IN his introduction to Early Modern Jewry, David Ruderman reveals something of his intellectual autobiography by relating to three seventeenth-century figures who inspired him in his scholarly path and had a significant impact on how he conceives of the Early Modern as a distinct era in Jewish history. Each figure is connected in some way to the Italian port of Venice. Though they differ considerably from one another, in their distinctive hybridity Leon Modena, Simone Luzzatto, and Joseph Shlomo Delmedigo were each paradigmatic of the age.

Modena, the enigmatic rabbinic figure, was full of internal contradictions. A man of great learning—restless and creative with no bounds, critical and sharp like a knife, courageous and questioning—he delved into the new and traditional worlds of knowledge that engaged Jewish culture in his day. Modena, as a man of many worlds and interests, a dabbler and an intellectual, holds in his person the vicissitudes and internal conflicts of the early modern intellectual experience.

The second, Simone Luzzatto, while also a Venetian rabbi like Modena, was dramatically different from Modena. Standing in between the Jewish community and the Italian surrounding, Luzzatto sought to lower the walls of the ghetto. His 1638 Discorso circa il stato de gli’hebrei et in particolar dimoranti nell’inclita città di Venetia (A discourse on the state of the Jews, particularly those dwelling in the illustrious city of Venice) fused notions of Italian civic thought with emerging concepts of raison
d’état. This stirring apologetic for the Jews of Venice forcefully argued that their petty trading, their overall usefulness and, especially, their loyalty to the Republic combined to make a significant contribution to the welfare of the city. In a work that is cited repeatedly in modern discussions on the emancipation of the Jews, Luzzatto enunciated a new political vision for the Jews, one in which they would be integrated more fully, even if not seamlessly, into seventeenth-century society.

The third figure, Delmedigo, charted a course for Jews toward the new sciences of the early modern period. Born in Crete, and of very distant Ashkenazic origin, Delmedigo’s identity was no less imbued with Sephardic and Mediterranean roots. He studied medicine in Padua, where he learned astronomy with Galileo, and spent a year in Venice where he encountered both Modena and Luzzatto. Delmedigo was clearly not the sedentary type. He traveled to the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and later to Central Europe, taking with him his conflicting identities and interests, *inter alia*, science and Kabbalah, rabbinitism and Karaism, East and West, new books and old manuscripts. Even more than the other two, Delmedigo reflects in his person the cultural image of the period to which this book is dedicated. Despite the fact that these three were individuals on the margins (or perhaps because of it), their restlessness, curiosity, and lust to travel were symptomatic of an age of changing boundaries and kaleidoscopic new vistas.

The Talmud tells of a stone in Jerusalem, the so-called stone of claims (*even to’im*). From atop this stone, in this highest city at the navel of the world, a person would announce what they had found, ask one’s great questions, and stake one’s claims. Ruderman’s stone of claims—his intellectual touchstone—has always been Venice. Venice was not just the incidental meeting place of these enigmatic men; it is the metropolis that best emblemizes the Italian world that sparked the intellect and curiosity of David Ruderman. Writing in the late 1980s, he described this Italian Jewish world in the following words:

> In absorbing diverse Jewish and non-Jewish cultural forms and creatively molding them into constantly novel configurations, in patiently tolerating diversity and discord, in channeling ideas and values from one place to another as an entrepôt and clearing house of merchandise, and in allowing individuality to blossom within a framework of communal consensus, Italian Jewry was expressing its own vitality, its own creativity. Perhaps the function of mediating and correlating, of translating one universe of discourse into another, is not so passive, not so unspectacular an achievement… From the perspective of the postmodern world in which we live, one of diverse cultural lifestyles and values where no single ideology reigns supreme but where bitter acrimony and extremism hold sway, the image of Italian Jewry seems refreshingly appealing. Perhaps in its quiet sanity and dignified restraint, in its mutual respect and tolerance for competing and dissenting parties, and in its harmonizing and integrative capacities, can be located not only the essential legacy of Italian Jewish civilization but also its enduring significance for contemporary culture.

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In this urban space we find excitement mingled with fear before the emerging world of print; encounters between Christians and Jews, some acerbic others welcoming and inviting; Jews tentatively exiting the secluded experience of the ghetto and embracing the adventure found on untrodden paths; and an explosion of intellectual innovation in science, mysticism, and a range of heretical ideas. Italy—with Venice at the center conceptually and historically—where the Talmud was burnt and Christian scholars integrated Kabbalah into their religious world, has long fascinated Ruderman, and over the course of his career he has sought to tell its complex story through a series of unexpected and wondrous characters, from Abraham Farissol and Abraham Yagel in northern Italy, to figures outside Italy but who embodied the “Italian-ness” described above, like Abraham Tang in London, and most recently Pinhas Hurwitz in Vilna. Ruderman has crafted in and through them the intricate world of what we might call a Venetian paradigm for understanding Jewish cultural history.

