his unique Kabbalistic and geometric perspectives on three unrelated topics then under discussion in late February. On February 20, I wrote to the editorial board, "I was just about to send this when the author's name rang a warning bell. I don't know enough kabbalah to know if this is real. Unfortunately, I have been spending my time on American Jewish history. Please let me know." Over the next two days, the editorial board discussed the merits of posting Anonim's contribution. Primarily Bassar and Zahavy were in favour of allowing the postings, while Backon and Abramson spoke against it. In the end, I settled for what I thought was a compromise, instead posting the messages to the website and not to the list itself. On February 27, I announced this

⁶² Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, January 19 1996.

decision to the main list. "Member Abe Anonim recently submitted three articles about the Kabbalistic angle on some of our ongoing conversations. These included articles on the Apple as a symbol, and the meaning of Genesis 1:1. Because the articles were on the long side, I have placed them in our on-line library instead of sending them via the list." Unfortunately this was not to the satisfaction of Anonim who sent me the first of several notes about moderating style and policies. These communications would last for more than half a year before Anonim finally quit the list. Anonim sent his first complaint to me, to Avi Feldblum, moderator of Mail-Jewish, and to Avrum Goodblatt on February 29. I immediately forwarded it to the editorial board.

There is absolutely no question in my mind that you are all well-intended, as is everyone else involved in posting material to the various Jewish forums.

Nevertheless, I continue to be frustrated in my attempts to post responses to Mail-Jewish, and now also to H-JUDAICA.

The most usual reason seems to be either that people have been away for a while, and then the old postings are lost, or that my postings are too long. In the future, I would greatly appreciate it if you would not lose my postings just because the list cannot be produced for a week or two, and I would greatly appreciate it if no one ever again told me the untruth that my postings were too long. I have been reading every posting for at least a year on mail-jewish, and I've recently been reading everything on H-JUDAICA. There are many postings that run several pages. Surely, it is dishonest to continue to tell me that my postings are too long.

If and when there is something in the CONTENT or form of my postings that is inappropriate, please let me know so I can correct that.

While I am not associated with any academic institution or yeshiva, I work for a non-profit educational foundation, which is in every regard both morally and legally equivalent to any other educational institution.

I have been working in my field of research for nearly 30 years, and my findings are as coherent, consistent, and fact-based as anything being published in the academic or religious world.

If the ideas I present are too complex, or too disturbing for some people, please say so. It is my intention to open a dialog on the issues I present, and not to continually sweep them under the rug because they are inconvenient (because of length or content) for some persons.

My work has been informally reviewed by name-brand scholars and rabbis, and while it is certainly a work in progress and certainly speculative, it is consistent with academic and rabbinic views. I always label my speculative and unreviewed work as such; I always offer backup references and supportive materials. Hopefully, I have learned to avoid flaming when insulted, and hopefully, I am learning to couch my discussions in language that is not offensive, and is understandable to a wide range of your readership.

While posting materials in libraries is fine, it is not a substitute of a timely posting of a submission to an ongoing discussion. In fact, posting to a library is the equivalent, in most cases, of disappearing the material in a polite way.

Please contact me directly so that we can discuss these matters and work out a protocol that is acceptable to your needs and my needs.

Please do not misunderstand my passion here. While I admit that I am easily personally insulted, this is not my motive for insisting that my postings appear. Hardly a week goes by without hand wringing over the loss of Jews by assimilation, and over the feuds between the academic, the orthodox, and the secular. I am sorry if Kabbalah scares people or has a bad name. AFTER ALL, so does the word "Jew" in some quarters. The work that I am attempting to present can potentially demonstrate to Moslems, Christians and Jews that they have much in common and can respect each other without compromising their own positions. This work also has the potential of demonstrating a direct relationship between physics and consciousness, so it may also provide a link of respectful understanding between the academic/secular and the religious perspective.

What I am attempting to present may not be entirely correct in its current form, but the basic findings will stand. Surely, a rediscovery of the roots of our alphabet and of a functional science of consciousness in the western traditions is worth space on your lists, and the time and effort on the part of moderators and audiences to understand it.

Please, please, please, let us square this away so that we can get on with building a world in which we can all live. If not us, who? If not now, when?⁶³

Over the next few days, members of the editorial board discussed the issue of sending Anonim's posts to the website rather than the list itself. In many ways the discussion was abstract, for the most part dealing with the development of a policy on how to handle long posts. While Zahavy continued to express the minority opinion in support of long posts, Judith Baskin wrote most clearly for the majority on March 1:

I would argue that the list is a place for queries (and responses to those queries) which have relatively broad interest for our subscribers; similarly there is a place on the list for brief individual statements on topics of Judaic studies interest and for the discussion such statement might prompt.

However, the list, at least in my view, is not intended as a forum for individual research or theorizing. If I have an elaborated idea I wish to share with my peers I will attempt to publish it in a place – probably an appropriate journal or as a book – where I hope others interested in the topic will read it. I accept that my article/book will undergo some sort of peer review and possibly have to be appropriately revised by me before it appears in print, and I accept that there is a value to this process.

Perhaps the list should make clear that it is not a forum for individual research as such and that the authors of such material should seek a more appropriate arena.⁶⁴

⁶³ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, February 29 1996.

⁶⁴ Baskin, Edboard-judaic Archives, March 1 1996.

Despite the editorial board debate, when Abe Anonim responded with another longer-than-average message to a note on Creation by Arthur Waskow on March 9, I allowed it out to the list, even though it continued the same theme as before, namely, explaining some topic through an examination of letter sequences. However, this time, Anonim's message was followed by a short note attacking his ideas. It also asked that the list not continue to post them. The second note was forged, but I allowed it out anyway.⁶⁵

Anonim, in part, wrote:

There is a teaching that all of Torah is in the first letter of the text. If you cannot figure it out from the first letter, HaShem, in His infinite mercy, repeats the same message in the first word, the first paragraph, the first section, etc., etc. This is an hierarchical array. Bet is the first letter of Torah. Bet is a "house". A house archetypally separates inside from outside - a primary dichotomy. Mathematicians have rigorously proven that all of formal mathematical logic can be derived from the distinction between inside and outside. (see G. Spencer Brown, Laws of Form, quotation below)...⁶⁶

To which Jeff Cohen replied, the next day:

I found the recent kaballistic explanation of creation to be little more than the same kind of pseudo-religious psycho-babble produced by L. Ron Hubbard. This is not meant as a flame, but a legitimate criticism of the inclusion of kaballah within scholarly Judaic studies. Personally, I could care less what people choose as their religious practice, but I do not think it qualifies as legitimate scholarship. That it is not to say that the study OF kaballah AS a religious practice is not legitimate. But the use of it in the guise of scholarship raises concerns for me.

I am curious what others think?⁶⁷

⁶⁵ There was no such user as "Jeff Cohen <jcohen@lawvm2.ucla.edu>"

⁶⁶ Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, March 9 1996.

⁶⁷ Cohen, H-Judaic Archives, March 9 1996.

This touched off a massive debate on the list about the place of Kabbalah in Jewish Studies, and elicited the following note from Baskin the next day:

Avi: sorry to be critical, but I must agree with Jeff Cohen's remarks re: the most recent Abe Anonim stuff -- I had really thought that after all of our discussions about quality and brevity that we weren't going to have to deal with that kind of thing anymore.⁶⁸

To which I responded:

Judith, you are right, I caved, that's the simple truth of it. Abe Anonim had taken to writing me very very long messages about list policy, censorship, etc. I wished not to offend, so I told him, bottom line, his posts MUST be 3 screens or less. He sent me such a note.

I figured that I would let the membership do the talking, and I was right, Cohen sent something the next day, and I have four responses to his note, which has removed the focus from the actual Anonim theory, to the issue of whether it was acceptable as scholarship.

In this case, I think I have survived by the skin of my teeth, and a little luck. In writing to me, Ancnim has made it clear that he feels my failure to post his original articles was "personal." He did not seem to accept the concept of "community standards." I think that YOUR/OUR desires to encourage brevity and quality will now be borne out as the "community" writes to express its desires.

Judith, I apologize for allowing it. However, perhaps, this will prove to be a lesson not unlike the child who touches the hot stove for Mr. Anonim. Once burnt, etc.

There is at least one member of this board who has written me privately in support of Abe's work.⁶⁹ Let me state again. This is not personal, nor an attack on his work. I, myself, have little time to evaluate its scholarship.

⁶⁸ Baskin, Edboard-judaic Archives, March 10 1996.

⁶⁹ It was Avrum Goodblatt, but I have no documents to prove it.

That will ultimately be up to all of you and the membership to decide. Let me also add that not all the posts agreed with Cohen.⁷⁰

I was wrong that he would change his method of corresponding with the list. Anonim made his next contribution, on a completely different topic, but still using his same approach, just three days later. This time, however, I edited his submission before posting it to the list. And again, unfortunately, he was angry, and again he wrote to me, and again I responded with a copy of the correspondence sent to the editorial board.

Anonim,

Perhaps, if you understood our findings you might better appreciate my anger. (...And, no thank you, I do not need lessons in "this new medium". It may be new to you. It is not new to me and I do not need polite put-downs. Do you understand that I take your cool quasi-polite responses as an insult?)

Hyman

Well now, Abe, YOU are angry? I am angry too. Frankly, you DO need lessons in this new medium. This is obviously not only my observation, but, given your example from mail-jewish, the observation of other moderators. It is not new to me, and it is what I do professionally. I am not QUASI-polite. I was 100% polite, trying to help in a sharing, learning environment. You have chosen to disregard it. Fine. I am willing to admit my mistakes and learn from them, Abe <see below, for example>. You, on the other hand, have NOT ONCE taken any responsibility for the current situation. You have steadfastly refused to accept that there are standards, you have made little attempt to fit in them, and have made little attempt to adjust your "teaching" style to this medium.⁷¹

And, as usual, the editorial board responded, with growing impatience, to Anonim's continued contributions and the nature of his responses to editorial decisions. However, over the next few weeks, some sort of equilibrium seemed to fall into place. Anonim

⁷⁰ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, March 10 1996.

would contribute a posting, I would edit it down and frequently add a line telling other members they could get more information directly from him. The equilibrium was short-lived. At the end of March, Anonim attempted to work within the editorial policy of shorter postings by breaking up a contribution on his theories into several smaller pieces. He was again rejected, and this time invoked his wife Sarah as mediator. While we discussed the rejection off-list, Anonim continued to respond to other threads throughout April and into early May. In just over a two-month period he made more than 10 contributions to the list. And then, on May 18, 1996 the situation reached a crisis. A series of notes on the H-Judaic list which I allowed out, perhaps in a momentary lapse in moderator judgement, escalated the situation. The first was a short note by Abe Anonim. That was followed by a note critical of Anonim, to which I, probably mistakenly, added an editorial comment which was further critical of Anonim.

From: Abe Anonim

Subject: Judaism: Belief or experience

There is one place where we certainly disagree. We are definitely not the same sort of Jew. When you say (in private correspondence) "...I already accept it as an act of faith...", I hear Islam - submission - and not Judaism. I suppose that most Jews these days _accept_ Judaism as an act of faith - and _in a way_, I do too. The difference between faith based on Islam, submission, and faith based on Torah, is that Torah was witnessed by the whole nation AND because the experience of those who witnessed at Sinai is available to persons today.

- AND this experience is not only gained from ritual and prayer with feeling. THE experience that distinguishes Judaism is the meditational/prophetic experience as it is known in Judaism - and as it has been practiced by our tzaddikim since the giving of Torah. The sages of the Great Assembly and of the Mishneh included persons who had been _spiritually_ up Mt. Sinai with Moshe; they included those who had the PaRDeS experience. They also included persons who could understand and re-experience what Ezekiel writes of, etc.

⁷¹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, March 15 1996.

The superstitious "Islamic"-Judaism of "simple" faith that is popular today fears, ridicules, and hides from these experiences. I believe that as long as this is so, Jews, Judaism, and Israel will be in danger. Only when we regain the heavenly Jerusalem can we truly regain and hold the physical city of Jerusalem - in peace.

I am opposed to true-belief and to true non-belief. I see both as the same superstition and the same idolatry. I am a scientist. I believe in experience and experiment. I believe that our sages were also scientists. They may have recommended "simple" faith to those who could not muster more, but I believe our sages would have considered "simple" faith a form of idolatry when practiced by an educated person.

Of course, I do not believe that you would allow these subjects to be discussed on your list.⁷²

The next day, Rebecca Lesses, then a visiting scholar at Cornell University, responded:

From: Rebecca Lesses <rml17@cornell.edu>

Subject: attack on Islam

While on this list we may debate scholarly issues about the study of Judaism, I don't believe we should be engaged in insulting the nature of other people's religious beliefs, either Jews or non-Jews. I am responding to <the previous poster>'s remarks on "belief and experience." He distinguishes faith based on "Islam, submission" and faith based on Torah, as if "Islam," or submission to God (either the religion or the principle), was in itself a bad thing. Now, there is a history of the exaltation of faith in Judaism itself -- look only at the insistence of many Hasidic masters on the importance of "bitachon" or "emunah." I also think that it is not appropriate on a list of this sort, which is striving not to engage in religious polemics, to insult the way of another religion, in this case, Islam. <the previous poster>'s remarks about Islam do not indicate the kind of respect that I think is demanded in a forum of this type.

And, to Lesses' note I attached the following qualifying preamble:

editor's note: I want to apologize for sending out an un-edited note yesterday which contained an attack on the religion of Islam. It is our community policy not to allow such material, and I want to apologize to

⁷² Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, May 18 1996.

you all and especially to any members of our group who are adherents to Islam. Below is Prof. Lesses' note, which summarizes why the earlier post was offensive.⁷³

As would have been expected, Abe Anonim was not pleased and let me know it in no uncertain terms.

One month later I post the following apology to the main H-Judaic discussion list, and four days after that, on June 16, 1996, Abe Anonim quit the list.

Subject: clarification administravia

There may have been some mis-understanding regarding our community policy on attacking other faiths. The policy is this: There will be an attempt not to post messages that attack other faiths or other persons. However, given the human component to this endeavor, sometimes something is missed and it gets by, or if re-read after posting, and if there was a mistake in posting, responsibility is taken.

Over the last month or so, there has been quite a bit of private correspondence with several list members over an exchange that occurred on our list. There are several people who feel that the exchange might have been too personal and possibly even hurtful to several people on both sides. We should all be very proud of our community-building via this list, and would not want anyone to be hurt by anything.

In particular, there was an exchange that took place in which a reference to Islam was taken to be hurtful by some. This post and was let go, because the thrust of the note was elsewhere and that thrust was worthwhile, and only later, were there second thoughts about it, in the face of some criticism. In the ensuing exchange several feelings were apparently hurt on both sides, which of course goes against the objectives of this community. Unfortunately, as a result, the true thrust of the comments were de-contextualized and lost. This letter is to ensure that the air is clear and that hurt feelings are healed on the part of ALL involved.

Regarding Abe Anonim's note before Shavout, it was not written to attack Islam. The main thrust of his comments were:

⁷³ Lesses and Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, May 19 1996.

"... THE experience that distinguishes Judaism is the meditational/prophetic experience as it is known in Judaism - and as it has been practiced by our tzaddikim since the giving of Torah. The sages of the Great Assembly and of the Mishneh included persons who had been spiritually up Mt. Sinai with Moshe; they included those who had the PaRDeS experience. They also included persons who could understand and re-experience what Ezekiel writes of, etc.

... I am opposed to true-belief and to true non-belief. I see both as the same superstition and the same idolatry. I am a scientist. I believe in experience and experiment. I believe that our sages were also scientists. They may have recommended "simple" faith to those who could not muster more, but I believe our sages would have considered "simple" faith a form of idolatry when practiced by an educated person. ..."

To which Abe recently added, in part:

" I have nothing but the highest respect for Islam, and I believe it is a valid path. My post was to indicate that Judaism and Islam are distinct, not that one is greater or lesser than the other.

... By my posting, I was attempting to engage debate on the difference between superstitious and experiential belief. I was referring not to Islam, the religion, but to the meaning of the word. For (anyone) to presume a prejudicial intent or meaning, is as extreme a perversion of my thoughts as I could possibly imagine. As I think I have a right to assume all on this list must know, Islam, like Judaism, also has an experiential, as well as a superstitious, component."

There is great interest in Abe's ability to shed light on the junction between Judaism the faith and scientific discovery. The exchange that took place, while understandable from a human interpersonal perspective, unfortunately completely detracted from the very worthwhile points Abe had been trying to make.

The moderator's responsibility is to ensure a cooperative and learning environment here on the list, as well as one that is open to constructive, caring criticism, for Abe, the other parties in the debate, and every one of you. This note serves as a pledge to re-affirm that commitment through actions, not just words.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, June 16 1996.

The intervening month was perhaps the worst month I ever experienced in five years as moderator and editor of H-Judaic. It began immediately, for just one day after the Lesses posting, both Anonim, and his wife, wrote separate letters which I forwarded to the editorial board.

Abe Anonim:

Unless you are referring to a posting other than my posting, your editor's note is a blatant lie. Sarah and I have your email correspondence. As you recall, you inquired as to whether I wanted this posted. If there was no editing, you are the editor who saw fit to make none.

I expect a full posted apology and explanation.

I think you're a sick person. I think you set me up. I think you are unaware of the consequences of public slander, no matter how carefully couched in academic inanity -- I am referring to your ass-covering footnote, that attempts to make your obvious slander of me a matter of policy.

By my posting, I was attempting to engage debate on the difference between superstitious and experiential belief. I was referring not to Islam, the religion, but to the meaning of the word. For you, or Lesses, to presume a prejudicial intent or meaning, is as dirty, sick, and bigoted a perversion of my thoughts as I could possibly imagine. As I think I have a right to assume all on this list must know, Islam, like Judaism, also has an experiential, as well as a superstitious, component. But I was not discussing Islam, and you knew that.

Avi, I expect a phone call. If I don't get a phone call, you can expect me to take action. Don't play around here. I strongly advise you to act as if you believe that I believe my life depends on this. When you advertise to your academic subscribers that I am a bigot, you destroy any possibility that these people will take the time to look at my work. Again, I say, I hope you understand the consequences of public slander. I hope you

understand that this is an exceedingly serious matter to me, and that you have crossed all lines of responsible behavior.

Call me today, immediately.

Sarah Anonim:

I am disappointed, to say the least, that this exchange has become necessary. Avi, no matter what you thought of Abe's posting, no matter what you think of his point of view -- or *anyone's* for that matter -- you do have an obligation, as moderator, to be careful of the reputations of those people on your list. Deleting Abe's name from Ms. Lesses' posting which in effect calls him a bigot deludes no one, as I am sure you are intelligent enough to know.

I have separate issues with Ms. Lesses -- she should have sent us email first, or asked for a public clarification before assuming bad will, bigotry, or whatever. BUT THEN, SO SHOULD YOU.

As a moderator, the *courteous,* *responsible* action for you to have taken, once you saw that Abe's posting was being interpreted as bigoted, was for you to *forward* Lesses' response to us, *privately,* and ask for a clarification to be posted publicly, and tell Ms. Lesses that you were doing that. (She should have done the same, but that *is* a separate issue, one we have with her, not you.)

Now, you have a public problem on your hands, which no-one intended, but which now exists. Ms. Lesses, who has already gone on record as being opposed to the very basis of our work, has publicly called Abe a bigot. (As I said, your removing his name fools no-one.) A public retraction is necessary. You cannot make this purely a "policy issue." A reputation *is* a personal issue. Period.

As I said, this didn't need to happen. The way to "get yourself out of the middle" in this case is to ensure that these matters are clarified *privately*, FIRST.⁷⁵

My reaction was to prepare the apology that eventually appeared one month later, but the issue first had to percolate through the editorial board. Backon was the first to comment, which, in turn, elicited a defense of Anonim by Goodblatt. However, it was Sarna who gave voice to the majority opinion:

I would resist the temptation to respond to Mr. Anonim's diatribe. My suggestion is that you permit him to send a brief clarification if he believes that his message was misunderstood by you and Ms. Lesses. Make clear to him that his message may not exceed in length that of Ms. Lesses, and that it may not deal in personalities, only in substance. You can even write to him impersonally, saying that you have consulted the board and it authorizes you to...." Finally, you may want to remind him that nobody is obligated to remain as a member of this list and that if he feels it has treated him unfairly you will certainly understand if he elects to unsubscribe.⁷⁶

Similar sentiments were expressed by other board members, particularly Schine Gold and Baskin, which again elicited defensive responses from Goodblatt. Goodblatt himself took to writing directly to Anonim, in an attempt to mediate. However, this only had the affect of postponing the eventual apology note.

Having not received direct approval for the apology note from the editorial board, I wrote to Anonim informing him that the editorial board's decision was to ask him to write a rebuttal, rather than receive a formal apology letter. He did not accept that. And, ironically, he attempted to post another long note on another topic on May 27, right in the midst of the on-going crisis; his note was rejected by the board. And thus it went for more than a week without resolution. Then on June 10, Sarah Anonim wrote on her husband's

⁷⁵ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, May 20 1996.

⁷⁶ Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, May 21 1996.

behalf to complain that I had allowed other lengthy posts out on to the list. To Sarah I wrote:

you're right. Another example is one by Abe Anonim on January 11, over 200 lines (that's about 6 pages, right?) I recall another in March that was about 3 pages long. Abe, if you detect a little annoyance in my tone, then you are correct; and it is the first time in all of our dialogue that I have been annoyed. Abe, I thought we decided mutually that we were setting up a system that was fair to both of us. Please write as many posts as you like about whatever topic you like and send them to me via Avrum and we'll post them. I think this is fair, don't you?

And to the editorial board I pleaded:

I would like to be rid of the problems Mr. Anonim keeps writing me about (and now our chair). He has accepted the wording of the note below. I believe this is acceptable to me, as it does not directly admit to slander on my or anyone else's part. PLEASE, I want to send this today or tomorrow, please please let me know if it is ok?⁷⁷

That same day, June 14, 1996, Tzvee Zahavy announced his resignation as Chair of the editorial board, and within twenty-four hours, Zatzman had nominated Jonathan Sarna to be the new Chair. The next day I posted the apology letter and on June 16 Anonim quit the list:

Well, I took my own advice - and all of yours - and spent Shabbos re-appraising the situation. I believe that I have had my say. There will be no more messages from me. I hope you (all) can understand that Zahavy's evaluation of me leads me to believe, reciprocally, that your leader is a dangerous and unwell person. I am nevertheless accepting Zahavy's invitation to leave you.

You (all) by your ineptness (Avi Hyman), presumptiveness (Ms. Lesses), and arrogance (Zahavy) have injured me. You did it politely - as is the way of persons in power when dealing with those out of power - but,

⁷⁷ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, June 13 1996.

polite or not, you have caused me public injury. The use of civility as a weapon to defame is just as noxious as incivility. The damage is the same. The only difference is that the "polite" way enables the "polite" persons to rationalize that they have not injured.

Thank you (Avi) for finally posting your (Avi Hyman's) corrective statement to the list. Please also post it to the archives (i.e., make sure it is included in the archives of daily H-Judaic digests). That ends this matter as far as I am concerned.

Now that you know my feelings, now that you are on notice that there is a direct challenge to intellectually dishonest and anti-semitic Judaic studies, now that I have learned that you are not capable of understanding the damage your polite club does, I will leave you all alone.

I am sorry that it was necessary for me to use loud and offensive language in order for the pain and damage your actions have caused to be heard. In the past, when I have shouted and then apologized, I have often regretted apologizing. I have learned that bureaucrats, like politicians, usually accept an apology as a sign of weakness and often attack further when given the chance. Nevertheless, I would like to apologize for my offensive behavior. It was intended to be measured and not a whit more than reciprocal. But, it is done. I regret that it happened and I apologize for my part.

These were far more serious matters than I think you ever considered. I work for a tax-exempt educational non-profit that is legally (if not in fact) equivalent to the schools you attend and teach at. I could have sued for slander. I could have demanded administrative sanctions from your schools. (Even if no action would have been taken, the paperwork you would have had to have dealt with would have been daunting.) I could have filed complaints with the philanthropic and public organizations that provide you with funds. (What do you suppose the chintzy Republican governor of N.J. would do to Judaic Studies funding at Rutgers if there were a public reaction? As all politicians know, it is much easier to poison waters than to clean them.)

There are many avenues by which I could have "gotten even." BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE IN GETTING EVEN. I may shout (in writing) when I am hit, but I leave real action to HaShem. Nevertheless it is fortunate and I am grateful that Avi did post his corrective note this morning. So, none of you have anything whatsoever to fear from me. I will not bother you further. You (Lesses, Zahavy) win.

You (all) do have much to fear from my work. I have the data and when I can present it in a sufficiently robust manner, I will. (But I will not likely waste my efforts on Judaic Studies professionals again. "Once bitten, twice shy.")

Over this Shabbos I reread a good deal of the published writings of Moshe Idel and Yehuda Leibes and a few others. Their scholarly efforts are truly monumental and rightly impressive. Unfortunately, their evaluations of the materials they themselves present are so wrong-headed as to be laughable. ... And, eventually, the public will laugh. Would that it were not so. Would that those who have labored so long and lovingly would not have to see their efforts laughed at simply because their colleagues would not pass on the data they needed to finish their works and crown their careers with honor. (I know I may be wasting my words by suggesting it, but if any of you want to see the data, I will show it to you. Just ask. - I won't hold my breath.)

