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Gershom Scholem on the Science of Judaism [*Wissenschaft des Judentum*]
(Retrospective Account, 1977)

A major goal of the nineteenth-century founders of the science of Judaism [*Wissenschaft des Judentums*] was to demonstrate Judaism's great cultural significance and to promote Jewish emancipation, equality, and social integration. This approach tended to emphasize acculturation and assimilation. In contrast, around the turn of the century – especially after the emergence of Zionism – there was a growing trend toward “dissimilation” among the younger generation of Jewish scholars.

In Munich I met two girls from my Jena circle, Toni Halle and Käthe Ollendorf; the latter's marriage to Johannes R. Becher was just breaking up. There was also Gustav Steinschneider, with whom I had been in the same army platoon in 1917 and whose fate particularly touched Escha and me. He was the grandson of the greatest Hebrew bibliographer and manuscript expert of the last century, a man who at a ripe old age freely admitted that he regarded it as the function of the *Wissenschaft vom Judentum* [Science of Judaism] to provide a decent burial for this important but declining phenomenon. Surely Moritz Steinschneider was the first authority in this field who was admittedly an agnostic and possibly even an atheist. I was a great admirer of this stupendous scholar, and if I had played in the Friedrichshain instead of the Märkischer Park as a boy, I could have seen the nonagenarian sitting there on a bench. In those days I reflected quite a bit about this group of scholarly liquidators, and in 1921 I planned to write an article about the suicide of Judaism being carried out by the so-called Science of Judaism for Benjamin's periodical *Angelus Novus*, a journal that never appeared.

Source of English translation: Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem. Memories of My Youth*. Translated from the German by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1998, p. 122.