**2 Chapter One**

**The Origins of the Schism in the Zionist Folklorists Camp**

We are bewildered by the schism of the small party of folklorists as a result of the multiplicity of the societies Yeda Am, The Historical and Ethnograpic Society, and The Palestine Institute of Folklore and Ethnology. If this split brings about writer envy – the more knowledge, the better, and if it causes the separation of hearts – it is cause for sorrow.

The Schism in the “Small Party of Folklorists”

Zionist folkloristics, which developed in nineteen-forties British Palestine, can be viewed as a new page in the history of Jewish folkloristics in general. Ostensibly, it was formed *ex nihilo* by a few dozen intellectuals who founded two main groups: The Tel Aviv-based folkloristic camp of the Hebrew Society for Yeda Am (hereby, Yeda Am) led by Yom-Tov Lewinsky (1899-1973), and the Jerusalem-based folkloristic faction of The Palestine Institute of Folklore and Ethnology (previously known as the Jewish Folklore Institute) (hereby, the Institute) led by Raphael Patai (1910-1994). This division, which is at the center of this book, has thus far not been discussed in the literature, given that, among other things, the conflict between these factions took place far from the public eye in the form of partially documented activities. Manifestations of some of the major developments in the conflict were kept in archival files to which access is subject to censorship imposed by the major figures involved. These documents indicate that the institution of folklore studies occurred during the nineteen-forties against a reality of fragments and attempts to collect them and forge meaning out of them. This disjointed picture of Jewish folklore in British Palestine reflects both the fact that the folk culture developed in different Jewish communities whose arrival was scattered, often piecemeal, and the fact that the arrival of folklore studies, a discipline that had developed in different locations, was random and unconsolidated. In other words, the fragmented Jewish worlds are reflected simultaneously in the spheres of folklore and folkloristics. The failure of both factions to unite, and the hostile feelings it evoked mainly in the Tel Aviv camp, indicated that it was impossible, under such circumstances, to present the Jewish folk culture as a unified entity.

Both folkloristic societies did not direct their activities solely in the direction of their local environment; their goal was to study the folklore of the Jewish people in its entirety and consolidate the Jewish folk culture as a complete and comprehensive corpus. From the perspective of some of the personalities involved, the presence of a “competing” folkloristic entity threatened this possibility; and in light of the extermination that had occurred in Europe, it was clear to both parties that any such corpus would remain incomplete. Immediately after the Institute was formed and Yeda Am became aware of the fact, attempts were made to liaise between the societies in the hope that they would unite. To arrive at what caused these attempts to fail is no easy task, for what seems like a minor event leads to a comprehensive, and perhaps even principled, reexamination of modern Jewish culture. It is only in these terms that one can understand why Zionist folklorists, who worked 60 km apart, could not work together. These difficulties did not derive from the distance, but rather from the surprising fact that what differentiated them was greater than what they had in common, even though members of both groups identified as folklore scholars working in pre-state Israel to harness the folklore created in diasporic Jewish communities for the sake of the national Zionist life. It was only from afar, across the ocean, that one could imagine a single society—a “small party of folklorists,” in Isaac Rivkind’s words.

The attempts to appease the opponent groups failed miserably: the Jerusalem society eventually relocated to America, Yeda Am became irrelevant over the years, and folklore scholarship in the Israeli universities, which grew from the nineteen-sixties onward, was derived from the work of Dov Noy (1920-2013), work that did not originate in any one of these societies, but, as we will see, was associated with them, even if contentiously. This schism largely defines my own work, given that I identify a need to describe the conflict and the failures of both camps as part of a process of forming contemporary folkloristic scholarship, which does not feed on nostalgic recollections of imagined golden ages in the past but rather takes a critical approach in examining processes of knowledge.

Even if some of the individuals involved are not familiar to readers at this point, I will relate briefly here to the beginning of the conflict between Tel Aviv’s Yeda Am and Jerusalem’s Palestine Institute of Folklore and Ethnology. In March 1944, upon learning about the founding of the folklorist society in Jerusalem, Asher Bavli (Bernstein) (1900-1966), a representative of Yeda Am, wrote to Raphael Patai, director of the Jerusalem Institute: “It is desirable and important to establish in Jerusalem a branch of Yeda Am,” and reminded him of Joseph Patai’s involvement in founding the Tel Aviv society: “You are certainly aware that your honorable father was among the society’s [Yeda Am] founders and ‘the act of the ancestors is an indicator for the descendants.’”

The fact that folklore research in the Yishuv rested on the shoulders of two societies reverberated in the press. In *Hed Yerushalyim*, May 12, 1944, the editor wrote:

We welcome the initiative of parties associated with Beit Haam [Jerusalem community house] to establish a special institute for *yeda am* [folklore]. There is a society with the same name in Tel Aviv, but it mainly studies textual sources, whereas the Jerusalemite Institute, which will be headed by folklore expert Dr. Raphael Patai – its role will be mainly to study the aural sources: the traditions, the songs, the idioms, etc. All these are gradually disappearing amid the tribes of Israel.

This statement was not easily ignored. In a response letter to *Hed Yerushalayim*’s editor, members of Yeda Am stressed that they “are in touch with Dr. Patai, head of the society for folk traditions in Jerusalem, for the purpose of cooperating and expanding the organizational framework of our society.” It is not coincidental that on the very same day, Yeda Am representatives also dispatched letters to Yosef Yoel Rivlin and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who held positions in the institute that Patai had worked diligently to establish. Following the newspaper reports, Dr. Meyer Premsela from the information bureau of Dutch *olim* [immigrants] protested vehemently in a letter to Yeda Am in April 1944:

We have become aware from the press that during *hol hamoed* Pesach [intermediate days of Passover] a society for *folklura* [ ] studies was formed in Jerusalem whose purpose and yours are the same. In our opinion, there is no place for two societies with the same goal in the Yishuv and we advise you to merge the two societies into one society.