Again, I apologize for my part in these unpleasantries and I ask you (all) for forgiveness for any negative aspersions on your good intentions and character(s) that might have been inferred from my statements. I meant to condemn only your actions, not your beings.⁷⁸

As one member of the board summed up:

Anonim's leaving ? What's the blessing ? BARUCH SHEP'TARANU ? :-)

The first time I saw that Anonim tried to post a *paper*, I immediately suggested to other members of the board that it NOT be included. All we

⁷⁸ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, June 16 1996.

had to do is state that his message is simply inappropriate to the aims and scope of a scholarly list.⁷⁹

In the end, the issues that overtook our interactions with Abe Anonim were of the conventions of scholarship. Unfortunately Anonim did not operate within the standard or understood codes, rules and boundaries of Jewish Studies discourse. This, in and of itself did not make his scholarship illegitimate. Nonetheless, as I sought to bring the organization into the Jewish Studies mainstream, I probably had little tolerance for what I perceived to be the marginality of his work, rightly or wrongly.

Jensen Revisited - the Aborted Brandeis Contract

While the Anonim Affair was unfolding, another confrontation with Richard Jensen was brewing. By the start of 1996, it had become apparent to me that in order for H-Judaic to succeed as an organization, it would need to secure an academic home, and eventually, a funding source. On its own, it would not be able to raise funds to pay a staff or produce proper newsletters. Having earlier failed to secure AJS endorsement, I raised the potential of a Brandeis University affiliation with Jonathan Sarna. This was made even more urgent when, during the year, the Shamash Project began to experience serious administrative and technical difficulties that compromised the newsletter listserv. In March of 1996 I approached Sarna for advice. He recommended I write a formal proposal which he would bring forward to officials at Brandeis. I prepared the proposal and sent it to Sarna on March 26, asking to house the newsletter on a Brandeis computer; the proposal did not ask for funding. Over the course of the summer, I exchanged a number of phone calls and faxes with Judith Sizer, associate general counsel of Brandeis regarding the preparation of a contract between H-Judaic and Brandeis. On September 9,

⁷⁹ author's name withheld, Edboard-judaic Archives, June 16 1996.

1996, Sizer sent me a copy of an agreement to affiliate H-Judaic with Brandeis University, signed by Irving Epstein, senior provost and vice president of academic affairs, and Antony Polonsky, chair of the department of near eastern and Judaic studies at Brandeis.⁸⁰

Unfortunately and in a serious oversight, all of this was done without the consultation of the editorial board or Richard Jensen. On September 19, Sarna sent a memo to the editorial board outlining the proposal. The proposal was met with an unexpected, and verbose discussion by members of the editorial board. And just as it seemed to pass the board's muster, Jensen interrupted the discussion, and flatly rejected the offer, thereby, once again, enforcing his personal will on the evolution of H-Judaic.⁸¹

Sarna, September 19, 1996:

Fellow Board Members, Shanah tovah,
Not long ago we dealt with two administrative matters that were related. As a reminder, they were:

- (1) To run two connected lists; one as an H-Net discussion group (H-Judaic) and the other as a formal professional newsletter (our Shamash list).
- (2) Given the recurring stability issues with the Shamash server, that we explore alternatives for the newsletter.

Regarding item 1, I believe we have begun to achieve a proper and effective synergy between the two lists, and our effectiveness will continue to grow as we move beyond our first seven years.

⁸⁰ Sizer, 1996

⁸¹ What follows is a synthesis of the board's open conversation of the Brandeis issue. I offer the string of discussion uninterrupted for two reasons. One, because it speaks for itself on the actual topic, and two, because it serves as a good example of how this new conversational medium lends itself to both scholarly and administrative discussions.

It is also my pleasure to inform the board that pertaining to item 2, we have come up with a very realistic solution that not only solves our stability issues, but serves to provide us with a concrete academic setting for the newsletter. Brandeis University has offered to host the newsletter!

Providing you approve, Avi will sign an agreement between himself and Brandeis, in which he agrees to continue his work, and in which Brandeis agrees to give its name and computer support to the publication. Additionally, Brandeis would appoint the board chair, who would in turn, set-up and maintain the board, which would oversee the publication in much the same way we do now.

According to my records, the following people are members of the current board: Henry Abramson, Josh Backon, Lewis Barth, Judith Baskin, Herb Basser, Bernard Cooperman, Nathan Ehrlich, Yossi Galron, Penny Schine Gold, Avrum Goodblat, Joseph Haberer, Guy Haskell, Howard Joseph, Yitzchak Kerem, Richard Menkis, Jim Mott, Leslie Train, Tzvee Zahavy, Belarie Zatzman, and Reena Zeidman. Richard Jensen of H-Net serving ex-officio.

Given the importance of this decision, I think that it would be appropriate if we heard from EACH ONE OF YOU. I look forward to the discussion.⁸²

Ehrlich, September 19:

Item 2 of Jonathan Sarna's recent memo to the board pertains to stability issues with the Shamash server.

I would like to begin the discussion by contributing the following information. During the past few weeks Shamash itself has been in the process of moving to a new server and new management. Its new electronic home is Utopia, an international Internet company, with headquarters in Waltham, MA. Its CEO is David Solomont who has come forward with significant resources that will provide Shamash with a stable base of operations. Shamash's administrative home will be Hebrew

⁸² Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

College, which is establishing a Center for Information Technology that will undertake research and development for the project.

Should the group decide to stay with Shamash, Hebrew College will be happy to provide an electronic and academic setting for the newsletter.⁸³

Baskin, September 19:

Yes, it sounds like a great idea to move to Brandeis, but like some of my colleagues, I don't have enough information to evaluate the pros and cons of the decision. What would be long term implications, if any, after Jonathan's chairmanship? What role would Brandeis have in making appointments to the board? A presentation of the larger picture would be helpful -- ie: need for and advantages and disadvantages of the proposed move vs. the alternatives.⁸⁴

Menkis, September 19:

I very much support doing all to ensure that this enterprise survives. If it means going to Brandeis, let it so be. But I agree with Judith-we need to know the details of the contract with Brandeis, to make sure that we are getting a more secure deal. It does sound very promising.⁸⁵

Haberer, September 19:

Go ahead with turning over to Brandeis. Sounds like a good move. But let us see the details of the written agreement before such a deal is finalized.⁸⁶

Haskell, September 19:

Interesting proposal. I think we need a little clarification on "Brandeis would appoint the board chair." Who at Brandeis? Using what criteria? Why wouldn't the board choose its own chair? I think it is important that

⁸³ Ehrlich, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁸⁴ Baskin, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁸⁵ Menkis, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁸⁶ Haberer, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

these issues be spelled out specifically, and that a formal proposal be presented to the board.⁸⁷

And Sarna again, September 19:

I am grateful to those who have commented on the too-brief message concerning the proposed arrangement with Brandeis to serve as a locus for the Newsletter. Let me offer some further details.

Last May, Avi approached me with the concern that the Newsletter would not be able to continue under its then arrangement with Shamash. He felt that an academic affiliation would be good for the Newsletter and asked me if I would explore with Brandeis the possibility of its serving as "sponsor." Brandeis agreed to explore the question, and over the past few months a proposal was hammered out. This is the proposal that the Board is now being asked to consider.

I cannot copy all three pages and eleven points of the proposed agreement here, but the key points are as follows:

Brandeis agrees to serve as a locus for the Newsletter under condition that

(1) Avi serves as managing editor, continuing to do what he has done before.

(2) The Newsletter will appear regularly with the same features. Additional features are possible, but require board approval.

(3) The Board will be chaired by a Brandeis faculty member, designated by the University. Otherwise, the board has the same functions as at present.

(4) Brandeis will arrange for electronic transmission, computer storage, web pages and computer assistance. Brandeis will also absorb costs. Brandeis will review the agreement every six months to assess level of its costs.

(5) Brandeis policies with regard to publications and use of its logo must be adhered to.

(6-9) Clauses that deal with the university's lack of liability; copyright and other legal matters designed to ensure an arm's length relationship and the independence of the Newsletter.

10) Either party may terminate on 30 days' notice.

⁸⁷ Haskell, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

The main benefit to the Newsletter is the use of Brandeis computers for necessary technical matters and the association with a majority Judaic Studies department. In return, Brandeis has a certain say in the running of the Newsletter and the Newsletter falls under certain Brandeis rules (which we adhere to anyway; mostly aimed at prevent libel suits.)

I was very excited by this arrangement, because it seemed to offer the kind of security that we needed and also created a closer connection between the Newsletter and academy. I hope that the board is equally excited, and I will be glad to learn of your responses⁸⁸

Zahavy, September 19:

Good work! I endorse the proposal.⁸⁹

Kerem, September 20, early Israel time:

In general I agree, however i don't thnk that pres. of newsletter should be a Brandeis person forever. While I sponsor (agree wholeheartedly) that Jonathan Sarna serve as president, diversity and rotation are important and healthy. Perhaps we can request that one of board members or liaison person be a brandeis faculty person. This point is not cardinal, but i don't like hearing taht pres. has to be a Brandeis faculty meber. member. Excuse the typos.⁹⁰

Hyman, September 19:

First - let me say how pleased I am that Nathan and Hebrew College have stepped in to work on Shamash; the Jewish internet is FAR better for it.

Second - from a technical standpoint, there would be no computer problems for the users. In fact, I have not used the Shamash list for a few months. Any requests for subscription are diverted to the H-Judaic list manually and the newsletter is sent to every H-Judaic participant via a little list I rigged up on my home server (which has no Jewish Studies program).

⁸⁸ Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁸⁹ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁹⁰ Kerem, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

Third - our main support at Shamash has always been Avrum Goodblatt, who also happens to be a founder of this newsletter. Avrum has pledged to continue his support, an offer I am most happy to accept.

Fourth - thank you thank you thank you to all of you for your continued interest and effort in this project⁹¹

Galron, September 19:

I believe it is a good idea to transfer the H-Judaic Newsletter to an academic institution that has the ability and the power to support the computer needs and maintenance of a listserver.

I am not familiar with other lists that are housed at Brandeis, but I believe that Brandeis has the ability to support (that is technical support) of a listserver.

As to transferring a subscribers list from one host to the other - it was done in the past in several occasions and the subscribers didn't need to re-subscribe: it can be done automatically.⁹²

Kerem, September 20, again, early Israel time:

As judth mentioned, we must clarify wahat Brandeis role will be in future. Will the diverse members of board have input and say and steer the direction or is list open to manipulation and conrol control by Brandeis at a certain point?

It sounds as if the chair can disband and appt the board as he sees fit ... that already sets stage for potential manipulation. The board reflects diversity and variou active peopel in filed of Jewish studies and e-mail publications in Judiac studies. too much weight given to Brandeis and chmn.⁹³

Zatzman, September 19:

I, too, have a few questions— perhaps Jonathan could respond.

⁹¹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁹² Galron, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁹³ Kerem, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

What are the implications of such a contract? ie. does this move mean a shift from our function as an independent body to an in-house role (Brandeis)?

What might happen when controversial issues arise? eg. when the Board decides that it might want to do a feature on homosexuality and Judaism -- and Brandeis, as our host, does not wish to be represented by this content.

Is there an intention to maintain an arms-length sensibility, or by insuring that the Chair is drawn from Brandeis faculty, to dictate policy/procedure, etc.

I raise these issues in the spirit of discussion, and with the recognition that Brandeis would serve as a superb, permanent home for us.⁹⁴

Basser, September 19:

so they want to select their own board of distinguished scholars-- sounds like we might be getting a pig in a poke. avi if you send me the contract ill scan it and send it out to everyone. Why should we say yes to something that might not be what we want. were there any negotiations or did they say-- take it or leave it?⁹⁵

And Sarna, for a third time, September 19:

It is a tribute to the editorial board that members take their responsibilities to carefully. Let me respond to a couple of questions. First, Brandeis modelled the contract it sent Avi on numerous other arrangements it has with print publications that it sponsors, e.g. POLIN and PROOFTEXTS. In both cases, the university acts as sponsor in recognition of the fact that a faculty member is editor and in both cases the university reserves a variety of rights in order to protect itself, but in both cases it has, in fact, given its faculty member full autonomy. Were the faculty members involved to change their affiliation or resign their post, sponsorship would like shift to the home institution of the next editor (unless the person who succeeded likewise came from Brandeis.) So in this case: whenever the

⁹⁴ Zatzman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

⁹⁵ Basser, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

term of the Brandeis "chair" ends, the board can either approve another Brandeis person or move the newsletter. It would be unreasonable to expect the university to expend funds on any other basis.

There is no plan to change the composition of the editorial board at all. Nor will Brandeis intervene to determine the composition of the board. If it does, the board will doubtless serve notice and abrogate the arrangement.

I would, indeed, use the facilities of the Brandeis General Counsel to check on items that might (God forbid) result in a lawsuit or otherwise be potentially damaging. Obviously, the board would have the final say, but I cannot imagine that we would want to take any action deemed so risky, and if we did we would have to face the knowledge that Brandeis might abrogate the arrangement and we would need another home. Presumably, this will be true no matter who provides a home for us.

I want to make clear that neither I nor Brandeis have any desire to do anything that will damage the newsletter or subvert the wishes of the board. Brandeis very generous offer came in response to an overture from Avi and myself in an effort to ensure that the newsletter would continue and thrive. Should the board decide to turn the deal down, some of us will lament the time wasted, but there will be no hard feelings. For the good of the newsletter, I hope that the board embraces the Brandeis offer so that we can move expeditiously to implement it.⁹⁶

Goodblatt, September 20:

As Avi noted, I am the co-founder (together with Yehiel Greenbaum, who was the editor) of the predecessor to this list, as well as the founder of Shamash. Being involved in the transition of Shamash to Hebrew College, I have some knowledge of particulars of the situation which might be of use.

The projected transition to Hebrew College will be taking place upon the signing of an agreement by David Solomont, myself and the acting chairman. The proposal was written by my lawyer, the chairman has signed, and David has stated that with minor wording changes he will be signing on Friday. If the signing does happen within the next few days, as we all hope it will, Shamash will be moving forward with Hebrew College

⁹⁶ Sarna, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 19 1996.

its academic and administrative home, and Utopia providing technical guidance and support. I will be advising Shamash in a limited capacity, time permitting [since I will be employed this year in the commercial sector].

However, while the signing is likely to occur, it is not certain. But we expect outstanding issues to be resolved in the next couple of days. Assuming there is a signing, then there is a reasonable possibility that this new Shamash could be a viable home for the project.

Certainly Brandeis has a competent computer facility, and a more than competent Judaic studies facility. I myself cannot say which home would be the more useful for this project. There are pro's and con's to both. Whatever the home however, I would strongly recommend taking a serious look at how lists and other services are run, by talking with others who make intensive use of them. Following are some separate points to keep in mind, no matter where the project ends up.

Not all lists servers are the same, and neither is the support. I have never heard complaints about Brandeis, but in point of fact, I have heard from a good number of my friends at various universities that in practise it is not easy to get sufficient technical handholding where funds are being cut back. I would strongly recommend that Avi talk directly with computer operations at Brandeis if he has not already done so, and find out:

As Avi mentioned, wherever the project ends up I will continue to offer my time to advise and assist Avi (mainly on the technical side - which is why I rarely post to this list on editorial matters). I had envisioned Avi's list as the cornerstone of a series of Judaica online projects, which include Yitzhak Kerem's Sefarad newsletter, and the Hebrew language discussion group and hope that that idea still might bear fruit.

In my opinion, the key value Hebrew College or Brandeis has for this project is NOT the technical. It is possible that Utopia's capability is superior to Brandeis', with all due respect. But that is not the point. The point is that without more resources Avi will NOT be able to continue to expand what he has done, and the most cost-effective way to add

resources is of course student interns. IMHO whichever institution is willing to strongly assist in locating students to spend time assisting Avi is the one to go with, all other things being equal (i.e. assuming Shamash does continue to exist and that there is equivalent autonomy in either choice)⁹⁷.

Basser, September 20:

I have no doubt Brandeis means well and is being fair, that does not necessarily mean the deal is in our best interests until we know that it is. I will try and get the deal on the screen if my little hand scanner can do it—it should if the fax is very clear and sharp.⁹⁸

Baskin, September 20:

While I gratefully acknowledge Brandeis's generosity, like many of my colleagues I am concerned about the condition that the chair of the board must be a Brandeis NEJS faculty member, even after Jonathan's tenure. I have always liked the board's freedom from any institutional connection. I look forward to continued discussion of the pros and cons of this offer.⁹⁹

Cooperman, September 20:

I apologize for not having been available lately; it seems that you have been discussing important stuff, and my next comments may well be off the mark. Since I have not had time to log on the last week or more, and since I am now reading my mail backwards (i.e., most recent first), I am responding to the latest stuff about moving the list to Brandeis without having first checked out everything to make sure I understand. If this is useless, please feel free to disregard it. Third: I understand that Avi wants a new home for the list, that Brandeis has offered such a home, but that members of the board are worried about the implications which are not yet clear. I have checked with our systems people at the University of Maryland, College Park. They tell me that we are quite able and willing to host the list here. The only condition would be that a member of the

⁹⁷ Goodblatt, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

⁹⁸ Basser, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

⁹⁹ Baskin, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

UMCP faculty (me for example) would have to be the official owner of the list. This is a administrative arrangement; it would not imply any control over content of the list nor even that I hold office on the board. If this arrangement would help, please feel free to let me know and I will begin the process of making it happen.¹⁰⁰

Schine Gold, September 20:

Can we slow down a bit? I'm not sure I see the advantage of pursuing a connection with U. of Maryland before we've fully understood the situation at Brandeis. I think we maybe need a fuller analysis from Avi of the advantages of a university over Shamash, and then an analysis of the advantages/disadvantages of the arrangement offered by Brandeis. Here are another couple of concrete questions I find myself wondering:

Jonathan mentioned that if the chair of the editorial board were to later be someone not at Brandeis, it would make sense to move the newsletter to that person's institution. Maybe so, but what then if there's a chair whose institution is unwilling to take on this sponsorship? Or is it no big deal?

Avi, you asked Jonathan to look into this when the future with Shamash was uncertain. Has the situation with Shamash changed sufficiently that we don't need to look elsewhere? Or should we wait another month or so before making a decision?¹⁰¹

Hyman, September 20:

.... the real question at hand is: what do we see as the future for this publication?

Access to technical equipment is not the issue. A few months ago, when Shamash started to have trouble, I silently moved the newsletter off the listserv and used my local resources to mail it out. We can use the "new" Shamash, we can use Brandeis, we could use Maryland (thanks BC, by the way), we could probably even sneak out the newsletter on H-Net's computer, although Richard Jensen likes discussion groups better than

¹⁰⁰ Cooperman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

¹⁰¹ Schine Gold, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

newsletters (poke -> Richard <grin>). But it does not change the newsletter at all. And I suppose that's fine too, if that's what you all want.

However, maybe we should consider some change. Why? Well, let me ask you all ... what is it that we actually have now?

I collect some notes with items of a professional nature; compile them once in a while; and send them out. True, it gives me fodder for my thesis (which I neglect too much), and it has given me experience which I have used to secure a couple of employment opportunities. And really, that's it.

But if we think about it for a moment, the newsletter (NOT the discussion group - this debate has nothing to do with H-Judaic) could really be more - it could be a pioneering effort in electronic publishing in Jewish Studies; it could eventually be a repository for unique things, like syllabi, short book reviews and curricular materials, and so on. Sure these might be big dreams, maybe far in the relative future, maybe beyond all of our times with this project, but they are realistic, if we want them to be. How many Jewish Studies newsletters are there in print that publish the kind of wide range of professional materials we do? AJS? Twice a year? Queens College had one, does it still come out? We have a niche we can fill, this could be the "required" non-peered periodical in Jewish Studies. Why not? It's your choice.

But if we choose change, we need more help than we have received so far. We need more "yichus" than we get from a "Human Factors Specialist" working on his doctoral thesis in Jewish Studies (at least until I finish it and one of you hire me as faculty at your university <smile>). A different editor? Maybe? (Although, there weren't many takers before I picked up the "job" a few years ago <grin>). Thus, some kind of institutional affiliation could help. With respect to Shamash, Avrum did/does a wonderful job, but Shamash was never a Jewish Studies institution. Hebrew College is. Maryland has one. So does Brandeis. I had a chance to speak to the computer guys at Brandeis, and we can get all we need, including a full access web site.

Brandeis would also let me try and raise money, which I would have no hope of getting if I applied for grants with the project as it is now (opinion

not fact <grin>), even with all of you on board. I think I am being realistic, but I could be wrong. Why do we need money? I could use some, then my wife wouldn't be mad at me for spending so much time on this <grin>. But the truth is, we could use it to hire some kids to do some html/www work, get some things scanned, promote it to more scholars; etc. And mostly, move it towards the above mentioned dream. If we want to.

I want to, and that's why I worked on the contract terms with Jonathan, the Brandeis attorneys, and computer people. But we are in this together, so I need your support. Hope this clarifies my position.¹⁰²

Zatzman, September 21:

Thank you to both Jonathan and Avi for your thoughtful responses. As a consequence, I am much more comfortable (even with the awareness that we still have some things to work out with our new host) with the notion of change you propose. Clearly, it is change undertaken with some real vision and commitment. I also wish to thank my Board colleagues for jumping to protect and help shape this endeavour! My question, now, is: how do we proceed? Do we need to vote on our preference?¹⁰³

Zahavy, September 21:

Cooperman's offer made me think that there was something else to add to my endorsement of the move to Brandeis. We are surely giving Brandeis a gift. The ejournal is a valuable resource that has developed over several generations. Most institutions are thirsty for some internet presence of substance. We are offering a nice donation to a Jewish institution. Naturally, Cooperman would like to have it at Maryland and others on the board might consider having it at their institutions.

Having said all that... should we perhaps hold an auction? I disagree with Avi's overall humility. We have a commodity here that is of value. Can we "sell" it to the highest bidder. Having said that... I do not know if any member of this board is adept at business deals. I assume not. Thus my conclusion that it makes much sense that we take the journal et. al. and

¹⁰² Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 20 1996.

¹⁰³ Zatzman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 21 1996.

donate it to Brandeis. However... if there is some interest in taking these vehicles commercial, I do have one idea for a deal. I will not divulge much now. But think about the prospect and let us discuss it if there is some sympathy for the concept.¹⁰⁴

Goodblatt, September 22:

Avi's point about computer resources not being the problem is relatively correct. I.e. what is more important is more and better information and resources online...

However, even if it were true that Brandeis was not the best technical home for the newsletter, and that some other site would have more powerful technical resources and assistance, and even given that there may be unforeseen difficulties with moving, I believe that for the success of the newsletter there is NO choice but to have academic sponsorship. 3 institutions have expressed interest - Brandeis, Hebrew College and UofM. Since my cousin David preceded Bernie at UM and since he has extended help to the Judaica list almost as long as Tzvee has, of course I would take such an offer very seriously. In addition, from my own personal knowledge, UofM has an excellent computer capability, probably exceeding that of Brandeis'.

BUT - Brandeis and Hebrew College are probably much richer sources of possible student assistance, thanks to Boston. And after all, Jonathan has already taken on the job of chairman, so are links with Brandeis already building.

My only concern however is the fact that this places too large a burden on Avi to fulfill. As I know from personal experience, running a one-man project is one thing, finding and managing personnel and fund raising are quite another. Thus, I would say that whichever site offers a student NOW or VERY SOON would be the most important factor.¹⁰⁵

Ehrlich, September 22:

¹⁰⁴ Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 21 1996.

¹⁰⁵ Goodblatt, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 22 1996.

I wish to reiterate the optimism expressed in my last posting on this topic. We have every reason to believe that an agreement will be signed shortly enabling the transition of Shamash to a stable home at Hebrew College and Utopia Inc. The newsletter will thereby be assured uninterrupted service.

Perhaps we can approach the question of academic sponsorship from a different perspective. The academic community undoubtedly recognizes the significance of an on-line Jewish studies newsletter. Why not explore the potential for securing multi-institutional support for this endeavor without compromising its independence? Brandeis and Hebrew College (and other fine institutions such as the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland) have unique resources that can benefit the newsletter.

Brandeis is blessed with a high concentration of professors and students with much to contribute in terms of content, internships, etc. Hebrew College, in assuming responsibility for Shamash, has committed itself to harnessing evolving information technology for the advancement of Jewish education. The newsletter has much to gain from the research and development to be undertaken by the College's new Center for Information Technology in areas such as on-line conferencing, electronic publishing, etc.

A significant focus of Shamash's mission, as envisioned by its founder, Avrum Goodblatt, has been on facilitating cooperative ventures by Jewish institutions from across the spectrum. The Jewish studies newsletter (of which Avrum was also a founder) can be a prime beneficiary of this approach. I recommend that we explore the willingness of Brandeis and Hebrew College (and other institutions) to work together towards meeting the current and future needs of the newsletter. If this effort proves unsuccessful we can resume evaluating the pros and cons of a single institution adopting the newsletter.¹⁰⁶

Hyman, September 22:

¹⁰⁶ Ehrlich, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 22 1996.

I believe the offer from Brandeis does NOT exclude "joint" ventures, in fact, it leaves it up to the board to decide. For example, Henry has secured a possible offer from Florida for financial sponsorship towards the book review project; I see no conflict between Brandeis as "publisher" and other institutional involvement; I think it would be very nice if the Hebrew College IT program provided support - interns or grad assistance to help it along, for example ... Nathan's idea is wonderful, and it fits perfectly with the proposal.¹⁰⁷

And then - Richard Jensen, September 22:

Folks--
there are TWO operations that people are confusing.
The daily H-JUDAIC is an H-Net operation and it is not moving to Brandeis. Brandeis does not want it.

