

CHAPTER THREE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE SEARCH FOR NONRABBINIC JUDAISM¹

We know from the Talmud everything about the lives of the literates. What we wouldn't give if we knew about the *am ha'aretz*, the peasant, the simple man; his clothes, the food he ate, his faith and beliefs.

Ludwig Blau²

To maintain with some scholars that the people who erected the synagogues were ignorant of the law against images, or cared little for the interpretation thereof by the Rabbis, amounts to explaining the past by the present. . . .

Letter from Louis Ginzberg to Louis Marshall, 1927³

. . . For some years I have been approaching the problem primarily from the Greek angle, an angle which quickly brought me to Philo and Hellenistic Judaism. To begin to dip into the great literature of the rabbis and Kabbalists is a perilous undertaking. I shall have to do so, as I am dipping all about, but I distrust in advance any conclusions I may come to. Still, very few of the

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rabbis have any real comprehension of the Greek spirit, and the problem can only be discussed by one who is not afraid to work in fields where a specialist will think he has no business.

Letter from E. R. Goodenough to Gershom Scholem,
April 27, 1937⁴

LUDWIG BLAU SPENT HIS ENTIRE PROFESSIONAL career seeking to set rabbinic literature within the broad context of Greco-Roman culture. He did this as a faculty member and then director of the Jewish Theological Seminary of Budapest (until the defeat of the Hapsburgs in World War I, called the Franz-Josef Landesrabbinerschule). The intellectual environment in which Blau functioned was harnessed to training rabbis to seek a balance between Judaism and full participation in general Hungarian culture, “to produce a type of Rabbi who would regard the Magyarization of the Israelite religion his calling.”⁵ Through modern scholarship, Blau sought to integrate the Jews into the general culture, both in late antiquity and in early-twentieth-century Hungary. Whether writing about Jewish marriage documents and their relationship to Egyptian papyri or about Jewish magic in the context of Greco-Roman magic, Blau was more concerned than most scholars with presenting Jewish sources in their Greco-Roman setting.⁶ Unlike his contemporaries, however, Blau’s focus was the people behind texts and artifacts, not exclusively the explication of texts. With the imagination of a historian, Blau clearly understood the limits of rabbinic sources for understanding ancient Jewry, and actively sought out alternative sources and alternative voices within traditional sources. Blau read rabbinic sources against the grain in order to discover ancient Jewish culture beyond rabbinic circles.

Ludwig Blau published “Early Christian Epigraphy from the Jewish Point of View” in 1923 and “Early Christian Archaeology from the Jewish Point of View” in 1926, both in the *Hebrew Union College Annual*. The latter article is of greater interest to us here, for in it Blau discusses correspondences between archaeological and literary sources in concrete ways and, as we have seen, urges the creation of “Jewish archaeology.” With Sukenik, Blau appreciated the fact that Strzygowski had placed Jewish “oriental” art at the center of the scholarly discussion. It was the positively disposed scholarship of Carl Maria Kaufmann and the Counter-Reformation field known as “Christian archaeology,” however, that most engaged Blau. As early as 1886, Blau’s teacher, David Kaufmann, referred to “archéologie

juive” as a companion to “archéologie chrétienne.”⁷ Following in the tradition of his teacher, Blau’s twin articles on “Christian Epigraphy” and “Christian Archaeology” are prolonged reflections on C. M. Kaufmann’s important *Handbuch der Christlichen Archaeologie*.⁸ Like Viollet-Le-Duc, this preeminent Catholic scholar viewed Jewish art quite positively, treating the art of the Church as a natural development out of Jewish material culture. His positive assessment clearly nurtured Blau’s call for the establishment of “Jewish archaeology.” Unlike C. M. Kaufmann on Christianity and Krauss and his “Talmudic archaeology,” however, Blau was interested in finding discontinuity between the archaeological sources for ancient Judaism and rabbinic literature (thus for him, “Jewish archaeology”). Ludwig Blau was the first rabbi/scholar of whom I am aware to highlight discontinuity between the rabbis and other Jewish communities during late antiquity using archaeological sources. Although clearly in the service of a liberalizing political agenda, his comments are usually cautious and convincing.

Blau was not the last twentieth-century scholar to search these corpora for “nonrabbinic Jews,” nor the last Jewish scholar to harness Jewish material culture to a Jewish liberalizing agenda. The search for nonrabbinic Judaism was the theme of much of the American scholarly discussion on ancient Judaism throughout the second half of the twentieth century, an approach most profoundly heralded by E. R. Goodenough. No single work influenced the historiography of ancient Judaism in America during the Cold War years more than Goodenough’s thirteen-volume *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (1954–68). To understand Goodenough’s contribution to the study of Jewish archaeology, I contextualize it in terms of the scholarship that preceded *Jewish Symbols* and that which flowed from and reacted to it.

Scholarship on ancient Judaism, whether or not it took account of archaeology, generally assumed the rabbi-centered approach that G. F. Moore called “normative Judaism.” The religion of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* was pervasive, whether written by “Orthodox” scholars or by Talmudists associated with Conservative or Reform institutions. Those who wrote about archaeology assumed absolute continuity between classical sources and the new discoveries, as is evident not only in the works of Samuel Krauss, but also of Louis Ginzberg, J. N. Epstein, Saul Lieberman, and E. E. Urbach.⁹ E. R. Goodenough’s *Jewish Symbols* approached the problem from the perspective of

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New Testament studies, not Jewish studies. Although dealing with the same period and often with the same texts, Jewish study of the latter Second Temple period and Christian “New Testament history” have, for most of their respective histories, run on parallel tracks. The questions and motivations of each discipline have seldom merged. Goodenough’s work is a good example of this phenomenon at mid-century, his approach merging into Jewish scholarship (as it veered from the Christian mainstream), gaining success through the agency of another American, Columbia’s Morton Smith, and his cadre of students.