The plural reference in “our opinion” points to a group of folklore enthusiast Dutch Jews (Ashkenazim and Sephardim) from both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. If indeed, as Premsela notes, two societies for “*folklura* studies” were founded, does this necessarily mean that their goals are the same? If so, his bewilderment is completely understandable. However, Premsela did not consider a possibility that even if two groups in the Yishuv engaged in folklore, neither their objectives nor what they identified as folklore were necessarily the same. The correspondence between Yom-Tov Lewinsky, who led Yeda Am, and Aharon Fierst (1877-1950), the sole representative of Yeda Am in Jerusalem, demonstrates that initially the Tel Aviv group, like Premsela, believed that the differences between the camps could be mediated:

We are greatly sorrowed by the establishment of a separate forum, which the Jerusalemites founded for themselves, at a time when unifying all the forces is required for a common effort. We appealed to Dr. Patai regarding a meeting to discuss collaborating and consolidating our efforts, and perhaps we will manage to unify the few folkloristic forces in the country for the purpose of joint work in this field.

One can only wonder if the “folkloristic forces” were indeed so few, as Lewinsky and others assumed, for in fact, at this stage Yeda Am already had hundreds of registered members. The notion that a unity of forces was possible or desirable, is also bewildering. In any case, in response to Lewinsky, Aharon Fierst provided his own explanation for the schism, which at first glance, seems reasonable:

I too was sorry to learn of the founding of a “separate forum” in Jerusalem, and as I remember, I also informed you about it. The starting point was – of course, as usual – Dr. Raphael Patai’s personal offense. And somewhat justified. He is my student and the son of a friend, and I have known and respected him since his youth [...] I admire him also for his six books [...] in all of which much folkloric material is accumulated [...] In any case, his parents told me – when Yeda Am was organized, they passed over him and completely ignored him.

Obviously, personal feelings played a central role in the crisis, but without belittling the significance of the personal aspect as a factor in the separation into two rival camps, it seems that Fierst himself recognized that it was only part of the explanation. In the same letter, Fierst then continues to outline the contours of a folkloristics divided between two big cities:

Our main aspiration at this time should be the collection of material pertaining to the lives of our brothers here in Palestine from Middle Eastern and North African countries and studying their customs which they are about to eradicate. And this is done to some extent by the circle forming around Patai; and this should be of interest first to the groups of students in the university departments. That is, the department for the study of Jewish folklore in both international and inter-tribal contexts, should be instituted here in Jerusalem. Tel Aviv will have other roles: historical, the establishment of settlements, linguistic [...].

The question of “our main aspiration” was controversial. Dealing with North African and Middle Eastern customs “which are about to be eradicated,” in Fierst’s callous words, was juxtaposed with the customs of Jewish communities in Europe which had already been “eradicated.” This position did not align with those of the principle figures in Yeda Am, and it is clear that Fierst did not imagine that the source of the dispute may be fundamental: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv folklorists could be very different from one another. It is clear from his letter that Fierst, as opposed to members of Yeda Am, viewed Jerusalem, not Tel Aviv, as the center of the Yishuv. This issue has not yet been resolved in the twenty-first century.

Both factions continued to solidify their individual positions. Attempts to mediate and unify failed. Neither side was willing to waive its autonomous stance and assimilate within the “rival” society. Eventually, two journals were published: *Reshumot – Sidra* *Hadasha* in Tel Aviv, and *Edoth* in Jerusalem. An examination of the processes leading to the formation of each society, and the institution of the folkloristic field through their journals, will later lead to the recognition that the folkloristics constructed in Tel Aviv and that formed in Jerusalem were fundamentally different. These processes also—and perhaps mainly—reflected a translation of folkloristic procedures that had taken place in Eastern Europe and France (Tel Aviv), on the one hand, and in Central Europe and the Mediterranean basin (Jerusalem), on the other. In the process of their duplication in Palestine, and with the establishment of these Zionist folklorist societies, it became apparent that there was no consensus surrounding the fundamental issue of what constituted Jewish folklore. In other words, despite the temptation to highlight personal rivalries, to understand the crisis of 1944, it needs to be scrutinized in a broader historical and geographical context.

A Return to Johann Gottfried Herder

One way to tell the story would be to assume that the integration of the diaspora in the work of the Zionist folklorists in the nineteen-forties was a disciplinary necessity, and that they relied on languages, such as Yiddish, Ladino, and Jewish-Arabic. It is also possible to focus on what seemed an anomaly: the fact that Zionist folklore scholars dealt incessantly with diasporic Jewish folklore and that folklore studies were not adopted by the Zionist nation-builders. From the Zionist position, folklore scholarship in pre-state Israel undermined the “melting pot” ideology dominating Ben-Gurionist Zionism and some of its fundamental axioms, and was therefore rejected by the establishment. However, this type of substantiated explanation for the rejection of folkloristic knowledge in particular, and ethnographic knowledge in general, seems insufficient to me. Had such an explanation been feasible, one would expect that the folklore scholars discussed in this book were aware of it and would have related to it one way or another. There is no reason to assume that they did not understand the reality in which they operated.

Instead, as a point of departure, we can formulate the problem before us by way of a “what if” or counterfactual question: why did Zionist folklorists in the nineteen-forties deal with the diasporic Jewish culture instead of relying on the precursor of folklore, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and crystalize on the basis of his philosophy a Zionist folkloristics? The adoption of Hebrew as the national language, and the return to the homeland, were supposed to guarantee the growth of a nation, *Volk*, according to Herder’s proposed criteria. The Hebrew nation in its homeland could return to its “authentic” language, climate, and land in which the Bible, the most transcendental organic poetics in Herder’s view, was created, and there “renew [their] days as of old.” If indeed, as many scholars claim, Herder is the father of folklore studies, and if indeed Zionism rejected the diaspora, as others claim, then recruiting Herder, who saw flaws in diasporic Jewry that lived an inauthentic life and spoke an inferior language, could have suited well the folkloristics that ostensibly had grown out of the sun-drenched earth of Zionist Eretz Israel.