What will move is the occasional newsletter that Avi also edits. It will become a totally separate operation from H-JUDAIC (albeit with Avi editing both.) It will have a new and different editorial board, NOT this one.¹⁰⁸

Hyman's response to Jensen, September 22:

while the board may be "officially" different, it is VERY likely that anyone qualified enough to be on the H-Judaic board would be welcome on the newsletter board, if you get my drift ...¹⁰⁹

And Jensen's rebuttal, September 23:

No, very "unlikely." I'm not sure who posted the last message, but let's make it clear we're talking divorce here. Brandeis wants the Newsletter--OK, but it has to have an entirely different editorial board. If they want a private list for their new Newsletter board they will have to set that up too (H-J-EDIT is exclusively for H-JUDAIC's board--and is not available.)

¹⁰⁷ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 22 1996.

¹⁰⁸ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 22 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 22 1996.

Plus I think we should make a "no crossposting" arrangement as well. The Newsletter will not be affiliated with H-Net and therefore will not make use of internal HNET materials that become available because of the dual roles Avi is playing (as editor of both H-JUDAIC and Newsletter).

Mind you, H-Net didn't want this crazy divorce in the first place. We would much prefer to have Brandeis (or some school) cosponsor H-JUDAIC and the Newsletter both. Brandeis doesn't want H-JUDAIC, perhaps because it's afraid of legal liability. Maybe some other school will take them both?

Richard Jensen
Executive Director of H-net
which owns H-Judaic but not the newsletter¹¹⁰

And Hyman's September 24 counter-rebuttal:

let's slow down here, no one is talking divorce
I posted it - and I am not aware of any divorce being negotiated here at all; all we are really talking about is changing the server for the newsletter from Shamash to Brandeis - this in no way should affect the wonderful working relationship we have developed between the discussion group portion (H-Judaic) and the newsletter portion (Shamash/Brandeis)!¹¹¹

Zahavy, September 24:

If I am confused - then what about the rest of you? Richard's postings make some statements about things that either I missed or have not been put before us. Was Brandeis asked to co-sponsor the H-net side? Did they turn it down? What legal issues made them spurn this offer? Why does Avi say the boards can be the same? Why does Richard say they cannot? Currently, are we all on two boards? If so, should we now form two boards? Why not do that?

Anyway: Is this correct? H-Judaic stays with H-net. We are discussing the e-journal. That is now with both Shamash and H-net. We want to move

¹¹⁰ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 23 1996.

¹¹¹ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 24 1996.

that to Brandeis. Richard wants to forbid cross posting on the list and the journal. Can Richard do that? Are there any such?

Definitely I ask for a moratorium on signing any agreements until we can get chrystal clarity on these questions. In fact I put that out as a formal motion. If it is seconded, can we have a vote?¹¹²

Hyman, September 24:

I am very sorry that this has become too confusing. It is all very simple - I was simply looking for a nice replacement to Shamash.

As far as I know, no formal request was made of Brandeis vis-a-vis the discussion group. There are NOT currently two boards. As a reminder, before H-Net, there was a Jewish Studies listserv, first on Tel Aviv's computer, then on Minnesota, and finally on Shamash. When H-Net wanted to do a Jewish Studies discussion group, I volunteered to moderate H-Judaic too. For two years, the Shamash list and the H-Net list had identical material (a newsletter). Then we finally kicked off the discussion group, and saved the Shamash list for just the newsletter - the membership of each list is IDENTICAL!!! - for all practical purposes, they are the same service - use one list for discussing, and one for the newsletter.

The Jewish Studies situation is unique in H-Net - we are the only ones that have a discussion group AND a newsletter - I think the members like it like that - nice and organized! (In fact, I'll even ask them tonight). H-Net's mandate requires a discussion group, not a newsletter, however, our unique situation and history has proven successful. It is NO-ONE's intention to sever this working relationship - we just want a more stable server than Shamash. That's all.

Can Richard forbid us? Richard can do whatever he wants with H-Net, it's his project and he's worked very hard on it, so he has earned that right. So let me be very clear here, for you all and for Richard - we are in NO way going to compromise H-Judaic or H-Net, nor is there a divorce planned - we are SIMPLY looking for a better server than Shamash (has been). We are dedicated first and foremost to H-Net and Richard Jensen, and if push

¹¹² Zahavy, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 24 1996.

comes to shove, we will use that list only, but it is the intent of the Brandeis proposal to find a new server ONLY for the Shamash list so as to continue our fine tradition of serving our community.¹¹³

And then the final note on the matter, posted by Richard Jensen on September 24, after which the deal with Brandeis was dead:

folks--
 let's run the Newsletter off hnet's own server
 we just bought a nice one!
 and forget all about Brandeis.
 problem solved.... ????¹¹⁴

That was it. We only heard from Jensen one more time in relation to the administration of the organization. In January of 1997 he again provoked concern among board members with the regard to the status of Susan Casper, a student of Abramson in Florida, who volunteered to do some copy editing of the newsletter. As one board member wrote, "Richard is being quite obnoxious and unnecessarily intrusive." Later that year, after his election defeat as executive director of H-Net, he quietly slipped off the editorial list without comment. As in earlier disputes, he held the position that Brandeis should sponsor the entire operation, including the discussion group, in association with H-Net. And just as defensibly, Brandeis had no interest in assuming legal responsibility for the volatility of the discussion group format. Perhaps the worst aspect of the failed Brandeis contract was the disappointment it likely caused for Sarna. Or at least, this is what I perceived. I would spend the next year and a half trying to re-build his trust by running a streamlined operation before handing over the reins to Aviva Ben-Ur, a recent graduate of Sarna's, in May of 1998. These feelings were best expressed in a note I received during the height of the Brandeis contract crisis:

¹¹³ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 24 1996.

Fri., 20 Sep., 1996

Dear Avi,

I am somewhat taken aback at the response to our memo re Brandeis. I think that the ball now needs to move back to your court. I had understood that the newsletter was in crisis and I went to a great deal of time and trouble to help out. Now it seems that there is no crisis and there are lots of folks who would be pleased to help. Obviously, I would be pleased if the newsletter came to Brandeis; moreover, I think it is very wise to have a contract of the kind that Brandeis created rather than some vague relationship without a contract. But I have no desire to make an issue of this. So I suggest that you take a stand. (1) If you want to pursue the relationship with Brandeis, put the contract on the list, explain why YOU think it is desirable, ask for questions that we can both try and answer, and ask for an up or down vote. (2) If you want to pursue other options, set a deadline (two weeks?) for other written proposals from institutions (Nathan's proposal should come from Heb College, with David Gordis's assent) and let people vote. Be sure to let Judith Sizer know that she will hear then. (3) If on reflection you do not want to pursue Brandeis, write a VERY nice and apologetic letter to Sizer. Of course, the option of Brandeis will then disappear forever.

In retrospect, we should either have kept the board informed of this or decided that the administrative issues of this kind are not the board's province. I had not realized that you planned to go to the board for a vote until you wrote to me, and by then it was too late. Since it is so close to Yom Kippur, let me assure you that there are no hard feelings here, and I will be satisfied whatever happens. Shabbat Shalom and g'mar tov --
Jonathan¹¹⁵

I planted JNF trees in Sizer's honour as thanks for all her work, and then I filed the contract away, not looking at it again until the writing of this history.

¹¹⁴ Jensen, Edboard-judaic Archives, September 24 1996.

¹¹⁵ AH Moderator Papers. E-mail letters from Jonathan Sarna to Avi Hyman, September 1996.

Relinquishing control

From the end of September 1996 until January 1997, the running of the list returned to a fairly calm, normal state. Most issues that arose dealt directly with the content of actual postings rather than any specific over-arching administrative matters. In November the board discussed the practice of removing institutional postal addresses and phone numbers from items submitted to the discussion group.¹¹⁶ It was resolved at the discretion of the moderator to continue the practice for security reasons, although the majority of the editorial board was opposed to this practice. In and of itself, the issue was not all that important, except for the fact that, in hindsight, it was the first indication of the coming end of my duties as list moderator. Among the first actions the board took when I stepped down some 19 months later was to overturn the policy and publish institutional postal addresses and phone numbers included in discussion list posts.

In December, two-thirds of the editorial board convened for a short face-to-face meeting at the annual Association for Jewish Studies conference in Boston. Among the matters discussed were the academic level of the discussion discourse and the need for additional staff assistance for the moderator. The issue of the academic level was raised in response to several comments made by list participants during informal discussions at AJS with members of the editorial board. In particular, it was felt non-academics had begun to hijack the discussion in the direction of personal political and religious viewpoints and queries. It was resolved that the organization would officially adopt a policy to raise the academic level of the discourse by requesting list members to include reference to works already consulted in their research queries. On the other matter, it had become apparent that the duties of discussion moderator, newsletter editor and website manager were

¹¹⁶ This was not the practice for items contained in the newsletter.

beyond the capabilities of one person. This was especially compounded by the fact that I started a full-time position with the University of Toronto in January 1997 and I was expecting my first child at the end of March later that year.

As a result, in January 1997, Susan Casper, a student of Abramson's at Florida Atlantic University, came on board as an associate newsletter editor. As a result, several small administrative policies were adopted, including asking people posting apartment notices to voluntarily donate one dollar to provide an honorarium for Casper. It was also resolved that the newsletter would no longer carry generalist job postings, and focus exclusively on Jewish studies positions. Also in January, Abramson began to distribute commissioned book reviews to members. Books were supplied from publishers through H-Net, and Abramson forwarded them for review by members of the list who had volunteered to do the reviews.¹¹⁷ Originally, the reviews were distributed via the discussion group list; however, members found the length of the review disruptive, so, as of March 1997, the reviews began to appear as special issues of the newsletter.

In June of 1997, in response to my declining ability to handle all responsibilities, the idea of Goodblatt serving as the website manager again surfaced. Although it would take more than a year of coaxing, Goodblatt eventually assumed the responsibility, a role he continues in as of this writing. In early July, I developed a lingering cold, and the frequency of list activity declined. As a result, the idea of having a back-up moderator was raised by editorial board members. On July 22, 1997, Marsha Cohen joined the editorial board as a back-up moderator, although she did not fill that role in any significant way until the following December and January. In the meantime, the

timeliness of the material (or lack thereof) was again raised by editorial board members, and in particular Sarna felt the situation had begun to be untenable by the end of October of 1997.

February and March 1998 marks the start of the final period of my tenure as moderator of what had become the largest professional organization for academic Jewish Studies in the world. In February, in a message to the editorial board, I admitted that I needed help, and was becoming burned out as moderator. After some discussion, a letter was sent to members of the list the following month asking for volunteers. Among the more than a dozen respondents were Aviva Ben-Ur and Lorenzo DiTommaso, both of whom would move into leadership positions with the organization. Peter Margolis also responded, but he did not join the editorial team until a year later. Based on her past contributions to the list and her connection to Jonathan Sarna it was decided that Ben-Ur was the most likely candidate for the next discussion group moderator.¹¹⁸ DiTommaso, technically adept and savvy, was chosen the next editor of the newsletter.¹¹⁹ Ben-Ur joined the editorial board on April 6, 1998, and DiTommaso on May 8. On May 25, 1998, I announced my retirement as the discussion group moderator to members of the editorial board who unanimously approved Ben-Ur as the next moderator. At the end of July, DiTommaso became the official editor of the newsletter. I wrote the board.

my dear friends on the board,
I first want to thank Marsha for stepping in this weekend; it is wonderful to have her as a back-up when needed.

¹¹⁷ Twenty-three reviews were published in 1997 and 1998. By August of 1999, and additional 17 reviews had been published.

¹¹⁸ She had recently defended her doctoral thesis at Brandeis with Sarna as her supervisor.

¹¹⁹ DiTommaso was given the opportunity to produce a mock newsletter, and then a real issue as a test of his skills.

Second, I want to apologize for the fact that I have not publically discussed this matter with the board, but I am stepping down as moderator of H-Judaic after 5 and a half years.

Aviva Ben-Ur will be assuming the role, as the fourth moderator in our list's nearly 10 year existence. I know you will extend to her the same courtesy and assistance you have extended to me during the last five years. In a few minutes, I will flip the switch making Aviva the moderator, and thereafter, all new posts to the list will flow to her account. Marsha, Jonathan, Henry, and I will still have the ability to post directly to the list, but Aviva will be the main editor.

In order to assist in the transition, I will continue to handle the technical matters, such as new membership requests, and dealing with bounced messages. Marsha will, of course, continue as back-up moderator. When things are more settled for Aviva in her new role, I will solve our continuing Website problem and move to a more stable Newsletter solution.

Thank you for all the years. I hope to finish my thesis soon (as you all should know, my thesis is about H-Judaic). I also plan to do some behind the scenes work with H-Judaic.¹²⁰

Although this marks the end of the formal period of this history, a number of items should be further noted. In February and March of 1998, the issue of an AJS connection was again raised, and there was even an attempt to get some funds from H-Net so H-Judaic could sponsor a breakfast at the 1998 AJS conference. This idea passed without positive result.

There was one later attempt at an AJS connection. In October 1998, Sarna again attempted to make the connection. At that time Ben-Ur was looking for employment and was experiencing computer breakdowns that required a substantial amount of money to repair. Under the impression that AJS affiliation would aid the list's ability to raise funds, Sarna attended a meeting of the AJS publications committee, at which he made a

¹²⁰ Hyman, Edboard-judaic Archives, May 28 1998.

presentation on behalf of H-Judaic. The AJS again rejected the idea of affiliation. Some time later, an affiliation was forged between Hebrew College and H-Judaic, so that people making donations to the list could direct their moneys through the college. Hebrew College, it should be remembered, took over the Shamash Project in 1997.

Finally, mention should be made of the moderators who came after Ben-Ur. While DiTommaso, a doctoral candidate at McMaster University, continues to serve as newsletter editor, and even took over the role of book review editor from Ambramson, Ben-Ur's tenure as discussion group moderator lasted only about a year. In the summer of 1999, she accepted an appointment as the Cole Fellow at the University of Washington, and resigned her commission as moderator. I filled in until three new moderators were found who could assume the responsibilities on a rotating basis. They are: Charles Isbell, a professor at Louisiana State University, Anna Urowitz, a recent doctoral graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Faydra Shapiro, a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION GROUP AND NEWSLETTER

Until now we have examined H-Judaic: The Jewish Studied Network within an organizational history framework. While documenting this organizational history is valuable in understanding the creation and maintenance of its community, we need to look at the actual content of the discussion group and the newsletter to see the nature of the community. It is a nature that often transcends the scholarly disciplines and religious backgrounds of the individual members. In fact, I argue that it is most successful as a community structure when it does transcend these variables. This next section of the thesis will look at some samples of the conversations that have taken place within the H-Judaic discussion group and that demonstrate the breadth of the field, and an examination of the kinds of articles that have appeared in its newsletter. The period of investigation for this section of the thesis runs from October 1995 until November 1998. This period was chosen because it was a period of maturation in the organization's early history as reflected in the growth in membership, the commencement of the discussion group format, and the transition of moderator duties and newsletter editor to new staff mid-way through 1998.

Membership and Newsletter Facts

In 1994, in preparation for my paper on H-Judaic at the annual Association for Jewish Studies conference, I sent out an informal survey form to the list membership, in an attempt to put together some kind of profile of the constituency. At the time there were approximately 1200 members, and H-Judaic had not yet started the daily discussion group format, instead, only publishing the newsletter. 248 members responded, providing me with information about their levels of education, age, gender, employment, and areas

of specialization.¹ A breakdown of these results appears in chart form in the last chapter of the thesis.

Table 4.1

H-Judaic Membership Breakdown

| Membership by Narrow Specialization | Membership by Broad Specialization |
|--|---|
| European History | History |
| Religion, Theology, Rabbinics | Religion |
| Holocaust | other Humanities, Social Sciences |
| Bible, Biblical History | Sciences & Technology |
| Medieval History | Language & Literature |
| Computers | |
| Post-Pentateuch, 2nd Temple | |
| Library, Archives | |
| Women's Studies | Membership by Degree Status |
| History Americas | Doctorate |
| Literature Americas | ABD |
| Philosophy, Thought, Ethics | Masters |
| Hard Sciences, Math | Bachelor |
| Health, Social Work, Psychology | High School |
| European Literature | Rabbi |
| Education | |
| Art, Art History, Architecture, Music | |
| Yiddish, Yiddish Literature | Membership by Sex |
| MidEast History | Male |
| Sephardic Studies | Female |
| History [unidentified] | |
| Law | |
| Hebrew, Hebrew Literature | Membership by Age |
| Sociology | 0-29 |
| Anthropology, Archeology | 30-39 |
| Economics | 40-49 |
| Film | 50-59 |
| Political Science | 60-> |
| MidEast Literature | |

Among the respondents, 71 percent were male, the majority between the ages of thirty and sixty (78 percent), and a majority had post-graduate education (87 percent), with 68

¹ A twenty percent response rate

Discussion Group Facts

For the three-year period from its initiation in October, 1995 until November 1998, the discussion group had 5375 submissions.² Aside from an initial slight drop at the initiation of the discussion group format, membership in H-Judaic rose from just over 1400 individuals to just over 1800.

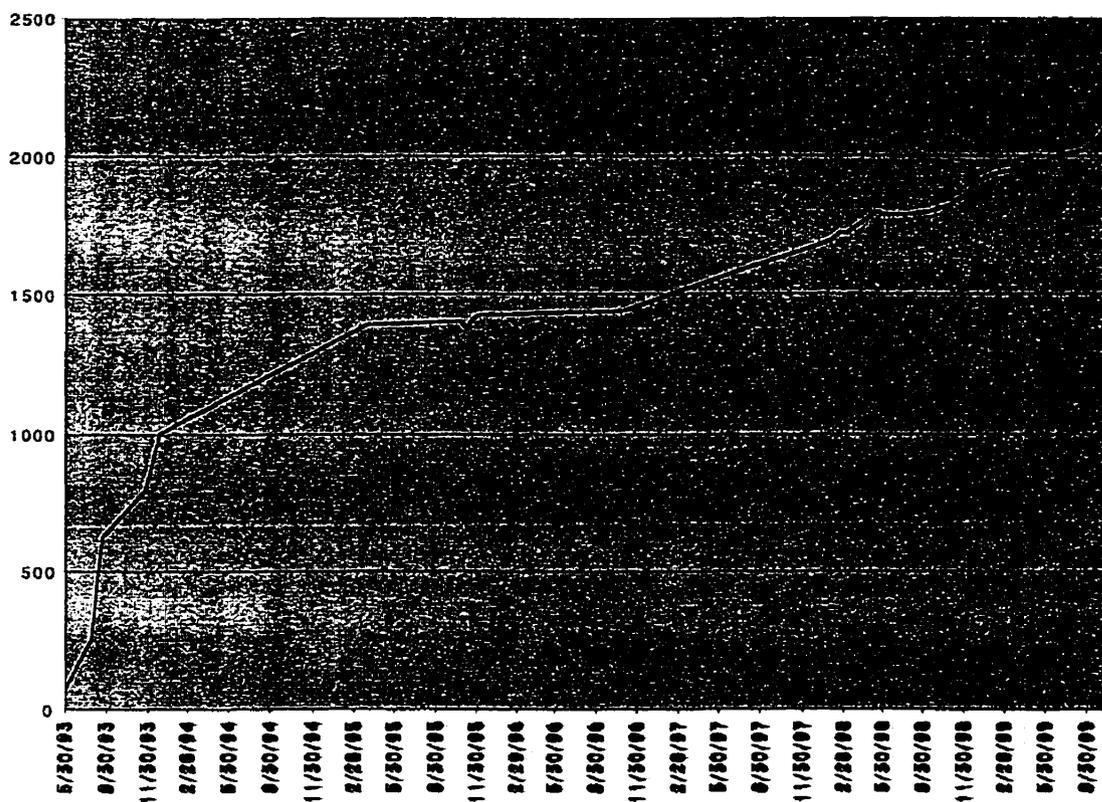


Fig. 4.1 Growth in H-Judaic Membership from 1993 through 1999

The 5375 submissions were made by 1333 different people during that period. Of those 1333 people, 618, or 46.4 percent of the contributors, posted a message only once. That

² Not including administrative notes posted by the on-duty moderator

means that nearly half of all contributors accounted for only 11.5 percent of all contributions. If we include those who only contributed two notes during the period, one sees (as predicted by other research on listserv-based communication) that a smaller, active group tends to dominate the discussion over time. An examination of the records reveals that 223 members posted only twice. So combined, 814 individuals (63.1 percent) posted only twice or once for a total of 1064 of the 5375 notes, or, only 19.2 percent.

On the other end of the spectrum, only 24 people posted 30 notes or more each during the three-year period, with the most contributions by a single individual numbering 82. Those 24 members combined to contribute a total of 942 notes, so that a group representing less than two percent (1.8) of all contributors accounted for 17.5 percent of all contributions. If we include the 19 members who posted between twenty and thirty notes, then we find that over a quarter (25.8 percent) of all notes were contributed by just over three percent (3.2) of the contributors. For the record, the top five contributors during the investigation period were: Arieh Lebowitz of the Jewish Labor Committee in New York (82 notes); Rabbi Robert Tabak, director of the Philadelphia Board of Rabbis (58); Aliza Kolker, a professor of anthropology at George Mason University (53); Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a faculty member at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (49); and Samuel Heilman, a professor of sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York (46). Of the H-Judaic editorial board members, six contributed 20 or more notes: Sarna, Baskin, Zahavy, Cohen, Ben-Ur (prior to becoming moderator), and Train.

CHAPTER FIVE: YEAR I THREADS

A re-reading of the discussion group archives reveals that many different topics were addressed, and that among those, seven stood out as significant threads¹ during the first year of operation for the discussion group.² Any judgement of what is most significant is highly subjective and in this case, qualitative in nature. It is based on several factors, including the volume of posts³ in the thread, the length of individual posts within the thread, and the duration of the thread over time. Other factors taken into consideration included how dominant the thread was in relation to other traffic on the list over the life of the thread, and whether the topic of the thread was substantive, or simple, also a subjective consideration. For example, a thread consisting of a request for bibliographic citations on a particular subject and follow-up recommendations, are not included. While seven threads are described, it must be remembered that these seven threads do not nearly represent the total number of threads during the first year.⁴

Academics, Rabbis and Community

The first significant thread erupted on the list in late December 1995, shortly after the annual Association for Jewish Studies conference in Boston. The discussion started with a reflective piece from H-Judaic editorial board member and chair of Jewish Studies at Queen's University, Reena Zeidman. In her note, Zeidman wrote about a common theme

¹ A thread is the collective of messages on a related topic that usually emerges from a single message. This is the computer-mediated equivalent to a conversation among two or more participants.

² The actual transcripts of the threads appear in an appendix to this thesis.

³ A post is an individual message to a discussion group.