David Ruderman was hardly the first Jewish historian to focus attention on this period, or even on the Jews of Renaissance Italy. But when he began his career in the 1970s, an entire volume devoted to case studies on the dynamics of Jewish culture in early modern Europe would have made little sense to most Jewish and European historians. While social, religious, and intellectual developments among European and Middle Eastern Jews in the period from the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1492) to the French Revolution (1789) were the subject of many studies—including by scholars as renowned as Gershom Scholem, Jacob Katz, Salo Baron, and Cecil Roth—this span of time was usually understood as the end of the Jewish Middle Ages and rarely conceptualized as a distinctive historical period.1

In the last two decades, historians in North America, Europe, and Israel have refined and developed the discussion of a period roughly spanning the three centuries from 1500 to 1800 in Jewish culture and more and more have found a periodization that offers an “early modern” period as a useful heuristic for interpreting historical developments. Demographic, geographic, and technological factors suggest different dynamics in Jewish culture and society than in the period up to the late fifteenth century (“medieval”) and different as well from the nineteenth (and “long nineteenth”) and twentieth centuries (“modern”).4 Such a view, clearly also reflecting a general historiographical trend in European history away from “Renaissance-Reformation” and “Enlightenment” periods toward a view of the “Early Modern” as a more broadly integrated conceptual frame, has more slowly made its way into synthetic treatments of Jewish history as well.5 Conversely, increasing progress has been made toward incorporating the Jewish experience into what is sometimes called “general” European history with the complex dynamics of Jewish-Christian cultural interchange in this period of particular interest.6 The incorporation of the Jewish experience and Jewish-Muslim interchange into the “general” history of the Islamic world is also on-going, enriching broader discussions of the intersections of Europe and the Islamic world.7
Periodization, however, is always an aide for historiographical inquiry, and never a determining demarcation of epochs. Where, for example, ought one draw the line between this period and that? Does the Jewish Middle Ages end in 1450? 1492? 1500? Does the Modern enter the stage in 1750? 1772? 1789? 1800? Any decision in these instances is itself an historical interpretation. Still, delineating aspects of continuity and discontinuity across periods and with respect to specific areas of social, religious, political, and intellectual life offers rich opportunities for more precise descriptions of particular aspects of the past. Any synthetic interpretations of a period must depend on a broad base of case specific research.

Arguably the first attempt to explicitly conceptualize the span from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century as a distinctive period in Jewish history came from the economic and political history *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750*, by Jonathan Israel (1985). Israel attempted to argue for an “early modern” period in Jewish history based primarily on changed economic and political circumstances associated with the gradual return of Jews to Western Europe. In a review of Israel’s work published in 1987, Ruderman—a Jewish intellectual historian, then at Yale, and already immersed in his work on the Italian world of figures like Modena, Luzzatto, and Delmedigo—praised the work for its attempt to conceptualize the period, but pointed out its deficiencies in the arena of Jewish cultural and intellectual history. In what might be seen as a belated response to Ruderman and other critics, Israel’s preface to the third edition of his work (1997) gestured toward cultural and intellectual factors. Israel could reference a number of studies of early modern Jewish-Christian interactions in the religious and culture sphere (as well as the economic) penned by historians in North America, Israel, and Europe between the mid 1980s and the late 1990s. Jewish-Christian interactions, and changes and developments in Jewish thought and religious life in this period had been studied before, against the backdrop of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, Absolutism, and Enlightenment. However the conceptualization of the period as a distinctive one in Jewish historiography was a new, and growing historiographical development.

Ruderman has played a key part in the advance of an early modern Jewish cultural history. Through his early monographic studies of two northern Italian Jewish intellectuals, Abraham Farissol (c. 1451–c. 1525) and Abraham Yagel (1553–c. 1623), he offered a close reading of the intellectual interests and scholarly agendas of two representative figures contextualized against the backdrop of Renaissance humanism, and late Renaissance interests in science and magic. With these studies, Ruderman joined a small group of scholars, among them Robert Bonfil, Arthur Lesley, and Moshe Idel, who were considering the impact of Renaissance culture on Jewish scholars in new and sophisticated ways that went beyond the Burckhardtean framework of older studies by Cecil Roth and Moshe Shulvass. Ruderman in particular focused on the dynamics and complexities of the interactions of multiple traditions in the intellectual lives of early modern Italian Jews, in his case studies of Farissol and...
Yagel and in his work as an editor of two significant collections that set the agenda for the field of Italian Jewish intellectual history for the 1990s and the 2000s.16