The Herderian model was accessible to Zionist folklorists such as H.N. Bialik, whose practices were based on the Hebrew language, which he insisted upon using, and the meticulous editing and formation of a canon of “all that is excellent and remarkable.” The fact that in the nineteen-forties, there were scholars who sought to continue in this folkloristic trajectory indicates that this is not a hypothetical option considered in hindsight. Still, these were the exception, and in the period before the establishment of the Jewish Hebrew state in the Land of Israel, most of the folklorists turned their backs on Herder, and in fact, on Bialik’s approach as well. The idea that the Zionist folklorists had no choice but to render the diaspora and its languages present, assumes that there is an essential affinity between the study of folklore and the different languages and customs of Jewish communities in the diaspora. As I will demonstrate in what follows, dealing with the territory of the Land of Israel was at the center of the approach of the few folklorists I deal with in this book, while their folkloristics was continuously focused on territories outside the country and on languages that were not Hebrew.

Why was Herder’s legacy abandoned when it seemed particularly valid to the Zionist reality of the nineteen-forties? Obviously, Herder’s eighteenth-century doctrine was not directly duplicated in this reality; his works were translated by Jewish intellectuals from Western and Eastern Europe, and were manifested in Hebrew and Yiddish revivalist authors. In all of these reincarnations, the Jewish intellectuals maintained a dialogue with their non-Jewish neighbors. However, while the Zionist folklorists, most of whom were born in Europe, laid the foundations for an Eretz Israel folkloristics in the nineteen-forties, they did not envision Herder due to the line of mediators and translators that stood between them and him. Even if our main interest is the folkloristics that crystalized in Eretz Israel in the nineteen-forties and fifties, the folkloristics-diaspora-Israel triangle obligates us to trace the translations of various processes from the beginning of Jewish folklore studies in Europe and their duplication, with formal modifications, in Israel. In this context, “translation” describes the ongoing process of transforming and duplicating terms and situations. Calling attention to translation invariably illuminates its inherent “infidelity.”

The terms “diaspora” and “Israel” exist here side by side, not one compared with the other. As a point of departure, one cannot presuppose this type of a-priori division: is a folklore scholar who was born in Galicia and worked in Israel, Israeli? Galician? What about a version of the Midas legend, which Zelda Schneersohn wrote in Jerusalem-based on a story told by a Moroccan storyteller, is it a Moroccan legend? Jerusalemite? Greek? And what about a scholar who was born in Israel and encounters a book written by a “diasporic” Jew, can we relate to him only as an Israeli scholar? These examples are enough to realize that in practical terms, the “diaspora” and the “Land of Israel” are always intertwined.

Zionism grew simultaneously with the development of folkloristics in Europe, therefore, the question at the center of the discussion, even if sometimes covertly, is: how is the category of folklore produced within the folkloristics-diaspora-Israel triad, what are the central sites identified with the production of this category outside of Israel, and how were these sites duplicated with the consolidation of Zionist folkloristics in the Land of Israel? Although this book deals with the folkloristic activity that emerged in pre and post-state Israel in the nineteen-forties and fifties, individuals from different times and places are relevant to understanding processes in this period.

The moment the deterministic intuition regarding the relationship between folklore studies and Zionism is abandoned, one can evaluate the heterogenous process of the translation and transformation of terms as practiced by folklore scholars by way of examining discrepancies between the different versions of Zionist folkloristics. This type of perspective illuminates the rivalry between the factions, whose twisted roots spread far and wide to different sites in and outside of Europe, and to much earlier periods.

Jewish Folkloristics in Europe

It is hard to define the point at which the study of Jewish folklore began to expand and branch out. One can start in the eighteenth-century with the *Volkgeist* idea, which Herder developed on the basis of a common language, geographical climate (territory), and common practices, an idea that impacted the status of European Jews. At the time, Europe’s Jews could not adopt Herder’s theory without radically amending it, given that his notions about the return to the Land of Israel were perceived as imaginary. Accordingly, members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement sought to become assimilated in Europe while preserving key religious principles. In the second half of the nineteenth century, several of them engaged in folklore—especially in folk genres of written Jewish literature—or in the daily customs of past eras, even without adopting Herder’s principles regarding the desired Jewish life.

In nineteenth century Germany, groups of scholars that dealt with ethnographic and museal documentation of cultures from around the world were formed and grew. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, ethnologist Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) became the leading figure in these circles. Inspired by Herder, Bastian developed the idea of a psychic unity of mankind, a highly influential concept within the German-speaking sphere and even beyond it. Two contrasting interpretations of Bastian appeared at the end of the century, which were directly relevant to the Jewish culture: the first was that of German geographer and ethnologist Richard Andre. Andre wrote the first monograph devoted to Jewish folklore, a mainly anthological-essentialist work, in which he outlined Jewish unity in terms of race, and described the Jews as “others” in relation to the Europeans. The second interpretation is that of Fredrich Salomon Krauss (1859-1938), who was born into a Jewish family in Croatia, within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Krauss developed comparative folkloristics based on his perception of folklore as a type of fountain of youth of the nations (the moto on the journal he edited read *Am Urquell* / *Der Urquell* – the fountain). From his residence in Vienna, where he served as secretary of Alliance Vienna, Krauss published many anthologies on the folklore of the Jews and of American “Indians” as well as folklore from Montenegro, Poland, and other places. For Andre, the Jews were not part of Europe, while Krauss saw in the assimilation of the Jews in Europe the solution to the question of the connection between the Jews and the continent.