Goodenough’s concern was to find Jews who were so thoroughly Hellenized that they could have quickly been absorbed into the early Christian movement. Goodenough ultimately located these Jews in the archaeological record and in the writings of Hellenistic authors such as Philo of Alexandria. This turn to archaeology has a long history in German Protestant circles. German Protestant scholars looked to the pre-Constantinian church for the archaeological roots of their own theologically based aniconism. They suggested that the first Christians, “like the Jews” were theologically “aniconic.” It was only when a degenerate Catholic impulse took over in the fourth or fifth century that figurative art – which they considered to be pagan to the core – could enter and profane the Church. Goodenough assumed a similar model for Jews, although he was interested precisely in discovering and highlighting the history of nonnormative, “Hellenistic Judaism.” His study was written with a definite Christian theological agenda (even as it was anticlerical), clothed in then-popular secularist terms as the “History of Religion.” Trained as a Methodist minister and later as a historian of Christianity, Goodenough offered a counterhistory to the Judaism that Moore and the normative Judaism community held to be axiomatic.¹⁰

According to Goodenough, the Pharisees dominated Judaism before the destruction of the Temple. With this assumption, he fit within the normative Judaism consensus. To Goodenough, the continuers of the Pharisees – the rabbis – were much reduced after 70 C.E.; they did not influence anyone but themselves. During this period, a mystical “Hellenistic Judaism” developed. The influence of the rabbis resumed during the Byzantine and early Islamic period, squelching Hellenistic Judaism. Goodenough’s interest was not the rabbis, as it was for most Jewish scholars, but in the “mystical Judaism” beyond the rabbis. Goodenough found evidence for his position in a source

that had not often been considered by his predecessors – archaeology. In his binary construction of Hellenized Judaism in conflict with non-Hellenized Pharisaic/rabbinic Judaism, Goodenough saw the rabbis as being “like New England ‘society,’ a puritanical sect walled up in its self-made ghetto, while outside was the wonderful world of Hellenized Judaism, mystic, artistic and free.”¹¹ More to the point, Goodenough saw the rabbis through the templates of both historical Christian antagonism toward the Pharisees and rabbinic literature and the self-perceived strict, legalistic Methodism of his youth – a religion that he himself had abandoned.

Goodenough described his approach succinctly in a letter dated November 18, 1947:¹²

The Jews of [the Greco-Roman] period, living for the most part before the Talmud was written, and so with only their Bible (in Greek translation) to go by, kept their devotion to the Torah, to the festivals and Sabbaths and dietary laws as well as they could simply from their Bible and from local and unstandardized traditions. They were certainly loyal to Judaism as they understood it, or they would not have continued building their synagogues in the teeth of pagan, and later Christian, opposition. But the symbols seem to tell us that these Jews were led by the growing Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, and other forms of mysticism. That is, I believe that in these centuries was laid the foundation for the type of Judaism which later flowered and persisted as Cabala. When a rabbinic based upon the legalism of the Talmud became supreme it suppressed the mystical type of Judaism (or the mystical types, for there must have been varieties), drove it out of general favor, but could not prevent its continuing and reviving in such medieval Cabalism as the *Zohar*. This the borrowed pagan symbols and the biblical illustrations at Dura seem to me to agree in telling us.

Since written texts from the Jews who used this art do not exist, the method of research by which the symbols are evaluated has to be to take the symbols and paintings themselves, but primarily the symbols, and to trace them back as they go from one religion to another. These symbols quickly reveal themselves as the essential vocabulary of the lingua franca of most religions of antiquity, one which still survives in Christianity But even tracing the symbols from one religion to another in antiquity forces one to open up the general subject of the subject of religious symbols. I have reached the conclusion that while each religion gives symbols of its own explanation, in terms of its own gods and myths, there is a constant religious “value” as I am calling it which a symbol never loses in such transition. The presumption would then be that Jews felt free to borrow the symbol because they wanted the “value” the symbols represented for their own religion,

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and had found a way to explain that value in terms of their own traditions or biblical proof-texts.

Goodenough's thought developed considerably between the publication of volumes one–four in 1954 and the completion of the posthumously published conclusion in volume twelve in 1968. In the face of a mountain of scathing reviews, in his final volume Goodenough softened his position regarding the extent of mystical Judaism, limiting such beliefs to an elite and not to the general population. Feeling considerable pressure (evidenced by the slackening of his usual gentility), Goodenough restated the genesis of his question:¹³

If the reader of this series is to recognize at all what its author is trying to do he must understand that the study of Jewish symbols is itself part of a larger investigation. For many years the author has been trying to answer the question how Christianity, starting with the teachings of a Galilean carpenter, could so quickly have become a religion of salvation from the world and the flesh, of a Savior who in his person brought divinity to a lost humanity, a religion of sacraments, organized priesthood, and theological formations – that is, a Greco-Roman religion even though it called itself the Verus Israel.

Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols* was an attempt to fill the gap between Judaism and Christianity, between what he perceived as the "sternness" of the Pharisees/rabbis and the Hellenism of the early Church. He began his studies with a dissertation on Justin Martyr's *Conversation with Trypho*,¹⁴ then moved to the writings of Philo of Alexandria. His project ultimately settled on the archaeological evidence for ancient Judaism as read through the lens of Jungian psychology. In his personal life, Goodenough spent considerable energies rebelling against Methodism into a kind of mystically oriented if sardonic anti-Protestantism.¹⁵ Ancient Judaism was the battleground where he worked his personal transformation. Goodenough's personal and his academic passions were thus in full consort.

