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Alison Rose. *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*. Jewish History, Life, and Culture Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. xi + 314 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-71861-6.

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Between Shtetl and Salon: Jewish Women in Vienna 1900

Alison Rose's pioneering monograph *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna* charts new territory on the familiar waters of Vienna 1900. Since the publication of Carl Schorske's compelling series of cultural historical essays (*Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* [1980]), a model that attributed an efflorescence of modern art, literature, and science in the Austrian capital circa 1890-1914 to the disillusioned sons of liberalism, historians have revised and expanded aspects of the Schorskean "failure of liberalism" paradigm. A number of recent works have corrected Schorske's neglect of the distinctly Jewish character of Viennese modernism, highlighting the prevalence of Jewish patronage of modern art, contributions to literature, philosophy, and psychology, and even proposing that notions of Jewish enlightenment, or *Haskalah*, stamped the general character of the Viennese fin de siècle.[1] Yet, aside from a few general works, Rose's groundbreaking publication represents the first full-length study dedicated to a gendered analysis of Viennese Jewry circa 1900.[2] Basing her work on collections of personal papers, memoirs, pamphlets, and oral histories housed in American, Austrian, and Israeli repositories, Rose seeks to "reintegrate Jewish women into the history of turn of the century Vienna in order to demonstrate their importance as cultural creators" (p. 2). With distinguished track records as salonières and business associates, Jewish women harnessed the flexibility in Talmudic law and traditional and reform Judaism to pursue a variety of religious, cultural, and intellectual pursuits propelling Viennese modernism.

Rose reveals how Jews and women navigated similar challenges in the late nineteenth-century struggle for emancipation, in their otherness vis-à-vis mainstream culture, and in the emergence of a group consciousness. Further linking the parallel development of Austro-Hungarian Jewish emancipation and the women's movement were deep-seated stereotypes of the femininity and physical weakness of male Jews, effectively deconstructed throughout the book via contemporary religious, literary, and scientific discourse. Embedded in "the perceived Judaization and feminization of Viennese culture," discursive linkage of Jews and women ran rampant in late imperial Austria (p. 3). Jewish women, therefore, doubly represented a *bête noire* to Austria's traditional social order: both as progressively educated women, potential bluestockings and "hysterical hermaphrodites," and as Jews in a climate of rising anti-Semitism. Yet the author maintains that Jewish women's social activism and progressive self-identities not only challenge Schorske's and Peter Hánák's notion of the liberal retreat from politics but also necessitate the revision of theories of Jewish identity, including Marsha Rozenblit's persuasive tripartite thesis, which posits that Habsburg-treu Austrian Jews navigated concurrent identities as Jews, Austrians, and Germans/Czechs. Modifying Rozenblit's model, Rose proposes the idea of a "quadpartite identity for Austrian Jewish women" (p. 220). However, while gender embodies an important factor in attuning group identity, the absence of equally "useful" categories, such as class and education, strikes a dissonant chord. A more complex polygonal formula factoring in these and

other identity determinants presents a richer solution, for adding gender as a discreet category unmitigated by further qualifiers runs the risk of essentialization.