The sources for the anthologies of Jewish folklore that Krauss published were diverse, for example, Krauss edited materials contributed to *Am Urquell* by I. L. Peretz, and he was friendly with Ignaz Bernstein, a scholar of Yiddish idioms. The folklore of Jews in a comparative framework also appeared in the Polish journal *Wisla*, edited by Jan Karlowicz, who was also a close friend of Krauss.

These two opposed approaches, Andre’s and Krauss’s, did not allow for the consolidation of a Jewish-European folkloristics, given that Andre’s approach served as a foundation for anti-Semitic views that gradually gained ground in the German scientific discourse, while Krauss’s approach was continued in comparative folkloristic projects that obscured the existence of a distinct Jewish subject. At the same time, Krauss’s universal methodology created an infrastructure for the development of Jewish folkloristics in Eastern Europe through figures such as I. L. Peretz, who employed Krauss’s basic practice: reliance on questionnaires and collectors of folkloristic materials.

Both Andre’s and Krauss’s approaches are in the background of the work of Max Grunwald (1871-1953), who aimed to establish the research of Jewish folklore as an independent discipline by founding the Society for Jewish Folk in Hamburg at the end of the eighteen-nineties, an endeavor for which he recruited several members of Wissenschaft des Judentums: David Kaufman (1852-1899), Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), and Marcus Brann (1849-1920). Grunwald’s initiative was vehemently opposed by Krauss, who was against any attempt to consolidate a separate Jewish folkloristics, just as he was against any attempt to harness folklore for the benefit of nationalism or regional politics. Still, like many members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, Grunwald advocated for emancipation and fought anti-Semitism, which was mounting exponentially at the time. He fought against employing race in discourse on the Jews and as an analytical category in general, and was opposed to adopting statistical approaches in folklore research as Andre had done before him.

With these objectives in mind, Grunwald established a Jewish folklore journal, *Mitteilungen* (The Newsletter) which he edited and published continuously from 1898 for thirty years. As editor and publisher, Grunwald was committed to the differentiation between belonging to a *Nation* based on civil rights (emancipation) in different nation-states, and belonging to the Jewish people (*Volk*) based on common cultural and religious principles. His folkloristics viewed Judaism as a multiplicity of performances nurtured by a common religion and separate surrounding environments. It is easily understood that territory played a definitive role in Grunwald’s folkloristics and in his aspiration for emancipation of the Jews. Thus, Grunwald regarded with serious consideration the material manifestations of Jewish culture in different regions and was in touch with art scholars; indeed, in referring, for instance, to the wooden synagogues of Polish Jews, he was able to point out affinities between folk creativity and the non-Jewish environment in which it was rooted; on the other hand, it was more difficult to identify an affinity between Yiddish and the Polish territory.

In the Russian Empire, in which Jews were emancipated, Jewish folkloristics that sought to nurture Judaism as a nation (natsiya) and not only as a people (narod) flourished and was facilitated by a perception of Judaism as a nation of culture, that is, as a unified spiritual entity in which territory plays a marginal role. This folkloristics defined folklore on the basis of ostensibly distilled performances of the spirit of the Jewish people. Shlomo Zanvl Rappoport, known by his literary name as S. An-Sky (1863-1920), initiated an ethnographic expedition to the fringes of the Russian Pale of settlement, and with his colleagues “collected” immensely valuable ethnographic material in the towns of Vohlin and Podolya as a means to reflect the spirit of the Jewish people in its entirety, as an entity transcending time and space. For the Yiddishists, who worked in the Russian Empire (and later in Poland), the Yiddish language became the most dominant factor in defining the Jewish “folk,” and to this end it was necessary to demonstrate that Yiddish, as opposed to Herder’s understanding, was not an inferior version of German, but rather functioned as a separate organic language that enabled the growth of a vital Jewish culture.

Between the world wars, folkloristic activity in Europe was facilitated mainly by the *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* (Yiddish Scientific Institute) which was formed in Vilnius in 1925 and in whose framework, researchers attempted to harness the Yiddish vernacular for the benefit of a folkloristics that relied on the imagining of a Yiddish nation. Parallel to the Institute’s expansive enterprise, the An-sky Vilna Historic-Ethnographic Society, with its branches in Vilna and Warsaw, was also engaged in folkloristic activity, albeit limited and based on the model of the Historical and Ethnographic Society in St. Petersburg. Jewish folklorists were also active beyond contexts of Jewish studies; some of whom dealt with Jewish folklore in the context of their Polish ethnological work.

Concurrent with the popularity of Jewish folklore studies in Poland between the world wars, in central Europe, a folklorist trajectory crystalized in the form of various monographs and mainly in the work of the rabbinical seminaries in Breslau, Vienna, and Budapest. In these frameworks, studies similar in their approach to Grunwald’s continued to emerge. Articles on folklore and folk literature often appeared in the Monthly for Jewish Sciences and History, the *Monteschrift*, published in Braslau; and in Budapest, scholars active in the rabbinical seminary also engaged in folklore and published articles in German, French, and Hungarian journals, such as *Magyar Zsidó Szemle* (Hungarian Jewish Review). The widespread interest in folklore in Hungary expresses, to a large degree, identity challenges faced by Hungarian Jews who negotiated between their Jewish and Hungarian identities, between belonging to Asia and belonging to Europe. Jewish folklore flourished in France as well around the publication *Revue des études juives* (Journal for Jewish Studies), which featured articles written by scholars from France, the Mediterranean Basin, and Hungary, as Alexander (Sándor) Scheiber illustrates in his comprehensive survey.

To conclude, on the eve of World War II, the study of Jewish folklore was well established in central, as well as in Eastern and Western Europe, by way of the publication of journals in various languages, expanding archival collections, and research expeditions. In these circles, the ethnographic sensitivity to the spoken Jewish languages, customs, and genres of written texts became increasingly astute.

