



Dean Phillip Bell, Stephen G. Burnett, eds. *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*. Leiden: Brill, 2006. 572 pp. \$129.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-14947-2.



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### *Habent suos Judaeos Reformationes*

At the very beginning of the book, the editors cite Heinrich Graetz's famous assertion of 1894 that the Jews "had no Middle Ages"; in other words, they did not experience a period of corrupt ecclesiastical politics and doctrinal "decay" that would have necessitated a reform of religion, and thus needed no Reformation. Graetz was expressing the utterly Whiggish *Kulturkampf* idea that the Reformation was the beginning of modernity and progress out of a backwards, Roman, past, implying that the category "Reformation" might extend beyond the internal dispute within Christendom. In any case, Graetz participated in the inscription in Jewish history of the triumphalist Protestant narrative that made the Reformation the first step on the road to emancipation, first for Protestants and then, by some kind of ineluctable logic of progress (Hegelian? Liberal? Marxian? Weberian?), for others, such as Jews. Petra Schoener's contribution to this book critiques this type of teleology but also echoes it. She states, in her last sentence, that "there was still a long way to go until the Enlightenment" (p. 391). With this statement she suggests that in 1555, for example, the Enlightenment was, somehow, coming. The editors suggest at the end of their introduction that Jews did par-

ticipate in the German Reformation, contributing to "developments in religion, politics, culture, and identity," such that "German Jews in this sense had a Reformation, whether they needed one or not" (p. xxxi). While some European Jews had a part in the Reformation, as Hebrew teachers, converts, polemicists, printers and so on, most Jews had no role at all, except retrospectively, in the great story of Protestantism's triumph over the "Dark Ages."

There can be no doubt that Jews in the German-speaking territories experienced shock waves that emanated from the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. A certain body of scholarship, including the superb work of Michael Toch, one of a few scholars whose work one might have expected to find represented in this volume who did not contribute, has explored the expulsion and withdrawal of German Jews during and after the Reformation from most major German cities, either eastwards, as traditionally assumed, or into the countryside, villages and smaller towns. Dean Bell addresses the small but significant changes in the conditions under which Jews lived during the Reformation in his valuable contribution "Jewish Settlement, Politics and the Reformation," but in

general, the editors had different fish to fry. At least half the authors address the question of Jews and the Reformation from the perspective of normative Reformation history and almost half the book is devoted to “Reformers and the Jews” in part 2. Another hundred pages are given over to “Representations of Jews and Judaism” in part 3. Part 4, also a hundred pages, the best part of the book, is devoted to “Jews, Judaism and Jewish Responses to the Reformation.” Part 1, “The Road to Reformation” is comprised of fine synthetic essays by Erika Rummel and Christopher Ocker. This volume makes available a large body of work, much of it in the form of synthetic digests of larger published and unpublished projects, on Jews in Reformation-era Germany. The editors valiantly translated many of the articles from German, with mixed results, especially with regards to the Schoener piece, and have thus made a double contribution towards making this work available to a larger scholarly audience, including research students. It would, however, be tedious to provide even a listing of all eighteen contributions to this thick volume with its 572 pages, never mind a review of each one. I shall limit my comments to a few pieces about which I have something particular to say.

Thomas Kaufmann, a Lutheran church historian working in a theological faculty, provides both a meticulous survey of the scholarly literature on Luther and the Jews as well as his own superbly well-informed interpretation of Luther’s writings on Jews and Judaism, on Hebrew and on “Judaizing.” Even a specialist can learn a good deal from this article, especially from Kaufmann’s trademark footnotes, themselves small essays and treasure-troves of information, critique and polemic. Kaufmann’s focus on Luther’s Christology as a constant in his views from the supposedly philosemitic pamphlet of 1523 to the vituperation of 1543 makes even better sense than previous arguments that Luther did not change his *theological* ideas, both soteriological and eschatological, towards Jews over this period, just his *practical* articulation of them. Kaufmann makes important points about Luther’s idiosyncratic view of Judaism and Jews, and about the place of Luther’s anti-Jewish screeds in later Lutheran attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. Kaufmann provides good evidence that nineteenth-century Lutheran scholars were not in any hurry to cite the hateful 1543 pamphlets. He notes that the revered Gotthard Deutsch, in his article on Luther in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901-1906), retained the traditional sense that Luther could be quoted by both friends and enemies of Jews, implying that his position was not a single, hateful one, and somehow varied over time. These

and other points suggest that the dominant Lutheran tradition between the Reformation and Shoah was not that of Luther’s anti-Jewish tirades, yet many items Kaufmann might have cited, especially from the realm of popular Lutheran pamphlets, tracts and propaganda, or the influential work of the seventeenth-century Lutheran “ethnographer” Johann Christoph Wagenseil, are merely excluded.

Kaufmann’s final assessment of the long-term effects of Luther’s attitude towards Jews distinguishes between the genocidal antisemitism of the last century (regardless of gleeful Nazi citation of Luther’s infamous 1543 pamphlets, especially “On the Jews and their Lies”) and “the delusions of a misguided sixteenth-century theology professor”; by deluded, Kaufmann specifies “according to our own [sic] standards of theology and moral reasoning, and according to the ‘command of ecclesiastical law to love one’s neighbor’ and the ‘provisions of Roman law concerning the Jews’” (p. 104). There is a valuable concession here, from a Lutheran theologian, that Luther attacked the Jews and Judaism so vehemently in 1543 because he was wrong and unchristian, rather than just old, sick and disappointed (as others have argued). Kaufmann also reminds us that there is no *direct* line from theological anti-Judaism to genocidal antisemitism. Yet he protests too much in adducing the discredited Daniel Goldhagen as the primary representative of “Anglo-American” acceptance of a genealogical line “From Luther to Hitler.”