Goodenough relates that his interest in ancient Jewish art began while he was still a young graduate student at Oxford University. There, looking for Jewish precursors of early Christian art, Goodenough was "gently" told by his "dons" that "it had no possible foundation. Jewish Scripture and tradition alike forbade the making of images, and so long as a group was loyal to Judaism at all it would have had nothing to do with art."¹⁶ Seven or eight years later, this time at Yale, Goodenough's senior colleague, Paul Baur, wrote an

article in which he asserted a Christian interpretation of an oil lamp bearing the image of David and Goliath. Goodenough questioned this Christian attribution, suggesting to Baur that the lamp might have been Jewish. Baur's response to Goodenough is indicative of the then-regnant paradigm: "there is no such thing as Jewish art, and that such a suggestion about the lamp would be nonsense."¹⁷ From this truism, so deeply grounded in the nationalist ideologies of the nineteenth century, Goodenough's study of Jewish archaeology began. Goodenough found in Jewish material culture an "unknown" resource to tap; and in the exoticness of this material, his tool for discovering nonrabbinic ancient Judaism. He first collected the evidence, bit by bit – ultimately producing a convenient repository of almost all known ancient Jewish art.

Based on his "discoveries," Goodenough then set about constructing a salvation-based mystery religion. That this was the Judaism that Goodenough "discovered" in the visual imagery of ancient Judaism is not in itself surprising. The salvation trope had long been applied to Jewish archaeological remains. Goodenough's focus on "symbols" as a supposedly unmediated tool for understanding what was "true" about Judaism during antiquity – and of archetypes in general – is also to be understood in terms of the intellectual history of his own period.

Goodenough found in Jungian psychology access to the universal "human psyche," and in "Jewish symbols," the concretization of an otherwise unknown nonrabbinic Judaism. He was in good company in his ahistorical endeavor. Working contemporaneously with such giants of the mid-twentieth century as Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin, Goodenough created an equally ahistorical conception of religion. Unlike Eliade and Corbin, however, Goodenough saw himself fully as a philologically based historian. In this sense, he was more like Gershom Scholem, if only superficially. Scholem's philological acumen was (and still is) legendary. Like Scholem, Goodenough was committed to a counterhistory of Judaism, to rewriting the Jewish past "based upon the belief that true history lies in a subterranean tradition that must be brought to light."¹⁸ But where Scholem found evidence for his reconstruction in the literature of Jewish mysticism (loosely called *Kabbalah*), for Goodenough archaeology provided the raw material for his counterhistory. Goodenough saw his work as the corollary of Scholem's – although Scholem himself dismissed Goodenough's dichotomy between the rabbis and mysticism. Still, Scholem was publicly respectful toward

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Goodenough. In a 1965 letter to Jacob Neusner, he wrote: "I am sure that Goodenough has put his hand on a very important problem, which other people have tried to evade. As to the solution, it seems to be still very far off."¹⁹

For Goodenough, the "discovery" of Jewish art was the "discovery" of a nonrabbinic Judaism that he consciously grafted to Scholem's work on Jewish mysticism. Goodenough cited Scholem's work in support of his division between Jewish mysticism and rabbinic legalism – a distinction that Scholem never accepted. In fact, against the normative Judaism consensus that might have supported Goodenough's binary model, Scholem considered mysticism to have been an essential element of Talmudic religion.²⁰ Like Scholem, Goodenough was convinced of the truth of carefully constructed meta-theories that tie together all of the available evidence. For Scholem, it was the grand progression from the Spanish Expulsion through Sabbatianism, Frankism, Hassidism, and ultimately Jewish Reform and Zionism. For Goodenough, it was the all-encompassing interpretation of Jewish symbols through the ages based on Jungian archetypes.²¹

Goodenough's strong interest in Jung brought him into the greatly esteemed company of the Eranos group of scholars whom Jung convened yearly in Ascona, Switzerland, to discuss and develop the "History of Religions." Steven M. Wasserstrom has characterized this intellectual community in his recent monograph, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin at Eranos*.²² A lesser member of this group, Goodenough – like his colleagues – saw himself as the incarnation of the tradition that he researched. As he quipped at the first session of a course taught at Brandeis University in 1962: "This will be a course in Goodenough."²³ Wasserstrom suggests that this sense of virtuosity is a hallmark of the Eranos members. Goodenough's "own intellectual and spiritual sojourn" was the text – both in his Brandeis course and in his scholarship. The virtuosos of Eranos privileged virtuoso religion over more general forms of praxis or cultural history that were more common to the members of each religious group. Although Scholem distanced himself from the more extreme psychological elements of Eranos, Wasserstrom has shown just how integral Scholem was to the community that assembled at Ascona. With his Eranos contemporaries, Goodenough privileged mysticism, myth, and "gnosis" – characterized by Wasserstrom as a "mystocentric conception of religion" and as a "gnostic

History of Religions."²⁴ Each in his own way, the scholars of Eranos considered "symbols" to be essential to religion in general, and to the religious traditions in which they were revered experts in particular. These symbols were thought to transcend all religions, being common to all.

Goodenough's work sparked an eruption of scholarly response, some of it of the most visceral kind. He rocked both the American and the Israeli variants of the normative Judaism consensus. For American Jews, the sense of a shared rabbinic religion was at stake, as was a shared national heritage for Israelis. Under the influence of Scholem, Zionists and (to a lesser extent) American scholars were aware that ancient Judaism included important mystical trends that had been disparaged or unacknowledged by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Blau – and apparently following upon him, Judah L. Magnes – had earlier seen in archaeology the voice of the nonrabbinic, providing a Jewish precursor for Goodenough's approach that parallels similar attempts to discover heresies in the art of early Christianity. Goodenough's binary counter-Judaism, however, was considered to be lacking in nuance by most and otherwise beyond the bounds of even these adaptations of the regnant paradigm. Goodenough's ahistorical assumptions were evident to scholars who were not Eranos initiates (as they were to Scholem), as was his essential ignorance of rabbinic literature. The wedge that he emphasized between the rabbis and archaeology was acknowledged by many, however, to be a useful contribution.