Jewish Folklore in Hebrew

The ethnographic sensitivity to language developed, in a near opposite fashion than that of the Yiddishists, also among members of Hovevei Zion. Ahad Ha’am (Asher Ginsberg), who adopted ideas from Herder, was recognized as playing a decisive role in this development. H. N. Bialik (1873-1934), who was influenced by Ahad Ha’am, implemented Herder’s hypothetical proposal regarding the revival of the Jewish spirit outside of Europe in the Hebrew language, and designated for himself a key role in revitalizing it. Conversely, Bialik’s attitude toward Yiddish was ambivalent, as is evidenced in his recruiting of Alter Druyanow (1870-1938) into the folkloristic project—*Reshumot*—a folklore series which they edited together with Yehoshua Hone Ravnitzsky (1859-1944). In these books, Yiddish texts appeared alongside Hebrew translations, a duality that accurately reflected the precedence attributed to Hebrew over Yiddish. The folkloristic position of this editorial team (Havurat Reshumot) is effectively expressed in Druyanow’s preface to the first edition of the Hebrew *Sefer Ha-Bdiha Ve-Ha'hidud* in which he takes a Hebraist folkloristic approach, that obscures the connection between the joke and the Yiddish language in which it is told:

It has become clear to me as an absolute certainty, that same premise regarding the ‘natural affinity’ between our joke and the language is fundamentally incorrect. I looked and saw that our joke is one of a kind: it is mostly and crucially not subjugated to the language in which it is formed [...] if indeed we do have in our treasure box some jokes and wits, upon which the weight of the subjugation of the Yiddish language lays, then we have, at the very lEast the same number of jokes and wits upon which the subjugation of the Hebrew language lays [...] therefore, it is obvious to me that the material I have will assume a linguistic Hebrew form.

Together with “rescuing” the joke from Yiddish, Druyanow made sure to distance the folklore from the oral culture and favored a (written) style close to that of the *Aggadah*. According to Druyanow, “the language [of the folk joke] is not the same as the vulgar speech, which is spewed out of the mouth verbatim, without any embellishment or adornment.” This understanding of the “folk” is contrary to contemporary perceptions that stressed the connection between folklore and society’s “lower” strata—Vulgus in Populo—a position that was expressed in the Yiddishist’s work on the folklore of the underworld, like A. Alamy’s description of his ethnographic work in a brothel.

While the Hebrew folkloristics was often in conflict with the Yiddishistic folkloristic trends, the work of Sephardi and Mizrahi folklore scholars on Ladino and Jewish-Arabic was sometimes reliant on Bialik’s direct support. At the same time, the discourse of some of them, such as Yosef Meyuhas (1868-1942), revolved around folklore as a product of territory. More callous than Meyuhas was Shmuel Ben-Shabbat (1888-1957) who wrote about the Jewish-Arab folklore and instated a rigid identification between the Jewish spirit and the fact that it was born in the “East,” while presenting a territorial interpretation faithful to Herder.

Meyuhas and Ben-Shabbat, like Avraham Elmalih (1885-1967), Moshe Attias (1898-1973), Baruch Uziel (1901-1977), Moshe Davis Gaon (1889-1959), and others, were part of a network of researchers that operated in the Eastern Mediterranean. These scholars, together with the threesome from Odessa—Druyanow, Bialik, and Ravnitzsky—who relocated *Reshumot* to Tel Aviv, herald the first steps toward the relocation of the center of Jewish folklore studies to Palestine. As I will demonstrate in what follows, the folkloristics that emerged in Mandate Palestine in the nineteen-forties was consolidated on the basis of this local folkloristics, alongside various foundations that were created outside of Palestine, and together with research principle stemming from the ethnographic endeavor in Palestine.

Ethnography in the Land of Israel

The study of the residents of the “Holy Land” complements the strand of scholarship focused on Hebrew culture as a historic-ethnographic model focused on the Bible, and which is the basis of the methodological ethnographic research that developed in Palestine in the early twentieth century. The foundations of this research are rooted in the eighteenth century, with the ethnographic shift in Bible research initiated by Johann David Michaelis (a follower of the Göttingen school for Bible interpretation), and later in Herder’s work. The transmutation of Abraham from a man of faith to a nomadic shepherd or Bedouin opened new possibilities for interpreting the Bible. At the same time, this position illuminated the need for ethnographic knowledge of the Orient; Michaelis even organized a research expedition to countries in the Orient in the eighteen-sixties. The interest in the Orient as a means to explicate the Scriptures was not new, and predates the eighteenth century; however, with the event of the Enlightenment, this position was revisited, and gradually, throughout the nineteenth century, was academically solidified outside the theological realm per se. Accounts of the customs of residents of the “Holy Land” in the twilight of the Ottoman era magnetized Christian scholars, such as Gustaf Dalman (1855-1941) and Hilma Granqvist (1890-1972), who identified biblical customs in the customs of the Palestinian residents. Parallel to these endeavors, Jewish scholars, such as the ethnomusicologist Abraham Zevi Idelsohn (1882-1938), and anthologist Samuel Weissenberg (1867-1928), operated against different imperialist contexts. Ethnographies of the “Holy Land” continued to develop during the period of the British Mandate, while British and German research groups partnered with other European, Zionist, and Palestinian scholars. This partnership, in which territory was the focal point of the research, was short lived and in the nineteen-thirties nearly ceased completely when the territorial conflict between the Jews and Palestinians became a key factor.