Scrutinizing not only Jewish women's practical involvement in education, philanthropy, religion, psychology, and culture, but also representations of Jewish women by the scholarly rabbinic community and elite lay leadership, Rose employs a dualistic methodology balanced between discourse and practice. Occasionally, however, the reader wishes that the author had sacrificed more of her otherwise fascinating analyses of Zionist texts and literature written by Jewish men for sources penned by her female historical subjects. Not the "New Woman" of the Jewish *Bürgertum*, striving for women's emancipation and cultural assimilation, but traditional Jewish matrons of the working and upper classes, dedicated to family, community, and Judaic spirituality, interest Rose. Rose unfolds the story of her Jewish women—wives, mothers, community and religious activists, and psychological and literary figures—in the span of six concise chapters. Beginning with the "Childhood and Youth of Jewish Girls," Rose portrays the sense of alienation and difference surrounding Viennese Jewish girlhood. Biographical and anecdotal evidence provides a rich mosaic of Jewish girls growing up with Easter eggs, Christmas trees, and rosary-touting nannies, and the ensuing cultural and religious confusion experienced by such girls at home and school. While controversial among the Viennese rabbinical elite, a variety of apologetically derived rituals—above all, the introduction of girls' confirmation in lieu of the bar mitzvah—carved out a greater space for women in Judaism than that prescribed by Talmudic law. Along with Rose's fourth chapter on Zionist women, the second chapter, "Community, Spirituality, and Philanthropy," constitutes the book's strong suit. Making a convincing case for Viennese particularity, Rose argues that neither the Western European model positing Jewish women's continuance of traditional religious practice in the home nor the Eastern European pattern in which Jewish women, secure of their ethnic distinctness through ghettoization, became increasingly secular, adequately describes Vienna's situation as a crossroads between East and West, modernity and tradition, the native and exotic. Instead, with minimal religious practice in the home and little social isolation, Viennese Jews "retained Jewish distinctiveness primarily in education, social, and political patterns, and were reminded of their identity by anti-Semitism" (p. 43). A variety of Judaic prayer groups, charitable leagues, and hospital-visiting societies, although partially influenced by modern Eu-

ropean values, expressed a specifically Jewish womanly ideal privileging family, religion, and community.

Chapter 3, "University and Political Involvement," presents a great disappointment to readers, not only in its preemptory discussion of late nineteenth-century educational reforms but also in its omission of non-Jewish leagues and schools in which Jewish men and women constituted a driving force. Vienna's Athenäum, an association of (largely Jewish) university professors offering university-caliber lectures to women, constitutes only one such example. Along with her brief survey of women's education in chapter 1, Rose presents the story of women's educational reforms in a slightly misleading manner. For instance, the non-specialist would gather from chapter 3 that the University of Vienna's "faculty of philosophy opened to women in 1897" and the evangelical faculty did not admit women "until 1923" (p. 88). In fact, the Philosophical Faculty opened to Austrian women as non-matriculating auditors as early as 1878 and the evangelical faculty admitted women in the 1920/21 academic year. While women lacked full rights of matriculation until 1897, Austria nonetheless excelled ahead of its supposedly more progressive Western European neighbors in admitting women, if provisionally, to university studies. Rose addresses the progressive aspects of Austrian women's education obliquely, stating that "the examinations leading to the Matura had been available to women since 1872" (p. 94). The ensuing series of decrees fully accrediting women's undergraduate and doctoral studies, which were of no small importance to Jewish women given their relative overrepresentation in higher education, are glossed over too quickly. That the bulk of the author's case studies of Jewish academic women fall in typically masculine fields of medicine, science, and law downplay female students' strength in modern philology (particularly French and English), literature, and art history. While Rose is to be applauded for bringing attention to female academics in such "unfeminine" fields to light, a clarification that the majority of female university students initially pursued concentrations in traditionally feminine subjects, such as language, literature, and art, would have been welcome.

As a counterpoint to the third chapter's female academics and activists, chapter 5 details how Zionism offered Jewish daughters, wives, and mothers alternate paths to the New Society's promise of gender symmetry. In an innovative gendered analysis of Theodor Herzl's and other Zionists' landmark works, Rose reveals that "Zionist leaders used Jewish women as scapegoats, blaming them for assimilation, for the lack of support for the

Zionist movement, and for the moral deficiencies of Diaspora Jewry” (p. 139). Salvation from unnatural gender orderings resulting from Diaspora life (that is, the overbearing matrons of Eastern Europe and the West’s self-centered, bejeweled, and materialistic dames) could be found in the New Society, wherein virtuous wives and mothers (“Estet Hayil”) would be re-feminized by centering their lives around family and home. Likewise, emasculated, henpecked men would recapture their virility by working the land. Rose’s fifth chapter on women as practitioners and subjects of medicine and psychoanalysis also confronts such sexualized stereotypes of Jews, including sexual voracity, mental and physical unfitness, and reversal of masculine and feminine gender traits. From Freudian theories on women’s masculinity complex to self-hating Jews, including misogynist philosopher Otto Weininger, Jewish psychologists and theorists “challenged the racial basis of negative stereotypes of the male Jew, while embracing negative stereotypes of women and Jewish women” (p. 179).