It should not be surprising that scholars of rabbinic literature were particularly dismissive of Goodenough's approach – as he had anticipated they would be. A plethora of studies on the relationship between the rabbis and art followed, particularly in Jewish contexts. The most important responses were carried out by the doyen of Israeli Talmudic scholarship – the Breslau-trained E. E. Urbach – and by two American Talmudists: Joseph Baumgarten, a student of Albright, and the Yeshiva University-trained Talmudist Gerald J. Blidstein (a student of the famed rabbinic scholar Abraham Weiss).²⁵ With vigorous disdain, Urbach brought vast amounts of rabbinic material to bear in order to dispel Goodenough and assert a seamlessness between the archaeological evidence and rabbinic sources. Urbach's study became the essential statement for Israeli scholarship on the place of art in ancient Judaism. Both Baumgarten's and Blidstein's studies are at some level influenced by Goodenough's distinction between the rabbis and synagogue communities, even as they are

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largely focused on rabbinic texts. Like Albright before him, Baumgarten strove to maintain a balance between archaeology, text, and community. Both he and Blidstein steer a course between the excesses of Urbach and Goodenough. Their work is nuanced by their presentations of relationships between the rabbis and other communities mainly in late antique Palestine using both literary and archaeological evidence. Both distinguish attitudes toward the visual in different segments of Palestinian Jewish society, in Palestine and Babylonia, closely “reading” rabbinic and some archaeological sources.

Jewish Symbols marked something of a turning point. Non-Jewish scholars (and some Jews as well) were astounded by the breadth of Goodenough’s collection of artifacts and sites. This astonishment had more to do with the sociology of knowledge, however, than the evidence itself. Goodenough collected the vast majority of images for his impressive collection from previous publications. This is made clear from his extensive and bibliographically annotated files of negatives and photographs (now at the Harvard Semitic Museum), only a few of which were procured from museum collections and nearly all of which were copied from scholarly publications. Goodenough lavishly acknowledged his predecessors in the preface to volume one.²⁶ Even so, the efforts put forth by Goodenough in the age before scanners, photocopiers, or even speedy mail communication is quite impressive. In a 1937 letter to Scholem, he wrote that “this is a tremendously time-consuming task, and I grow very discouraged with my slowness, but I am really getting together some striking material.”²⁷ The large and impressive volumes prepared by Goodenough, financed by the Eranos-related Bollingen Foundation (named for the Swiss village near which Jung built his retreat), were intended to assert position through the force of the argument, the extensiveness of the photographic collection (which included specially commissioned color images of the Dura Europos synagogue), and by the considerable shelf space the thirteen oversized folio volumes require in library stacks. In this way, Goodenough, supported by Bollingen, made sure that his work could not be overlooked. Morton Smith’s comment that before Goodenough Jewish archaeological discoveries were mostly “neglected, and almost all of it misinterpreted” is simply not true.²⁸ Goodenough himself would certainly have quickly denied it. The synthetic work of Samuel Krauss, Blau, Sukenik, and others belie this statement.

Goodenough claimed Jewish archaeology for his own through the careful collection and interpretation of Jewish archaeological finds. He claimed Jewish art of late antiquity as the missing link between Paul and Nicaea in the history of Christianity. The very act of publication reflects a receptivity to this project in post-war America that in all likelihood would not have been found in previous decades. The gradual elevation of Judaism to the triumvirate of American religions (Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism),²⁹ the founding of the State of Israel, the organization of American Jewish museums, renewed movement in Christian circles in viewing early Christianity within a Jewish context, and movement in Jewish circles to interpret ancient Judaism broadly within the Greco-Roman context (as they read the Jewish experience in North America broadly within the American context) provided the backdrop for this paradigm shift.

Jewish Symbols continues to deeply influence Jewish scholarship, although Goodenough’s influence in Christian circles is comparatively small.³⁰ His influence within Jewish circles may in part be attributed to the similarity between his thought and that of Goodenough’s junior colleague, the former Episcopalian priest turned historian of religion, Morton Smith, and Smith’s cadre of Jewish Theological Seminary-trained, Conservative rabbi-doctoral students. Smith was the first Christian graduate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, having written his first dissertation in that university’s flagship Talmud department.³¹ The dissertation was completed after his return to America “under the supervision of Prof. Lieberman and to his satisfaction” and in close contact with Hebrew University registrar Gershom Scholem.³² Smith’s connections to both Jewish and Christian scholarship were thus irreproachable, even as his personal connection to Christian piety slackened and grew adversarial. Smith was particularly close to Scholem and was eventually the translator of his *Jewish Mysticism, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Literature* (1960).³³ Smith’s ability to influence Judaic studies was thus substantially greater than that of Goodenough. This distinguished Smith from Goodenough, who was ever the outsider.

Smith and Goodenough shared numerous biographical, religious, and scholarly affinities. Like Goodenough, Smith rebelled against normative Judaism (as both had done against orthodox Christianity – in its past and present manifestations). Each of these scholars wrote counterhistories of ancient Judaism and Christianity. Smith, like his

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colleagues Goodenough and Scholem, focused on historical resources that had previously been considered marginal to understanding Jewish religious history, and moved them from the periphery to the very center of scholarly discourse. Well-trained in rabbinic literature, Smith did not accept Goodenough's mystical Judaism, although "like Goodenough, Smith argued that Jewish magic and art provided clear evidence that non-rabbinic Judaism persisted well into 'the rabbinic period.'"³⁴ It should come as no surprise that the most penetrating critique of Goodenough's work and the scholarship that preceded it was penned by Morton Smith – which he published only after the elder scholar's death.