A full contextualization of Jewish intellectual life in the sixteenth and seventeenth century required an assessment of the role of the Scientific Revolution in Jewish culture—the world of Delmedigo—a relatively understudied subject prior to Ruderman’s Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe (1995).17 Although Jews had played a limited role in the development of the new science, Ruderman suggested that engagement with the natural world and new scientific developments partly shaped Jewish culture and society. In considering these issues, Ruderman moved beyond the sphere of Jewish culture in Italy and past the early seventeenth century, to consider the work of Jewish intellectuals in the Ottoman Empire, early modern Ashkenaz, and England, ranging from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, thus anticipating the theme of mobility and border crossing that so defines his understanding of the era to this day.

Charting the trajectory of Jewish scientific learning brought Ruderman to a new series of studies of Jewish engagement with the Enlightenment, complicating regnant narratives of the Haskalah. In a series of studies of eighteenth-century English Jewish intellectuals, Ruderman has contributed to a broadening of the horizon of eighteenth-century Jewish thought beyond the traditional focus on the German-based Haskalah movement.18

From his early studies of Italian Jewish intellectuals to his later work on eighteenth-century English, German, and Polish Jews, Ruderman has placed central emphasis on the individual as the representative or exemplary figure through whose life and career the problems of a period and cultural context are revealed.19 Whether by design or by serendipity, Ruderman’s scholarly trajectory has allowed him to explore the dynamics of cultural and intellectual interactions of early modern Jews with most of the major intellectual trends of early modern Europe, grouped under the heuristic rubrics of “Renaissance,” “Scientific Revolution,” and “Enlightenment.” Arguably the only major area left unexplored by Ruderman is the direct impact of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations on Jewish culture, a field that has received renewed attention in the last decade or so, as can be seen in some of the studies in this volume.20

Perhaps not surprisingly, the range of Ruderman’s own research and writing increasingly drew him toward a synthetic consideration of the period as whole.21 In 2010 he published the programmatic Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History, which lays out what he sees to be the distinctive elements of an “early modern Jewish culture.” Early Modern Jewry represents the fruit of decades of attempting to synthesize the period in teaching undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Maryland (1974–83), Yale University (1983–94), and the University of Pennsylvania (since 1994).22

Without pretending to any kind of comprehensiveness, this volume is an extension of Ruderman’s project, contributing a series of telling historical snapshots of
the current state of research that forward, refine, and challenge how we understand the early modern period, and spark further conceptualization and inquiry. As such, the editors and the authors offer it as a tribute to David Ruderman for his formative role in the development of this discussion since the mid-1980s, not only in his own scholarship, but also as a teacher and as a program builder and facilitator of scholarly conversation.

Ruderman had already delineated some key elements in early modern Jewish intellectual life in earlier writings, including the key role of print, the significance of networks and mobility among Jewish intellectuals, and the value of extraordinary individuals who served as conceptual diplomats, absorbing and translating so-called external traditions into a Jewish idiom. Interaction between Jewish and Christian cultures, through texts and personal encounters of Jewish and Christian intellectuals, has also been central to Ruderman’s understanding of this period. In his 2010 work, Ruderman articulated what he deemed the five defining factors of a Jewish Early Modernity: an “accelerated mobility”; “communal cohesiveness”; a “knowledge explosion”; a “crisis of rabbinic authority”; and a “blurring of religious identities.” While acknowledging that this list cannot capture all aspects of early modern Jewish life, Ruderman argued that these were symptomatic and constitutive of a distinct period in the cultural framework of Jewish life lasting roughly from the late fifteenth through the late eighteenth century. The intense and ongoing cultural encounter of Jews and non-Jews throughout this period also suggests ways that this periodization of Jewish culture could be a useful common language linking Jewish history to the dynamics and processes unfolding in early modern European culture in general.

Ruderman’s categorical pentaverate proves compelling to several of the authors represented in this volume. Individually, the essays collected are tightly wrought case studies that illuminate aspects of Jewish culture in early modern Europe, whether constructions of Judaism by non-Jews or those on the margins of Jewishness or the interplay of social and intellectual connections between and among Jews. Read as a mosaic, the microstudies present a rich and nuanced portrait of a Jewish culture that is both a contributing member and a product of early modern Europe.