⁴ Listserv software does not automatically thread discussions in the way that other software does. Therefore, actually assembling all threads would take a manual reconstruction effort that is out of the scope of this work. The eighteen identified threads were reconstructed manually by tracking back through the archival record looking for trends.

she saw emerge at the recently held AJS conference, namely, "the need to talk about ourselves as Jewish studies professionals and our roles out of the classroom." According to Zeidman, "I think it is fascinating that the non-academic community has become the focus of our attentions. It appears as if community involvement has replaced the concerns for pedagogy in the classroom."⁵ Having been in the unique position as moderator to read Zeidman's note before all others, I took the liberty of contributing to the conversation immediately. "We must be equally honest in our evaluation of the growing symbiotic relationship we are developing with the community. Do we really expect the community to want nothing for its money? Can we really expect future funding if we ignore the community's desires?" I asked in relation to Zeidman's assertion that "communities must be educated to understand the perspective of the academic."⁶

In response to the first two notes, five more arrived within a day, but only two from people with academic appointments. The main thrust of the second wave was the importance of intellectual access to members of the community, particularly if the role of rabbi diminishes. This was best summed up by Linda Clifton, editor of the *Crab Creek Review* in Seattle, who wrote, "I believe the Jewish community is turning to its academic scholars because we ourselves possess better secular educations and trust academics in a way that we do not trust traditional Jewish scholarship."⁷ The following day, a schism began to emerge among participants in the discussion. While a number of notes still addressed the problems and benefits for academics engaged in community teaching, a new sub-thread emerged, namely, an attack on rabbis as educators. The underlying thrust of this discourse was that communities were turning to academics to replace rabbis as

⁵ Zeidman, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 29, 1995

⁶ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 29, 1995

⁷ Clifton, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 1, 1996

primary educators. As Robert Toren wrote, "rabbis are not expected to be academics, or scholars, nor are they trained as educators. Congregations are geared up to be life-cycle factories. Think about the bar/bat mitzvah as a rite of passage: emerging adults expected to literally parrot nonsense syllables. Garish parties and expensive gifts are lavished on the teenager for performing a ritual that has no meaningful echoes in the adult life of the community. Academics are the few easily identified individuals who possess some sort of knowledge in depth, who will not talk down to people, not preach at them, not have a soliciting agenda in the back of their minds. Rabbis are concerned with the bottom line of membership. Their salaries are tied to it. Congregations are membership organizations with no standards other than membership dues. Rabbis, as the CEO."⁸

The reaction was swift. Wrote Florida Atlantic University professor and rabbi, Henry Abramson, "one aspect of the discussion troubles me deeply, and that is the disdain for rabbis and their scholarship -- I am disturbed because, with one major caveat, I agree. But before we condemn them utterly, it's worth noting that (historically speaking if nothing else) rabbinical scholarship is much more Jewish than what most of us do for a living as Jewish academics. How many of [us] really know how to learn a simple *blatt Gemore*? How many of us know which side of the page *Tosafot* is on, or how to look up an ordinary *halakha* in the *Shulhan Arukh*? Forget about real learning with *Rishonim* and *Aharonim*! We have to face facts -- despite our languages, our endless publications and our high-falutin titles, if we were dropped in the smallest *shtetl* of 19th century eastern Europe we would be regarded as quaint, charming *amei ha-arets* -- ignoramuses. And like it or not, for centuries mastery of traditional texts was the *sine qua non* of Jewish scholarship. So here's my major caveat -- obviously we are hanging around the wrong

⁸ Toren, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 2, 1996

bunch of rabbis. Their function should not be to officiate at the 'sweet sixteens' of our American lives, but to stay in touch with our tradition and let us know what it has to say. *Especially* because we are Jewish academics and intelligent, laypersons look to us to tell them something about our heritage, we have have a *responsibility* to learn with the rabbis."⁹ Likewise, added Philadelphia rabbi Robert Tabak, a Ph.D. in American Jewish history, "I would like to propose a model that sees rabbis as allies, who often reach a far larger audience than most academics. There should be a recognition as well that rabbis represent potential colleagues for dialogue and popularizers (in the best sense) of specialized research to wider audiences. Rabbis may be the 'General Practitioners' or 'Family Doctors' who can learn a great deal from specialized researchers."¹⁰

For Nadav Caine, a doctoral candidate at Stanford University, the issue was less about the quality of rabbis and more about the quality of the training and opportunity. "For my generation, I have found the option of the rabbinate rather invisible --and this disturbs me. Unlike in past generations, I have never heard the clergy discussed as a possible, let alone admirable, profession at any of the Ivy League schools I've passed through. And the abysmal quality of most Jewish education in this country will never present itself as an option to an undergrad with an interest in Jewish studies and teaching (or is the profession already saturated with glorified camp counselors?)."¹¹

Just ten days into the thread, a certain ironic twist became apparent. Wrote Rabbi Dow Marmur of Toronto, "my question to the academics who look down on the rabbis is: What scholarly/scientific/objective evidence is there for these assertions? Since when has

⁹ Abramson, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 6, 1996

¹⁰ Tabak, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 6, 1996

¹¹ Caine, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 8, 1996

sour grapes become a respectable academic discipline?"¹² What was the irony in Marmur's note? The irony was that the bulk of the attack on rabbis had been launched by non-academic members of the list. The "fascinating texture" of the change in the conversation was even noted in a second note from Zeidman. Several negative letters followed, as well as letters supportive of the rabbinate. For example, Abe Anonim wrote, "in my opinion and from my perspective both the rabbinic and academic scholarly communities are working with half a deck."¹³ Wrote rabbi and Reconstructionist Seminary professor, Arthur Waskow, "is [the Jewish Studies profession] a branch of Hellenistic/ Modernistic social science in which knowledge is defined by analysis and mechanical models of the universe. Or is [it] rooted in a Jewish understanding of the nature of knowledge, crystallized in the Hebrew fusion of 'knowing' and 'making love' and 'being intimate' in *Yodaya*. That is, what would a university be like in which learning was a lot more like making love?"¹⁴

For the most part, this thread remained an exchange between laypersons attacking the rabbinate and rabbis defending it against an onslaught they perceived to be coming from academics, but in fact was not. If anything, those academics who entered the debate tried to steer a neutral, analytical course. Of the 37 notes contributed to this thread, 18 came from members situated in academic institutions, 12 from laypersons, and 7 from individuals who self-identified themselves as having rabbinical positions. However, only about twenty-five percent of the messages from the academics could be judged as critical of rabbis, where as fully seventy-five percent of the notes from laypersons were highly critical of rabbis, academics, or both. Finally, notes from rabbis were about evenly split

¹² Marmur, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 8, 1996

¹³ Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 10, 1996

¹⁴ Waskow, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 9, 1996

between defenses of the rabbinate and attacks on academics. Less than a month after the initial Zeidman post, and as with most threads, the discussion ended just as quickly as it began. However, this thread was not without spinoffs. A year after the thread ended, Penny Schine Gold, a member of H-Judaic editorial board and at the time a participant in the on-line discussion, put together a panel to further explore the role of the academic in community-based learning at the 1996 AJS conference.

Genesis Kabbalah

The next significant thread began the last week of February 1996. Jonathan Safren of Beit Berl College in Israel cross-posted an inquiry on the meaning of Genesis 1:1 from the B-Hebrew list. In fact, Safren posted three notes to the H-Judaic list, one to summarize the discussion, the second a copy of his response on the B-Hebrew list, and a third consisting of other responses sent to the other list.¹⁵ Abe Anonim was the first to respond with a very long note explaining the verse using his geometric letter patterns. I did not post it. Instead I placed Anonim's article on the H-Judaic website and informed members they could find it there.¹⁶ Setting aside Anonim's piece, two tracks emerged initially in the thread. While some correspondents provided references and citations to various studies on the interpretation of Genesis 1:1, others picked up on an aside in Safren's notes. Specifically, Safren contended that there were two main theses on the definition of the First Verse; one approach was that God had created the heavens and earth from nothing, and the other approach was that order upon chaos was created. The philosophical sub-thread was exemplified by the University of Chicago's Nancy Nield who wrote, "I wonder if this notion of YHWH structuring the primordial undifferentiated--but pre-existent--matrix of matter can be reconciled with Luria's notion of *tzim-tzum*, which

¹⁵ Safren, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 23, 1996

presents the process of creation as exactly a radical contracture of the *Ein Sof* which permits absence/immateriality/nothingness/infinity to suddenly become presence—exactly creation out of nothing."¹⁷

Among the contributors to the philosophical discussion was Abe Anonim. As indicated above, I allowed this note to make it out to the list, which immediately sparked a new debate on both the main list and the editorial board list. Essentially, Anonim's note explained creation through the sequence of letters found in Genesis. The Cohen letter that followed sparked a discussion on the merits of a *wissenschaft* or scientific study of Judaism versus a study infused with religious doctrine. As Haim Beliak asked, "why are we fighting the battles of the 19th Century now?"¹⁸ Essentially, the question at hand was whether Kabbalah was an appropriate tool for the proper study of Jews, or should it simply be confined to the religious sphere and treated as a subject of study. The exchange between Judith Seid and Rivkah Lambert embodied the debate. Wrote Seid:

Several messages have asked why we seem to be fighting the battles of the last century. We are fighting the battles because they are still relevant. There are still those among us who believe that text is more important than truth and that text, not truth, is the proper subject of religious study. There are still those among us who do not view the Jews as a historic people, but as a religious people. There are still those among us who believe that Judaism was created by YHVH and not by the Jewish people. It's okay with me that people believe these things, but it is not okay with me when they insert their personal religious belief into academic study and claim that religious and scientific truths are comparable. Religion and science answer different questions; their truths are not comparable. Scientific

¹⁶ See earlier section on Abe Anonim for more details.

¹⁷ Nield, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 29, 1996

¹⁸ Beliak, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 11, 1996

truths do not belong in a house of mourning. Religious truths do not belong in a classroom or in an academic journal.¹⁹

To which Lambert, of the University of Maryland, responded:

I find this a frankly distressing aspect of Jewish scholarship in academe, as if Jews who believe in "religious truths" do not belong, and ought not participate, in the "academic" discussions of text. I think Judaic studies has always had this tension, between those who view "text as more important than truth" and those who view "truth as more important than text". For a religious Jew, of course, there is no contradiction, since text IS truth. The tension is difficult to manage, I agree. But to claim that religious truths do not belong in a classroom or in an academic journal relegates the whole area of Judaic studies to one kind of thought, to one group of thinkers. I believe the richness of Judaic studies exists, in part, from the very diversity of thought that also, admittedly, confounds me at times.²⁰

Meanwhile, in a query completely unrelated to the ongoing thread, Alan Jackson asked for the etymology of the Hebrew word for tree, including Gematric or Kabbalistic etymologies.²¹ The unique perspective in Abe Anonim's earlier contribution to the Genesis thread had not been well received, even if it did create a significant conversation about Kabbalah and the its role within Jewish studies scholarship. Nonetheless, its poor reception did not deter Anonim from again contributing, this time using his methodology to account for the etymology of the Hebrew word for tree. "Torah Hebrew was originally a formal acronym language. Each root word's operational meaning is precisely set by the formal operational meaning of each of the letters chosen to spell the word. Only when Torah Hebrew is viewed exclusively at the *Pshat* (word and narrative) level does the phonetic and not the operational meaning of the word become more important. At the

¹⁹ Seid, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 12, 1996

²⁰ Lambert, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 13, 1996

²¹ Jackson, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 12, 1996

Sod (foundation, letter-sequence) level of Torah, the meaning of each word is determined by the process defined by the sequence of meanings of the letters," wrote Anonim.²²

There was no reaction, so Anonim posted again, this time, by the use of his subject line, in response to the on-going discussion of Kabbalah in Jewish studies.

[Once, when] I happened to look at a copy of the Hebrew text of Genesis... Because I could not read the words, my eyes fell on the more familiar letters. I noticed what seemed to be a pattern in the sequence of Hebrew letters. (If I could have read Hebrew I wonder if I would have noticed the letter pattern)... The sequence of letters in B'Reshit is ordered. (This is not a statistical statement. We have found a specific set of solutions.) The letter text string of B'Reshit 1:1, for example, can be shown to be geometrically structured. It forms a ribbon, which is wound into a serious of forms representing a series of relationships. I hope those reading this notice a problem here. If a scholar is not familiar with geometry, they will not be able to recognize geometric metaphor. That, in my opinion, is one of the most important reasons why kabbalah and related studies of the "sod" (foundation) level of Torah are so lacking in credibility. This is why I, like Jeff Cohen, felt that there was no content to kabbalah.²³

Again, there was little reaction. Wrote Safren, the originator of the thread, "every time I read an attempt to build a house of cards on the word/letter sequence, frequency or structure of the Biblical text, I let out an involuntary groan. Haven't such people ever heard of Biblical textual criticism? Of the Septuagint? The Judaeen Desert Scrolls? The Samaritan Pentateuch? Building mystical theories on the Masoretic consonantal text is like leaning on Isaiah's 'broken reed'."²⁴ Haim Beliak was even more poignant with his comment, "regarding letter skipping and other secret codes in the Torah... Nechama Leibowitz once called it Avodah Zarah."²⁵ There would be no further attempts by

²² Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 14, 1996

²³ Anonim, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 17, 1996

²⁴ Safren, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 19, 1996

²⁵ Beliak, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 20, 1996

Anonim to co-opt the discussion. Over the last five days of the thread, the issues of Kabbalah's role in Jewish studies, and whether "a good scholar should engage in some self-criticism in order to identify biases and personal intellectual proclivities," as Fred Astren wrote, continued to be the focus of the conversation.²⁶ In the end, there were 39 messages by 23 different authors over a 32 -day period (16 different days with posts) in the Genesis Kabbalah thread.

Word Processors

At roughly the same time that the Genesis Kabbalah thread erupted and dominated the list, another, less divisive thread emerged as well. Started on February 11, 1996 by the University of California's Howard Wettstein, the theme of the thread was non-English word processing. Wettstein asked for recommendations about word processors that would allow him to move between English and Hebrew. For the most part, the 21 people who participated in the 24-note thread gave their opinions on various products. As Lafayette's Howard Marblestone later wrote, "the basic issue is whether or not you want fully formatted R→L Hebrew in, or connected to, your text in Roman letters. If you wish to use only Hebrew words or phrases, and are not, therefore, concerned with their formatting, then one of the insertion utilities is for you."²⁷ The conversation grew to encompass Yiddish word-processing as well as Greek and Polish. A few of the posts dealt with Macintosh computers, and even featured a posting by Mark Hurvitz of Nisus Corporation, the leading manufacturer of Hebrew word-processing for Macintosh computers. One post, by Leonard Berkowitz, reminded people about their responsibility to not illegally copy commercial software. And the last post, 33 days after the thread had begun, was a typical academic response to the topic at hand. "On the question of word

²⁶ Astren, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 20, 1996

processors in Hebrew and English: you may want to consult several of my articles published in ...," wrote Moshe Pelli of University of Central Florida.²⁸ The dialogue of the thread was unremarkable, except for one thing. While it was temporally concurrent with the Genesis Kabbalah thread, there was zero overlap in the participants. Not one person among 23 authors in the other thread participated in the word processing thread, and not one of the 21 authors in the word processing thread participated in the conversation about the first verse of Genesis or the role of Kabbalah in Jewish studies.

Fagin

In May, Belarie Zatzman of York University posted a query about ways of handling the apparent anti-semitism contained in Charles Dickens' portrayal of the character Fagin in the novel *Oliver Twist*. What emerged was a three-week long thread in which discussants debated how anti-Jewish the portrayal actually was, how anti-semitic Dickens was, and the larger context of Jewish characters in Anglo and American literature. Specifically, Zatzman wondered about the effect 'dejudafying' Fagin would have on the reading of *Oliver Twist*, and if not, how one might handle such a negative portrayal in teaching the work to young audiences. Early responses were generally opposed to dejudafying Fagin. Some, like Carmel Chiswick of the University of Illinois felt that it would be "better to deal with the anti-Semitic portrayal of the character straight on rather than sweeping it under the rug. Make it clear that the invidious images were a product of anti-Semitism (by Dickens, by the London of that time) and not a telling portrait of either the individual or of a 'typical' Jewish type."²⁹ This was also picked up by Linda Clifton, who saw the book as an opportunity to "explore the images that expressed anti-Semitism in 19th

²⁷ Marblestone, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 21, 1996

²⁸ Pelli, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 6, 1996

²⁹ Chiswick, H-Judaic Archives, May 11, 1996

Century England and compare them to stereotypes of other minority groups."³⁰ For different reasons, Ted Steinberg of SUNY Fredonia, also supported leaving Fagin Jewish. "We have to remember that in a novel full of villains and fools, only one is described as a Jew. Do we want to deny that Jews might have been involved in illegal activities?"³¹

On the issue of Dicken's own beliefs, two camps emerged. One, as exemplified in a note from Daniel Breslauer of the University of Kansas, did not attribute personal anti-Semitic motivations to Dicken's creation of Fagin. Wrote Breslauer, "I suspect that Dickens was using a stereotype as old as Shakespeare's Shylock and for the same purpose—to probe social ironies."³² Several writers commented on Dicken's *Our Mutual Friend* as an apologetic for his earlier Fagin. Others were not so sure. Wrote Robert Michael of the University of Massachusetts, "I don't want to believe that Dickens was anti-Semitic, but... Dickens had inevitably to be influenced by the anti-Jewish ideas carried into the 19th century by the Bible and religious education, popular myths and sayings, novels, plays, newspapers, magazines such as *Punch*, songs, Parliamentary debates and laws. Even in his early writings, where he did not treat Jews in any extensive fashion, Dickens still regarded them negatively. Dickens may or may not have been antisemitic, but his early work surely calls forth the possibility, perhaps probability. What should surprise us? That another famous literature was consciously or unconsciously hostile to Jews and fallen into anti-Jewish stereotype. What is surprising, is that a few of these writers were NOT anti-Semitic."³³ A few days later, Michael sent a note with a summary of American literary attitudes towards Jews as a follow up. Near the end of the thread, the

³⁰ Clifton, H-Judaic Archives, May 14, 1996

³¹ Steinberg, H-Judaic Archives, May 13, 1996

³² Breslauer, H-Judaic Archives, May 14, 1996

³³ Michael, H-Judaic Archives, May 19, 1996

conversation was best summed up by Judith Baskin of the University of Albany, who pointed out that the antisemitism harbored by Anglo and American writers and expressed in their literary works were certainly stereotypes. "But perhaps we should also admit that [the] depictions reflect some of the individual Jews [the authors] encountered."³⁴ Over the three-week period of the thread, 18 individuals contributed 21 messages.

Thomas Bird: Do you have to be Jewish to be in Jewish Studies?

During the summer of 1996, two threads emerged, both with a very similar theme - do you have to be Jewish to be in Jewish Studies? The first thread, which began in mid-June and ran for nearly three weeks, dealt with the issue theoretically, and sometimes personally. The second thread, which began in mid-July, and ran for two months, dealt with the appointment of Thomas Bird, a Catholic, to the head of Queens College Jewish Studies, and the cloud of controversy that shrouded that appointment and his subsequent resignation. The two threads were directly related in the historical record, with the first thread setting up the environment that gave rise to the second. In some ways, they may be considered one.

It is hard to say where the first thread began. In many ways, it had its roots in an earlier conversation on determining 'who is Jewish' with reference to a social science study of Jews. Something³⁵ in an earlier note posted by Patrick O'Brien of the University of Hawaii led Jerry Blaz to write, in part, "I have tended to agree that any individual can do scholarship in this area regardless of ethnic/religious origin. Not that I believe a common assumption that the distance between the researcher and the phenomenon is not of

³⁴ Baskin, H-Judaic Archives, May 23, 1996

³⁵ I can't see what it was exactly, but Blaz makes specific reference to O'Brien in his note, albeit without quoting him.

consequence. There is a purpose to be served by presenting a good methodological reason that to have a researcher who is so familiar with the socialization of the subjects that the micro-moral reality-constructing methods of the subject are also the researcher's is preferable. I do not anticipate such an investigation to present the same results as a similar investigation by a Jew."³⁶ Nancy Nield of the University of Chicago was immediately troubled by what she saw in Blaz's position.

Would our research prove to be invalid/less valid because we are not members of the community that we study? Why is it intrinsically or inherently better methodologically to be a participant in the group that one studies? Doesn't this assumption ultimately result in a kind of academic censorship or disapproval (which I've definitely encountered and I'm sure will encounter throughout my career), which encourages white, straight, (especially male) Catholic or Protestant scholars to avoid infringing on the territory of the Other. (Which of course includes not only Jews, but women, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other people of color, gays and lesbians, the sick, the disabled, the poor). Or worse yet, be damned for daring to impose "their" hegemonic patriarchal discourse onto an already silenced and oppressed margin? Must the scholarly voice which speaks *of* the margins necessarily always be *from* the margins as well? It greatly troubles me that as a non-Jew researching a Jewish artist, my writing, <might be considered> valid, but "different." Does this "difference" not imply some type of inauthenticity or misunderstanding with ethical repercussions?³⁷

Several other letters followed with similar themes. Andrea Pappas of the University of Southern California was particularly forceful. "The logical result of a position that rules out 'outsider' accounts is the impossibility of producing anything other than autobiography. As a historian who also worked on 16th Century Catholic fresco painting, I am certainly not going to buy an argument, which, has as its conclusion, something to

³⁶ Blaz, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 22, 1996

³⁷ Nield, H-Judaic Archives, June 25, 1996

the effect that, if I am not a member of 16th Century Catholic, Italian society, I cannot write historical accounts about that era."³⁸ The result was a defensive follow-up note by Blaz several days later. "I stated that I saw no particular objection to research by non-Jews regarding American Jews and then I discussed some micro-sociological approaches where it could be problematic, or present a perspective that might differ from that of a member. Then I concluded that even this difference of perspective, however, would be of sociological interest. I suppose that people are free to 'read in' any tone they wanted, but I can assure you all that my intent was not 'ensorious'."³⁹

I am quite certain that Laurence Loeb of the University of Utah did not know that his note would be the last of this thread, or that his summary observations would serve to foreshadow the next thread, but they did. "In sum, the greater the variety of perspectives brought to research, the better the possibility that nuances and subtleties will not be lost in the search for 'truth'."⁴⁰

The openness and welcome of the Loeb position stands in sharp contrast to events which unfolded at Queen's College in New York during the same period. Thomas Bird, a specialist in Yiddish, and a member of the Jewish Studies program at Queens College in New York for 25 years was appointed director of the program in the summer of 1996. His appointment was not without controversy, most vocally from a colleague of his in his own department and a previous program director, Samuel Heilman. When the first two notes on this topic, one from Zachary Baker of YIVO, and the other from Eve Jochnowitz of New York University, arrived in the moderator's inbox, I knew there would be trouble.

³⁸ Pappas, H-Judaic Archives, June 26, 1996

³⁹ Blaz, H-Judaic Archives, June 30, 1996

⁴⁰ Loeb, H-Judaic Archives, July 8, 1996

As a result, the first note in the thread was actually an editorial appeal. "Later, there will be two notes about the appointment of Prof. Bird at Queens College. I'd like to take this opportunity to remind people that we do have a community policy that actively discourages notes which contain personal attacks on others. I am not making this comment in relation to the two upcoming notes themselves, but I can see where this thread could get out of hand."⁴¹

Baker's note, as a point of information for other members, essentially quoted Heilman as reported in various media sources covering the controversy - "he's not Jewish, he does not have a Ph.D. in Jewish studies and he doesn't speak or understand Hebrew. Jewish studies exists to give Jewish students a role model, just like any other ethnic studies program. It's not that you have to be Jewish to teach Jewish studies -- you don't. However, there is a role-model aspect of it, in the same way there is with women's studies, with black studies. No one would dare break this mold with other programs."⁴² Jochnowitz's note responded by condemning unnamed critics of Bird as being "unwise and counterproductive" and "an embarrassment to our field."⁴³

The next post was another administrative note informing members that the next set of letters on the Bird Affair would be delayed so I could have enough time to check them for content first. Meanwhile, on nothing more than a whim, I looked up Samuel Heilman's e-mail address on the Internet, mailed him a copy of the first two notes and subscribed him to the list without telling him. He responded in the way I had hoped. He immediately began to participate in the thread. However, in an attempt to make the

⁴¹ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, July 16, 1996

⁴² Baker, H-Judaic Archives, July 16, 1996

⁴³ Jochnowitz, H-Judaic Archives, July 16, 1996

reading more exciting, I held back Heilman's first two posts, saving them for last among the seven that followed the next day. And as could be expected, the first five notes decried the treatment of Bird and cited many examples of non-Jews leading Jewish studies departments. For example, University of Texas professor Seth Wolitz was indignant: "the forced resignation of Prof. Thomas E. Bird is a damaging display of communal provincialism and university cowardice."⁴⁴ Albany's Judith Baskin was philosophical: "unless Jewish/Judaic Studies Programs and Departments define their purposes in the widest terms possible, Jewish Studies will continue to be seen as marginal and nothing more than a sop to Jewish students and donors." And then came Heilman:

Unfortunately, the press selectively quoted from my statements and remarks. I too agree that one does not have to be Jewish to head Jewish Studies. My objections to Bird were: he has no doctorate, few qualifications beyond a knowledge of Yiddish, was appointed without consultation of the faculty -- even though his predecessor had served only 2 years. Bird had no record of involvement in Jewish studies professionally, beyond his sitting at some meetings of the faculty in Jewish studies. I also pointed out that in all our ethnic studies programs, this would be the only appointment of a person who was NOT from the ethnic group. When asked why it was important that there be someone from the ethnic group, I replied that that the director serves as, among other things, a role model in the community and for students of what it means to be serious about Jewish studies and what the campus believes Jewish studies should be. That, alas is what the press found most "newsworthy." And though I sent a full statement, they never published it.⁴⁵

He followed his post with a copy of the full text of his formal statement. I followed his notes with two more administrative notes reminding members of the organization's policy against personal attacks (known in CMC parlance as "flames"). I also threatened to start

⁴⁴ Wolitz, H-Judaic Archives, July 21, 1996

⁴⁵ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, July 21, 1996

actively editing notes that contained personal attacks. Despite Heilman's attempts at defending his positions, the attacks continued. Attacks on Heilman, attacks on the idea that an ethnic studies professor should serve as a role as a model for students from that ethnic group, and attacks on the concept that only Jews can teach Jewish studies. Of the eight posts that appeared the next day, only one sought to question the original Bird appointment. But a week into the discussion, a small shift in direction of the thread became discernible. There were two reasons for this. One, Heilman continued to argue that his real complaint with Bird's appointment had to do with academic credentials and institutional procedures, and the issue of Bird's religion played only a minor part. Second, members began to complain that I was too liberal in the use of my editorial knife, cutting and snipping sections of messages that I deemed were attacking in nature. As the conversation progressed, several people began to pick up on the themes Heilman had been presenting. Furthermore, a few even began to propose that the head of the program should be Jewish. "Now some are ready to acknowledge there is a Jewish stake in the future of Jewish studies. Yes, most are worried about the legitimacy of Jewish studies as if that were the main issue. That is a joke since it will always have suspect roots and no attempts to 'universalize' or suspend the connection between people and culture will make it easy for people who seek those types of legitimacy," wrote Haim Beliak.⁴⁶

But it was the issue of my editorial control, which eventually brought an end to the thread. Paul Rose of Pennsylvania State wrote to say "I am most concerned about your practice of inserting SNIPS in the Bird postings. This makes it appear as though abusive language is being used and damages correspondents in the eyes of general readers of the list. I know that in the cases where I am aware of the original wording, the words

⁴⁶ Beliak, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 1, 1996

snipped have been perfectly proper. I believe that you owe it to your contributors and recipients to stop this procedure at once. I would be grateful if you would place this posting on the list in an unedited form."⁴⁷ I did. And then I invited others to share their opinions on my editing style. The next day I wrote to the list, "I have received several private responses so far. And there is a wide spectrum of opinion, (of course), ranging from the sentiment that the list is too edited compared to other lists, that there should be no editing at all, on the one hand, and that the list should continue to be edited to retain its civility on the other. If one particular sentiment seems to emerge with some consensus, then I am happy to oblige."⁴⁸ One day later, Sigrid Peterson wrote what turned out to be the last note of the main part of the thread:

I am perturbed that comments about Bird, Heilman, and the situation in general at Queens College that were speculations without knowledge, or specific suppositions based on experience with other University systems and programs were passed through unedited, while a comment representing some critical thought, that was not <hebrew>lashon ha-ra</> and not <latin>ad hominem</>, was <snipped>. If my career were ended by one email post that leaves the reader confused and wondering what I said, it would surely have ended before now. Given the volume of stuff I have posted over the years in various forums, not everything has been totally clear, even without <snippy> editors. However, I am **very** concerned over the state of Jewish Studies if its major electronic forum seeks harmonization and announcements, rather than the critical discussion of what constitutes scholarship in the field, and the encouragement of critical perspectives on the place of Jewish Studies in the modern secular university. Perhaps the first debate needs to be on the topic "Where should the discussion occur?"⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Rose, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 4, 1996

⁴⁸ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 5, 1996

⁴⁹ Peterson, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 6, 1996

Near the end of the month, Beth Berkowitz of Columbia University revived the thread slightly, by asking for information on accessing an article written by Lawrence Schiffman on the Bird affair stored on the H-Judaic website. As a postscript, about a week after the Berkowitz note, Julia Graham wrote to the list asking for an update on the Bird situation and advice on dealing with Jewish students in a Judaism course at the University of Colorado. Graham had been appointed as a non-Jewish teaching assistant for the course, and she was anticipating potential difficulties as a result. She received two suggestions via the list, and one from University of Washington professor Martin Jaffee proved to be a poignant summary for both threads.