These groups rendered Mandatory Palestine not only a sort of primal or untainted source of knowledge—an ethnographic field that nourished European research centers—but also a foundation for its becoming a center of scientific knowledge in its own right. One can argue, following folklore scholar Sadhana Naithani, that the perception of “research centers” as opposed to “research fields” is misguided from the outset, and is based on colonialist premises regarding center and margins. Naithani shows how “folklore collectors” that worked in India and Africa were forced to cope with theoretical questions no less than scholars in The Folklore Society in London. Nevertheless, the founding of Hebrew University in 1925 was a leap jump in the history of local science. Although ethnographic scholarship was institutionalized only in the nineteen-sixties, already in the early days of Hebrew University, ethnography scholars worked at the Institute for Eastern Studies. Special note should be given to the works of Yosef Yoel Rivlin (1889-1972), who researched the Jews of Kurdistan, Erich Brauer (1895-1942) who studied Jews from Yemen, Afghanistan, Bukhara, and Kurdistan, and the comparative musicologist Robert Lachmann (1892-1939) who specialized in the study of Arabic music. The separation of the Institute of Jewish Studies from the Institute of Eastern Studies at Hebrew University blurs the German orientalist legacy shared by both institutes: Goitein and Rivlin, for instance, were educated at the Institute for Oriental Studies in Frankfurt where there was no such separation. Nevertheless, ethnographic research was integrated in the Institute for Jewish Studies, albeit as a minor field manifested primarily in the work of Samuel Klein (1886-1940), one of the Institute’s first three professors, who took charge of Palestinology studies, as the discipline was called at the time, a field with distinctive affinities to the ethnographic interest in the Holy Land.

In addition to his role at the university, Klein was active in other local organizations—The Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, and more importantly for our purposes, the Palestine Society For History and Ethnography, which operated according to the model employed in St. Petersburg, and later in Vilna and Warsaw, and whose activities were conducted, beside Klein, by Ben-Tzion Dinberg (Dinur) (1884-1973) and Simha Assaf (1889-1953). Within a short time, Dinberg became the leading figure in the Jerusalem-based society that focused on historical research, and whose main impulse to engage in ethnography stemmed from the struggle over An-Sky’s inheritance (part of which he bequeathed to the Palestine Society For History and Ethnography which would be established in Jerusalem). In fact, Dinberg was against combining history and ethnography: “What does this combination teach us, and does it work?” he asked, adding, “Are these not two different sciences [...] each with its own methodology?” In the end, ethnography was pushed out of the historical society’s activities. However, given that the rise and fall of ethnography in this society is known to have had a decisive impact on the development of folkloristics in Palestine in the nineteen-forties, it is important to address this work, which has not yet been discussed methodically in the literature, in more detail. Moreover, although ethnography was forced out of its activities, in the society’s yearbook, *Maasef Zion*, one of the most significant programs in the study of folklore in the Land of Israel appeared.

On the Ethnography of The Palestine Society For History and Ethnography

While Ben-Zion Dinberg dismissed ethnography from the society, a number of active members advocated for it based on a genuine interest in the field. In 1930, Yosef Yoel Rivlin, then a young PhD at the Institute for Eastern Studies at Hebrew University, was appointed chairman of the folklore division. It is not surprising that Rivlin, who, as mentioned, received his orientalist education in Frankfurt, pushed toward research of “Eastern ethnic groups.” Tanchum Berman (1889-1954), another division member, presented a completely different research program: Berman, who started out as a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (Chaim Zitlowsky and Sh. An-Sky’s party in Russia), called for collecting methods that were operatively similar to procedures customary in the Yiddish Scientific Institute, that is, establishing a vast network of folklore collectors and a nationally distributed network of representatives, including in European and Arab countries. While such “collector” networks were indeed a foundation of Krauss’s universal folkloristics, and of the Jewish folkloristics that were formed in Warsaw and later at the Yiddish Scientific Institute in Vilna, here one can detect a solitary attempt to establish a Jewish folkloristics based on groups of collectors in Palestine and the diaspora from within a research center in Jerusalem. Rivlin and his colleagues’ aspirations to expand the activities of ethnic research resulted in their appealing to public figures by means of ethnographic questionnaires. Rivlin even offered to pay collectors from “Mizrahi communities” (for instance, 1 mil. per idiom). Concurrent with the “ethnic” expansion, the Jerusalem society developed its connections with researchers abroad: with the Yiddish Scientific Institute (a sensitive issue, as we will see later, given the hostile relationship between it and the Society History and Ethnography in Vilna—a natural partner of its parallel society in Jerusalem), with rabbinical seminaries in Breslau, and with a non-Jewish scholar who had come to Palestine to conduct ethnographic research among Jews, Dr. Ludwig Ferdinand Krauss, who later became one of the leading Nazi theorists dealing with “race.”

The Palestine Society For History and Ethnography changed its attitude toward ethnography: despite the fact that its activities at the end of the nineteen-twenties and early nineteen-thirties, including statements made by its leaders such as Dinberg, reflected a perception of ethnography as a partner discipline of history, there were hardly any articles related to ethnography published in the *Zion* anthologies (the society’s annual publication), and only in the fifth anthology did the editors make a special effort to keep their word. In a meeting in which it was decided to publish *Zion* as a quarterly edited by Dinberg and Yitzhak Baer, it was determined that the quarterly would be dedicated in its entirety to the history of the Land of Israel and oriental countries, but will include supplements on folklore—a “step-son” who could later be dismissed. Eventually, as soon as *Zion* became a stage for the Society, and the society founded by Dinberg became an historical society, the ethnographical activity gradually decreased, and by the end of the nineteen-thirties the division had dissolved completely. In 1938, Michal Rabinowitz (1879-1948), one of the division’s central figures, wrote an article on in folk art in which she expressed her frustration from the society’s debasing attitude toward folklore:

The same respectful and admiring attitude with which we treat books, is reversed in our debasing and negligent treatment of the aural literature, the same rich creation that lives and is lively in the mouths of the people and which is transmitted orally and passed on from generation to generation [...] While we do have in Palestine a “Historical and Ethnological Society” and it published six anthologies and this year is the forth year in which it is publishing a quarterly titled *Zion* which is dedicated to the history of Israel, the folklore supplement dedicated to folk artifacts is regretfully meager and limited, the society has not found—certainly did not exert itself to do so—loyal assistants and has not managed to recruit groups of collectors and documenters, which under the society’s guidance, would collect the folk artifacts from among the ten tribes of Israel, whose ethnic groups and tribes are here in Palestine.

