H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

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.

Reviewed by Magda Teter (Department of History, Wesleyan University)
Published on H-HRE (April, 2008)

Breaking New Ground on Judaism in the German Reformation

Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett's book, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, is an insightful collection of essays on the topic the title so well summarizes. The book presents the familiar and much-studied topic of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany in a new way, by interweaving Jews into the narratives of the various "Reformations." The editors have succeeded in lining up an impressive range of historians of the Reformation and of Jews, featuring both established scholars and up-and-coming younger colleagues.

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1, "Road to Reformation," includes two essays: Erica Rummel's "Humanists, Jews, and Judaism" and Christopher Ocker's "German Theologians and the Jews in the Fifteenth Century." Both essays set the stage for the following sections that discuss the Reformation and its ramifications for Jewish society and culture, as well as for Jewish-Christian relations. Ocker's study focuses on the more traditional theological attitudes toward Jews in mostly fifteenth-century Germany, while Rummel's essay discusses the relationship between humanism and Jews and Judaism in the fifteenth century, contrasting north European humanism with Italian humanism. While reading the collection in its entirety, rather than choosing individual essays, I would have preferred Ocker's contribution to precede Rummel's, whose essay would allow for a smoother transition to part 2, "Reformers and the Jews."

Part 2, the longest section, comprehensively covers all major reformers and adds the neglected topic of Catholic Reform in Germany, discussed in Robert Bireley's essay, "The Catholic Reform, Jews, and Judaism in the Sixteenth Century." Some essays in this part of the collection, mainly the ones that cover new ground, are more descriptive than argumentative. As a whole, this section sheds new light on the areas that scholars have previously examined, and it provides new information in areas that scholars have not yet studied. For example, Thomas Kaufmann, in "Luther and the Jews," explores the internal theological context for Martin Luther's teachings on Jews. Kaufmann complicates our understanding of the implications of Luther's teachings on Jews beyond Luther's lifetime, suggesting that the turning point for the use of his teachings was "in the late nineteenth century, in the context of the origins and articulation of modern racist anti-Semitism to an aggressive use of Luther's later 'Jewish writings'" (p. 103). This essay is quite useful for anyone who studies and teaches the Reformation, German history, or Jewish-Christian relations. Kaufmann's contribution on Luther is complemented by Timothy Wenger's informative study of Philipp Melanchthon. And, like Kaufmann's essay on Luther, R. Gerald Hobbs's contribution on Martin Bucer presents the complexities of Bucer's attitudes toward Jews, helping to reconcile theologically Bucer's seemingly contradictory appreciation of the Hebrew language with his counsel to expel Jews from Saxony in 1537.

The place of Jews in the reformers' theological system is the main theme of part 2, and it is also the focus of Hans-Martin Kirn's essay, "Ulrich Zwingli, the Jews, and Judaism." Achim Detmer's contribution on John Calvin takes us in a new direction. Challenging earlier scholars' conclusions about Calvin's attitudes toward Jews, which claimed Calvin had no contact with Jews and his ideas were largely theoretical, Detmer maps out Calvin's potential encounters with "real" Jews. Detmer's essay is followed by Joy Kammerling's discussion of Andreas Ossiander's views about Jews and his defense of Jews against charges of ritual murder within the context of Protestant-Catholic polemic. Kammerling argues that Ossiander's pamphlet condemning ritual murder accusations was more a part of this polemic than an expression of "philo-Judaism" (pp. 242-246). This essay would have benefited with a more explicit examination of Luther's reactions to Ossiander. In the next essay, Bireley addresses Johann Eck's reaction to Ossiander. These

two contributions, by Kammerling and Bireley, should be read and taught together. Section 2 ends with Michael Driedger's essay on the "Jews, Anabaptists, Radical Reform, and Confessionalization."

Part 3 focuses on "Representations of Jews and Judaism," visual and literary. Maria Diemling's essay examines Antonius Margaritha, one of the most famous Jewish converts to Christianity whose book *Der gantz Jüdisch glaub* (1530) became an influential work for shaping Jewish-Christian relations in early modern Protestant states. Diemling's essay is followed by Yaacov Deutsch's discussion of the emergence of a new kind of Christian polemical literature concerning Jews. Deutsch convincingly argues that in contrast to medieval Christian polemic that had focused on anti-Christian content within Jewish writings, early modern works focused on the ritual, or the practice of Judaism. This was the novelty, Deutsch argues, of Margaritha's *Der gantz Jüdisch glaub*. Section 3 closes with two essays, one by Petra Schöner on "The Visual Representations of Jews and Judaism," and the other by Edith Wenzel's misleadingly titled "The Representations of Jews and Judaism in Sixteenth-Century German Literature." This title is misleading because the essay focuses not on German literature, but on German anti-Jewish writings. Wenzel's essay could have been strengthened with the inclusion of more genres, such as pamphlets, popular literature, sermons, devotional works, and the like, in place of, for example, a discussion of medieval stories of William of Norwich or Simon of Trent.