The most important source of legitimation of your role is the professor who teaches the course. S/he owes you and the students an introductory lecture on the role of the informed observer in the study of religions, and the difference between representing a religion and inquiring into its history, structure, and form. These basic ground rules of religious studies have to be woven into the discourse of the course at every juncture. If they are not, the course is an academic charade and you are a victim of incompetent teaching.⁵⁰

In the end, the first thread had fifteen posts by thirteen different people, while the second, Bird thread had 46 notes from 29 different people, including three from Heilman himself, who would go on to be one of the top five contributors to the list over the next two years.

Queer Jews

The previous threads had highlighted the issue of marginality, particularly the marginality of non-Jews in Jewish Studies. But professional marginality in Jewish studies is not confined to non-Jews. Many scholars feel marginalized when it comes to their topics of research. For example, I sometimes feel marginalized within Jewish Studies because of

⁵⁰ Jaffee, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 10, 1996

my emphasis on technology. One look at a typical Association for Jewish Studies call-for-papers will indicate the accepted categories of discourse in the mainstream Jewish studies world. As a result, I was determined not to let the H-Judaic list become another locus of marginalization. Thus, in early September 1996, when a message appeared on the Hasafran (Jewish librarians) list asking for good films about gay and lesbian Jews, I immediately cross-posted it to H-Judaic. The response was a month-long thread of 16 messages contributed by thirteen people including two from the National Center for Jewish Film in Boston and one from the director of the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Toronto. Ironically, the first response was from member Yoel Kahn who stated emphatically that, "there are no (memorable) films specifically about gay and lesbian Jews."⁵¹ Obviously, in the opinion of others, there were, as J.C. Keiner of the University of Reading wrote, "it is not true that there are no films on Jewish lesbians and gays. Several have been shown at the London Jewish Film Festival and at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival recently."⁵² In the end, members responded with citations to journal articles, websites, and 25 actual film titles. And one call for participants for a feature-length documentary about "Hasidim and Orthodox Jews who have left *frum* (religious) communities to come out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and those who choose to remain Orthodox and how they negotiate their sexuality and identity in religious communities."⁵³

⁵¹ Kahn, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 9, 1996

⁵² Keiner, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 11, 1996

⁵³ Shandler, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 17, 1996

CHAPTER SIX: YEAR II THREADS

For the second year of the discussion group's existence (October 1996 through September 1997), I have been able to identify six significant threads, based on the same criteria I applied earlier. Five of the six threads occurred during the first half of the year. This was in part due to a slowing of the list due the birth of my child in late March 1997. This slowing would have been consistent with Harasim and Winkelman's research that I cited earlier, namely, that their analysis indicates that active discussion and interaction is significantly related to the online presence of the moderator: the more active the moderator, the higher the level of activity.¹

Schimmel's Unreasonable Belief in Modern Orthodox Jews

The second year in the life of the discussion group began seemingly inauspiciously, but in hindsight, controversially. On October 4, 1996, Solomon Schimmel, a professor of Psychology and Judaism at Hebrew College in Boston wrote to the list asking for participants for a study he was conducting in anticipation of a paper to be delivered at the upcoming American Academy of Religion conference the following November. His goal was to analyze why modern Orthodox Jewish academics and scientists believed in a God-revealed bible, despite empirical data and logic to the contrary. There was no comment on the list. A few weeks later, Schimmel wrote again, at first thanking those who had responded privately, and then asking for information on a particular reference to earlier work. Naturally, Schimmel contextualized his note with a repetition of his research goals. Again, there was no further comment. Then, on November 6, Schimmel wrote a third time. Arising from his research, Schimmel asked members to comment on "how essential, if at all, is an orthodox belief system in maintaining worthwhile Jewish

¹ Harasim and Winkelmans, 1989. P. 16

communities in the US that will perpetuate themselves?"² As part of his note, Schimmel proposed a set of vague characteristics to define a worthwhile Jewish community, which elicited a small set of complaints. However, a few days later, Carmel Chiswick of the University of Illinois, wrote to say that instead of looking at what factors are needed to sustain a Jewish community, we should instead discuss what is the minimum requirement. To that end, Chiswick proposed that we look to the story of the Four Sons in the Passover Haggadah as a guide. Chiswick's hypothesis was that identification with the Jewish people was perhaps enough, as shown in the Four Sons story. Wickedness and a refusal to identify with the community was worthy of rejection, even as ignorance and simplicity were not.³ Over the course of the next week, the discussion moved to a small thread on the meaning of the Four Sons story and devolved away from Schimmel's original quest. But this was not the end of Schimmel. A month or so later, on the last Sunday of the year, Schimmel wrote to report on the reception of his paper at the AAR.

Is it morally wrong for a Jewish academician to point to, and criticize in a public forum, in which non-Jews are present, (e.g. in a session of the American Academy of Religion, or a university classroom, or in an article or book), moral, ethical or intellectual deficiencies (as he or she perceives them so to be) of some aspect of Jewish thought, values or behavior? What prompts me to ask this question?

I recently presented a paper at the Study of Judaism section of the American Academy of Religion. The overall theme of the session was Jewish Fundamentalism in the Contemporary World. My paper, titled "The Tenacity of Unreasonable Beliefs In Modern Orthodox Jews: A Psychological Analysis", was critical of certain aspects of modern or centrist orthodox Judaism. I discussed and analyzed what I consider to an implausible orthodox belief or doctrine, and several values that in my opinion are immoral or unethical and which I think are related, at least in some instances, to the belief.

² Schimmel, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 6, 1996

³ Chiswick, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 10, 1996

For the purpose of this posting it is not necessary for me to discuss the specific content of my paper and my arguments. What is relevant is that two academicians who have read the paper have accused me of being morally reprehensible for criticizing Judaism, or in this case, orthodoxy, in a public forum. One compared me to a "malshin" or "moser" (someone who reports to the gentile authorities a crime committed by a fellow Jew). The other compared me to Abner of Burgos and other Jewish apostates who were not content with merely converting to Christianity but who, after their apostasy mounted vigorous attacks on Jews and Judaism, accusing Judaism of being an irrational religion, and the Talmud of teaching immoral and unethical values. (For the record I am not an apostate. I was born a Jew, have lived my life as a Jew, and expect to die as a Jew). My two critics also argued that Christian antisemitism is alive and well and that Christians will use my words, or my paper, when published, to attack Jews and Judaism.⁴

I am not sure if Schimmel anticipated the response he got. A number of the first notes were reasonably supportive, others chose to ignore the content issues of Schimmel's paper, and instead focused on both the specifics of critical analysis and the broader issue of the role of Jewish Studies in academia. However, a few writers, apparently not content to accept Schimmel's claim of adherence to scholarly canon at face value, asked for copies of Schimmel's paper. Even more extreme was the reaction of Marsha Cohen. "Schimmel seems to imply he was playing by the rules of academia, while his critics are not, and that the primary issue was the presence of non-Jews in the setting in which he was delivering his paper. I would like to suggest that he reconsider these assumptions. Frankly, I found the title of Professor Schimmel's paper, 'The Tenacity of Unreasonable Beliefs in Modern Orthodox Jews: A Psychological Analysis', offensive from the

⁴ Schimmel, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 29, 1996

moment I first read it in the AAR program-book."⁵ In an ironic twist of what had been and what would come, Samuel Heilman wrote:

I would venture to suggest that the same voices that argue that non-Jews can and should have a voice in studying Jews critically (and I am one of them) cannot deny the same opportunities to Jews. Jews can and should study Jews critically as well. And in the university, there is no room for silencing those voices. What can be demanded, however, is that the highest standards of scholarship be maintained, whether the students are Jews or not. When the standards are maintained, the issues remain academic in the best sense, and not parochial. Those who turn these matters into parochial issues undo what the university is about and aims for -- the free exchange of ideas.⁶

Lawrence Schiffman of New York University was the first to make the demand. Resorting to hearsay, Schiffman wrote that he had heard from a non-Jewish student that the session was deeply offensive to religious people as it "was nothing more than an attack on Orthodoxy, which had no academic substance. This session was not academically acceptable as it was far from the dispassionate study of religion which we scholars are called upon to engage in."⁷ On the other hand, Robert Goldenberg of SUNY Stony Brook did attend the session and wrote to report that "I fully accepted his use of the word 'unreasonable' to describe the beliefs he was discussing. Both in the context of his presentation, the term appeared descriptive and not merely judgmental, and also I considered it apt."⁸ "The discussion of Sol's post has crossed the lines of the original query, and entered into the AAR presentation, its scientific method and its propriety. I think the time has come for Sol to share the AAR paper with list members, at least a

⁵ Cohen, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 30, 1996

⁶ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 1, 1997

⁷ Schiffman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 1, 1997

⁸ Goldenberg, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 1, 1997.

synopsis of it. We are curious by now," responded Alon Goshen-Gottstein of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.⁹

Meanwhile, the growing divisiveness of the debate caused some members to be concerned about privacy. "One of our regular list members wrote to ask if there were any 'media' types on the list. The answer is yes, there are those in the media who read our posts daily. If that influences the way you write, please make note of it. At 1500+ members, we cannot be considered a private group in the least, and there is some likelihood that what you say will be quoted, although members of the media are required to give full attribution."¹⁰

By this point in the discussion, the thread had developed into two streams; one devoted to the theoretical issues around academic freedom and the role of critical thought; the other stream around the academic merits of Schimmel's paper. "I heard Sol Schimmel's paper at the AAR and thought that it was appropriate and in no way scurrilous. If it rankled some of the attendees, I would suggest that thin skins are not good equipment for the AAR, where the participants come from all walks of the academic world and the religious scene that Lenny Bruce himself used to call 'Religions, Inc.'," wrote Pinchas Giller of Washington University in St. Louis.¹¹ "Should Sol Schimmel have presented his paper? This seems to me the basic question, the one avoided by those who have defended academic freedom most vociferously. The question is not whether or not he has a right to his opinion, but whether or not an opinion piece should be presented as objective fact. Without seeing the paper, there is no way to judge either the quality or nature of what

⁹ Goshen-Gottstein, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 2, 1997

¹⁰ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 2, 1997

¹¹ Giller, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 7, 1997

was presented. The title, however, as someone else has pointed out, leads one to skepticism," wrote David Kaufmann of Tulane University.¹² And again Schiffman raised the stakes. "I have had the opportunity to read one of the papers in the now notorious session at AAR in its written form. I remain of the opinion that the aggregate session, as constructed and as it played out at the meeting, was inappropriate for a scholarly meeting. I think we have to bend over backwards to keep the contemporary polemics of our respective communities out of academic frameworks, since on these matters our views are formulated based on non-academic considerations which cannot be tested by scholarly criteria. This is where the session raised serious questions in my view."¹³

"I did not intend my original posting on the propriety or impropriety of criticizing one or another aspect of Judaism in a public academic forum to evolve into a discussion of my particular presentation at AAR. However, one thread of the discussion has developed along those lines. So, in response to [the] suggestion that I present a synopsis of the presentation, I will now do so," Schimmel finally responded. "[Furthermore], the AAR session was part of the Study of Judaism section and I happen to be primarily interested in Judaism. The announced topic for the session was Jewish fundamentalism and the contemporary world. I think the theme of my paper was appropriate to that theme. As far as Larry Schiffman's point that a representative or defender of orthodoxy should have been included in the session, that is something which would have to be addressed to the organizers of the session. I simply responded to a call for papers by submitting a paper proposal, which was accepted. I did not know who else would be presenting at the session and had no input into that decision. Personally, I would have been pleased to have

¹² Kaufmann, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 7, 1997

¹³ Schiffman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 7, 1997

had the opportunity to engage in scholarly discussion and debate with representatives of the modern orthodox group whose views I critiqued."¹⁴ Here is Schimmel's synopsis:

1. The belief or claim that the entire Pentateuch, from Genesis through Deuteronomy (except perhaps for a very few verses) was revealed by God to Moses at Mt. Sinai in the late 14th or early 13th century BCE, (Torah Le'Moshe Mi'Sinai, TMS) is an unreasonable belief or claim in light of overwhelming evidence against it from more than one hundred years of modern biblical scholarship and comparative Ancient Near Eastern studies.

In addition to those disciplines, the fields of anthropology, philosophy, biology (e.g. paleontology) and psychology provide indirect support for the view that the TMS claim or belief is unreasonable. The reasonable view based upon the evidence from biblical scholarship is that the Pentateuch is a work that in its final form is post-Mosaic and composed of earlier multiple sources (Multiple Source/Post Mosaic theory, or MSPM).

2. Many orthodox Jews, including distinguished scientists, professionals and academicians in fields of Jewish Studies affirm the TMS view and reject the MSPM view. Since these people apply rigorous criteria of a scientific and scholarly nature in their respective professional endeavors, why do they ignore the evidence and arguments in favor of MSPM and continue to affirm TMS?

3. I suggest that belief systems are based on many factors, some of which have little to do with their plausibility. Among these are the positive moral, emotional, social and existential consequences of the belief system for the individual and his or her community. Other factors that can maintain unreasonable beliefs (in the sense of the belief being strongly contradicted by evidence or logical argument) are the fears or anxieties that people have about the implications of their rejecting their beliefs, such as the adverse effects of such rejection on the individual's sense of meaning and purpose in life, on his/her identity, on his or her relationships with family members, or on the cohesiveness of the community to which he or she is bonded and whose values he/she wants to sustain. In the case of orthodox Judaism, in particular, there is a fear for the survival of the

¹⁴ Schimmel, H-Judaic, Jan. 7, 1997

Jewish people based upon the assumption that its survival depends upon the survival of orthodoxy and the survival of orthodoxy, in turn, depends upon affirming the belief in TMS and the halakhic authority which it confers. I suggest that in addition to rational arguments presented in favor of TMS (which I personally find unconvincing, as do most scholarly students of the Pentateuch) the so-called "compartmentalization" that one finds among many modern orthodox scientists and scholars (in that they do not apply the same standards and criteria for assessing the plausibility and validity of their religious commitment to the doctrine [dogma, belief or theory] of TMS, as they do to theories or assertions about other phenomena or literary works which they study in their respective intellectual endeavors), is sustained by emotional and social factors, including fear of the effects of giving up, or letting go of, the belief.

4. I suggest that the belief in TMS and what is inferred from that belief, sometimes results in what I consider to be unethical or immoral attitudes, values and behavior, such as that, in principle, (and not necessarily in all cases, in practice) women have fewer legal rights in marriage and divorce than men (which still has consequences in the modern orthodox world today, as with the agunah problem), or that, in principle (not in practice today), Jews who engage in homosexual behavior, blasphemy or Sabbath violation in knowing and deliberate disregard for Pentateuchal law, should be put to death, following due process. In extreme and rare cases the belief/claim that the Pentateuch was revealed by God to Moses, and that one is absolutely certain that this is the case, can and has led to religious fanaticism, such as with Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir. In addition to several unethical or immoral (from my point of view) implications of a belief in TMS, there are negative educational and intellectual consequences of it as well. I point out that there are also many positive ethical and moral values (in my view) in modern orthodoxy, (some of which are related to the belief in TMS).

5. I point out that it is important for those who affirm a belief in, or make a claim for the theory of TMS, to clarify for themselves whether their belief or claim is made on the basis of its presumed demonstrable and verifiable nature, with evidence or logical argument, or whether it is based upon a subjective existential "leap of faith". If it is the former, then the belief or claim should be subject to the same kind of criteria and standards for

confirming or verifying claims in scientific and academic discourse as are other claims or theories in science and scholarship. In my opinion, the TMS belief, (claim, theory, dogma or doctrine) fails the test of reasonableness. If, on the other hand, the TMS belief is a subjective, existential one, then how can the modern orthodox maintain that their belief is the only true and "authentic" one, which in principle all Jews (and indeed, all humans) are obligated to affirm, and that those who do not affirm TMS and the mitzvot that follow from it, should, at least, in principle, be punished? After all, what may be subjectively meaningful to modern orthodox Jews may not be so to others, who may have their own subjectively meaningful belief systems, or even none at all.¹⁵

In many ways, Schimmel's synopsis took some of the steam out of the discussion. Until his synopsis, there had been 38 messages in the thread contributed by 27 individuals. In the days that followed the synopsis, there were only ten more posts. Of those ten notes, only two dealt directly with the synopsis, while the rest were final comments on the theoretical aspects of the thread. One of the contributors of the two notes that dealt with the synopsis chose to limit his comments only to one aspect of the issue, "namely that an assumption that TMS is scientifically disproved is brought as a fact, rather as the subject of discussion." Quoting from an article in a recent issue of *Nature*, Gilad Gevaryahu continued, "although this article does not deal directly with the subject matter, it deals with one aspect of Jewish historicity, but it put the alleged fact into question."¹⁶ (Apparently, according to the sections of the *Nature* article Gevaryahu quoted, scientists had discovered differences in the frequency of Y-chromosome haplotypes between Jewish priests and their lay counterparts that antedate the division of world Jewry into Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities and confirm a distinct paternal genealogy for Jewish priests). For Gevaryahu, this was scientific proof of the Bible's story, and, the start of another significant thread on H-Judaic.

¹⁵ Schimmel, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 7, 1997

Meanwhile, Samuel Heilman's response to Schimmel's synopsis represented the best conclusion to the main part of the thread. Wrote Heilman, "having read Schimmel's synopsis, I am moved to point out that his call to believers to justify their belief in divine revelation at Sinai on rational or reasonable grounds misses the basic element of belief. As in the old maxim: Believe not what is, believe what is absurd. Beliefs of this sort are by their very nature beyond the rational."¹⁷ In the end, 32 individuals contributed 48 messages, the bulk in less than a month.

Naming Girls

I stated from the outset that this section of the thesis would not include threads that consisted of primarily bibliographic citations. Nonetheless, I make brief mention here of a thread started by Stephen Fruitman of Umea University in Sweden on naming ceremonies for girls. I mention it because it was rather extensive at 17 messages in just over a week. Most of the messages cited various books and publications that contained information about naming ceremonies. However, several notes mentioned two cultural variations of a female naming ceremony, the Sephardic *Zeved Habat*, and the Alsatian *Hoole Grash/Hol Kreish/Haut la Creche*¹⁸ ceremonies. Unfortunately, despite the volume of correspondence, this thread did not evolve into any kind of scholarly examination of naming ceremonies in Jewish tradition.

The Epistemology of the Latke (with Ketchup)

The same cannot be said of the Latke thread, which began in early December, 1996.

¹⁶ Gevaryahu, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 15, 1997

¹⁷ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 15, 1997

¹⁸ From the French for "lift the crib".

Many long-time members of the list still fondly recall the thread on Latkes that lasted just ten days, but was one of the largest threads by volumes of messages. Those that do recall the thread often attribute its initiation to a professor of sociology at McGill University, Morton Weinfeld. The thread, however, was started by Eliezer Abrahamson, who sent a note to the list asking for historical information on the custom of eating latkes on Hanukah. In fact, Weinfeld probably never intended to even participate in a discussion on latkes on H-Judaic. At around the same time that Abrahamson was sending his note to H-Judaic, Weinfeld was sending a humorous note to the small list run by the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies. In his ACJS note, Weinfeld wrote, "I would like to raise a crucial question facing the Jewish people at this point in time. How best to eat latkes? There are three obvious possible choices. With sour cream, with applesauce, [and], believe it or not, with ketchup. It would be important to see what the rank ordering among Jewish scholars might be on this crucial question. The consequences for Jewish continuity are self-evident and need not be elaborated here."¹⁹ A day after Abrahamson's note, I cross-posted Weinfeld's query from the ACJS list to H-Judaic.

The deed was done. "In the spirit of postmodern, postcolonial political correctness, I would feel called upon to protest the eurocentrist tenor of the latke discussion except that the prospect of *soufganiot* with ketchup (or mayonnaise) is even less appealing than that of latkes with same," wrote McMaster University Associate Dean Adele Reinhartz.²⁰ "I believe there is a passage in Leviticus that specifically prohibits the application of ketchup to latkes. If there is not, I propose that we add one," added Andy Buckser of Purdue University.²¹ Nonetheless, Scott Leonard of Youngstown State University

¹⁹ Weinfeld, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 4, 1996

²⁰ Reinhartz, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1997

²¹ Buckser, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1996

understood Weinfeld's ketchup usage: "many sages agree that the only proper way to eat them is with applesauce--thus commemorating the way the Macabees dashed out the brains of the Seleucids. (Of course the symbolism of ketchup is similar and obvious.)"²² Others were not so kind. "Ketchup? I shudder at the mere thought. Is this a peculiarly Canadian heresy?" asked Stanford's Edward Jajko²³. "Ketchup is suitable only for people who confuse latkes with hashbrowns--in which case we don't discuss anything at all with them," added the University of Washington's Martin Jaffee.²⁴ "[The] inclusion of ketchup on his list I won't take seriously - presumably it's some local perversion to which there can be no response but to bracket it, then seal it in an oubliette," wrote Bert Stern of Wabash College.²⁵ And that was just the first day!

The craziness continued. "My husband eats them with mustard," declared Marsha Cohen.²⁶ "I fear the heresy of Mort Weinfeld will besmirch the good name of Canadian Jewry. No, we do not eat latkes with ketchup in igloos. One might expect us to follow his lead and propose vinegar as a dip in Quebec. Latkes obviously go with sour cream; we in Canada know that. And never yogurt. Oy vey, that my people have fallen so far," bemoaned Concordia University's Norma Baumel Joseph.²⁷ "I won't even discuss the ketchup question which offends even my Southern Episcopalian roots!" exclaimed Kristin Zapalac of Washington University.²⁸ And it wasn't just ketchup that was the source of derision. "I speak on behalf of the seventy percent of the Jewish people who are

²² Leonard, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1996

²³ Jajko, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1996

²⁴ Jaffee, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1996

²⁵ Stern, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 5, 1996

²⁶ Cohen, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1996

²⁷ Joseph, N., H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1996

²⁸ Zapalac, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1996

lactose intolerant to some degree. Latkes with sour cream is an antisemitic plot originally promoted by the Tsar's secret police in the late 19th century, a time of numerous plots against the Jews. Its purpose was to subtly destroy the link between the Jews and the secret of our survival: the latke. With sour cream the latkes would cause discomfort to most Jews and gradually they would give them up, losing their vitality and future," complained Howard Joseph, senior rabbi of Montreal's oldest synagogue.²⁹ But no other note better characterized the growing debate than Alex Sagan's essay on the latke and continuity. Sagan of Harvard University, composed his note in the form of an open letter to Weinfeld, and is reprinted here in its entirety:³⁰

Dear Professor Weinfeld:

I believe, contrary to what you suggest, that the consequences for Jewish continuity are not entirely self-evident, but I am felicitously provoked by your "internettish" opinion survey (however unscientific it may turn out to be).

To begin with, I believe we must distinguish between Jewish continuity and Jewish survival. These two notions are related, and they may overlap, but they must be distinguished if we are to think clearly about the issues you raise. Let us begin with continuity and soon enough we will come to the question of survival.

Continuity means, in the first instance, the absence of rupture or discontinuity. Its expected form would be the continuation of the traditional practice, whatever it may be. I believe the traditional practice is to eat pan-fried potato pancakes with either applesauce or sour cream. Continuity would, therefore, consist in the preservation of this custom.

