

Arno Herzig, Hans Otto Horch, Robert Jütte. *Judentum und Aufklärung: Jüdisches Selbstverständnis in der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002. 244 S. EUR 28.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-525-36262-4.



Reviewed by Uffa Jensen (History Department, University of Sussex, United Kingdom)

Published on H-German (May, 2004)

The pivotal importance of the Enlightenment for the transformation of German-Jewish life has been firmly established in the historiography. For a long time, however, the relation between German Jews and the Enlightenment were described primarily as part of an intellectual history, as much of the historiography on German Jews was for a long time shaped by what Germans call *Geistesgeschichte*. Only in recent years, has scholarship emphasized the social and cultural implications of this period.[1] In a new assessment of the Enlightenment in Jewish history, scholars, it seems, have come to look again at questions of intellectual and cultural history.[2] This collection of essays—its editors claim in their introduction—follows this tendency in that it wants to address questions of discourse and communication processes.

In the first essay, Rotraud Ries discusses the role of the court Jews in the process of transforming Jewish life. In opposition to older views that emphasized the modernizing influence of court Jews in the Jewish communities, she stresses the stabilizing function court Jews had on their respective communities. Noteworthy in Ries's account is her description of the crisis that the children of court Jews experienced, often leading to conversion to Christianity. It seems that here we can see the more problematic aspects of the modernizing legacy of the

court Jews' life and culture. In their essay, Ingrid and Uta Lohmann provide a detailed history of the Juedische Freischule in Berlin from its foundation in 1778 until its end in 1826. Their claim that the founding of this school proved to be of "great importance for the history of Jewish education" (in the peculiar German sense of *Bildung*), needs to be put into perspective (p. 66). As the authors note later in the text such school projects rarely gained the unanimous support of the Jewish community. Additionally, large proportions of the Jewish elite sent their children to non-Jewish schools, as soon as this was possible. In 1819 the authorities prohibited the significant innovation to co-educate Jews and non-Jews which put an end to, arguably, the most interesting aspects of the Freischule's history. As fascinating as this history is, the transformation of the Jewish education happened largely elsewhere.

Gabriele Zuern writes about the attitudes towards death among the Jews of Altona from 1772 to 1875. By interpreting testimonies and gravestones she can demonstrate that tradition was upheld longer in these aspects of Jewish community life. In his essay, Eberhard Wolff discusses the conflicts around the ritual of circumcision. He compares the different approaches by rabbis and physicians to this question. He can show that the physicians had far fewer problems arguing about the religious as-

pects of the ritual than their rabbinical counterparts had about its medical implications. Hence, we can evaluate the changing prestige of their professions. Eva Groiss-Lau's essay deals with a conference in 1836 to which the Bavarian authorities invited reform and orthodox Jews in order to discuss the transformation of Jewish life in rural Bavaria. She can demonstrate that the state took an interest in the inner-Jewish affairs, because it tried to evaluate the different forces within Jewish life. Perhaps not surprisingly, changes in the governmental perspective ultimately had more to do with the general political developments than with the inner-Jewish ones.

Hans-Michael Haussig analyses a speech that the orthodox rabbi Israel Deutsch gave on Friedrich Wilhelm IV's birthday and the anniversary of his ascension to the throne. Thereby, he presents again the—by now well established—argument that willingness to integrate into German society and bourgeois life was shared in Orthodox circles. Saskia Rohde presents in her essay some of the discussions among Jewish and non-Jewish architects about the construction of synagogues. In this context, the transformation of Jewish life can be seen less in the buildings themselves, than in the terms (like *Gotteshaus*) that were used to describe them. Here the Christian vocabulary became more and more influential—a point that Haussig also makes about the religious discourse. Finally, Gabriele von Glasenapp discusses the different representations of the Jewish teacher in the Jewish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In what she calls “ghetto-stories,” which are quite often written by teachers themselves, this figure comes to epitomize the Jewish process of acculturation through *Bildung*.

The individual essays in this collection often have their merits in providing the reader with new details and insights about the overall process of transformation. We learn to appreciate this process in a variety of settings: from architecture to medicine to funeral habits. However, it seems strange to compile these essays under the title *Judaism and Enlightenment*, because only a few of the articles address this period properly. Moreover, fun-

damental issues about this relationship—e.g., the origins of the Haskala, the fixation with the Berlin developments around Mendelssohn—are not mentioned anywhere. It is certainly timely to call for a Jewish historiography of the nineteenth century that analyses the transformation of Jewish life as discourse and communication processes. However, here the introduction promises more than the essays actually achieve. Strangely enough, the introduction for a book on Jewish identity in the bourgeois public sphere does not even mention Habermas's work on this sphere and the subsequent debates about it. From this, Jewish historiography could still benefit a great deal. Instead, the theoretical framework that the introduction does provide seems strangely unfounded and confusing. Not surprisingly, almost none of contributors found this framework useful enough to include in their analyses. Hence, it is impossible to see from this publication how Jewish historiography could profit from a perspective on discourse and communication processes.

Notes

[1]. Especially David Sorkin's various studies on this period are examples of this different focus. See for example David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000).

[2]. That there is still potential for a new intellectual history of the relationship between Enlightenment and Jewish history can be seen in Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); H-German review (April, 2004) by Jeffrey Grossman at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=326711082495057>.

Copyright (c) 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Uffa Jensen. Review of Herzig, Arno; Horch, Hans Otto; Jütte, Robert, *Judentum und Aufklärung: Jüdisches Selbstverständnis in der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9314>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.