Smith's critique of the normative Judaism model was no less disparaging than was Goodenough's. The difference is that Smith denied, as Scholem did, Goodenough's binary relationship between rabbinic Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism. This emerges in Smith's estimation of Moore's *Judaism*: "Although it too much neglects the mystical, magical and apocalyptic sides of Judaism, its apology for tannaitic teaching as a reasonable, humane, and pious working out of biblical tradition is conclusive and has been of great importance not only for Christians, but also for Jewish understanding of 'Judaism.'"³⁵ Still, Smith, like Goodenough, gave prominence to the notion that the rabbis were a minority voice, not the arbiters of "normative Judaism."³⁶ Smith's focus on the religion of Jews beyond "normative Judaism" is influenced by developments in the German Protestant study of early Christianity, particularly Walter Bauer's *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Earliest Christianity*.³⁷ This approach was clearly central to both Goodenough's interests and to Smith's focus on the "mystical, magical and apocalyptic" sides of both Christianity and early Judaism. As Shaye J. D. Cohen notes, "Smith saw his own work as complementing that of Walther Bauer on early Christianity and Erwin Goodenough on early Judaism."³⁸ Both Goodenough and Smith filled the void created between sources that had once been filled by "normative Judaism" by ascribing central value to texts and artifacts that were formerly considered marginal. Smith filled the void with a mixture of the "mystical, magical and apocalyptic" together with a large dose of anticlerical cynicism regarding the efficacy of ancient (and modern) Jewish and Christian "orthodoxies." This approach was recently lionized in terms of rigorously applied "hermeneutics of suspicion" by one of the last Smith students, Seth Schwartz, now of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.³⁹ Truth be told, Goodenough

and Smith and their most ardent followers set out to reground the mosaic of ancient sources in ways that were often no less "normative" in effect than that which they intended to replace.

It should not be taken lightly that among Smith's most prominent students were American-born Conservative rabbis. Among the most prominent of these students are Jacob Neusner, Lee I. Levine, and Shaye J. D. Cohen. Smith, followed particularly by Levine and Neusner, found in Goodenough's emphasis on the non-"Orthodox" a point of departure for their own studies of rabbinic influence in late antique Jewish culture.⁴⁰ During the late 1950s and 1960s, in studies both at Columbia University and the adjacent Jewish Theological Seminary, the scholarship of each reflects a strong interest in the balance between tradition and modernity together with questions related to rabbinic authority. Such questioning became a leitmotif of this religious community. Historiography was seen by historian – and later chancellor – Gerson D. Cohen as a bridging tool between tradition and modernity – and between the seminary and its Americanizing constituency. For Cohen, "the study of Jewish history . . . could help span the abyss between textual scholarship and issues of concern to the contemporary Jew."⁴¹ In this, Cohen followed closely on his immediate predecessor, Louis Finkelstein's lead. Unlike his predecessors as chancellor, all but one of whom were renowned Talmudists⁴² and all of whom actively styled the seminary as a nondenominational and traditionally observant *Wissenschaft*-focused institution, Cohen's leadership was keenly denominational.⁴³ He sought to bridge the growing gulf between the seminary and increasingly denominational (read, less "Orthodox") Conservative congregational life through the denominationalization of the Jewish Theological Seminary. A perusal of Cohen's scholarly and rabbinic writings suggests a keen interest in questions of authority in Jewish history, particularly on the place of the non-"Orthodox," in ways that are antithetical to Finkelstein's generally traditionalist approach to history. Finkelstein strove to assert a direct lineage from the Prophets through the ancient rabbis, the medieval period until the rabbinic greats of the modern period, and finally to contemporary Talmudic scholars of the Jewish Theological Seminary.⁴⁴ By contrast, Cohen, a model *Wissenschaft* scholar who edited and was the translator and major commentator of a major medieval lineage of rabbinic authority – Ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*⁴⁵ – eventually chose to reexamine in practical ways the notion of rabbinic

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authority within Conservative Judaism. As chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Cohen modified the normative Judaism consensus regarding shared origins. Just as significantly, he sought to replace traditional “Orthodoxy” as the legitimate heir of ancient and medieval Judaism (even within the Jewish Theological Seminary), and to create in its place a liberalizing and strongly denominational Conservative Judaism.

With his ties to Israeli and American Jewish scholarship, particularly with Lieberman and Scholem, Smith supported his rabbi-students in their search for a counterweight to the normative Judaism consensus and provided an entrée to his counterhistorical approach. Each in his own way, these rabbi-students dedicated their careers to sorting out the place of the rabbinic community in Jewish culture. For Levine, and to a far lesser extent for Neusner, archaeology provided an external vantage point from which to view the ancient rabbis.

Levine considers Moore and Goodenough to be “two of the most important scholars of Judaism during the period of the Second Temple and the Talmud.”⁴⁶ Following Smith, Levine believes that “Goodenough’s contribution was first and foremost in the collection of archaeological materials that provide witness to the broad utilization of art, multifaceted as it was, among Jews of those generations. . . .”⁴⁷ For Levine, discovery of this “multifaceted” world is Goodenough’s unique contribution. Introducing his 1998 volume *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?*, Levine wrote:⁴⁸

These two ostensibly different cultures clashed on occasion, yet in most instances contacts of Jews and Judaism with the Hellenistic-Roman world proved immensely fructifying and creative. Some Jews may have been intimidated by this culture, but many found it attractive, stimulating and even indispensable.