In the first section of this volume, “Realms of Authority: Conflict and Adaptation,” we examine the dynamics of the authority structures of the Jewish communities in the aftermath of the seismic expulsions and migrations that reshaped the geographical contours of the Jewish world. This section explores the formation of Jewish communities, Jewish communal autonomy, and cultural representations of leadership. These are traditional concerns of Jewish historiography but require renewed attention for the early modern period against the backdrop of changing geographical/demographic patterns and political arrangements. Expulsion and migration not only led to a mobility that had consequences for Jewish culture, but also for the internal cohesion of now larger transregional Jewish communities (such as the Sephardic Diaspora in the Ottoman empire or the networks of Ashkenazim that stretched across German lands and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth); and in places
where Jews from different regions came together (such as northern Italy). These essays also demonstrate the ways that Jewish leaders and intellectuals conceptualized their and their community’s places within local, regional, and national polities. The emergence of Sabbatianism and the changes in European politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries only sharpen questions of communal politics and leadership at the end of the period.

Although Jews very much responded to political and religious developments in Christian Europe, a large percentage of early modern Jews lived under Muslim rule, and the experiences of Jews living in the Islamic world need to also be incorporated into the broad historiographical conception of Early Modernity in a global Jewish history. While this volume does not contain essays on developments in the Persian sphere, a number of essays relate to the Ottoman Empire and North Africa and to interconnections and exchanges across the Mediterranean, an important corrective to overly Eurocentric studies. The geographical remapping of a Jewish Early Modernity can contribute a great deal to a better understanding of the integrated economic and cultural landscape of the era for Christians and Muslims alike, and permits a keener awareness of the porous, changing, and context-dependent boundaries dividing the broader cultural, political, economic, and demographic landscape of the epoch.

The impact of expulsions and migrations in the fifteenth century, especially the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the forced conversion of Jews in Portugal in 1497, has been much discussed and is proposed by many as the natural starting point for consideration of Jewish Early Modernity. By carefully tracing the history of an elite Portuguese exile family and their marriage patterns, Joseph R. Hacker’s essay is a case study of the dynamics of social change in the aftermath of expulsions and in the encounter of Jews from distinct communities in new locations. But such encounters did not begin only in 1492, and Elliott Horowitz shows the impact of encounters of Italian Jews from different backgrounds in his analysis of the fifteenth-century rabbi Judah Messer Leon’s projections of his authority in central Italy in the social and intellectual arenas. The impact of the later, catastrophic Chmielnicki massacres (1648–49) on family life is the subject of Adam Teller’s article, and shows the importance of gender for understanding intersections of family life and communal affairs.

If Horowitz’s account of Jewish politics in the career of Messer Leon plays out against a backdrop of internal Jewish communal life, Matt Goldish’s essay on Prague maps the way that internal Jewish politics and family rivalries can play out against a broader political canvas. And while the relation to external political events is implicit in the calculations of Goldish’s subjects, the studies by Benjamin Fisher and Anne Oravetz Albert on Sephardic political discourse illuminate explicit attempts among key intellectuals in the Spanish and Portuguese community of Amsterdam to put forward Jewish political theories. Ruderman and others have stressed that Jewish communal authority and autonomy in this period consolidates and intensifies medieval patterns.24 Yet while the Amsterdam community is often pointed to as a key example, Fisher’s work on the Jewish identification with the Dutch state suggests
a proto-modern anticipation of nineteenth-century emancipation-era patterns. At the same time, Albert suggests that Orobio de Castro was reconceptualizing Jewish communal autonomy as Jewish communal sovereignty in a robust defense of rabbinic authority and in dialogue with Christian political thought.

Section II, “Knowledge Networks,” collects essays that engage the dynamics of intellectual life in light of demographic, political, and technological change. The advent of print changed the means of communication and reshaped networks of scholarship. While the “meta-halakhic” disciplines of philosophy and Kabbalah had been pursued in the medieval period, early modern publishing (first among several factors) led to new phenomena with unanticipated consequences: the popularization of the Kabbalah, the spread of knowledge in the vernacular, and intellectual engagement with new science.

We begin this section in the fifteenth century, with Talya Fishman’s analysis of Profiat Duran’s ideas of the possibility of a somatic spiritual engagement with Scripture, a theory that, Fishman suggests, ties together several late medieval Jewish intellectual trends on the eve of major intellectual and cultural change. In his careful study of Joseph Shlomo Delmedigo’s interests in atomism in the seventeenth century, Y. Tzvi Langermann also takes up the issue of Jewish intellectual engagement with current philosophical issues. The deep entanglement of both Fishman’s and Langermann’s subjects with Kabbalah represents one continuity of the late medieval to the early modern. But Kabbalah was far from static, and Langermann shows the developing connections of Lurianic Kabbalah and evolving scientific theories. Yossi Chajes’s study of the intersections of Lurianic Kabbalah and the new science through diagrams gives a fascinating look at the kinds of novel intercultural intellectual dynamics that emerged in Early Modernity.