²⁹ Joseph, H., H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1996

³⁰ Irving Howe, in his *World of Our Fathers*, writes that Jewish humour, as it emerged out of the end of World War II in American, wove fantasies of loathing and embarrassment, "which could bring an audience with many middle-class Jews to shocked laughter because it uncovered a kinship in the forbidden," (p. 570). It is hard to say what the role of humour is within a Jewish 'academic' context, but Sagan's letter to Weinfeld, as well as other notes in this thread, may well reveal a kinship in the forbidden. In this case, the forbidden may be poking fun at the ever-present ego of the scholar - a rare ability to laugh at oneself.

The choice between sour cream and applesauce strikes me as the sort of dilemma which we need not solve definitively. Giving no particular priority to either applesauce or sour cream, I believe that both are part of the texture of Jewish custom in North America (among whom Ashkenazic praxis predominates). This is a case in which we should invoke the Talmudic term "teku" ("let it stand") to describe a matter which cannot or need not be resolved. (I should say, parenthetically, that there is some etymological disagreement over the meaning of "teku", and we may debate whether its usage denotes a matter that is utterly insoluble by anyone, or whether it refers to disputes that only the wisdom of a returned Elijah the Prophet can resolve. In either case, the two alternatives--in this case sour cream and applesauce--remain as legitimate alternatives for the foreseeable future.)

The sour-cream-or-apple-sauce query, I would argue, enriches more than it perplexes. It gives Jewish culture a variety and dynamism which makes it attractive and might actually promote its survival. The objective of latke-hamentashen debates, after all, is only superficially to establish which food is superior. The deeper purpose is to infuse both symbolic foods with the richer meaning.

But what meaning do these condiments possess? As far as I know, they are simply eaten to enhance the delectation. They do not even rise to the level of symbolism connoted by white foodstuffs on Shavuot, when notions of purity are central. It goes without saying, therefore (kal v'homer), that they have none of the symbolic force or halachic requirements that obtain in the case of matzah. In other words, there is no halachic or symbolic reason to eat either--or any--thing with our latkes. What we are dealing with is custom.

Custom is not law, but Judaism accords great respect to custom. It has often been suggested that, in Jewish life, law changes more easily than custom. Communal and familial "minhagim" are treated with the greatest respect and are not to be discarded. The very familiarity of the revisited custom is compelling; it is evocative, soothing, and emphasizes the eternal repetition of cherished rituals.

So, we have a custom, a tradition, of two coexisting alternatives. And this dyad serves us well. Sour cream for those who enjoy a truly rich experience, almost a meal in itself. Apple sauce for those who prefer a sweeter taste, for kosher meals featuring meat, and for those who are watchful of their cholesterol level or similar matters. Personally, I like

applesauce. I used to enjoy sour cream, too, but I can no longer eat milk products; lactose hassles are, among the populations of northern Europe, a special curse of the Jews (and not our only one).

What, then, should we think of ketchup? The unprecedented use of this bottled beast is the very opposite of continuity. Or is it? Here the question of survival arises, for we must ask if this uncustomary innovation furthers or undermines what is valuable in Jewish culture.

This would seem to present a microcosm of the Jewish encounter with modernity, in which we may have trouble agreeing on which innovations are beneficial and which are destructive. For some, Reform Judaism and secular Zionism are profound sins which promote the destruction of the Jewish people, for others they epitomize the Jews' very ability to survive by refashioning their culture in response to changing circumstances. Is ketchup on latkes an example of Jewish vitality and adaptability, or is it another instance of being too open to secular or non-Jewish influences that might winnow away the precious remnants of a dwindling heritage? We do not now have the answer to this question, and we must leave it unresolved for the moment, "teku". Perhaps future historians will reach a consensus on the subject.

To state the situation plainly, there are those who like ketchup on latkes. I count myself among them (though I admit to doubts about the appropriateness of this predilection). This is only to be expected in countries, such as the United States, where fried potatoes are regularly eaten with a dollop or splatter of this red sauce. In the Low Countries, where mayonnaise (which is said to be of Balearic origin) is the preferred topping for "fries", the situation is entirely different.

And while we have the transatlantic comparison on the table (so to speak), we should consider the fact that Chanukah celebrations at Dutch synagogues do not include latkes at all, but rather balls of fried dough. This, like many Jewish practices, seems to have multiple causes: on the one hand, there is the fact that such fried dough is part of the Dutch culinary repertoire; on the other hand, there is the growing influence of Israeli culture (which prefers doughnuts to latkes). These doughnuts now have a Dutch name and a Hebrew one, though one can note differences between the treats made by Dutch Jews and by Amsterdam's Israeli bakeries.

What does one think about the increasing prevalence of this same Israeli fare in America? Such "sufganiyot" are more and more common

here. At our Chanukah party this year, we will serve both latkes and sufganiyot. Will we continue indefinitely to serve two different fried, filling, fattening foods? Perhaps, but there can be little doubt that Israeli customs (often based on the gastronomic practices of Jewish immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa) will exert increasing influence in Jewish communities worldwide. Think of falafel (but do not run out and get some).

Will the latke itself be forgotten in the process? Does this matter if the underlying practice of eating something fried in oil is preserved? Religiously speaking, Jews eat fried foods at Chanukah to remember the "miracle of the oil". Though historians of Antiquity might tell it differently, Chanukah is supposed to commemorate how one day's worth of pure oil burned for eight days, allowing the sanctuary of the ancient Temple to be rededicated after the Assyrians were driven out by the Maccabian revolt (see Tractate Shabbat, 21b). This whole story, I dare say, has undergone more changes than the condiment menu for latkes, especially as secularism and Zionism have teamed up to eclipse the Talmudic story about the oil with a hagiography of the muscular Jew in which Judah Maccabi appears as the Moshe Dayan of ancient times.

Despite our attachment to latke making and latke fressing, we might agree that it would better to replace it with the sufganiyah than to completely lose the treasured custom of eating something fried in observance of Chanukah. What is one to think about the baked latkes I was served at the home of a hospital nutritionist? The potato, after all, is less essential than the oil, at least for one kind of traditionalist. (The potato, for what it is worth, is American in origin. Is that a "New-World" reason to maintain its consumption at Chanukah?)

But let us not get ahead of the curve, for the latke's days are far from over. And if we value the latke, we must think long and hard about what exactly we valorize? Do we just want people to keep eating latkes (in which case ketchup is to be welcomed if it keeps the latke alive and rejected if it does the opposite)? Or do we want people to eat latkes the way they have been eaten in our families, the way they were eaten in the cities and shtetls where our immigrant forebears were born? How is our attitude affected by the thought that those distant communities were destroyed, and what do we make of the fact that neither assimilation (ketchup?) nor the dogged adherence to custom and law prevented that destruction?

The cultural topography of Jewish life has been utterly reoriented. Its magnetic poles are not Poland or Prussia but Israel and America. How, then, should we view changes in how Jews are Jewish? A comparative study recommends itself here. How does the state of latke fressing compare with the fate of the now omnipresent bagel, with the disappearing blintz, with matzah (machine-made and shmurah), with hamentashen, with kashrut? I believe the existing literature has only scratched the surface of such subjects.

We find ourselves, as usual, on the horns of a dilemma. Jews may disappear if they do not adapt to changing conditions. They may also disappear if they adopt certain practices too readily. We cannot entirely solve this dilemma, but we must try nonetheless. But first you'll eat.

Alex Sagan, Center for European Studies, Harvard University³¹

After Sagan's essay, the thread began to wane. How could anyone possibly have competed? Wrote Rita Bauer, "I think that Latkes were originally eaten with sour cream. There is mention of eating dairy products on Hannukka to remember the brave act of Yehudit, (Juda Maccabee's sister). When forced to sleep with the Greek leader of the region, [she] fed him cheese to make him thirsty, and a lot of wine until he fell asleep and then cut off his head."³² Lydia Gil, of the University of Texas, wrote to suggest a compilation of all the notes into a study called "The Epistemology of the Latke."³³ But perhaps it was Rice University's Stephen Larent Hood's one-line play entitled 'Chanukah and the Postmodern Condition' which best summed up the thread:³⁴

Mr. Potato Head: "These pancakes are to die for. What's in 'em?"

In the end, 37 different people posted 41 notes in just a couple of weeks. In addition to Weinfeld's original suggestion of apple sauce, sour cream, and ketchup, several other

³¹ Sagan, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1996

³² Bauer, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 10, 1996

³³ Gil, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 11, 1996

³⁴ Hood, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 11, 1996

dressings were offered, including: mayonnaise, salt, cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, mushrooms, Cajun spices, sugar, mustard, vinegar, in chicken soup, jam, onions, gravy, marmalade, black beans, and dates. Also of note, academics out-contributed non-academics by more than three-to-one in this thread. Finally, and ironically, no one ever answered Abrahamson's original query, as to how potato latkes came to be the Ashkenazic food of choice for Hannukah, given the North American origins of the potato. Alas.

Genetic Cohens and the Hawai'ian Khazars

The Genetic Cohen thread was perhaps the most complex and multifaceted thread of the period in question. It began in the midst of a discussion on the academic merits of challenging belief, moved on to genetics, progressed through contemporary Middle East politics, into Semitic linguistics and finally back to genetics. As mentioned above, in the midst of the debate around Solomon Schimmel's paper, Gilad Gevaryahu posted a note, which quoted an article in *Nature* as scientific proof for TMS (Torah from Moshe at Sinai). Gevaryahu claimed that the scientific discovery of a unique paternal genetic makeup among the Jewish priestly class regardless of ethnic origin, was proof of the existence of the biblical figure Ahron, the brother of Moses and the first Jewish priest. Aryeh Cohen wrote next to contest Gevaryahu's conclusion, stating instead that, at best, the research might prove there was a priestly clan prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.³⁵ Murray Freedman then cited several other populist examples of scientific 'evidence' for aspects of TMS, including Creation. Among his proofs were the 'statistical significant' Torah codes, as he described them, and the passing on of

³⁵ Cohen, A., H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 18, 1997

mitochondrial DNA through the matrimonial descent of Judaism.³⁶ Freedman's theory was immediately shot down. Wrote Michael Carasik of Brandeis University, somewhat sarcastically, "[have you] been able to establish how mitochondrial DNA was passed along during the patriarchal age, when Jewishness was inherited from the father?"³⁷ Freedman responded with a nearly incoherent message that attempted to further his point by showing that the transmission of Jewishness as matrilineal is universally accepted because prayers for the sick always reference the mother and not the father.³⁸ Whether or not he intended it, Freedman referred to matrilineal descent as "banal and mundane." This did not sit well with the University of Michigan's Judith Elkin, who exclaimed in response, "Only someone who has never given birth could refer to the process as banal and mundane. Hey! wake up and taste reality!"³⁹ Undeterred, Freedman wrote again, this time invoking the scientific evidence of genetic Cohens in an attempt to debunk Arthur Koestler and his theory that Ashkenazic Jews were not Hebrews, but were descendants of converted Khazars from the 8th Century, and therefore not entitled to any claim on Palestine.⁴⁰ The thread had taken another turn.

While a few people wrote to comment on the ramification of the Khazar theory on contemporary Middle East politics, H-Judaic board member, Judaic languages linguist, and University of Toronto Yiddish professor, Leslie Train wondered out loud about the etymology of the Jewish surnames Kagan and Kahane. Specifically, he wondered, could they have originated in the Altaic Kaghan among the Turkic speaking Khazars, and then been transposed under the influence of Russian pronunciation. "Could the name Kagan be

³⁶ Freedman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 20, 1997

³⁷ Carasik, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 21, 1997

³⁸ Freedman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 22, 1997

³⁹ Elkin, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 24, 1997

from Khazar influence? Are as high a percentage of Kagans genetic cohanim as Cohens, Katzes etc?" Train asked.⁴¹

Freedman rejected Train's attempt to give credence to Koestler's theory and wrote again, this time with a folk etymology of his own. "Would not the Kh in Khan, like Khazar be pronounced as the ch in Loch unlike the initial consonant of Kohen?" retorted Freedman.⁴² In his note, Train had postulated that "the only other source would be Aramaic, but I don't know of any other similarly-profound influence of Aramaic, especially where it would be displacing a Hebrew word."⁴³ Nonetheless, University of Michigan Semitics linguist Gene Schramm responded that the names "are simply the Aramaic equivalents of Hebrew Kohen. The Turkic items are as related to the Hebrew as the Hawaiian Big Kahuna."⁴⁴ (At this point, Valerie Weinstein of Cornell University wrote to give members of brief history of the Hawaiian priestly class). "Obviously I did not make myself clear as to my dilemma, vis-a-vis the Slavic form kagan/kahan for kohen (Hebrew) or koien (Yiddish). I can think of no other instance where Old Church Slavonic, Old Russian or modern Russian change a long o (in cohen) for a, or an accented long e for a. This is problem number one. Number two: If kagan is from Aramaic, the question remains - Why? Why from Aramaic and not from Hebrew or Yiddish? And aren't surnames relatively recent in Easter Europe? If so, explain the Aramaic influence," rebutted Train.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Freedman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 24, 1997

⁴¹ Train, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 26, 1997

⁴² Freedman, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 27, 1997

⁴³ Train, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 26, 1997

⁴⁴ Schramm, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 27, 1997

⁴⁵ Train, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 29, 1997

Schramm did not respond, nor did any other linguist, although a few non-linguists wrote to say that Russian had no letter H so that an H sound was often replaced by a G sound, and one person wondered out loud whether there was any relationship to the Mongolian name Khan. (Interestingly enough, Dr. Train is also trained in Mongolian, although he did not respond to the assertion).

Meanwhile, the other two sub-threads continued on. Ruth Abrams at the University of Massachusetts asked for secondary literature on the Jewishness of the Khazars. She received several references, including a number from Igor Zlochevsky of the Jewish Heritage Society in Russia. Simultaneously, a number of members continued to debate the implications and veracity of the scientific issues raised around the genetic make-up of the priestly clan. Most of the comments were made by members who had not read the original article. They were merely speculating on whether Ahron was the original phenotype or whether there had been a mutation in some later priest. One even suggested that the original phenotype was Levi, one of Jacob's sons, and the ancestor of the tribe to which Ahron and Moses belonged. Notwithstanding the 'noise', two notes stand out in the final days of the thread. University of Utah anthropologist, Laurence Loeb, "did carefully examine the original, one page, report by Skorecki in *Nature* ."

There is a lot less here than meets the eye. The sample size is very small. The marker with the largest distinction between kohen and Yisrael [YAP+ DYS19] purporting to show a presence of 1.55 percent in priests and 18.4 in lay Jews, becomes even more interesting when comparing Ashkenazic and Sefardic Kohanim. Among Ashkenazic priests 2.4% show this marker while among Sfaridim there are no cases whatsoever. Among the rest of the markers, there are many other such inconsistencies. [YAP- DYS19A 20% vs 8%, B 45% vs 71%, C 23% vs. 4%, E 0 vs 8%]. Interestingly, the overall difference between Ashkenazic and Sfaridic Israelites is consistently of a smaller order reflecting the heterogeneity of ancestry.

One might suggest that while there is an obvious genetic drift in these markers when comparing Kohen and Yisrael, there is at least as great a drift, perhaps greater, when contrasting Ashkenazic and Sfaridic kohanim. In sum, the discrepancy between these two groups of kohanim, who are ostensibly of similar origin and share similar claims, needs some serious explanation before we try to make too much of the possible lineal implications of priestly descent.⁴⁶

And a week later, in a follow-up note, Loeb wrote again. "What is remarkable, is that despite incidents of intermarriage and occasional large scale conversions, to say nothing of genetic drift by isolated Jewish communities, the genetic evidence suggests that the overall contribution of genetic content from outside the Jewish population pool of some 2000 years ago, is remarkably low."

The general reaction to genetic-based material suggesting "racial" ties among Jews generally receives a visceral negative response because of our social experience with the popular usage of the term. My great forebear Franz Boas and my teacher Harry Shapiro struggled against racist concepts especially with their own Jewishness at risk. In any case, we Jews appear to be as much a biologically distinctive group as many other societies, small and large. As open-minded scholars, we need to be constantly reviewing and rethinking these materials to consider their implications. Scholars of Judaica need to become aware of the broader world of research which already takes such matters as appropriate and whose consequences will inevitably impinge on their work.⁴⁷

In the end, there were 34 posts contributed by 27 people between the second week of January through the first week of March.

⁴⁶ Loeb, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 17, 1997

⁴⁷ Loeb, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 26, 1997

Jewish Women, Jerry Seinfeld, and Betty Boop

As the discussion around the genetic makeup of Jewish priests was winding down, another thread was just starting. On February 20, 1997, Rivkah Lambert of the University of Maryland asked for assistance in identifying American films that contained explicit cultural representations and icons of Jewish women for a course she was going to teach on 'Images of Jewish Women'. In the days that followed, Lambert received several title suggestions from colleagues, and various pieces of advice on how to treat the matter in a classroom. For example, Carol Zemel in SUNY Buffalo's Art History department wrote that "my own feeling is that both the Jewish mother and princess are antisemitic stereotypes premised on inversions of Christian/bourgeois icons of femininity -- the Virgin mother and virgin bride."⁴⁸ Andrea Lieber of Vassar College noted that "there are not nearly as many clear-cut depictions of Jewish women in film/television/magazines as there are of Jewish men. Indeed, the archtypical 'JEW' in the popular media is usually male. This phenomenon makes the study of Jewish women in the media particularly fascinating, yet also difficult in that examples are harder to come by."⁴⁹ Ellen Flanders, the director of Toronto's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, urged Lambert to look for independent films beyond Hollywood.⁵⁰ And Judith Seid wondered aloud about accounting for "the radical change in the image of Jewish women from the overly sexed image of earlier this century and before, to the current sexless princess?"⁵¹ Later, Beth Kissileff asked "while I realize that the media is a large part of American culture and has a certain role in shaping perceptions of ourselves, I am not sure why that structure needs to be replicated in a course. Why not focus more on ways Jewish women have chosen to

⁴⁸ Zemel, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 21, 1997

⁴⁹ Lieber, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 21, 1997

⁵⁰ Flanders, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 24, 1997

⁵¹ Seid, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 24, 1997

perceive themselves and not worry so much about the ways others perceive us?"⁵²

Likewise, Jeffrey Shandler of the University of Pennsylvania recommended a conceptual shift.

I would like to encourage readers of the list that, when they deal with this material in their classes, they expand the discussion beyond the usual discussion of "positive/negative" images of Jews. I find that this paradigm, which has its roots in media "watchdog" groups and "thumbs up/down" media critics, doesn't enable the fullest and most insightful discussions of these media works and their place in modern Jewish life. Students should be encouraged to consider the complexities inherent in the relationships among the creators, disseminators, critics and audiences vis-a-vis Jewish (or other) subjects. The role of genre is also important and often neglected.⁵³

In a month's period, 35 members responded with over 40 posts to Lambert's request with a rich assortment of film and television titles and suggested resources, both in print and archival. Not only was the thread substantive in its content, but also in its contributors. These included three widely published scholars on the study of Jewish women in film, Riv-Ellen Prell, Sharon Pucker Rivo, and Eve Sicular.

The effect of the high level discourse also painted some light-hearted contributions and sub-threads with the brush of scholarship. Adam Fuerstenberg of Ryerson Polytechnical University wrote to ask, "what about the many Seinfeld episodes where the parents of his friend (George?) are shown in a very unflattering form, especially the woman, in fact all the 'Jewish' women."⁵⁴ A number of people pointed out that the Costanza characters were Italian, not Jewish. "[But] what's interesting about this is how conflated the 'New

⁵² Kissileff, H-Judaic, Mar. 3, 1997

⁵³ Shandler, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 5, 1997

⁵⁴ Fuerstenberg, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 26, 1997

Yorkishness' of the show has become not only with a vague sense of Jewishness, but with an even vaguer sense of generic ethnicity in which the details are not really important," wrote Daniel Soyer.⁵⁵ His sentiments echoed an earlier comment I had made: "it does raise the interesting point of how the image of Jewish women converges with the image of New York women, Jewish or not. Is it possible that the portrayals cited on the list recently are actually images of New York women, and only because of the focus of this list, do they also happen to be Jewish women? How often does this happen in our analysis of the Jewish experience - assigning cultural attributes to Jews, which might in fact be unique to the larger co-territorial community in question?"⁵⁶ Likewise, when YIVO's Zachary Baker asked whether or not Betty Boop was Jewish⁵⁷, Eve Jochnowitz of New York University, among others, treated the question seriously. "Is Ms Boop Jewish? I have begun to think that she almost certainly is. She is one of a venerable line of sultry Jewesses in American popular entertainments from Little Egypt at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 to Ariel, the Hasidic babe from the recent episode of the *X-Files*."⁵⁸ Incidentally, Jochnowitz and others pointed out that the voice of the Jewish mother who taunts Woody Allen from heaven in his film *New York Stories* is that of Mae Questel, who was earlier the voice of Betty Boop! In the end, between the main part of the thread and the Seinfeld/Boop sub-threads, 45 people contributed 52 messages to the exploration of image of the Jewish woman in American film.

⁵⁵ Soyer, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 5, 1997

⁵⁶ Hyman, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 27, 1997

⁵⁷ Baker, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 5, 1997

⁵⁸ Jochnowitz, H-Judaic Archives, Mar. 9, 1997

The Yale Five

As the 1997-98 academic year approached, five Orthodox Jewish students at Yale University requested they be exempted from the requirement that they live in the university's co-educational dormitories. In early September, the now frequent contributor, Samuel Heilman, raised the issue of the Yale Five, as they came to be known on H-Judaic.⁵⁹ The conversation was unfocused. Princeton University's Froma Zeitlin was angry. "The orthodox students at Yale who are demanding separate accommodations knew perfectly well what the policies of the university were before applying (and accepting offers of admission)," she wrote.⁶⁰ Haim Beliak saw it as "a challenge to the authority of residential universities to control the socialization of students [and] a challenge to the notion that students learn from each other by living together in all their diversity and make their own society."⁶¹ In Tzvee Zahavy's opinion, "a lawsuit is an extreme measure. We can be assured that Yale will dig in its heels and fight the students. [While] they have made a valid point against campus moral laxity, the students have blown a situation out of proportion when other remedies might have been tried."⁶² Meanwhile, Morton Weinfeld sought to compare the Yale request to a memo sent to McGill faculty from the university's administration asking for accommodation for religious holidays for students with an attached list of holidays for every religion. "I'd like to think of the Yale Five's very real concern under the general issue of reasonable accommodation, and see if general principles can apply. Though it is not clear-cut, I would like to see Yale make some effort to accommodate the Five," wrote Weinfeld.⁶³ In a second note, Heilman added, "there is no doubt that a trend on today's campuses that

⁵⁹ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 7, 1997

⁶⁰ Zeitlin, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 8, 1997

⁶¹ Beliak, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 8, 1997

⁶² Zahavy, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 12, 1997

allows and even encourages ethnic and racial separation is very much alive. Indeed, I believe it fair to say that it is precisely because this trend DOES exist that the Yale students felt it conceivable to make their case public. One may agree or disagree with their position (and I am not at all certain where I stand on the matter), but there is no doubt that they are not setting a precedent with their request. They are rather putting a Jewish twist on requests and arrangements that women's groups, African-American groups and others and a variety of campuses have already made."⁶⁴ Alex Sagan of Harvard asked whether single-sex dormitory halls would satisfy the Orthodox students' demands?⁶⁵ To which Shalom Carmy of Yeshiva University replied that they would not be satisfactory "because there would still be the possibility of loose sexual behavior when a student's sexual partner comes to visit, casual unplanned encounters in the shower room, etc."⁶⁶ Wrote Beth Kissileff, "in a way, I see this as a measure of our comfort level as Jews in America. We don't need to try as hard as possible to assimilate when entering the upper echelons of the educational system. I feel pleased, in part, that even at Yale with its well-documented quotas in the earlier part of the century, Jews now are confident enough to want to be at Yale 'without' feeling that they need or must join the club at the expense of halachic observance."⁶⁷ Among the most interesting of the notes in this thread was that sent in by the Hillel rabbi at Harvard, David Starr.

As a Hillel rabbi at Harvard, I interact with most of the more involved, more knowledgeable Jewish students on campus. Some of the frum kids, I repeat some, clearly are not comfortable socializing with non-Jews, which is understandable, given their prior educational environments - some are clearly ambivalent about the valence of a secular education, vocational

⁶³ Weinfeld, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 14, 1997

⁶⁴ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 14, 1997

⁶⁵ Sagan, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 15, 1997

⁶⁶ Carmy, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 16, 1997

⁶⁷ Kissileff, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 18, 1997

issues aside. Especially after yeshiva in Israel, they wonder what they're doing at a place like Harvard. A few years ago, when Professor Twersky had dinner with a few students at the Hillel, several asked him how he had felt, going to schools like Boston Latin and Harvard as an Orthodox Jew. He said matter of factly that it was no big deal; this is what kids did. They didn't get it. The synthesis he embraced they questioned, which is why [we have] experienced in recent years the phenomenon of students accepted to Harvard who go to Y.U. instead. Other students, perhaps like the Yale case, opt to go Ivy, carrying with them all of the ambivalence about secular ed in a secular environment. They compartmentalize: seeking the tools of the learning, while distancing themselves as much as possible from the extracurricular, nonformal, social dimension of the college experience, limiting it mainly to Hillel. That's why a place like Harvard doesn't allow Hillel to serve lunches daily; if they did, students would have even less contact with the non-kosher student body.⁶⁸

A few days later, Yvonne Solow forwarded part of an article with the latest news on the situation of the Yale Five. As it turned out, one of the Five, a Rachel Wohlgelernter, got married before a Manhattan justice of the peace, but did not marry in a Jewish ceremony. In this way, she became exempt from Yale's policy requiring all freshmen and sophomores to live on campus unless they are over age 21 or are married.⁶⁹ As with most threads of this nature, 22 posts (by 20 people) later, nothing was, or probably could be resolved. Nonetheless, by the time David Berger of the City University of New York wrote the last note of the thread on October 20, the H-Judaic daily discussion list had officially entered its third season.