However, these words, like the rest of the society’s ethnographic activity, did not nurture folkloristic research focused on the territory of Palestine. Instead, an a-territorial national approach was preferred. In this sense, a connection did not materialize between Klein’s work, as a geographer of Palestine, and the committee for ethnography that dealt with the folk art and artifacts of the “tribes of Israel.” At the same time, the society was the first to attempt to regularize the study of Jewish folklore from within the Land of Israel: in the society’s fifth anthology one of the most important programmatic article in the history of Jewish folklore studies was published, an article by Dov (Bernhard) Heller, the only one in the society who attempted to link Jewish folklore to the territory of the Land of Israel. Consideration of this article and the polemics it generated are indicative of the discipline’s status on the eve of the Shoah, and on the continuity of the folkloristic research that was created in Europe and the folkloristic research in Palestine.

Back to Dov Heller: Eretz Israel Folklore from Hungary

Dov Heller, a professor at the rabbinical seminary in Budapest, was the student of two scholars who dealt in the study of the Orient, folklore, and Judaism: Benjamin-Zeev (Wilhelm) Bacher (1850-1913), who was also known for his scholarship on *aggadah*, and Ignác Goldziher (1850-1921), who, through his work, contributed to study of the Bible from a comparative perspective of the study of myths. Heller was in touch with several of the prominent folklore scholars in Europe, and was known, among other things, for taking part in the comparative folklore project of Johannes Bolte (1858-1937), one of the most important folklore scholars in pre-WWII Germany and Jiří Polívka, a Czech scholar of Slavic literature. Shmuel Klein, also from Hungary, took it upon himself to appeal to Heller, who he perceived as an expert on folklore, to compose a program for the society. While this was perhaps the first Eretz Israel program for folklore studies, it was still written by a Hungarian scholar living in Hungary. Heller’s approach, which emphasized material-based ethnographic research paralleled by scholarship in comparative literature, deviated from the emphases that characterized the Jewish folkloristics that crystalized in Eastern Europe—for example, An-Sky, who underlined the Jewish life cycle and year cycle as practically metaphysical, or the folkloristics that developed in Poland and was based on language. For Heller, the study of folklore was applied as well to the day-to-day culture. In a letter he sent to the Jerusalem society, Shlomo Shapira expressed his discontent with the ethnographic questionnaire Heller had proposed:

Firstly, the questionnaire makes a most striking distinction between the spiritual culture and the material culture [...] this is expressed in such a way that the holy ark that bears traditional images and symbols he includes among the tools and fixtures made of wood, such as household tables and chairs, stables and cowsheds in the yard [...] the classification of the eminent author in my opinion is not befitting at all a Jewish questionnaire, given that nearly all of our folk artifacts belong to the spiritual culture [...] and in general Prof. Heller’s program gives the impression that it was prepared for a rural settlement [...]

On three gorged pages, Shapira proposed a host of suggestions to remedy Heller’s program: for instance, replacing the questions related to the geography of the place with questions about the history of the ethnic group;a suggestion to replace questions pertaining to material culture with references to holidays and commemorative dates and with a discussion on different artifacts; adding an item referring to education, etc. Further on, Shapira’s sources of inspiration are made evident:

After making corrections to the proposed questionnaire, I wonder whether all this trouble is worthwhile. In my opinion, it would be more practical to accept, as a foundation, An-sky’s questionnaire, which includes 238 pages and 2078 questions, to revise it according to the questionnaires of the Yiddish Scientific Institute and Grunwald’s questionnaire, and translate it into Hebrew [...] and finally, I must say that my sharp critique of the proposed questionnaire is of its inappropriateness for the study of the Jewish way of life. But as a general ethnographic questionnaire I find it satisfactory and of a high scientific standard.

Heller proposed a comprehensive ethnographic-folkloric operational plan, which combined methodologies commonly employed by scholars of Jewish folklore in Europe with methods used in ethnographical research in Europe; that is, distinctively territorial methods, such as the German folklore atlas that Heller used while writing his article. His plan connected between the Jewish folkloristics created in Europe and the attempt to implement European ethnographic-territorial principles in Palestine. The “scientific” approach, in Shapira’s words, created a distance from the perception of Judaism as a spiritual entity that cannot be conceptualized by way of the description of objects, as if it were an ethnography of fishing villages in Sweden or Sicily. At the same time, Shapira’s argument drew upon scholars such as Grunwald, who were not that far from Heller’s position. In fact, his criticism was based on ethnographic models that did not focus on the Eretz Israel territory, and which were derived from the social-revolutionary An-sky, the Yiddish Scientific Institute, and Grunwald, who was deeply invested in attaining emancipation for the Jews in Europe. An-sky’s questionnaire, which was published after the expedition he led, was based, as opposed to Heller’s, on an approach that does not map territory, and it is hard to see how they were supposed to implement it properly.

Whether supporting Heller’s stance or Shapira’s position, the most important program published by the Jerusalem society remained orphaned, and was practically the opposite of research trends in post-Shoah Jewish folkloristics. Raphael Patai, Heller’s student at the rabbinical seminary in Budapest, and who wrote the first doctorate in the history of Hebrew University under the supervision of Shmuel Klein, was a leader of these trends. He did this, among other things, by way of joining Rivlin who was the head of the society’s folklore division. Patai received formal authorization for the abandonment of Heller’s program in the summer of 1942, when Israel Halperin, an editor of *Zion* quarterly, rejected an article he had sent him, saying that: “I have the honor of returning his article ‘From the folklore of Moroccan Jews,’ given that *Zion* quarterly does not feature a folklore section. With its establishment we had the intention of forming a special stage for folklore, but we have failed to do so until now.”

