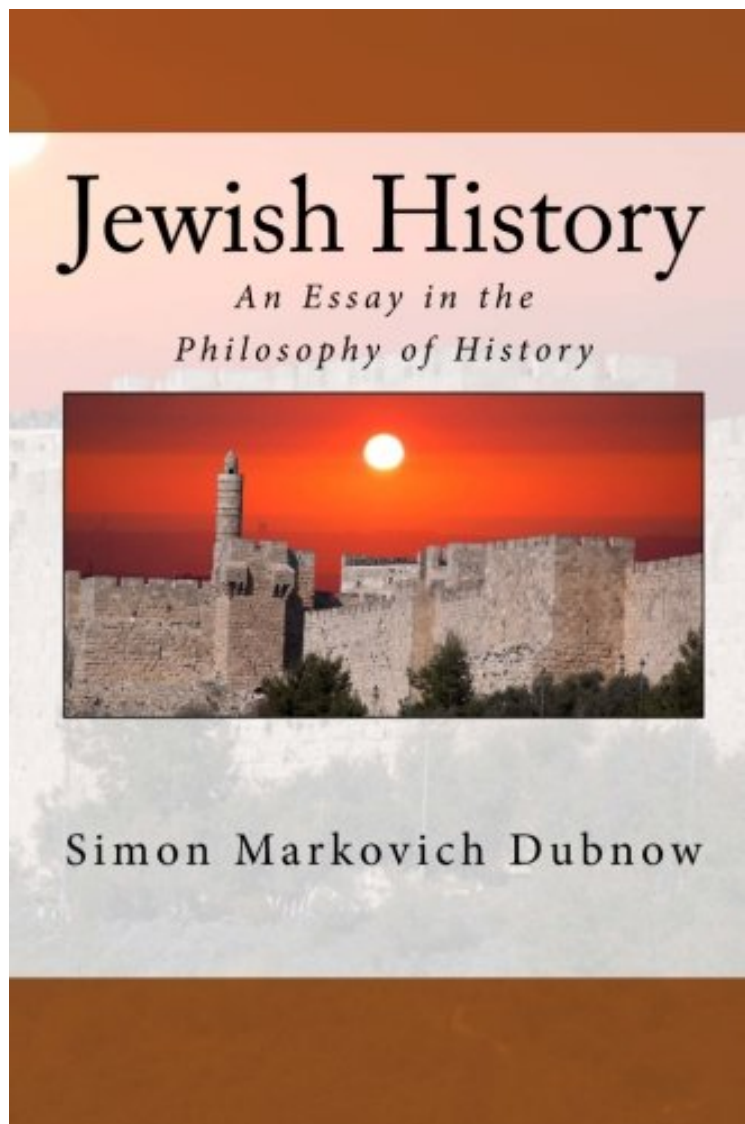


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## Jewish History: An Essay in the Philosophy of History

*Simon Markovich Dubnow*

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As historian, ideologist, literary critic, and journalist, Dubnov put forward the idea that the Jewish people were more than just coreligionists, but in fact constituted a people whose common bond was a shared culture. His work influenced nearly every historian of the Jewish people who came after him, even though the vital intellectual world of East European Jewry, in which Dubnov was such an important figure, was destroyed by German Nazism and Soviet Communism. -Kelly Boyd, *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, Volume 1, 1999

The author of the present essay, S. M. Dubnow, occupies a well-nigh dominating position in Russian-Jewish literature as an historian and an acute critic. His investigations into the history of the Polish-Russian Jews, especially his achievements in the history of Chassidism, have been of fundamental importance in these departments. What raises Mr. Dubnow far above the status of the professional historian, and awakens the reader's lively interest in him, is not so much the matter of his books, as the manner of presentation. It is rare to meet with an historian in whom scientific objectivity and thoroughness are so harmoniously combined with an ardent temperament and plastic ability. Mr. Dubnow's scientific activity, first and last, is a striking refutation of the widespread opinion that identifies attractiveness of form in the work of a scholar with superficiality of content. Even his strictly scientific investigations, besides offering the scholar a wealth of new suggestions, form instructive and entertaining reading matter for the educated layman. In his critical essays, Mr. Dubnow shows himself to be possessed of keen psychologic insight. By virtue of this quality of delicate perception, he aims to assign to every historical fact its proper place in the line of development, and so establish the bond between it and the general history of mankind. This psychologic ability contributes vastly to the interest aroused by Mr. Dubnow's historical works outside of the limited circle of scholars. The author attempts, for the first time, a psychologic characterization of Jewish history. He endeavors to demonstrate the inner connection between events, and develop the ideas that underlie them, or, to use his own expression, lay bare the soul of Jewish history, which clothes itself with external events as with a bodily envelope. Jewish history has never before been considered from this philosophic point of view, certainly not in German literature. The present work, therefore, cannot fail to prove stimulating. As for the poet's other requirement, attractiveness, it is fully met by the work here translated. The qualities of Mr. Dubnow's style, as described above, are present to a marked degree. The enthusiasm flaming up in every line, coupled with his plastic, figurative style, and his scintillating conceits, which lend vivacity to his presentation, is bound to charm the reader. Yet, in spite of therapy style, even the layman will have no difficulty in discovering that it is not a clever journalist, an artificer of well-turned phrases, who is speaking to him, but a scholar by profession, whose foremost concern is with historical truth, and whose every statement rests upon accurate, scientific knowledge; not a bookworm with pale, academic blood trickling through his veins, but a man who, with unsoured mien, with fresh, buoyant delight, offers the world the results laboriously reached in his study, after all evidences of toil and moil have been carefully removed; who derives inspiration from the noble and the sublime in whatever guise it may appear, and who knows how to communicate his inspiration to others.

Language Notes  
Text: English, Russian (translation)  
About the Author  
Simon Markovich Dubnow was a preeminent Jewish historian who introduced a sociological emphasis into the study of Jewish history, particularly that of eastern Europe.