So crucial is print to understanding early modern Jewish intellectual history that Ruderman, in his Early Modern Jewry, treats the history of ideas and the history of this ground-breaking technology in tandem under the historiographic rubric “explosion,” which suggests its potentially violent, landscape-altering, and unpredictable consequences. Ruderman’s reflections there join a growing body of scholarship on the impact of print on Jewish culture in the period, and two essays here expand our understanding of the implications of what was printed for shaping Jewish culture: Moshe Idel focuses on the printing of Kabbalah while Amnon Raz-Krakovski traces the printing of works related to or extracted from the Talmud at the time of its burning.

Both Idel and Raz-Krakovski show the critical interrelationship between the printing of Hebrew books and the encounters of Jewish scholars with Christians, be they other scholars, printers and publishers, or church censors, expurgators, and inquisitors. Indeed, all the essays in the first two sections concern themselves with Jews who were in one way or another deeply engaged with non-Jewish sources of authority and texts. The third section of the book, “‘Jews’ and ‘Judaism’ in the Early Modern European Imagination,” focuses a lens explicitly on cultural and intellectual
interchange, especially between Jews and Christians, noting the major role of conversos as intermediaries and mediators. The early modern period saw not only an unprecedented level of Christian interest in post-biblical Judaism, it also witnessed the emergence of a large number of Jews, especially exconversos, with an intimate knowledge of Christianity. The constructed images of Jews and Judaism that emerge in this period can hardly be called the product of a “Christian” imagination but rather of a broader European imagination.

Giuseppe Mazzotta’s study of the intersection of the work of Pico della Mirandola with Jewish thought offers an introduction to this theme. As with Talya Fishman’s study of Profiat Duran, Mazzotta’s is a case study of a figure, Pico della Mirandola, who was a pioneer of what would become characteristic of Christian scholarship on the Jews—a move from purely (or primarily) polemical motivations to an engagement with Judaism as a new way of thinking about Christianity. Anthony Grafton’s examination of Christian discussion and presentation of Hellenistic Judaism is a case example both of the dynamics of that encounter and of what happens in an era of expanding knowledge. Andrew Berns, in a similar vein, looks at instances in which knowledge of the Jewish past was a joint endeavor of Jewish and Christian scholars. Joanna Weinberg’s study of the memorialization of Erasmus in both Latin and Hebrew similarly demonstrates how scholarship can transcend boundaries within a republic of letters.

Boundaries were never fully erased as evidenced in Jonathan Karp’s study of Luther’s ideas about Jews and usury during the Reformation. But various kinds of cultural, intellectual, and social interchange are critical to understanding this period. Debra Kaplan’s nuanced study underscores the critical role of converts in the kind of Christian Hebraist activity examined by Berns, Weinberg, and Grafton. Adam Sutcliffe’s case study of the converso Miguel de Barrios and his idiosyncratic construction of an identity on the borders of Judaism and Christianity suggests another model—what Sutcliffe calls “conservative hybridity.” Of course, border-crossing hybridity had real consequences in some early modern contexts, as Roger Chartier’s study of Antônio José Da Silva’s encounter with the Inquisition makes clear.

One of the consistent questions about the Early Modern is its relationship to Modernity. If case studies dealing with the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries permit us to see basic trends and patterns that define early modern Jewish cultural life, what changes or remains the same in the eighteenth century, typically viewed as the key hinge point in the emergence of European—and Jewish—modernity? As in many synthetic interpretations it is sometimes easier to point to the beginning of a series of phenomena than to the end.

Various cultural, intellectual, and social developments arguably make the eighteenth century the key period for the emergence of modern European social and political conditions, including secularization and the rise of the centralized nation state. Recent books on the period have sharpened discussion of the nature of the Enlightenment and secularization. Do developments in this period presage or pre-
dict aspects of modern Jewish culture? Do new developments, especially political ones, in the eighteenth century mark the end of the period and the beginning of a new one? Or are the dynamics of Jewish enlightenment and secularization processes continuations of early modern cultural trends? If such trends continue into the eighteenth century, which continue into the nineteenth?

