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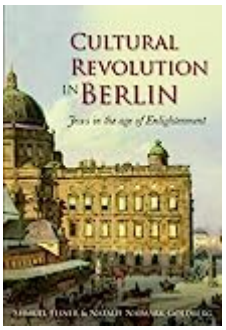

Shmuel Feiner, Natalie Naimark-Goldberg. *Cultural Revolution in Berlin: Jews in the Age of Enlightenment.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-85124-291-7.

Reviewed by Louise Hecht

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S. Feiner u.a.: Cultural Revolution in Berlin

While it is common for library collections to grow in particular ways due to specific interests of librarians and users, the Leopold MÃ¼ller Memorial Library at the Oxford Centre for Jewish and Hebrew Studies entails a history especially intriguing for Jewish historians. Like a matryoshka doll it contains a seemingly infinite number of valuable collections, accumulated over time by outstanding scholars and purchased for the library by knowledgeable librarians through generous endowments. One of the libraryâs treasure troves for scholars of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah movement, is the Foyle-Montefiore Collection, which bears the name of Englandâs most famous Jew of the nineteenth century Moses Montefiore (1784â1885). It contains the private library of Leopold Zunz (1794â1886), one of the key figures of Germanyâs Wissenschaft des Judentums, and Zunzâs impressive collection includes the library of Lazarus Bendavid (1762â1832), an important representative of Berlinâs radical Haskalah movement.

During his stay as a visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Jewish and Hebrew Studies in 2007, Professor Shmuel Feiner, a leading expert in the study of Haskalah from Bar Ilan University, suggested âthat Zunzâs books and pamphlets would tell the story of the cultural revolution in Berlinâ (preface, p. ix). Feiner thus picked up on a trend increasingly popular in Humanities and recently also adopted by Jewish Studies, i.e. relying on material culture for reconstructing individual biographies or even narrating the history of a movement. E.g. Dieter J. Hechtâs reconstruction of a Zionist biography through the content of an apartment in Jerusalem, cf. Dieter J. Hecht, Der Weg des Zionisten Egon Michael Zweig: OlmÃ¼tz - Wien - Jerusalem (German and Hebrew), Baram 2012, and the project by Caroline Jessen to assess the reading culture of German immigrants in Israel by reconstructing their libraries, cf. Caroline Jessen, ââVergangenheiten haben ihr eigenes BeharrungsvermÃ¶genâ¦â: Josef Kastein and the Troublesome Persistence of a Canon of German Literature in Palestine/Israelâ in: Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 57, 1 (2012), p. 35â51. The project was realized in cooperation with Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, another renowned expert on the German Haskalah movement from Bar Ilan University. In his preface the retired Hebrew Curator of Bodleian Library Piet van Boxel found a fitting ex-

pression for the material culture approach by emphasizing that âin this monograph Shmuel Feiner and Natalie Naimark-Goldberg lead the readers along the shelves of the MÃ¼ller Libraryâ (preface, p. ix).

The bookâs title âCultural Revolution in Berlinâ could not have been chosen more adequately, since it refers the reader not only to the bookâs subject but also to the revolutionary digitization project of the MÃ¼ller Library by which the book is accompanied. Digital Haskalah is a fully searchable online library of the primary sources discussed in the book with a user-friendly and aesthetically appealing interface. `http://www.ochjs.ac.uk/mullerlibrary/digital_library/haskalah.html` (27.03.2013). It contains the full text of the 71 rare books and pamphlets selected by Feiner and Naimark-Goldberg for their publication and hence provides the scholar of Berlin Haskalah with an invaluable asset for research and teaching. The bookâs eight chapters and the, alas very short, selected bibliography serve as a tangible companion and guidebook through the virtual source collection, also for less initiated readers/users.

