

**Julia Laura Rischbieter.** *Henriette Hertz: MÖÆ'ÄÄσzenin und GrÖÆ'ÄÄ¼nderin der Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rom.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004. 184 pp. EUR 38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-08581-6.



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## Biography of Henriette Hertz or of Frida and Ludwig Mond?

The book under review is a published M.A. thesis. After carrying out extensive archival research in Germany and Great Britain, Julia Laura Rischbieter has written a biography of Henriette Hertz (1846-1913), who is credited with founding the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome. Rischbieter has organized her book in two separate parts: one chronological and one topical (which is also chronologically structured). While chapters 3 to 5 follow Hertz's life story, chapters 6 to 9 focus on various aspects of her life (her love for Rome, her interest in education and art collecting, her philanthropy and the founding of the Bibliotheca Hertziana).

Rischbieter's goal was to produce a biography that put Henriette Hertz into the context of her time and peers (*Handlungskontext*). The author hoped to set Hertz's actions within their historical context and show the connection between individual actions and social structure. She faced, however, serious challenges for such a biographical study. As Rischbieter points out repeatedly, sources about Hertz's life are very scarce. The reader learns early on that no sources exist relating to her parents' background and childhood (p. 23). The same holds

true for Hertz's early education (p. 30). The chapter on Hertz's childhood reads like a general characterization of Jewish bourgeois upbringing in the nineteenth century, but not like a biography of an individual. In contrast, the author insists on telling the story of Frida and Ludwig Mond, with whom Henriette Hertz lived for most of her life, in detail. Here Rischbieter could draw on a large number of biographical sources (published and archival material). This chapter is by far the best part of the book. The only problem is that this book is supposedly about Henriette Hertz and *not* about the Mond family. Yet the narrative follows the lives of Frida and Ludwig Mond even into areas very distant from the story of Henriette Hertz, involving the social, cultural, psychological and economic aspects of the Mond family's success story in Germany and London.

Because there are few sources related to Henriette Hertz's social and economic standing, the author too often wanders into the realm of pure speculation. When Rischbieter considers the reasons for the lifelong friendship between the Mond family and Hertz (p. 78), for instance, she refers to the assumption one often finds

in secondary literature, that Hertz was independently wealthy and thus able to provide financial support to Mond when he needed it early on. This assistance has been seen by some authors as the reason for the very close relationship between Henriette Hertz and Frida and Ludwig Mond. However, as Rischbieter concedes, no conclusive evidence suggests that Hertz possessed any wealth. Only after Ludwig Mond's death did Hertz inherit some financial assets. This state of affairs raises the much larger issue of the founding and funding of the Bibliotheca Hertziana. It is not clear who bought the Palazzo Zuccari, which later became the Bibliotheca Hertziana. For all we know, it is more than likely that it was bought by Ludwig Mond, who also provided the necessary financial means for acquiring the library. Henriette Hertz certainly inspired the creation of this institution, but she probably did not finance it.

As the author points out, it is hard to distinguish between the philanthropic actions of Henriette Hertz and Frida and Robert Mond (p. 103). It seems they acted together after some private deliberations. If this is the case, why would one write Hertz's story as an individ-

ual biography? Would it not have been better, from the outset, to follow the approach of a collective biography that would have encompassed all three individuals? Furthermore, the author wanted to tell the story of Hertz and of the Bibliotheca Hertziana. Why is it necessary to ascribe the founding of this institution to Hertz alone? Although it might have been Hertz's idea, Ludwig Mond probably played an important part in the founding of this institution. As Rischbieter makes clear, Frida Mond and Henriette Hertz often provided the inspiration, Ludwig Mond the financial means.

It has become customary in Germany to publish M.A. theses that contribute significant new information and new interpretations to our field. In many cases, these theses display the quality and quantity one would expect from doctoral dissertations—they are grounded in archival research and reflect the current state of knowledge. However, if one decides to publish such work, scrutiny should be exercised in the selection of the few that are worth publishing. While this book certainly contributes to the growing field of studies in philanthropy, its title promises more than the author can fulfill.

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