Ruderman ends his Early Modern Jewry with the proposal that much of eighteenth-century Jewish cultural history should be seen as continuous with the Early Modern, along with the tantalizing suggestion that some Jewish cultural dynamics in the period of emancipation and industrialization from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century might be profitably analyzed for their early modern characteristics. In particular, Ruderman is not convinced that the Haskalah movement represents a break from the early modern in intellectual or cultural terms, a position he has elaborated in a series of essays and oral and written dialogues with Shmuel Feiner and others. For Ruderman, the paradigmatic synthesis and interchange of “Venice” remains alive in places like London, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Prague in the eighteenth century.

The penultimate section of this volume, “The Long Eighteenth Century in an Early Modern Key,” examines eighteenth-century Jewish culture as a hinge between the Early Modern and the late. Despite recent rejections of the secularization thesis as a master-theme of modernity, understanding issues of secularization and secularity remain a part of the historiographic conversation. In his essay, Michael Heyd suggests that a general crisis of confidence in the connections between a “secular” human realm and the divine pervaded early eighteenth-century European discussions and that understanding the general crisis could shed light on the Jewish case of modernization.

Yaacob Dweck’s study of the Holy Land emissary and bibliophile Hayim Yosef Azulai opens a window onto eighteenth-century Hebrew book culture, showing continuity with the previous two centuries, but also the emergence of a new phenomenon that would be critical for nineteenth-century Jewish scholarly activity—the great public and semipublic libraries of Europe. Francesca Bregoli’s study of Livorno (in which Azulai also plays a role) likewise depicts a scene in which the upheavals of a secularizing milieu of the Livornese Jewish elite is braided with strong lines of continuity with earlier patterns of patronage and networking.

Such continuities of Early Modern “connectedness” of Jews across time is echoed in space, as can be seen in Andrea Schatz’s portrait of Naphtali Herz Wessely and other Enlightenment figures, who were mediators not only between the Jewish past and present but also across geographic boundaries. Present-day Jews could themselves be bridges, which is the role they play in Edward Gibbon’s thinking about Jews and Christians of antiquity, as David Katz shows. Katz’s essay returns us to the familiar world of the transmission of negative images of Jews, adherence to which early modern Christian Hebraism and Enlightenment discourse on the “other” proves continuous rather than discontinuous.
How to mark clear change—and when it can be observed—in the discourse about the “Jewish question” as well as internal Jewish discussion takes center stage in Shmuel Feiner’s essay on Moses Mendelssohn’s responses to the critical events in the year 1782. While it would be too simple to take one year as the “beginning” of modernity, Feiner highlights the ways in which most of the key issues in Jewish modernity were adumbrated by state action, public debate, and Jewish responses in one remarkable year. In Sharon Flatto’s study of three generations of rabbis from the Landau family of Prague, beginning with Ezekiel Landau, one of the key interlocutors in the debates of the 1780s, we can see the indications of a rapid process of intellectual and cultural modernization at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. In other realms, however, the years around 1800 do not mark a clear divide between an early modern and a modern Jewish history. Rebecca Kobrin’s study of the treatment of Eastern European domestic servants, and the relationship between gender and class stratification among Jews, shows considerable continuity from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century.

Part V, “From the Early Modern to the Late Modern (and Back Again),” follows the traces of the Early Modern that are both etched into and effaced from later eras. Moving from the social to the literary, even an unimpeachably modernist writer like Mendele Moykher Sforim could, as Israel Bartal shows, offer an attempt to return to early modern patterns of language use from the middle of the nineteenth century. While Bartal does not invoke a concept of medievalism, in fact, by reaching to a pre-Haskalah past, Mendele was reaching back to what he would have considered a “medieval” Ashkenazic past. And while we typically think of American Jews as belonging firmly to modern Jewish history, Beth Wenger’s essay provocatively situates eighteenth-century American Jews in an early modern context. Her subjects could not foresee a future exceptionalist American Jewish historiography, and she shows how they naturally drew their own lines to Jews elsewhere in the world and back into Jewish history.

Thus Bartal and Wenger, in different ways, offer us reflections on the project of historiography as retelling the past and as connecting to the past in whatever present one finds oneself. They also remind us of the contingencies of periodization. In her essay, Vivian Liska takes up these problems by examining the twentieth-century reception of Rahel Varnhagen, a figure who stands on the precipice of the Early Modern/Modern (or Medieval/Modern) divide. Yosef Kaplan’s portrait of an acrimonious exchange over the role of the Jews in premodern Spanish history, as preserved in the writings of and letters between two towering twentieth-century historians offers us a final reflection on the connection binding the work of the historian and the dynamics of modern Jewish culture and politics.