One need only replace the phrase “Hellenistic-Roman” in this formulation with “modern” in order to find a worldview that comports with Conservative ideology on the place of Jews and Judaism in modern America. This approach posits positive interaction and integration of Jews into the majority culture, even as Jews become part and parcel of that culture. Historiographically, this approach is related to Columbia University historian Salo W. Baron’s rejection of what he calls “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history.”⁴⁹ For Jewish historiography before Baron, Jewish history was often conceived as a long series of

persecutions. Baron precipitated a paradigm shift, whereby Jews were no longer seen as powerless but as holding significant power owing to their “social and economic” positions in various societies. No less than the historical context, this model reflects the growing comfort of Jews in Western, and particularly American, culture. Levine, as a student of Cohen and of Cohen’s teacher, Baron, is not alone among contemporary archaeologically focused scholars in adopting this counterhistory – what Robert Bonfil has called in another historical context an “anti-lachrymose conception of Jewish history.”⁵⁰ Art historian Kurt Weitzmann’s conception of an “Age of Spirituality” when Jews, Christians, and polytheists lived together in harmony, for example, was formed as a protest against Nazi racial law, and developed further in tolerant yet religious post-war America.⁵¹ Archaeology serves an important role in Levine’s construction of a late antiquity that was “immensely fructifying and creative.” Significantly, his recent 748-page monograph, *The Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2000), contains very limited discussion of the negative influence of Christian Rome on the synagogue, which included confiscations, burnings, rededications as churches, and other restrictions – both in diaspora communities and in Palestine.⁵² Rather, Levine emphasizes positive elements of Christian influence on the synagogue, implicitly suggesting a more-or-less happy coexistence.

This scholar imagines a rabbinically friendly – although not rabbinically dominant – Jewish antiquity, where nonrabbinic Judaism flourished. To Levine, the rabbis were set off from (negatively defined) nonrabbinic Judaism as a distinct “class.” The term “class” imbeds in his analysis sociological models of class conflict, although the implications of this model are not spelled out.⁵³ Peaceful urbanism without clear rabbinic dominance is expressed, Levine suggests, in the archaeological record. Israeli reviewer Yoram Bronowski captured the strongly American tone of Levine’s *Judaism and Hellenism* when he described it as “a quiet song of praise (*shir hallel*) . . . to this blending (*mizug*) [of Judaism and Hellenism].”⁵⁴ The anti-lachrymose blending posited by Levine seems particularly attractive when read against the background of 9/11, now that the complexities of Jewish existence have become ever more apparent – even in America.

Jacob Neusner was a personal friend of Goodenough’s in his later years and today is executor of his literary estate. Neusner not only edited Goodenough’s memorial volume, but also claimed in a 1964 letter to Scholem to

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have had a hand in the revision of Goodenough's thesis. In this letter, Neusner took considerable credit for having helped Goodenough "revise his historical explanation of the 'symbols'" in his summary statement, volume twelve.⁵⁵ This is clearly the case, for there is considerable similarity between Neusner's formulation in a 1963 article, "Jewish Use of Pagan Symbols after 70 C.E." and Goodenough's revised thesis. Neusner suggests that⁵⁶

Obviously, Jews throughout the Greco-Roman and Iranian worlds shared much in common; there is no reasonable ground to doubt that the main elements of law and doctrine were widespread. There is considerable reason to suppose, however, that local variations and modulations of ideas, emphasis, and interpretation of law and doctrine were far more substantial than we have hitherto supposed.

Compare this to Goodenough's formulation in volume twelve, published in 1965:⁵⁷

Wherever we find Jewish remains, such as synagogues or collective burial grounds, we may, I believe, suppose that this minimal Judaism existed, else I cannot imagine why synagogues would have been built at all. But we cannot take anything beyond this for granted. Usually we do not have to look far to find the Jews of a given group were observing the sabbaths and festivals, though the forms of their observance would vary greatly when local customs, usually under the influence of gentile religions about them, as with modern Reform Jews, came to be included in Jewish ritual. The peculiar observances of the Essenes, Therapeutae, and Qumran sects probably reflect only a small part of such divergent observances in the ancient world.

Neusner's approach here certainly does parallel that of the revised Goodenough thesis, with its "minimal Judaism," or as he calls it a page earlier, a Jewish "common denominator"⁵⁸ – a formulation that E. P. Sanders stated positively in his study of the "common Judaism" of the period. Goodenough acknowledges Neusner's contributions broadly in the preface to volume twelve, describing "the critical aid that a recent acquaintance, a brilliant young scholar, has given during the last two years, Jacob Neusner."⁵⁹ Neusner's revelation of his part in reformulating Goodenough's thesis is illuminating, particularly because it affirms at some level Scholem's intuition in an earlier letter to Neusner (March 3, 1964) in which Scholem wrote:⁶⁰

I am not sure whether your polemical remarks about Prof. Urbach are justified. You say that he grossly exaggerated

the contrast [of great rabbinic power pre-70, and slackened influence after the destruction of the Temple] which Goodenough proposed.⁶¹ On the face of Goodenough's formulation I would not say that he did. I think it is rather you who tries to smooth out the somewhat extravagant formulations of Goodenough. . . .⁶²

Scholem's comment, harsh as it was, hits the mark. Goodenough's challenge to "normative Judaism" clearly had a powerful influence on Neusner's thinking. Although Neusner was aware of Goodenough's excesses, the Goodenough of volume twelve shares many basic assumptions with Neusner's contemporaneous writings. The volume reflects a narrowing of the gulf between Neusner's methodological assumptions and those of E. R. Goodenough.