Part 3 raises questions of apologetics and anachronism in the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the premodern period. Diemling's discussion of Margaritha's representation of Jewish rituals promises "a more balanced reading of Margaritha's account" and escapes the accusatory tone found in earlier Jewish historiography, but it does not escape apologetics (p. 303). Reading her discussion of Margaritha's work, I wondered about the accuracy, or lack thereof, of his statements about Jewish praxis. As a reader, I wanted to know about the goals Margaritha sought to accomplish and how they influenced the accuracy of his portrayal of Jewish rituals. Diemling refuses to answer these questions, because she claims that she is "less interested in listing mutual 'breaches of rules' (and thus judging which side was 'better' or 'worse'), instead she wants to understand how Christians and Jews perceived, described, and imagined each other" (p. 327, 87n). Diemling's apparent fear of becoming judgmental and taking sides is misplaced, but not unusual in a study of Jewish-Christian relations–a field dominated by the discussion of Christian attitudes toward Jews, in which there is still a noticeable discomfort about acknowledgement of Jewish anti-Christian sentiments. It is only in recent decades that scholars have begun to examine the mutual attitudes of Jews and Christians toward each other–sometimes not without controversy (as was the case with the reaction to Israel Yuval's work in the 1990s). But, it is historically significant whether or not Margaritha presented rituals accurately, if still polemically, if we "want to understand how Christians and Jews perceived, described, and imagined each other," especially since Margaritha's work, as Deutsch shows in the essay following Diemling's, shaped much of the subsequent "ethnographic" literature about Jews and their rituals (p. 327, 87n).

The study of Jewish-Christian relations is fraught with another problem, not unrelated to the discomfort over Jewish anti-Christian attitudes. It is apologetics of a different sort–that of a projection of post-Enlightenment expectations of tolerance, equality, and mutual respect onto an era in which ideas of equality did not yet exist. These two traps are perhaps the most common in the study of Jewish-Christian relations, but, as Deutsch's essay on "ethnographic" literature in the early modern period and Elisheva Carlebach's contribution about Jewish responses to the Reformation demonstrate, it is possible to engage in an analysis of both Jewish and Christian texts without a trace of apologetics or discomfort. Both essays succeed in explaining the past on its own terms.

The volume ends with part 4, "Jews, Judaism, and Jewish Responses to the Reformation," which contains the final four essays. Bell's "Jewish Settlement, Politics, and the Reformation" provides a useful overview of demographics and political background for the impact of the Reformation on Jews. It is followed by Carlebach's "Jewish Responses to Christianity in Reformation Germany," which is bound to become a standard essay on the subject. She provides a nuanced reading of Jewish polemic against Christianity, showing the clandestine, oral and in manuscript, dissemination of Jewish anti-Christian polemic at a time when Jewish sources became more accessible to Christians. Carlebach's discussion of Josel of Rosheim points to a complex process that illustrates the differences between an official posture, aimed at public Christian consumption, and an unofficial posture, aimed at an internal Jewish audience. Among other aspects of Jewish responses to the Reformation, Carlebach discusses conversion and martyrdom. Jay Berkovitz's "Jewish Law and Ritual in Early Modern Germany," the next contribution in this section, focuses on the new legal and ritualistic developments at the time of the Reformation, though not necessarily directly a re-

sult of the Reformation. The impact of print material on the shaping of rituals and controversies over the homogenization of ritual and law are at the center of this essay. Print is also the subject of the last study in the volume, Burnett's "German Jewish Printing in the Reformation Era (1530-1633)," in which he examines the relationship between Catholic efforts to censor Jewish books, especially the Talmud, and the shrinking opportunities for German Jewish printers in the Reformation era.

The volume's contributions are not of even quality. It includes some truly outstanding essays that shed new light on "old" subjects, and these essays will serve students and scholars of early modern history, Jewish and Christian. Some essays are analytical, while others are descriptive. Some break new grounds, while others reflect the known state of the field. Read together at once, some essays are repetitive, but read independently, most provide enough background information to be used in classes. One can structure a whole course on the basis of this volume, or use parts to enhance classes on Hebraism, humanism, or Protestant theology. The only aspect of Jews and the Reformation that is missing is an examination of how theology and Reformation as a whole affected daily Jewish-Christian interaction, the one between neighbors. Despite some shortcomings, this volume is an extremely important contribution to the history of the Reformation, early modern Europe, and Jewish-Christian relations. It will be a standard work for anyone engaged in these fields for many decades to come. Its main drawback, one that will prevent it from being widely used in classes, is the prohibitive price of the volume.

Citation: Magda Teter. Review of Bell, Dean Phillip; Burnett, Stephen G., eds., *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*. H-HRE, H-Net Reviews. April, 2008.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14411