Unraveling the Knot

With the abandonment of ethnography by the Historical Society, local ethnographic research reached an impasse. The situation became even more critical when key figures in the field—

H. B. Bialik, Alter Druyanow, Shmuel Klein, Erich Brauer, and Robert Lachmann—passed away. When WWII broke out there were no agencies in Palestine that dealt with folklore and ethnography. The dozens of scholars who continued to work in these fields were not organized, and their work lacked clear direction. The rise of the Nazis; the ceasing of research activity in Germany and later in Austria, including the closing of the seminaries in Breslau and Vienna; and the paralyzing of the Yiddish Scientific Institute’s activity in Vilna as a result of the crushing of Jewish life in Europe—all these brought an end to the study of Jewish folklore on the European continent from the beginning of the nineteen-forties. Heller passed away shortly before the Nazis entered Budapest and the local seminary was closed. The destruction of Jewish life in Europe inevitably led to the ethnographic approach piloted by Grunwald, who right after the Anschluss joined his wife and son in Jerusalem. The Yiddish Scientific Society, the hub of Jewish folklore studies in Eastern Europe between the world wars, was relocated to America. The “Biltmore Plan” (May 1942) proclaimed that the “problem of the Jews”—in Ahad Ha’am’s words—would be solved by Zionism in the Land of Israel by way of a Jewish nation state (defined in the plan as “commonwealth”). Amid the destruction, Heller’s program seemed like a vision from another world, which related to an irrelevant situation and employed approaches that were now appropriated by German scholars committed to the concepts of “blood and earth.”

Dinberg’s society was driven by processes in Eastern Europe and its ethnographic division was in touch with collectors and institutions in Europe. As a result, in light of the news of what was occurring in Europe, one could have ostensibly “returned to Herder,” to focus on the local territory and on folk expressions created in the Hebrew language, and to establish a new world while ignoring the ruins of the old world. However, as mentioned, none of this happened. On the contrary, from within the ruins, a folkloristics grew that dealt with diasporic territories and with languages used in them. Like in Shapira’s case, folklore scholars in Palestine drew their research positions from the wells of Jewish folkloristics that were abundant during the fifty years that preceded their work; they continued to copy and translate the many (and often contradictory) approaches that crystallized in Europe while responding to the dramatic shifts in the lives of Jews at the time; the destruction of European Jewry, Zionism’s focus on an Eretz Israel territorial alternative in which Hebrew is the official language, and the transference of Jews from Arab countries to Israel. Tensions and contradictions soon surfaced, which were manifested in the conflicts between research approaches that pointed to varying relationships within the triangle: folkloristics-diaspora-land (Israel). Given that the folkloristics that developed in Palestine in the nineteen-forties translated folkloristic perceptions formulated in the previous century in Europe, the identity of the Jewish “folkgeist” in the new circumstances (ostensibly) positioned Jewish folkloristics in terms of the Hebrew language or the Eretz Israel territory as a translation of the “diasporic” Jewish folkloristics which was based on language (mainly Yiddish, as part of the non-Zionist or semi-Zionist national ideologies) or on territory (like in the case of Grunwald who strived for emancipation).

Consideration of the research routines at the basis of Zionist folkloristics in the forties shows that there was no inherent contradiction in the intersection between folklore studies and Zionism, two “ideological” terms that always existed in some form of combination. In fact, my findings contradict approaches that emphasize the ostensibly imminent relationship between folklore and nationalism. The fact that the building of the Zionist nation was not founded on folklore studies, unlike, for instance, Germany, Finland, and Ireland, is not unusual: the premise that folklore is unequivocally related to nationalism ignores its part in nurturing regional (sub-national) identities and multi-cultural (a-national) perceptions. Likewise, one can point to “failures” or malfunctions in recruiting folklore studies for nation building: the folklore in France or Belgium was associated with regional concepts and did not contribute to nation building, and in Franco’s Spain folklore was in the way of “enemy.” In contrast, already at the end of the nineteenth century, folklore studies appeared as a comparative framework transcending cultures, languages, and places, as we saw in the reference to Friedrich Krauss and in colonialist and imperialist contexts.

The criticism on recruiting folklore for the benefit of nationalism was joined by different processes both in American folkloristics and German folkloristics and its coping with the field’s Nazi past. This trend continued with the establishment of European ethnology at the end of the nineteen-sixties in Sweden and France, and was later adopted in the *Volkskunde* departments in Germany and Austria, as well as study and research programs in academic departments and research institutes in other countries as a discipline that was based on post-nationalist ethnographic concepts that were presented as a substitute for national folklore. However, this dichotomic worldview is problematic: in a comprehensive review of processes leading to the institutionalizing of folklore (mainly in Europe), Bjarne Rogen demonstrates that the study of folklore crystallized in different contexts that deviate from nationalism and frequently contradict it. Moreover, the shift to European (post-national) ethnography does not guarantee the dismissal of essentialist terms from the research discourse. Similarly, the identification of Jewish folklore in Israel with ethnicity and not with “the nation” is “unnatural” or lacks essentialism. Conscripting folklore studies for the benefit of the various versions of Zionism is examined here in concrete terms, without being tempted to outline a chronology of anticipated failure. This while focusing on the division into two Zionist folkloristic camps, a particularly fertile schism for a broad understanding of Jewish folkloristics. This fissure will be explained next by way of following in the footsteps of a limited number of figures and in accordance with the ethnographic-historical approach employed here, which seeks out the way in which key terms—“land,” “diaspora,” and “folklore”—were organized in different ways in a particularly dramatic period.