The final chapter on art and literature offers intriguing deconstructions of the *Ghettogesichte*’s virtuous female types, characters pulling male protagonists back to Judaism after periods of religious doubt. Yet, regrettably, the author omits the fine and applied arts, a major avenue of Jewish women’s creative expression. In addition to serving as patrons of the Wiener Werkstätte and other modernist endeavors, Jewish women played a major role as artists in Austria’s fin-de-siècle *Frauenkunst* movement. While the author references a predecessor league, the League of Viennese Women Artists and Writers (1886), Jewish women’s strong presence in Austria’s twentieth-century women artists leagues campaigning for women artists’ artistic, economic, and institutional parity is omitted entirely. Also excluded is the Viennese Ladies’ Academy (1897), a private, later publicly incorporated state academy founded and funded largely by Jews to provide women with professional artistic training. Particularly in light of Steven Beller’s arguments on Jews’ relatively minor numbers as visual artists, the leading role of Jewish familial networks in such leagues and academies demands further inquiry.[3]

Overall, the degree to which the author succeeds in her revisionist aims remains compromised by her suppression of inter-confessional leagues, associations, and groups in which Jewish women played major roles. In “reinsert[ing] the Jewish woman into her proper place as a pivotal figure both in the fin-de-siècle imagination and in the everyday reality of Viennese society, politics, and culture,” the author’s insistence on focus-

ing exclusively on Jewish organizations obscures Jewish women’s tremendous contributions to the women’s movement (p. 5). By marginalizing the experiences of assimilated Viennese Jewry, Rose has internalized her subjects’ aversion to the upper-middle-class Jewish woman, with her strong assimilationist and emancipatory tendencies. While Rose correctly highlights that the headlining voices of middle-class Austrian feminism (Marianne Hainisch, Rosa Mayreder, and Marie Lang) were Gentiles, Jewish women’s presence in the rank and file of the Austrian women’s movement should not be underestimated. Jewish women played a major, if not dominant, role in a variety of progressive leagues dedicated to furthering women’s educational, vocational, and intellectual development. While Rose’s focus resides primarily in women upholding traditional Judaic religious and social practices, certainly the identity of assimilated Jewish women—the women who contributed so tremendously to a variety of progressive causes under the umbrella of the women’s movement—and the manner in which such women navigated conflicting allegiances of Judaism, modernity, and feminism deserves greater attention. Such women’s unwavering allegiances to liberal principles of *Bildung*, self-help, and self-improvement would have only stoked the kindling of her arguments on the continued vitality of Austrian liberalism. In addition, readers might find a seamless presentation of material, rather than subchapters and subdivisions, more effective. Despite such minor shortcomings, Rose’s monograph on Jewish women constitutes a groundbreaking contribution to the continuing scholarly dialogue on Vienna 1900. In shifting the focus of the conversation to gender, sexual, and religious identities, Rose not only gives Jewish women their rightful place in the annals of Viennese cultural history but also provides the field with new ways to scrutinize the city’s contested modernity.

Notes

[1]. James Shedel, *Art and Society: The New Art Movement in Vienna 1897-1914* (Palo Alto: Society for the Promotion of Science, 1981); Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); and Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[2]. Two recent German-language works include Elisabeth Malleier, *Jüdische Frauen in Wien, 1816-1938* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2003); and Charlotte Kohn, ed., *Luftfrauen: Der Mythos einer jüdischen Frauenidentität*, BiografiA, vol. 2 (Vienna: Präsenz Verlag, 2006).

[3]. “The number of Jews who were painters was relatively small, at least around 1900,” according to Beller. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, 26, see also 219. While the numbers of male Jewish painters may have been small, Jewish women comprised a significant minority, as much as one-third, of female Austrian painters.

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