Since those early days, Neusner has repeatedly taken up Goodenough's thesis, postulating a great gulf between rabbinic literature and synagogue remains.⁶³ It is not surprising that Jacob Neusner has served as principal propagator of Goodenough's legacy, in a sense as Goodenough's Boswell. Neusner published an abridged version of *Jewish Symbols*, to which he added his own notes, thus replicating the blending of his ideas with Goodenough's that is implicit in volume twelve of *Jewish Symbols*.⁶⁴ In all of Neusner's writings about Goodenough, one senses both genuine affection and identification with Goodenough, as well as a desire to safeguard his reputation and contribution.

Following upon Goodenough and Smith, Neusner, Levine, and Shaye Cohen have focused on the extent of rabbinic power, influence, and authority. Unlike Goodenough and, to a lesser extent, Smith, these scholars never overcompensated in their own studies of rabbinic literature by stressing elements in ancient Judaism that are most characteristic of magical or mystic virtuosos over the literature of the ancient rabbis. These scholar-rabbis have their eyes fixed squarely on the world of the Talmudic rabbis. Each in his own way, Shaye Cohen, Levine, and Neusner found that the social position of ancient rabbis was "ambiguous" in ways that the reader might easily compare to the status of modern (particularly Conservative) rabbis.⁶⁵ While not abandoning the Talmud focus that they inherited from their seminary education, each of these scholars set out to present the image of an ancient Judaism that was not wholly rabbinic. A root of their question, I would argue, is to be found in the transformations occurring almost simultaneously at the Jewish Theological Seminary and within the Conservative movement. These scholar-rabbis reflect the spirit of their day, their work paralleling a distancing of

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the Conservative Jewish community from traditional models of authority and a concomitant embrace of the social sciences (especially history) for formulating a less “normative” identity and more “pluralistic” communal norms. Some were cognizant of the communal uses of their scholarship; others were not.⁶⁶

It should be remembered that history has never been just a secular social science for Conservative Judaism, but a hermeneutic for uncovering religious truths. The wedding of historiography with Jewish jurisprudence (*halakha*) is seen by Conservative Jews as a feature that distinguishes their religious system from both Orthodox and Reform practice.⁶⁷ Historiography served both *de facto* and *de jure* as a tool for approaching traditional sources in a modern “scientific” way and at the same time fashioned a chasm between the past and contemporary practice and belief. Within this community, the historian serves as both mediator/formulator of that tradition and often as a culture hero – particularly when cloaked in the mantle of the professor–rabbi that often set him (and now, her) at the apex of the religious system. This status was expanded under Chancellor Cohen and current Chancellor Ismar Schorsch, both historians. Historians became the arbiters of Conservative doctrine, replacing in this role the once-dominant law-focused Talmud department of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The fact that Saul Lieberman died in 1983 and that the decision to ordain women to the Conservative rabbinate came in the same year after a gruesome fight is not coincidental.⁶⁸ These were pivotal events for the Conservative movement. Conservative scholarship on ancient Judaism provided a usable past for a liberalizing Conservative movement.

Thus, Goodenough’s and Smith’s theological–historical goals and those of American Jews in search of a new balance between Judaism and “Hellenism” (read in the current context of 1960s and 1970s American culture) were mutually supportive.⁶⁹ In fact, Goodenough saw his mystical Judaism as a kind of ancient Reform movement. Historical scholarship at Reform seminaries showed comparatively less interest in *Jewish Symbols*.⁷⁰ Reform had distanced itself from Talmudic authority long before, and so this issue was not of vital significance for the present as it was for Conservative Judaism. A new historiography of ancient Judaism, first actualized as ideology under the chancellorship of historian Gerson D. Cohen, served to bridge the gulf between the Jewish Theological Seminary and the

increasingly liberalized Conservative synagogue movement, breaking down the old consensus in favor of a somewhat more “democratized” (or, in contemporary Conservative parlance, “egalitarian”)⁷¹ religious ideology that aligns with parallel trends and transformations in American mainline Protestantism.⁷²

With the vantage point of fifty years since the first volumes of *Jewish Symbols* appeared, some of the errors of Goodenough’s analysis are more evident than they were to earlier interpreters. Goodenough misunderstood the rabbinic, as many of his reviewers stressed. He also erred in his creation of the binary opposite “mystical Judaism.” Goodenough’s overstatement was all the more monumental (and even colonialist) owing to his almost complete unfamiliarity with rabbinic sources in the original languages, a gap of which he was painfully aware. By his own admission, Goodenough did “not read Hebrew”⁷³ and knew rabbinic literature only in translation. He made no use of the vast literature of Byzantine-period Jewry, particularly *piyyutim* that had been preserved in traditional collections or discovered in the Cairo Genizah – not because many of these documents were unpublished in his day, but apparently because they appeared (and despite massive publication programs, still appear) almost exclusively in Hebrew. To be fair, the then-accepted dating of the “Galilean-type” synagogues – Baram, Gush Ḥalav, Meiron, Nabratein, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Arbel – to the second century allowed for the use of Classical rabbinic sources to interpret these buildings. This is no longer the case, however, as we now know (as Brunner intuited) that these synagogues date to the Byzantine period.⁷⁴

Still, it is indicative of his difficulty with the Hebrew and Aramaic literature of ancient Judaism that Goodenough makes no reference to Byzantine-period liturgical texts in the course of his interpretation of late-fifth- and sixth-century buildings such as Na’aran and Beth Alpha. This is particularly the case in light of the thematic parallels between the synagogue remains and the poetry that Slouschz, Sukenik, and others had noted. Indicative of Goodenough’s difficulty with Hebrew and Aramaic texts is the fact that a fragment of a Jewish liturgical parchment discovered near the Dura Europos synagogue was below Goodenough’s “radar screen.” He missed it altogether. This is startling for a scholar as careful as Goodenough, especially because this most important document was first published by C. Torrey in English 1936⁷⁵ and discussed by R. de