⁶⁸ Starr, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 19, 1997

⁶⁹ Solow, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 21, 1997

CHAPTER SEVEN: YEAR III THREADS

Generally speaking, there was an over-all decline in the volume of material emanating from both the discussion group and the newsletter in year three. This was due to several reasons - my progression towards burnout, the eventual transition to a new moderator and new newsletter editor, and the incumbent learning curves associated with both. Nonetheless, during the third year of the study, there were five significant threads.

Two Judiths and a Saint Esther

In mid-December 1997, member Kris Zapalac of Washington University wrote to ask for popular retellings of the Judith apocrypha in Jewish tradition. Over the course of a month, a wandering thread of 41 posts emerged with the lowest Diffusement Rate of any of the major threads in the period of study¹.

¹ I have coined the term Diffusement Rate to refer to how widespread a discussion becomes. A thread with a Diffusement Rate of 100 means that each author only contributed once, in other words, the discussion was very diffuse. Although it would be impossible to have a Diffusement Rate of 0, the closer to 0 the rate is, the more likely the discussion is becoming monologic, the listserv equivalent of a monologue. However, it is unlikely that a series of notes contributed by only one person would be construed as a thread, therefore, the lower the Diffusement Rate, the more likely it is that the conversation is dialogic, or is dominated by two or three people at the most. Of the 18 major threads identified in this section of the study, only two had a Diffusement Rate of less than 60. In the discussion on Genesis and Kabbalah, the thread featured a number of contributions by Jonathan Safren and Abe Anonim, as well as a number of people writing a second note, where normally, they might have only contributed one. This produced a Diffusement Rate of 59. The discussion about Judith and the subsequent thread, featured 17 out of 41 posts by just two people, Zapalac and Neulander, thus causing a Diffusement Rate of only 56, the lowest of any thread in the study.

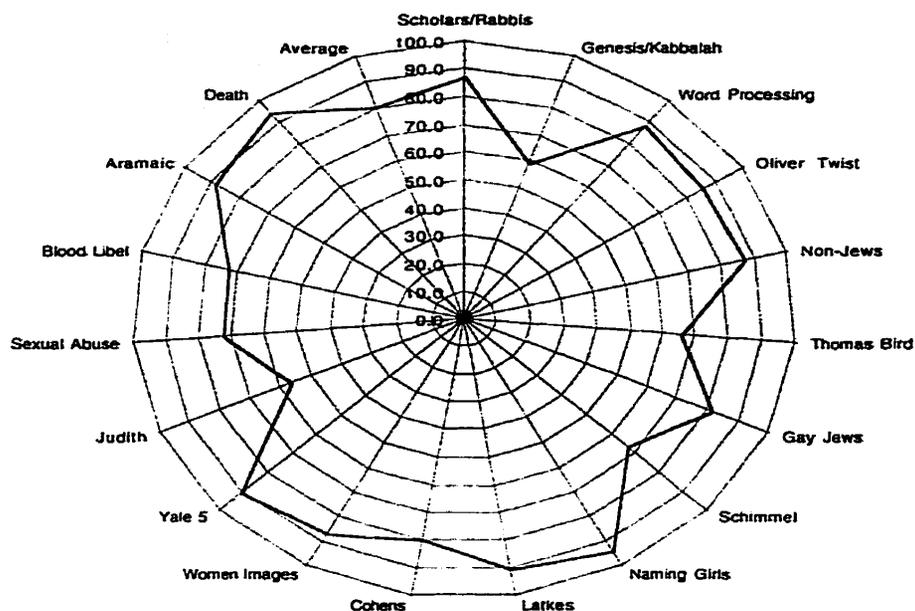


Fig. 7.1 Diffusement Patterns for Major H-Judaic Threads

In particular, over forty percent of all the notes in this thread were contributed by Zapalac and Judith Neulander.

In and of itself, the fact that two members were interested enough to contribute significantly to a thread is not particularly noteworthy. Additionally, Judith Neulander was one of the more prolific contributors to the discussion group during the period, with 45 notes, which ranked her sixth out of all contributors, so we should not be surprised to see her here. However, the observant reader of this thesis would have noted that Neulander's name is missing from previous threads, despite her prolific contributions. As it turns out, Neulander had only joined H-Judaic a few days before the start of this thread, which means her 45 notes were written in just a one-year period! Allow me then, to

digress in chronology in order to contextualize the impact of Neulander's contributions to this thread.

In late November of 1997, I sent a note to a small discussion list of the Committee for the Anthropology of Jews and Judaism run by H-Judaic board member Guy Haskell. The note was an invitation to the anthropologists to join H-Judaic. Several did, and on November 30, I sent a note to H-Judaic welcoming all the new anthropologists who had joined. One of them was Judith Neulander, who had defended her doctoral thesis the prior June and was working out of the Folklore Institute at Indiana University. Neulander immediately began to post messages, one on December 3 in a small thread on Bruria, and then on December 4, in a small thread regarding the Olam Katan group for the study of small Jewish communities. Wrote Neulander in her second note, "for those interested, the alleged crypto-Jews of New Mexico were the topic of my Ph.D. dissertation (sucessfully defended June 1997). I found that claims of a crypto-Jewish survival in the Southwest (most actively promoted by a core group of academics from New Mexico--none of whom has any training whatsoever in anthropology, folklore, or ethnomusicology, and all of whom draw a blank on ethnographic theory, method and technique) is an ersatz marrano revival."² Part of her dissertation work, she continued, appeared in article form in a special issue of the Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review.

Neulander had stepped right off the virtual 'boat' and right into controversy. Responded Utah anthropologist Laurence Loeb, "having examined the dissertation and the recent issue of Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review, I am of the opinion that the arguments are not as thoroughly convincing as they would have everyone believe. Suffice-it-to say,

² Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 4, 1997

considerably more, not less, research needs to be done in evaluating the broad and growing collection of testimonials, cultural markers and intriguing documentation concerning crypto-Jews in North America."³ Neulander was taken aback by what must have seemed a questioning of her thesis conclusions. "Yesterday's criticism provides a perfect instance of the basis on which I am criticized, when I am criticized--a valuable example of passion over reason, as so frequently attends this topic. The criticism states that the 'the JFER issue and the dissertation,' were read and they were found to be 'not very convincing,' however, nothing is cited in the JFER issue to support this claim [and] the dissertation is not available, so could not have been read."⁴ The same day, University of Nottingham anthropologist Seth Kunin wrote to the list too.

I would like to respond to Judith Neulander's Email in which she argues forcefully that the 'crypto-Judaic' community in New Mexico can not be considered authentic. One of the primary reasons for this proposition, aside from the no doubt worthy research, is that no trained anthropologists have studied this community. As an anthropologist (with a PhD in anthropology) I have conducted ethnographic research among the crypto-Jews in New Mexico for the last two years. This research has revealed that the community is much more complex and varied than presented. Although it certainly includes a significant element of culture construction, (as do all cultures at all times), the identity is, in many cases, clearly based on long standing traditions with patterns of practice which are understood by the individuals (and often their parents and grandparents) to be of Jewish origin and which often at least appear to be related to Jewish practice. It also suggests that there are complex processes (including that of Bricolage) which have led to the development and transformation of their ritual practice. We can not expect to find survivals -- most anthropologists agree that culture is constantly changing and taking on elements from its context (both geographical and cultural). All aspects transform to meet the cultural needs, there are no survivals or untransformed relics of the past (especially given that the crypto-Jews did

³ Loeb, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 8, 1997

⁴ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1997

not have a written Jewish culture). Thus, crypto-Judaic practice must be examined in its own terms especially in regard to how it is understood and used by people identifying themselves as crypto-Jews today. In spite of this generally understood principle, there seems to be engagement in a search for traditional (historic) authenticity. From an anthropologist's perspective, as opposed to that of the folklorist, questions of authenticity especially determined eticly are not useful --they are often based on ethnocentric assumptions.⁵

In an attempt to defend herself, Neulander rebutted that, "those who take the trouble to read what I have written, will also learn that the crypto-Jewish canon is not generated from within the Hispano community that it so broadly redefines. [It] is the creation of academics -- in particular a core group of local academics, none of whom has any training whatsoever in ethnographic theory, method or fieldwork. All of whom stand outside the non-academic Hispano mainstream, informing the emic community of its ethnic specificity, based on its etic misperceptions of folkways that are demonstrably non-Jewish--folkways whose (20th century) origin and persistence in the region is cited and discussed in the work."⁶ In the end, the thread was side-tracked by non-anthropologists asking for the definitions of all the terms the anthropologists had been throwing around. As Andy Buckser of Purdue wrote, "welcome to the wonderful world of anthropological buzzwords! You guys should have known that once you let anthropologists into the list, you'd be in trouble."⁷ Not unlike Abe Anonim and Solomon Schimmel before her, Neulander was not discouraged by negative feedback. She responded vigorously and was encouraged to write often on related topics.

Enter Kristin Zapalac and her query about Judith, Judah Maccabee's sister.

⁵ Kunin, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 9, 1997

⁶ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 11, 1997

The first few responses to Zapalac were bibliographical, including one from Hebrew Union College professor Marc Bregman writing from Jerusalem to tell Zapalac that Adolpho Roitman, Curator of the Shrine of the Book (Dead Sea Scrolls) Museum had done his dissertation work on Judith.⁸ Then came Neulander. "Charged with converting (rather than slaughtering) Amerindians, Spanish colonials—who thought Indians were a Lost Tribe of Israel too 'savage' to 'grasp' the intellectuality of the New Testament—felt they had to introduce Amerindian peoples to Christianity through a more 'primitive' means: the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew Scriptures. This they did through folk theatre. I did not look for Judith in Hispano tradition, nor did I inadvertently run across her there. But I do know that Judith and Esther were both conflated as aspects of the Virgin Mary, and were widely venerated as such in Spanish folk tradition. The theatrical folk tradition was carried by Spanish colonials, and persists in many of the New World outposts that they colonized."⁹

Meanwhile, Zapalac continued to flesh out her query by asking about the differences between the Vulgate version of the book of Judith and the sources cited in Rashi. She also cited the Encyclopaedia Judaica which attributed the Spanish plays of Neulander's post to a 'Marrano' playwright named Felipe Godinez in the 17th Century. "I wonder if his dramas were written with an awareness of the Amerindian conversion project in mind or used in that project? I wonder too if his approach to the stories differed from those of his non-Marrano Christian contemporaries?"¹⁰ Neulander responded with a long letter about

⁷ Buckser, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 12, 1997

⁸ Bregman, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 17, 1997

⁹ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 17, 1997

¹⁰ Zapalac, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 23, 1997

two different traditions in the theatrical productions of Esther and Judith, one written by and for the literati, musicians and fine artists, the other, oral, often anonymous, and the origin of Spanish folk theatre. "Felipe Godinez was a Jew who converted to Christianity, a New Christian who wrote 'Aman y Mardoqueo o la reina Ester'. Since I'm not familiar with his play, I can't say which tradition he adhered to—as a sincere New Christian, however, he may well reflect the Christian worldview," wrote Neulander.¹¹ In her next note, Zapalac corrected what she saw as several errors in fact that Neulander had posted, including the historical development of the St. Jerome Vulgate, the Septuagint, and Martin Luther's versions of the Bible as compared to Hebrew scriptures. She also pointed out that the Council of Trent had never bestowed sainthood on Esther.¹² Neulander responded with several citations listing Esther as a saint.¹³ Nottingham's Seth Kunin, who had earlier sparred with Neulander, now entered the discussion, wondering aloud about how wide-spread the veneration of Esther as a saint was in the Hispanic community, or whether it was a phenomenon more unique to the crypto-Jews of New Mexico. "It is possible that such a community would select Saints to venerate that allowed them to express both their public Catholic identity and their private Jewish identity," wrote Kunin.¹⁴

Meanwhile, other contributors continued to provide various references on the wide range of sub-threads now engulfing the list. Among them was Allan Corre, an emeritus professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a published scholar of the Judith

¹¹ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 28, 1997

¹² Zapalac, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 29, 1997

¹³ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 30, 1997

¹⁴ Kunin, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 31, 1997

story, and Elisabeth Hollender of the University of Koeln, Germany, who reported on a 1991 Italian symposium on Judith in Jewish tradition.

Perhaps in support of Kunin's position, Zapalac continued, "neither Esther nor Judith appears in the Roman Martyrology despite the fact that Esther was given 20 December as a feast day by the Coptic church. I even found another source that said -- naturally without citation --that the Ethiopians celebrated Judith on August 7. Of course, since neither of these Coptic / Ethiopian celebrations would have been known to the Catholic missionaries in the New World, we're still left without any 'elite authority' for the American feast days with which the discussion of Esther began."¹⁵ Responded Neulander, "my New Mexican research shows that there is absolutely nothing documented in the past, or visible in the present, to indicate that people are meeting 'descendants of the 'Hidden Jews' of the southwest' when they pay tourist fees of \$1995 per person for this privilege. Rather, there is significant evidence, both documented in the past and visible in the present, to indicate that these tourists are meeting descendants of some of the most virulently antisemitic (and most deeply Hebraized) Protestant sects in the history of American folk religion."¹⁶ As an aside in the same note, Neulander wrote, "this discussion of Hebraized Christian traditions is misplaced on H-Judiac. I feel a bit guilty about this, which is why I posted a reference to my article. Perhaps it would be best for interested parties to read it, and email me privately with questions or comments. Unless people want to keep this going on H-Judiac, I'll bow out on Esther in Christian tradition."¹⁷ She managed to go five days without posting again.

¹⁵ Zapalac, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 1, 1998

¹⁶ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 5, 1998

¹⁷ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Jan. 5, 1998

The fact is, "Jewish" boundaries are blurred in Christian tradition because Christianity absorbs that tradition--their translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and of Jewish apocryphal writers is part of--not outside of--the Christian canon. In the United States in particular, among (but not limited to) premillennial churches in the Adventist family (and others), Christians are the "true" Jews. We "fleshy" traditional Jews long ago lost our right to the Covenantal Promises by "killing Christ," and in later generations, by refusing to accept him as the Son of God. The penalty is final, and total extermination at the Second Coming, after which the "true Jews" will rule eternally over Israel (in a virtually Jewless Paradise, for in this worldview, there can be no other kind).

A few more notes, a few more comments on various references and works of art, and then as suddenly as the thread had started, it ended. Most fittingly, Zapalac and Neulander had the last two notes. Zapalac's note was in response to an earlier post from Julian Goldberg who cited a list of Old Testament figures in the New Testament Hebrews 11:1-40.

Zapalac pointed out that the list was particularly striking in its omissions, rather than its inclusions, particularly the absence of the women around which the discussion had taken place.¹⁸ Neulander closed out the thread with a recap of her interest in Esther as saint in Spanish tradition.¹⁹ It would not be the last time we heard from Neulander (in fact, she joined another thread just two days later, with a brilliantly endearing opening line of "I don't know the origin of the phrase, but ...").²⁰

Hosea and Sexual Abuse in the Bible

For two weeks in February 1998, the conversation turned to an examination of sexual abuse in the Bible. The thread was started by Arthur Greil, a professor in sociology and health policy at Alfred University, as an attempt to assist a student with research on

¹⁸ Zapalac, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 12, 1998

¹⁹ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 16, 1998

accounts of sexual abuse in the Bible where a woman could look for guidance and comfort from the story.²¹ A few people, such as SUNY Albany's Judith Baskin, and Alice Bach of Stanford University, suggested modern Jewish resources dealing with abuse. Jonathan Safren of Beit Berl College responded that "in none of the instances where rape is mentioned in the Tanakh does the woman ever take any steps to avenge herself. This has perhaps to do with the patriarchal nature of the culture - or it's just by chance, or because it doesn't suit the theological needs of the storytellers/redactors."²² However, a number of other respondents offered alternative approaches to dealing with stories of rape and abuse. For example, Jolene Chu suggested that Ahasuerus' death sentence on Haman had more to do with seeing him on Esther's couch than with Mordecai's plight.²³

Another such re-interpretation was offered up by Rabbi Susan Friedman of Puerto Rico. "So far in the discussion no one has suggested what to me is one of the most outstanding examples of sexual abuse, the canonizing of the book of Hosea. That people may harbor visions of wife as whore is a fact of life which we cannot control, but making such a text part of the basic literature of a nation is a pretty abusive policy statement, IMHO²⁴," wrote Friedman.²⁵ Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, however, found it "curious that anyone would interpret the book of Hosea as characterizing in general wives as harlots, as R. Friedman is suggesting. In my opinion, Hosea has nothing to do with sexual abuse or any other kind

²⁰ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 18, 1998

²¹ Greil, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 8, 1998

²² Safren, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 11, 1998

²³ Chu, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 11, 1998.

²⁴ IMHO stands for In My Humble Opinion, an acronym commonly found in e-mail messages.

²⁵ Friendman, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 12, 1998

of abuse. The whole book is a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. Hosea was told to take a loose woman, the last woman on earth that he would have normally sought to marry. The harlot represents the idolatrous Jewish nation, who has been unfaithful. The wife in the story is the antithesis of the ideal of Jewish womanhood."²⁶ Furthermore, added Safren, "if the canonization of this or that biblical book had to depend on that book's attitude towards wives as whores, not only the Book of Hosea would have had to be omitted as Rabbi Susan Friedman suggested, but also Jeremiah, Proverbs and a few others. One can't apply present-day sexual or feminist mores to a society, which ceased to exist thousands of years ago. The use of 'prophetic pornography' by Hosea, Jeremiah and others to describe Israel's backsliding into idolatry was appropriate for its time and that of the canonizers."²⁷

Others were not so sure. Thomas Longstaff at Colby University felt that Korobkin's position ducked the important question of whether one should understand Hosea's marriage as both historical and metaphorical - part of Hosea's experience upon which he drew.

More important, the images in Hosea are ones of harsh treatment [so] that it is not incorrect to label [them] "abusive" (I suspect even by ancient criteria). The idea that an appropriate punishment, literally or analogically, is to uncover a woman's nakedness in [public] is very problematic. Are women to conclude that such abusive acts are an appropriate (and even divinely endorsed) means of punishment?²⁸

Korobkin was also taken to task by Bernard Katz at the University of Guelph for suggesting that Yael, in the Book of Judges, used sex to seduce Sisera and then killed

²⁶ Korobkin, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 16, 1998

²⁷ Safren, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 16, 1998

²⁸ Longstaff, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 17, 1998

him. (Korobkin had cited the Yael story as an alternative 'positive-image-of-woman' story to that of Hosea). "There are some problems with this reading. For one thing, Sisera and the Cananites are allied with Yael's family. What is her motivation for murdering such a prominent Cananite general? There is another reading by Rachel Turkienicz, which has quite strong support in the text. In this reading, Yael is raped by Sisera and takes her revenge by killing him with the tent-peg." wrote Katz.²⁹ While Korobkin did not respond to Katz's note, he did respond regarding his defense of Hosea. "I think the comment about the 'abuse' mentioned in those verses is only problematic if you understand metaphor in one way only. As the text is clearly metaphorical, it would seem to me that this type of public humiliation would never be carried out on a literal level. The purpose is thus to convey the idea that when one degenerates so horribly, it is appropriate to strip that person of his/her dignity to 'expose the sinner', wrote Korobkin.³⁰

The final word on Hosea went to Naomi Graetz of Ben Gurion University. "I have written extensively about Hosea's Wife as a battered wife and the metaphor of God/Husband ruling over/controlling Israel/Wife. A crucial part of my thesis is that a metaphor is not JUST a metaphor when we discuss God's abusive relationship with 'HIS' people."³¹ In the end, 13 people contributed 18 messages to the sexual abuse thread.

Blood Libels

From sexual abuse to blood libels. In mid-June, after Aviva Ben-Ur had taken over as moderator, Henry Near from the University of Haifa wrote to ask about why the concept of the blood libel arose in the first place (likely in Norwich in 1144). Near had read a

²⁹ Katz, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 17, 1998

³⁰ Korobkin, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 19, 1998

³¹ Graetz, H-Judaic Archives, Feb. 22, 1998

number of sources, which he found mostly speculative, even the one that associated the blood libel with the Eucharist ceremony.³² Several people responded with references to scholarly work on the topic. For example, Paul Rose of Penn State, among others, cited the work of Gavin Langmuir, who divided blood libels into two types, one associated with ritual murder, as at Norwich, and the other associated with cannibalism, first noted at Fulda in 1235.³³ Gilad Gevanyahu, among others, referenced the work of Israel Yuval, who found the origins of the blood libel in the acts of kiddush hashem - the killing of Jewish children by their parents, during the first Crusade of 1096.³⁴ According to Judith Neulander, "abominations in western civilization are traditionally imagined as defiled (and defiling) 'mixes' or 'confoundings of categories. One of the first mixed races of literary note were evil, giant cannibals spawned by Sons of God and Daughters of Men in the Book of Enoch. This seems to be the icon-of-choice to signify abomination in the west. Hence, it does not seem strange that accusations of cannibalism have at one time or another been visited on almost every people who ever constituted an Ethnic Other in western civilization (including early Christians, in Rome). It seems to me that the blood libel, where Jews are accused of infanticide in order to consume Christian blood, is a variant of this tradition."³⁵

Others, like Bar Ilan University's Joseph Tabory were more direct in their association between cannibalism, the Eucharist and the blood libel. "Has it occurred to anyone that Christians actually do drink blood. It seems to me that the miracle of transforming the wine and bread into blood and flesh before they eat it, (relying on Jesus' instruction to eat

³² Near, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 18, 1998

³³ Rose, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 19, 1998

³⁴ Gevanyahu, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 19, 1998

³⁵ Neulander, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 19, 1998

this, it is my flesh, and drink this, it is my blood), is a possible source for their thinking that Jews do the same."³⁶ However, Gevryahu disputed the Christian origins of Tabory's claim by pointing out that wine-as-blood has a long history in the Five Books of Moses, which could easily have been the source of Jesus' symbolism.³⁷

In late June, Near wrote back to the list to thank those who had shared their thoughts and references with him, and so the thread appeared to have died. However, two weeks later, Naomi Cohen of Haifa University resurrected the thread.³⁸ Specifically in reference to the Tabory-Gevaryahu debate, Cohen wrote:

Might I point out that for some time this very point was the subject of heated theological controversy in the Catholic Church, and eventually "transubstantiation" (viz the literal transformation of the wine and the wafer at Communion) became an obligatory tenet of Catholicism -- for about 1500 years now.

While I have no idea what this actually signifies to the educated Catholic, I do not for a moment doubt that the illiterate communicant in the Middle Ages -- whether peasant or knight -- would have had no sophisticated rationalizations connected with it. ... and it should perhaps also be borne in mind that the "bread and wine" which turned into the "body and blood" is actually reminiscent of the "Last Supper" which is assumed to have been the Seder.

Of course what one has here is one non-sequitur after another. But that is what Demagogy and prejudices are compounded from.³⁹

Alan Miller of Berkeley pointed out that the dogma of transubstantiation was only accepted as Catholic doctrine 71 years after the Norwich Blood Libel,⁴⁰ although Cohen later wrote that the dogmatization was simply a regularization of what was already the

³⁶ Tabory, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 22, 1998

³⁷ Gevryahu, H-Judaic Archives, Jun. 23, 1998

³⁸ No Eucharist pun intended.

³⁹ Cohen, H-Judaic Archives, Jul. 14, 1998

norm.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Gevaryahu was not convinced about an Eucharistic connection.

"The Romans frequently accused the Christians of cannibalism because Christians spoke of themselves as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. Indeed the Romans persecuted the Christians on this and other grounds. Since the Romans considered Christianity as a Jewish sect, it is likely that they would have extended this charge of cannibalism to Jews in general. If the Romans were already accusing Christians and Jews of performing human sacrifice and drinking human blood in the first centuries CE, and if this is indeed the historical origin of the blood libel, then why do we not even hear of the blood libel until 1096 or 1144?"⁴² commented Gevaryahu.

While Gevaryahu was unable to suggest an alternative, University of Massachusetts history professor and moderator of H-Antisemitism, Robert Michael did. Michael felt that the blood libel was a natural extension of the ritual-murder defamation, which "most likely stemmed from the myth of the Jews' unending role in Jesus' crucifixion, which was believed to be ritually and maliciously repeated every year on an innocent Christian child."⁴³ Ruth Langer of Boston College was more supportive of Cohen's approach, however.

