



**Gerhard Lamprecht.** *Fremd in der eigenen Stadt: Die moderne jüdische Gemeinde von Graz vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg.* Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2007. 318 S. EUR 32.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7065-4202-9.



**Reviewed by** Joseph W. Moser (German Program, Washington & Jefferson College)

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## A History of Styrian Antisemitism

The subtitle of this book may be misleading for readers expecting a thorough examination of the modern Jewish community of Graz before World War I. The book is rather a history of antisemitism and the alienation of the Jewish community in Graz and Jews in the Austrian duchy—now state—of Styria, thus the actual title of being alien in one’s own city may be more accurate of what the book is about. Gerald Lamprecht defines Jews in Styria through the eyes of non-Jews and antisemites. The first fifty pages deal with Styria’s ban on Jews, which extended from the end of the fifteenth until the end of the eighteenth century and Joseph II’s tolerance patent. Given this long history of exclusion, Styrian non-Jews held very strong opinions on whether or not to allow Jews to move to Graz. Lamprecht writes: “Zu einem sehr bedeutenden kulturellen Code f¼r die deutsche und Österreicheische Gesellschaft wurde im 19. Jahrhundert sicherlich der Antisemitismus” (p. 23). While this history of antisemitism is certainly interesting, it overpowers a book that sets out to cover Graz’s Jewish community. The middle section of the book covers important figures and organizations in the Jewish community; however, towards the end, a chapter on “SchÄchten-Tierschutz” re-

turns the focus to antisemitism and antisemitic rhetoric, and this debate is not unique to Graz or Styria.

While the book is certainly not without merit, one problem with Lamprecht’s approach is defining the Jewish community from outside. He is more concerned about the various positions that non-Jews had towards Jews and how Jews reacted to antisemitic rhetoric and actions. This is not to say that antisemitism was not an important consideration for the Jewish community of Graz, but Lamprecht focuses on the history of antisemitism while at the same time pointing out that Jews in Graz were assimilating rapidly. The apparent position that Jewish culture revolved around antisemitism is not the only simplistic interpretation of Jewish life in this book. In a subchapter on the “Die Rolle der Frau,” he opens with: “Wie in patriarchalischen Kulturen Äblich, wurden auch im Judentum soziale Rollen und Eigenschaften dem Geschlecht zugeordnet” (p. 198). Apart from the poor choice of terminology, by assuming that all patriarchal cultures had a “usual” way of defining themselves, he simplifies the role of Jewish women, and perhaps inadvertently makes Roman Catholic Austria seem to not

have a patriarchal culture and structure. This part of the book would have benefited from more research on the specific roles of Jewish women in Graz, instead of resorting to generic assumptions.

The fact that the book explains some very basic concepts about Jews living in nineteenth-century Austria raises the question as to who its audience might be. As the eighth volume in a scholarly series sponsored by the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, the book may rightly be described as seeking a scholarly readership, but not necessarily one beyond the confines of Austria. This is unfortunate, as the Jewish community of Graz should be of interest to all scholars of central European Jewish culture. The emphasis on explaining the intricacies of Austrian antisemitism contrasted with very basic descriptions of Jewish life indicate a readership more familiar with Austrian history in general than with Jewish culture in central Europe.

While Lamprecht makes a good argument that the Jewish community reached its highpoint in 1914, it is a shame that he did not write about the community's history in World War I and the interwar period, as well as the destruction of Jewish life in Graz after the *Anschluss*. Instead of a lengthy history of antisemitism in Styria, it would have been more interesting to have a complete picture of the community's history, which only extends for about ninety years from roughly the 1850s, when the first Jews arrived in Graz, until the Shoah. Ironically, I was

reminded of Austrian history textbooks used in Austrian public schools until the 1980s, which ended at World War I, avoiding the country's most troubling *Zeitgeschichte*. Such circumlocution, however, could hardly have been the author's intention.

The only important moment of Graz's history during the Holocaust mentioned in the book stems from the destruction of the synagogue, built in 1892, in November 1938. In 2000, a new synagogue built by Graz's city government was opened in its place, an important step in Graz's history to re-establish a Jewish community. However, the Jewish community of Graz today, much like that of Vienna, is proportionately so much smaller than it was around 1900 that interest in Jews in Graz and Styria remains that of non-Jews looking to a "foreign" culture and pondering the non-Jewish past of antisemitism. This perspective is unfortunate, because the premise of the book is not to treat Jews as foreign.

However, despite the book's focus on the history of antisemitism, it is certainly an interesting contribution to the study of Jews in Austria. Scholars interested in the history of antisemitism will find this an interesting case study for small-town Austria, and even scholars interested in Jewish life in Graz will get some insight into the Jewish community. Indeed, the book raises many interesting questions about Jewish culture in Graz and hopefully the *Centrum für Jüdische Studien in Graz* will publish more research on this topic.

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