Liska and Kaplan remind us that David Ruderman and all of the writers in this volume operate not in an early modern culture but in a contemporary academic world and a particular series of institutional and political arrangements that cannot
but inform scholarship. Ruderman’s interlocutors here are in fact his colleagues and students who have relationships with him ranging from decades of close friendship to more recent interactions. While some of the authors here (Cohen, Kaplan, Heyd, Hacker) were educated with Ruderman at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem at a time when the distinctiveness of the early modern period was not part of the Jewish historiographical agenda, his doctoral students from Yale and Penn represented here (Chajes, Flatto, Kobrin, Shear, Kaplan, Bregoli, Dweck, Albert, Berns, Fisher) more or less “grew up” with the notion of an early modern period in Jewish history naturalized and internalized.

Over four decades, Ruderman’s Renaissance Jews have found in him a most sympathetic and astute observer who always sought to uncover the context and intellectual setting in which they traveled. His *dramatis personae* were not one-dimensional figures who spent their days studying only the canonical books of Jewish tradition. They moved in many different circles, crossed between Jewish and Christian worlds, dabbled in science and Kabbalah, studied and practiced medicine and the occult, engaged in economics and had a compulsion for gambling, played with allegories and imaginative constructions, and never ceased to redraw the sensitive boundary between loyalty to and identification with Jewish culture and community and the Christian world and thought.

Ruderman’s passion does not end with the intellectual figures of the Renaissance. Always attuned to the currents of modern Jewish thought, an interest he cherished long before he became an academic, he has informed his studies of the eighteenth century with extensive knowledge of, and keen insight into, modern science, philosophy, and religion. Dramatically, he has given new life to a group of English-Jewish thinkers, who clearly struggled with their attraction to and rejection of Christianity, and tried to enunciate a position that was never free of the ambiguous identities and religious influences they experienced.

Ruderman the scholar has always also been a teacher, and a devoted one. Not only does he love shepherding bright young minds into serious scholarship, he trains them to challenge and dispute their teachers. His students know that this is his calling, and they have reaped the riches of his knowledge, passion, and support. Whoever has not heard David Ruderman sing the praises of this or that student who will become the future “great” has never heard David Ruderman speak. He takes deep pride in their achievements, even—especially—as they find their own independent voice.

A generous and capacious intellect, Ruderman possesses an unsurpassed ability to bring people together from all backgrounds and traditions to study, learn from each other, grow, and bring new insights to the scholarly world and the general public. He has invested the energy, drive, and vision he brings to scholarship and teaching to the institution of Jewish learning he has directed at the University of Pennsylvania since 1994. The Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies has evolved under his leadership into one of the premier centers for advanced studies.
in the humanities. As one peruses the subjects that have dominated the interests of the Center and the personalities who have participated in its activities, one sees the nature of Ruderman’s orientation from the outset. For Ruderman, Jewish studies needs to be studied within the wider web of its contexts, be they geographic, intellectual, thematic, or comparative. The topics on which the Center focused its year-long seminars range from biblical archaeology to contemporary art, with much in between. In turn, the interdisciplinary interaction that became synonymous with the seminar has shaped his own catholic approach to the Early Modern.

And the teaching mission for Ruderman has not been limited to his students. Public lectures, programs that bring congregational rabbis together with academic scholars, and opportunities for members of the Center’s board to learn from the Center’s fellows all bring to fruition another aspect of his notion of community of learning, in which nonacademics and academics learn together and widen each other’s horizons. Professor, rabbi, and former camp counselor merge seamlessly in David as he convenes these scholarly communities year by year at the Center and as he communicates the value of serious learning to a wider public.

It might be an over-determined reading of historiography as biography to relate too closely David’s scholarly emphasis on interaction and cultural symbiosis to his own role as a bridge-builder across different academic communities in Israel, Europe, and the United States. But if we can speak of a “Philadelphia” school in Jewish history that has emerged under David’s leadership, it would be one that looks a lot like the paradigmatic “Venice” that has characterizes his own scholarship: a view that emphasizes mediations of minority groups and wider cultures, while still giving due weight to the internal dynamics and dynamism of the minority. Indeed, the early modern period—with increasing crossing of boundaries, hybridity, acculturation, and an attractive wider culture even while Jews maintained semi-autonomous communal structures in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ottoman empire, or the Italian ghettos—seems a particularly fruitful realm of investigation for someone with David’s range of interests and commitments. Perhaps we might even say that David has acted in many ways as a model early modern Jewish intellectual who moves seamlessly between the “general” republic of letters, and the particular Jewish conversation.