Many German scholars, intellectuals and writers have also expressed some aspects of what is in fact a more sophisticated set of ideas regarding the citation, reproduction and tropes of antisemitic discourse, not merely an old-fashioned “genealogy of ideas” or *Quelengeschichte*. Goldhagen’s book hardly represents the most robust statement of these ideas, rather the opposite, as Goldhagen has no firm grasp of the technical points of theology involved, and seems to function as a straw man in Kaufmann’s argument. The citation of Luther by modern antisemites and Nazis was by no means part of an inescapable “warrant for genocide” pre-programmed in the Middle Ages or Reformation, but neither can such citation be explained away as a mere coincidence or anomaly, regardless of traditional Lutheran theologians’ distaste for Luther’s tone in 1543, or even of contemporary Lutheran theologians’ admissions of Luther’s unchristian errors. Luther and his legacy will need more “saving” than that.

By contrast, Timothy Wengert’s “reappraisal,” over

nearly thirty equally scholarly but ultimately less apologetic pages, of Melanchthon's attitude toward Jews and Judaism pulls no punches and makes no attempt to rescue Melanchthon by disconnecting traditional European hatred(s) of Jews and Judaism from genocidal anti-semitism. On the contrary, Wengert's last sentence suggests some kind of connection: "Jews became enemies and Melanchthon's rhetoric became filled with some of the vituperation all too common for his age and ours" (p. 135).

In a superb survey that makes available to an English-speaking audience many of the fruits of her specialized research, Edith Wenzel demonstrates just how little the hateful images of Jews changed over the course of the later medieval period and the Reformation era, referring repeatedly to Heiko A. Oberman's work on theological perceptions of Jews in the same period. Oberman's general scholarly vision of change within continuity here might be said to have been proven by Wenzel for the field of literature. One important point is ignored: Luther, and most Protestants until very recently, removed Jews and Judaism from the apocalyptic scenarios in which they had figured as eschatological threats and enemies of Christendom since late antiquity. The tradition of the apocalyptic "Red Jews" transmitted in the rich vernacular literature of the thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries found no resonance in Protestant or post-Tridentine Christendom; only Yiddish texts seem to have picked up the motif of the Red Jews in the sixteenth century, and then to use them for internal Jewish purposes rather different in content from the original Christian version, as Rebekka Voss will soon show. This difference is perhaps more doctrinal and scriptural-exegetical than literary, yet exegesis clearly had direct effects on literary depictions as well, as Wenzel herself shows.

Maria Diemling and Yaacov Deutsch present surveys of their own work on converted Jews who attempted to "reveal the truth" about Jews and Judaism to a Christian audience and focus upon Anthonius Margaritha, Johannes Pfefferkorn and Victor von Carben, among others, some anonymous and hitherto little studied. This work goes well beyond that of previous generations of scholars. Deutsch in particular is quite open about the accuracy, in places, of some of these early "ethnographic" works written by apostates. Michael Walton, another notable absence from the volume, will soon publish on the same topic, to much the same effect. Stephen Burnett's article on Hebrew printing from 1530 to 1633 demonstrates nicely both the challenges and hardships faced by Jewish scholars and their remarkable ability to write, edit

and publish from "interstices" in the large mutually hostile blocs of the period, making important contributions to both Jewish learning and Christian Hebrew learning.

One point made in a number of essays, particularly Ocker's, is that theologians before and during the Reformation, especially Luther, were frequently more concerned with virtual, theological Jews and even with theological Judaism than with the real, live phenomena. The contributions of Deutsch and Burnett in particular show that Christians also engaged to some extent with real Jews and with Judaism in this period, though not usually to Jews' advantage. The Jews did not, in fact, "have" a Reformation. They experienced and were experienced by Protestantism and by Protestants during and after the Reformation in a variety of ways, physical, cultural, political and theological. Jews in Protestant territories were generally no better off than elsewhere or previously, and the last wave of expulsions from the great cities and towns of the Empire was to some extent fueled and justified by Luther's *StÄ¼rmer*-esque incitements of 1543. The Reformations, rather, *had their Jews*. They seem to have "inherited" this tendency as well from medieval predecessors. Luther in particular, as Kaufmann points out, engaged and encouraged a departure from traditional learned and orthodox Christian attitudes and rulings regarding the place of Jews in Christian societies, a departure rooted in popular sentiment and mob violence, in a hypertrophic Christology and in medieval precedent, to be sure, but also in opposition to central positions in Scripture and tradition as well. In many cases, Reformers attacked their opponents as Jews or judaizers—thus creating another type of "Reformation Jew," most of whom were Catholics, Anabaptists or other "sectarians." Catholic polemics sometimes referred to Luther and other Protestants in the same terms, though less often than Luther imagined. We should not confuse such issues with the actual history of Jews and Judaism in this period, on which a great deal of work remains to be done.

Specialists will find much to agree with, much that is new, much that is not and some material that is controversial in this volume. This is no traditional handbook, though it might well serve a similar function. Every essay in this book is a contribution to the project of the volume: to bring together and make available in condensed, more accessible but scholarly form new research on Jews and Judaism in Reformation Germany, especially for a broader Anglophone readership. The volume succeeds in this enterprise and will be a valuable addition to any library, even to those private collections whose owners will have to dig deep to afford the price Brill must, alas,

charge for a book this thick if they are to manage without publishing such volumes!  
out asking authors for subsidies. At least someone is still

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