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Mesnil du Buisson in French in 1939⁷⁶ and in Hebrew by S. Lieberman in 1940,⁷⁷ L. Ginzberg in 1941,⁷⁸ and E. L. Sukenik in 1947.⁷⁹

As Smith, A. D. Noch, and other Christian scholars expressed⁸⁰ – and Jewish scholars did not discuss in print – Goodenough reinterpreted the material remains of Judaism in keeping with his own Christian theological–historical suppositions and background. For him, the rabbis paralleled directly the aniconic and strict Christianity of his youth.⁸¹ Goodenough’s approach was facilitated by the removal of each “symbol” from its original setting (be it a catacomb, synagogue, or whatever) and reorganization of that material according to themes. This is as much a function of the technology that he used as of his own proclivities. The cataloging of art according to theme, whether on cards as in, say, the Princeton Index of Christian Art or in codex form, often results in an overemphasis on details, a relativization of the important and unimportant. No one who works from firsthand experience of a major monument would equate a decorative detail with a major feature of the program. This is prone to happen, however, when one works from photographs. A minor detail can take on major proportions when it is reproduced to the same size as the major feature on the pages of a codex or projected on a slide screen. Goodenough had no sense of the limits of interpretation – not every grape or bird in a mosaic is meaningful. Having never visited Dura, and having visited Israel only during the early 1950s after his own ideas were fully formulated, Goodenough only knew what atomized photographs could yield about these monuments. In his analysis of “Jewish symbols,” he juggled his visual sources and reorganized them according to predetermined categories, severing the ties, say, between a menorah in the floor at Beth Alpha with its archaeological locus, and even with the Land of Israel. Goodenough then applied universalizing interpretive principles drawn from his knowledge of Jewish diaspora sources in Greek and from psychology. Smith attributes Goodenough’s focus on detail to his religious background. My own sense, however, is that it is based at least as much on an inability to judge proportional significance. Paul Veyne rightly refers to such explanations of art as “an excess of intellectualism.”⁸²

Jewish Symbols is ultimately a projection of Goodenough’s own Christian theological questions onto Jews, redressed as a secularized “history of religions.” Hypothetical Jews had served this function for Christian theology at least from

the Gospel of John and Justin Martyr’s *Conversation with Trypho* until modern times. Goodenough’s colonization was genteel, in the best tradition of mid-century America, and it was surely not malicious in any way. Nevertheless, Goodenough’s dislike for Orthodox “halakhic” Judaism (and his lack of understanding of it) is palpable throughout *Jewish Symbols*.

Thus, Goodenough’s *Jewish Symbols in the Greco–Roman Period* should best be viewed as a transitional document. Its enduring scholarly significance rests in the way it set Jewish archaeology at the center of the scholarly agenda, particularly (although by no means exclusively) within Jewish circles. *Jewish Symbols* served as a goad for scholars to rethink the place of the rabbis in ancient Judaism, at a moment when elements within American Jewry were most receptive to such thinking. It is not surprising that Goodenough’s critique was taken most seriously by Smith and by Conservative Jewish scholars and their students (including the present author). Historiographic and theological searching for the place of rabbis (ancient and modern) in Conservative Judaism was rife during the decades when *Jewish Symbols* appeared.

Goodenough’s unique contribution to scholarship is found in the paradigm shift that his counterhistory generated. *Jewish Symbols* sparked two generations of scholars to actively seek out alternate voices in the extant sources, both archaeological and literary. This in itself is a major contribution. His most profound error, however, rests in his reevaluation of the “classic” notion that Jews don’t do art. Contrary to his British and American mentors, Goodenough knew that Jews *did* do art – and quite a lot of it. For Goodenough, mystical (read, ancient “Reform”) Jews did indeed create art – just as modern Reform Jews did.⁸³ Ancient “Reform” Jews built the synagogues of Beth Alpha, Dura Europos, and Sardis – and buried their dead in lavishly decorated tomb complexes such as Beth She’arim and the Roman catacombs. He restricted the notion of Jewish artlessness to one group of Jews – the rabbis. Jews did do art, he argued – only rabbis didn’t. Goodenough erred in believing that the Talmudic rabbis did not value the visual, maintaining that rabbinic “normative” Judaism, like the Methodism of his youth, was aniconic to the core.

Shortly after Goodenough’s death, Smith likened Goodenough to Christopher Columbus. Concluding an important review essay in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Smith wrote: “Soit. Columbus failed too. But his

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failure revealed a new world, and so did Goodenough's. . . . Informed opinions of ancient Judaism can never, henceforth, be the same as they were before he published."⁸⁴ Smith's analogy reflects a long tradition of Columbian hyperbole. Goethe, for example, compared the legendary eighteenth-century scholar Johann Joachim Winckelmann to Columbus for supposedly having discovered Greek art.⁸⁵ The vision before Smith's eyes was Columbus the seeker of a path to India (in our case, mystical Judaism and the origins of Hellenistic Christianity) who inadvertently discovered "America" – for Smith, ancient Jewish art and nonrabbinic aspects of Judaism. Smith's "failed" Goodenough was

the Columbus celebrated on the American civic holiday of Columbus Day – the hero commemorated in parades, public squares, and sculpture; in the "District of Columbia" and Columbus, the capital of Ohio; and, most importantly for Smith, his own Columbia University. Christopher Columbus is today often viewed quite differently. He is often looked upon as the person who opened the Western Hemisphere and its native inhabitants to centuries of colonial exploitation. If Goodenough – joined by Smith – is to be likened to Columbus, perhaps, we would do well to see in the work of these scholars curious and intriguing blends of both "Christopher Columbuses."