All this David has accomplished while remaining a modest man who reveres others more than he does himself, inquisitive and down-to-earth, sensitive to the needs, wishes, and goals of others, and a dear friend, colleague, and mentor. Unfortunately we could only bring together a small number of his friends and colleagues to collaborate in this volume. In this project of affection and honor, the contributors have each offered him an aspect of their scholarship that they feel ties them to David. The editors and the authors of the essays here each feel privileged to have been part of David Ruderman’s intellectual and social world and look forward to continuing conversation with him for many years to come.
Notes


5. The division of medieval and modern is epitomized in textbook accounts such as H. H. Ben-Sasson et al., A History of the Jewish People (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1969: English; London, 1976). Even recent surveys such as David Biale, ed., Cultures of the Jews: A New History (New York, 2002), split this period between the “medieval” (vol. 2) and the “modern” (vol. 3). In the case of this volume the division is between “Diversities of Diaspora” and “Modern Encounters.” Likewise, Raymond P. Scheindlin, in his one-volume A Short History of the Jewish People from Legendary Times to Modern Statehood (Oxford, 1998), divides this period differently for different areas of the Jewish world— “medieval” Jewish history in both the Islamic world and in Christian Europe come to an end around 1500; the Jews of the “Ottoman Empire and the Middle East” are then considered in a chapter that spans 1453 to 1948; the Jews of “Western Europe” from 1500 to 1900 are treated in one chapter; while the Jews of Eastern Europe are treated in a chapter that extends from 1770 to 1948.


7. Attention to Jews in the Muslim world in the period from circa 1492 to 1800, however, is often presented as a continuation of the medieval or as a prelude to the modern. See, for example, the periodization in the two volumes of primary sources and textbook overviews by Norman A. Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook (Philadelphia, 1979), which takes the story from the medieval through the nineteenth century, and the overlapping The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times (Philadelphia, 1994). More recently, see Zion Zohar, ed., Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times (New York, 2005), which places most articles on the early modern period in a section titled: “From Expulsion to the Modern Era: Exile, Decline, and Revival” but includes an article on “early modern Sephardim and blacks” in the section titled “Sephardic Jewry in the Modern Era and Special Topics.” In Biale, Cultures of the Jews, attention to Jews in the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Central Asia in the broad “early modern” period generally occurs in articles devoted to those areas in the third section titled “modern encounters.” See also Scheindlin’s periodization discussed above. Likewise a distinctive “early modern” period does not emerge in the three volumes edited by Shmuel Ettinger, Toldot ha-yehudim be-artsoy ha-Islam (Jerusalem, 1981), that has been influential in teaching Jewish history in Israel. Volume 1 of that work published by Merkaz Zalman Shazar is subtitled “The Modern Period up to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century,” and begins with the seventeenth century. The connection between a me-
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10. See e.g., John Edwards’s comments in the introduction to his survey, The Jew in Christian Europe, 1400–1700 (London, 1988), wherein he offered his own work focusing on the religious history of Jews and Christians as a kind of corrective to Israel’s focus on largely secular factors. Although Natalie Zemon Davis and Peter Burke (among others) had published before Israel, the 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion of work in which cultural approaches to early modern European history became central. For an overview of the "cultural turn," see Lynn Hunt, ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley, Calif., 1989).

11. Israel, European Jewry, ix: "If mercantilism was one main branch of the dichotomy of impulses and pressures which transformed European Jewry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as important, if my argument is right, was the mounting European spiritual and intellectual crisis, rooted in humanism and the Reformation, which first became fully evident, with far-reaching consequences in the second half of the seventeenth century."


15. For references to this literature and an overview of the historiographical developments up to the early 1990s, see Ruderman, “Introduction,” in Ruderman, ed., Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy (New York, 1992), 1–39.


19. Ruderman was certainly not alone among early modern Jewish historians in focusing on individual biography as a means of getting at larger issues. Cf. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics (New York, 1971); Yosef Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Oruobio de Castro, trans. R. Loew (Oxford, 1989). While some studies of historiography have noted the fall and rise of biography within professional historiography, an examination of the fortunes of biography in

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Jewish historiography is a desideratum. It is worth noting that very few of Ruderman's doctoral students wrote intellectual biographies for their dissertations.


21. His interest in synthesis certainly began much earlier. See e.g., “At the Intersection of Cultures.”


23. Ibid., 15–16.


26. On the connection between print and too much information, see Ann Blair, Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age (New Haven, Conn., 2010).