A piece missing from the discussions here is the significant change in the eucharist which occurred around the time that the accusations against Jews began to appear. Preparation of the eucharistic elements changed from being in the hands of the laity to being the sole responsibility of the clergy - and the form of the bread changed to the wafer symbolically marked which persists today. This is also the point at which individuals stopped receiving communion regularly, and when veneration of the host becomes an element of ritual life. All this speaks to an increase in

⁴⁰ Miller, H-Judaic Archives, Jul. 15, 1998

⁴¹ Cohen, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 2, 1998

⁴² Gevaryahu, H-Judaic Archives, Jul. 17, 1998

⁴³ Michael, H-Judaic Archives, Jul. 17, 1998

mystery and awe and otherness in the liturgical life surrounding the host, one which is more conducive to folk – and not particularly theologically grounded – transformations in meaning which leave room for ventings of anti-semitism.⁴⁴

Langer's note represented the last substantive note in the thread. In the end, 18 people contributed 25 notes over the course of a month and a half. For the record, one final note appeared in late October from Robyn Sassen in South Africa, who was working on a piece of artwork related to the theme of blood libel narratives, and she asked for assistance in tracking down several references cited during the previous summer's discussion.⁴⁵

Aramaic, the Living Language

As the 1998 school year began so too did a new thread. His interest piqued by a National Public Radio show on which the correspondent claimed that Aramaic was still a living language, Ari Zivotofsky, a fellow at the National Eye Institute of the American National Institutes of Health, wrote to ask for additional information.⁴⁶ The immediate response was a number of brief notes claiming the use of Aramaic among Kurdish Jews and a number of small, eastern Christian groups, such as the Chaldeans and Assyrians. York University professor Carl Ehrlich suggested that the leading centre for modern Aramaic research was at the University of Heidelberg,⁴⁷ and several people mentioned the scholarly work of SUNY Stony Brook professor Robert Hoberman. On September 17, Robert Hoberman wrote to the list.

⁴⁴ Langer, H-Judaic Archives, Jul. 23, 1998

⁴⁵ Sassen, H-Judaic Archives, Oct. 25, 1998

⁴⁶ Zivotofsky, H-Judaic Archives, Aug. 31, 1998

⁴⁷ Ehrlich, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 9, 1998

Aramaic has been spoken continuously since ancient times and there are indeed speakers of Modern Aramaic today. Small groups exist in two areas: three villages near Damascus (Ma`lula, Bakh`a, and Jubb`Adin), where the people, some of them Christians and some Muslims, speak eastern Aramaic, and in south-western Iran (Ahvaz, Khuzistan), where Mandeans speak modern Mandaic, or did until recently. The largest group of speakers, however, are native to Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. These are the Christian and Jewish minorities among the Kurdish and Azeri Muslim majority. In 1950 there were about 30,000 Jews, and essentially all of them moved to Israel, where they are called "Kurdim". Though the young people are abandoning Aramaic, it is still easy to find plenty of older fluent speakers. The Christians number several hundred thousand, and are called Assyrians or Chaldeans, according to their religious affiliation: the Chaldeans are Uniate Catholics and the Assyrians traditionally members of the Ancient Church of the East ("Nestorian"). Through normal linguistic change the Aramaic of Ma`lula, etc., of Kurdistan/Azerbaijan, and of the Mandeans have become entirely different languages (more different, say, than Biblical Hebrew is from Biblical Aramaic), and within the the Kurdistan/Azerbaijan group there is also tremendous diversity, probably amounting to several distinct languages. In fact, all the Modern Aramaic languages display some extremely interesting grammatical changes.⁴⁸

Nathan Katz at Florida International University added that a few Nazaranee Mapillas (Mar Thoma) Christians in Kerala, southwestern India, were still using Aramaic⁴⁹. As an aside, Hoberman also commented on the use of Aramaic in modern Israel, responding to an earlier query from Carmel Chiswick on whether or not speakers of Israeli Hebrew could understand modern Aramaic, or vice-versa? Hoberman responded that they could not.⁵⁰ Despite the linguistic isolation, Benjamin Richler of the National Library in Israel, among others, reported that a new musical ensemble in Israel, Nash Didan, had begun

⁴⁸ Hoberman, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 17, 1998

⁴⁹ Katz, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 27, 1998

⁵⁰ Hoberman, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 27, 1998

performing modern songs in an Aramaic dialect they learned from their parents and grandparents.⁵¹ In the end, 16 people contributed 18 notes to a better understanding of Aramaic as a living language.

Death and Mourning - Part I

Given the impact that Samuel Heilman had on the list, it is fitting to see that the last major thread in the study was started by him, in mid-November, 1998. "For a book on the ethnography of Jewish death, I would appreciate hearing from anyone about customs or practices they know of with regard to any stage of death: *tahara*, burial, mourning, *yarzheit*, *yizkor*. I am interested in all sorts of practices -- including those that may be relatively syncretistic or contemporary," asked Heilman.⁵² While it would have made for an exciting conclusion had Anonim, Schimmel, or Neulander responded, alas, they did not.

Nonetheless, others did respond, most with bibliographic references. Irene Riegner wrote that a practice of having two shivas necessitated by the migration of the elderly to Florida. The first shiva is held at the location where the parent lived, and is held primarily for the deceased's peers. The second follows later at the home of the survivor child as an opportunity for the gathering of their own peers. "If the parents moved to a retirement community, the children often don't know their parents' friends---perhaps only by name or just to say 'hello'. There's no shared history; these people are strangers. They will meet them during the shiva and never see them again. But the daughter or son will probably learn things about this part of their parent's life, the phase which was lived apart from their children. On the other hand, sitting shiva in the home of the daughter or son brings

⁵¹ Richler, H-Judaic Archives, Sep. 17, 1998

together a community of friends, [even though] these friends, most likely, did not know the parent who died," wrote Riegner.⁵³ However, the dearth of ethnographic responses prompted Heilman to write again requesting "even personal experiences and recollections about encounters with death, mourning or any other 'aftermaths' of dying."⁵⁴ Steve Siporin of Utah State University responded.

In Venice, as recently as 1978, there was a custom of having a procession through the ghetto area—a sort of final circuit—with the body of the deceased (in a coffin). The body was prepared in a building in the Ghetto Nuovo (the oldest section of the ghetto). The procession ended at the side of the Canal Canareggio where the coffin was placed in a boat and taken to the Jewish cemetery on Lido. Congregants gathered there at the cemetery for burial and followed the custom of eating something somewhere 'before' going home.⁵⁵

"I think it necessary to add that the custom of the procession has a definite purpose: to have the deceased pass in front of the five synagogues in the Ghetto for the last time. Moreover, the door of the synagogue in which he used to pray is kept open while the procession passes, and the procession can stop in front of it in case a 'hesped' (funeral oration) is given. The procession itself is probably also meant, on the whole, as a sort of 'obituary notice'," added Dario Calimani of the University of Foscari in Venice.⁵⁶ And Florence Marmor wrote to say that "the Venetian mourning custom reminds me, and explains the custom, I saw repeated on the Lower East Side of New York City and in Brooklyn in my youth. The funeral cortege made its way from the funeral parlor around the area frequented by the deceased, of course, passing the last home and other important places in the deceased's life as best as possible. It was a very somber trip. I was told that

⁵² Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 15, 1998

⁵³ Riegner, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 16, 1998

⁵⁴ Heilman, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 23, 1998

⁵⁵ Siporin, H-Judaic Archives, Nov. 29, 1998

this practice was reserved for the extremely devout."⁵⁷ In the end, this thread was 16 messages long (15 contributors), lasting just over two weeks.

Death and Mourning - Part II

While not truly a thread, the cultural phenomenon of sending obituaries to the list is significant, and thus mentioned here. During the three year study period, 34 obituaries were sent in covering the deaths of 15 people. Of the 34 obituaries, six were written by Jonathan Sarna. For the record, here are the people who died: Amos Funkenstein, professor at UCLA (November 95); Jacob Marcus, professor at HUC, described as the "dean" of American Jewish history by Sarna (November 95); David Rome, archivist of the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives (January 96); Marvin Fox, professor at Ohio State and then Brandeis and founder of the Association for Jewish Studies (February 96)⁵⁸; Danny Leifer, Hillel director at the University of Chicago (March 96); Seth Brody, professor at Princeton (April 96); Moshe Davis, professor at Hebrew University and founder of the International Centre for the Teaching of Jewish Civilization (April 96); Shraga Abramson, professor at Hebrew University (April 96); Sefton Temkin, professor at SUNY Albany (December 96); Yitzhak Twersky, professor at Harvard and the Talner Rebbe (October 97); Joseph Sutton, scholar of Syrian Jewry (November 97); Yedida Stillman, professor at the University of Oklahoma (February 98); Bella Abzug, political activist (April 98); historian Jacob Katz (May 98); and scholar Judah Goldin (June 98). As most of the obituaries said, may their memories be for a blessing.

⁵⁶ Calimani, H-Judai Archives, Dec. 1, 1998

⁵⁷ Marmor, H-Judaic Archives, Dec. 3, 1998

⁵⁸ One of the obituary notices for Fox came from renowned novelist Chaim Potok

FINAL THOUGHTS ON THREADS

At the outset of Chapter Five, as we began to examine the various threads, it was stated that while these threads were selected on the basis of their significance, the judgement of what is significant was highly subjective. The factors which played a role in the determination of significance were the volume of posts, the length of individual posts, duration of the thread, dominance of the thread in relation to other list traffic and the substance of the topic. Recent discussion with colleagues⁵⁹ have borne out that while content-based classifications of threads have not been the normative way of defining a thread traditionally, it might very well be the appropriate way, as researchers begin to explore the limitations of more technical definitions. For example, Mark Guzdial, a researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology, has written of threading as a measure of sustained discussion (which is required for a successful computer-based collaborative forum).⁶⁰ Nonetheless, when it comes to an operational definition of a thread, Guzdial, like other commentators,⁶¹ relies on a more mechanical or technical classification of a thread, rather than on content analysis. In this case, a thread is defined as the series of notes that are replies to a parent note. But in defining a thread via content analysis rather than mechanically, a note which deals with the same subject matter might be thought of as part of the thread even if it was not mechanically produced as a reply to a parent note. In other words, suppose a person posted a note on a particular subject and then a second

⁵⁹ For example, my colleague Clare Brett who is the Online Learning Facilitator at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

⁶⁰ Mark Guzdial, "Information Ecology of Collaboration in Educational Settings: Influence of Tool," 1997, p. 86.

⁶¹ See for example, Greg Notess, "Reading USENET News: Using the RN and TRN Newsreaders," in *Online*, 17(5), 1993, or, Tony Pompili, "Changing Channels," in *PC Magazine Network Edition*, 14(5), 1995.

person came along and created a wholly new note with a different subject line, but substantively related in content to the first. Most software applications which mechanically thread the discussion would not treat these notes as a thread. Yet our human brains would. This is the methodology underlying my grouping and selection of the threads discussed above. And it is not without precedent in the research world.

For example, the work of researchers doing Latent Semantic Analysis “captures the essential relationships between text documents and word meanings. LSA is a mathematical/statistical technique for extracting and representing the similarity of meaning of words and passages by analysis of large bodies of text.”⁶² While strictly not a method for threading a discussion on the basis of content, LSA represents a move away from ordering notes purely on a mechanical basis or physical heirarchy. In another example of this kind of analysis, researcher Jim Hewitt, in his work on the life-spans of threads, has noted that the kind of asynchronous, text-based interaction that occurs in a discussion forum lacks the verbal and visual information normally present when people talk in person. Furthermore, timing is important as a speaker makes constant adjustments to their speech based on various cues fed back from listeners - a process Hewitt calls ‘grounding’. According to Hewitt, the very nature of computer-mediated communication makes grounding difficult. Even simple verbal acknowledgements are inefficient when parts of a conversation are separated by hours or days, which may explain why online interaction is difficult to sustain, or why a thread dies.⁶³

Below, in chart form, taking all the post distribution data of our highlighted threads, and calculating the distribution average over 23 days (as represented by the longest thread),

⁶² LSA Website Executive Summary, June 2000.

we see that, on average, the bulk of a thread occurs between Day 2 and Day 6 in a thread. It also indicates, that a second, smaller peak may occur between Day 11 and Day 15, if a thread lasts that long. Looking back at the threads themselves, we would find that, where a second peak occurs, it is more likely to be associated with the emergence of a sub-thread.

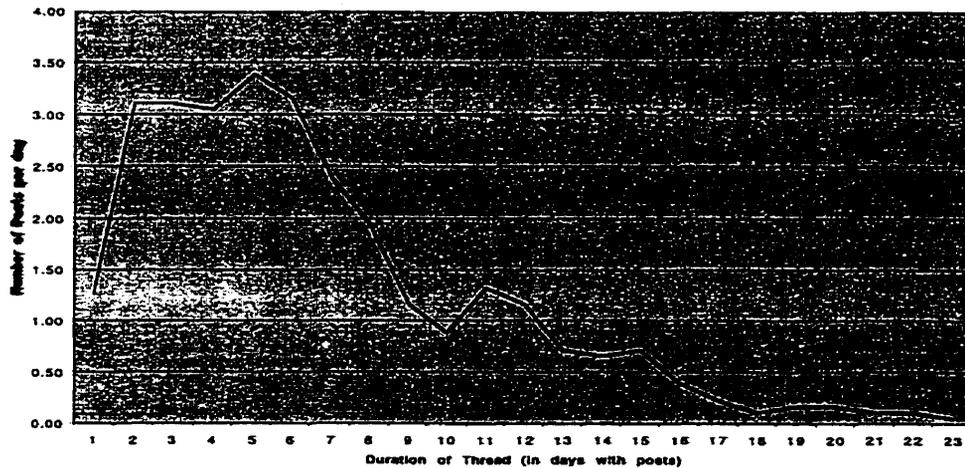


Fig. 7.2 Average Thread Duration

Why any of the threads died remains a mystery. Some simply died while others ended with concluding notes. Some were immediately replaced by another substantive thread, while others were not. Other than the influence of the moderator, there appears to be no particular pattern to the death of these threads. In an effort to produce a better product, I often would intentionally group thematic messages together and create the appearance of a mechanically generated thread where the listserv software normally would not. Where I deemed a topic 'worthy' enough, I would make the messages appear near the top of a digest. If I got bored with a topic, or another more interesting topic came along, the first thread would be moved out of prominence. The desired effect was either to spawn more

⁶³ Jim Hewitt, *Sustaining online interaction in a Knowledge Forum Classroom*, 2000.

contributions to the thread or kill it. This of course, only held true when I had time enough to care.

In this way, the role of the moderator had as much or more of an impact on the life of a thread than any other factor. In the next chapter, my observations and conclusions, I will be discussing the role of the moderator more specifically.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

What was the original hypothesis that led to the writing of this history? It was stated at the outset that it appeared as though the field of Jewish studies, and the use of communication technology in academia, had both matured to the point where, in the late 1980s, a viable, Internet-based Jewish Studies professional organization could exist. On the surface it appears that H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network meets the requirements to affirm this hypothesis. After all, eleven years past its creation, the organization publishes a regular weekly newsletter, frequent book reviews, and has a membership exceeding 2200. As we review, we will see that we can only partially affirm the hypothesis. While H-Judaic does have a certain viability as an organization, various factors within Jewish Studies and within academic technology still limit that viability somewhat.

While most scholars attribute the initiation of modern Jewish studies to the Haskalah, and the later *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, as we have described, the reality is that university-based Jewish Studies as we see it today is more a product of a post-World War II world, more specifically, a product of a post-1960 world. However, despite significant organizational and institutional developments over the last 30 to 40 years, Jewish Studies is still not a cohesive discipline, even in the eyes of some of its own practitioners. As we have seen, some, like Neusner, have even argued that given the range of disciplinary methodologies at play in the examination of the Jewish experience, there is no such thing as a 'Jewish Studies' field.

Likewise, despite the significant penetration communication technology has made in academia, even in the humanities and social sciences, there are many who still only see its potential in minimal ways. We read above, for example, that scholarly publishing in

electronic mode does not yet count toward professional standing in the same way that paper publishing does, even if the electronic format is peer-reviewed.¹

Looking closer at H-Judaic: The Jewish Studies Network, one can begin to see where there are continuing questions regarding its viability, even more than a decade into its existence. The three most important factors for the viability of an on-line entity are (1) a shared knowledge base among the membership, (2) the role of the facilitator/moderator, and (3) adoption by members of the scholarly community at whom the enterprise is targeted. How does H-Judaic shape up?

Clearly H-Judaic suffers from the lack of a shared scholarly knowledge base. If one looks back at the eighteen major threads during the sample period, for example, one finds that twelve (fully two-thirds) were directly related to topics which were current in the popular Jewish culture of the time (including aspects of Jewish humour), or were connected to the politics and professional issues of Jewish Studies, rather than what might be defined as substantive scholarly topics. Furthermore, two-thirds (a different set of twelve) would require no familiarity with the traditional texts and languages often associated with classical Jewish Studies. In other words, the community of scholars who comprise the membership of H-Judaic, do not, in fact, share a common knowledge base beyond the political and popular. If one accepts a Neusnerian perspective that claims that there is no field of Jewish Studies (if only for the sake of argument), then observations about the lack of a shared knowledge base among H-Judaic members would be logical. For how could a non-existent discipline produce a shared scholarly knowledge base that would translate into a fully viable on-line community? Furthermore the range of constituent

¹ Harrison and Stephen, 1992, p. 189

disciplines represented in either the cited International Centre for the Teaching of Jewish Civilization work or in the 1994 survey of H-Judaic members would further support this contention. It should be added, however, that it is quite possible that this is not unique to Jewish Studies. Perhaps any academic collective that somehow transcends disciplinary borders, such as Women's Studies, Labour Studies, Black Studies, or Islamic Studies, would be laced with political or social purpose.

However, the mere existence of H-Judaic, with over 2200 members and the mere existence of various other associations such as the Association for Jewish Studies, means that Neusner and the likeminded are not fully correct either.

If there is no unifying disciplinary common, there is a sense, intangible but present, of something shared, which is hard to deny. Looking at the threads, and at the content of the H-Judaic newsletters, and at the most hotly contested issues in Jewish studies (as outlined in chapter 1), one sees something that most participants have in common - namely the professional politics of the field. From the clergy to the historians in the "Academics, Rabbis, and Community" debate; from the sociologists to the Yiddishists in the "Thomas Bird" affair; from the psychologists to the Dead Sea Scrolls experts in the "Schimmel" controversy; and to issues of death, one need not be an 'expert' in any particular aspect of the Jewish experience to participate in a conversation about the politics of Jewish Studies (and to a lesser degree, popular culture). Indeed, H-Judaic seemed to be most vital where politics, professional issues, and popular culture remained the focus of discussion.

However, as stated earlier, a shared knowledge base is not the only requirement for a viable on-line entity. Buy-in by the members/participants is also a requirement. Harasim et al identify this phenomenon - participants are more active when they have a strong

personal interest.² In the case of H-Judaic, its ability to develop further is highly dependent on community buy-in, including financial buy-in. Looking back over the history of H-Judaic, one sees again and again where this community buy-in and commitment was lacking. The Jensen-precipitated crisis with H-Net and Brandeis, and the rejection of affiliation by the AJS, three times, is an indication of this. Nowhere was this more poignantly illustrated than in an article by Bernard Cooperman that appeared in the Fall 1996 issue of the *AJS Newsletter*. Writing under the heading, "Is it Good or Bad for Jewish Studies? Reflections on the Net and Jewish Academe," Cooperman reflected on the "reasons for cyberphobia" among those in the field. "Our students are constantly inundated with the facts of the information explosion, and they draw a logical conclusion: they cannot hope to master any body of knowledge. Moreover, they have been told it is not necessary to master knowledge: only to know where to look things up. The Net is a logical extension of this attitude. It is an unlimited, amorphous body of undifferentiated data. It is an infinite Yellow Pages. And just as there is no way or reason to memorize the Yellow Pages, there is no reason to memorize what is on the Net."³ It should be remembered that at the time Cooperman wrote this piece, he was both the chair of the AJS publications committee and a member of the H-Judaic editorial board.

I further propose that it is unlikely for an online entity like H-Judaic to develop further precisely because, in the end, it lacks community buy-in, which in turn affects its ability to develop a greater measure of professionalism in the moderator role. While Harasim et al remind us that the quality of online moderation is the third key factor beyond a shared knowledge base and community adoption, they do not present the whole picture. True, when H-Judaic had a fully committed moderator, it was a viable organization. And when

² Harasim, 1995, p. 43.

Greenbaum left the helm, when Goodblatt went off to explore a larger Jewish networking universe, when Zahavy let the list devolve into unmoderated mode, when I was forced to give up my role due to employment and child-care responsibilities, and when Ben-Ur was faced with a change in her employment status, the organization stalled in its production of materials and services. True, reliance on volunteers, while noble, appears not to be conducive to the proper continuous development of such an on-line entity, as predicted by theoretical studies. But Harasim and others gloss over another important aspect - the personal agenda of the moderator. Paraphrasing Harasim, 'when moderators are actively involved, responding regularly, posting new material, encouraging activities and discussion, members will respond with enthusiasm and regular participation.'⁴ But what motivates the moderator?

Internet sociologist Sherry Turkle writes of a cyberspace in which we talk, exchange ideas and assume personae of our own creation; we build new kinds of communities in which we participate with people daily, with whom we might have fairly intimate relations but never physically meet.⁵ And these online personae have something in common with the self that emerges in a psychoanalytic encounter.⁶ If nothing else, the experiences of moderating H-Judaic and writing this dissertation have given me insight into my self. I was motivated to be moderator in order to establish my own credentials and ensure my livelihood, and perhaps have my ego bask in the glow of being in control. And this personal motivation resulted in a symbiotic commitment to the responsibilities of being moderator. But my ego sometimes also got in the way, whether it was

³ Cooperman, 1996.

⁴ Harasim, 1995, p. 43.

⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, 1995, pp. 9-10.

⁶ Turkle, 1995, p. 256.

manifested in the fights I had with Richard Jensen or the use of devious tactics in dealing with troublesome members. I also don't believe I alone share these traits, if we were to look at the motivations and actions of other moderators of other lists. Therefore, any analysis of the moderator role which focuses solely on pragmatic issues and ignores the cult of personality does not do justice to the position.

After devoting over seven years of my life to this particular organization, I cannot end on a negative note. Cooperman saw a resentment and a genuine fear ("a fear of being trivialized in the Information Age") among many of his colleagues. But the presence of a growing number of established and esteemed scholars in the administration of the organization and continued increases in membership numbers bodes well for movement towards a more professionally-run, viable, on-line organization for Jewish studies. A decade ago H-Judaic was in its infancy. It is now in its adolescence.

What have we learned and what is left to learn? We have learned that size can make a difference in the absence of other critical factors like a shared knowledge base (due to the wide breadth of the domain).⁷ We have also learned that even though the ratio of talkers to lurkers is small at any given moment in time, given enough time, a majority of members will eventually say something, and given enough time, some will go on ad nauseum.

And what will be its future? What will changes in information technology do to an organization built mainly on e-mail? What will be the effect of a new generation of

⁷ In other words, if you have too many disciplines represented, you might as well have as many as possible - somewhat akin to a Learned Societies Conference - it may be billed as a single event, when in fact the societies have little to do with each other.

scholars raised in the information age on community buy-in for technology applications? Will funding bodies recognize the potential? Will scholarly bodies? Will there be a merging of existing corporeal organizations with the virtual ones like H-Judaic? How will H-Judaic look when compared to other similar organizations? Will Weinfeld still eat his latkes with Ketchup, or will he try mushrooms as suggested on the list? These are the research questions of the next ten years.

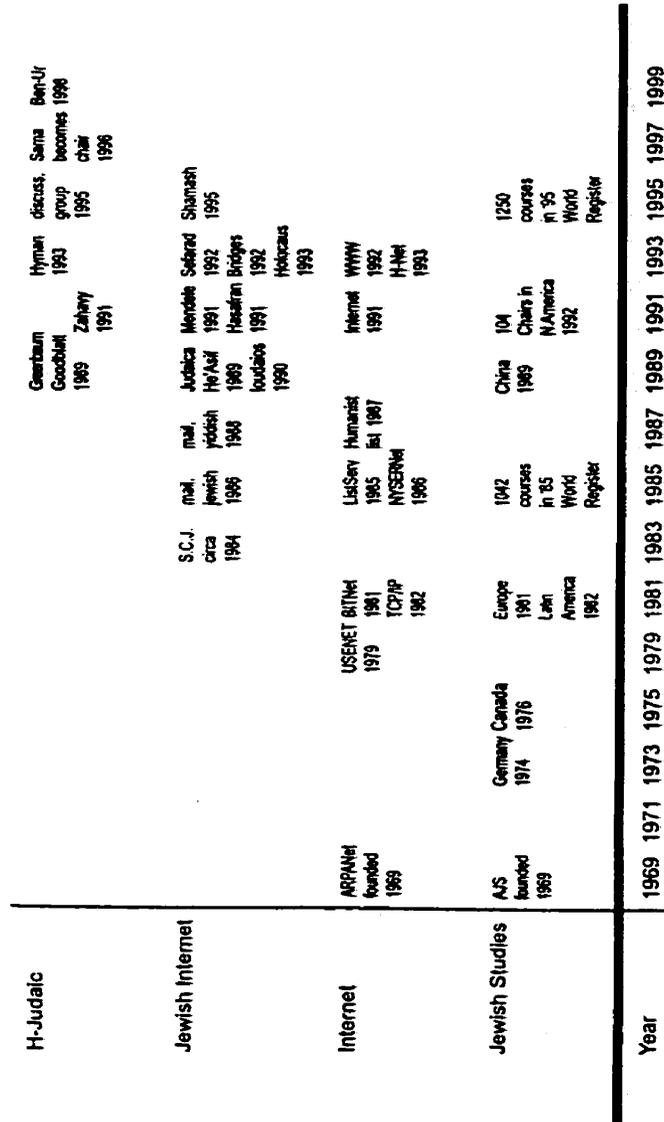


Fig. 8.1 Timeline of Events in this Dissertation

TYG

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