While Digital Haskalah presents the sources in alphabetical order, Feiner and Naimark-Goldberg carefully crafted their narrative of Berlin Haskalah. Surprisingly, however, they focus exclusively on Berlin and thereby ignore all diversifying trends in Haskalah research during the last decades. For the sake of pedagogic approach, they thus choose to follow the master narrative that was endorsed by previous generations of scholars and even exclude the gender perspective. The latter seems all the more noteworthy, as Naimark-Goldberg only recently published a comprehensive study, in which she analyzed the Jewish encounter with Enlightenment from the female perspective. Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin, Oxford 2013. The same astonishing fact can be noticed with regard to Moses Mendelssohnâs position in the movement. In various publications Feiner has disputed Mendelssohnâs centrality for the Haskalah; yet in the present book, the âGerman Socratesâ is represented with eleven out of 73 publications.

The apparent overrepresentation of Moses Mendelssohn, however, adequately represents the collection, i.e. Bendavidâs and Zunzâs intellectual proclivities, which made the authors ârealize what a strong impression Mendelssohn made on the minds of German Jews throughout the modern periodâ (p. 5). Moreover, and this is indeed the tremendous advantage of the chosen approach, it makes the reader realize how the master narrative was forged. What might at first sight seem as the replication and repetition of an outdated narrative thus becomes the compelling story of a movement in its making.

After a short introduction in chapter one, adequately undertitled âfocus and limits of the storyâ, the narrative unfolds in chapter two with the strife of early maskilim for the renewal of Jewish culture by introducing sciences (especially astronomy) and grammar studies into the curriculum of Ashkenazic Jewry. In addition to many well-known books and booklets on the mentioned topics, this chapter also contains an unpublished manuscript by Meir Neumark, son of a printer from Berlin, who enjoyed the patronage and library of the bibliophile Czech rabbi David Oppenheimer (1664â1736) for composing Tokhen ha-kadur (Order of the Spheres). In this treatise that is based on German and possibly even Latin sources Neumark seeks enlightening his co-religionists about the latest scientific and geographical discoveries. Unfortunately, this manuscript from the Bodleian Library is not included in the Digital Haskalah-project.

Chapter three focuses on Moses Mendelssohnâs (1729â1786) intellectual venture as a Jewish scholar and a German philosopher. Chapters four through six discuss different features and stages of the Haskalah movement as religious tolerance, education and the evolvement of a distinctively Jewish public sphere. Guided by the collection as much as by deliberate choice, Feiner and Naimark-Goldberg felicitously avoid a flaw that tarnishes many projects dealing with the subject, i.e. the exclusion of either German or Hebrew texts. While the earlier chapters examine mainly Hebrew works, chapter seven draws the readersâ attention toward different modes of Jewish involvement in German society.

Claiming that the Haskalah movement had come to an end around 1800, Feiner and Naimark-Goldberg add chapter eight as an epilog that is devoted to the âradicalization in Jewish intellectual circlesâ (p. 69) and called âBeyond Haskalahâ. The chapter is mainly devoted to Jewish struggle for civil rights and most prominently discusses the controversy surrounding David FriedlÃ¤nderâs (1750â1834) unprecedented 1799 proposal to Provost Teller in Berlin. In his subtly subversive letter FriedlÃ¤nder suggested that Berlinâs Jewish elite would join the Protestant Church in exchange for political and civil right, though without accepting Christian dogmas, which in his view were contrary to reason and natural religion. While the proposal could be interpreted

either as an act of opportunism and treason or as the genuine expression of a âdivided soulâ as the authors tacitly imply (p. 76â77), we might also read it as FriedlÃ¤nderâs peculiar contribution to Mendelssohnâs presentation of Judaism as a rational religion without dogmata. Remaining faithful to the narrative that centers on revolution, progress and development, the book ends with the presentation of four publications related to the Jewish Free School in Berlin and thus projects the message to future generations.

While the connoisseur might encounter minor inaccuracies (especially in chap. 4 and 5), the book is written in an appealing style and language, which certainly convert it into an enjoyable reading for scholars, students and interested laypeople alike. In general authors and publisher have to be complimented on this carefully crafted and edited volume with high-quality images that make even the rather plain and humble-looking Haskalah books seem attractive and exciting.

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