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Michael A. Meyer, Michael Brenner, eds. *German-Jewish History in Modern Times.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 436 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-07472-8.

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The Leo Baeck Institute plays a critical role in the writing of German-Jewish History. With centers in Jerusalem, London, and New York, the organization has supported research on a wide range of topics in Jewish history. An early goal was to produce a multi-volume history of German Jewry. Several early attempts were unsuccessful, but now, forty years later, the first volume of *German-Jewish History in Modern Times* has been published and translated into English. The series, published under the editorial guidance of Michael A. Meyer, the international President of the Baeck Institute, consists of four volumes (Volume One: *Tradition and Enlightenment 1600-1780*; Volume Two: *Emancipation and Acculturation 1780-1871*, Volume Three: *Integration in Dispute 1871-1918*, and Volume Four: *Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945*). If the first volume in this series is any indication, this series will become the premiere survey text of Jewish history for a long time, benefiting general audiences, scholars of Jewish history, and historians interested in the relevant period. The focus is both on the Jewish community and individual Jews who were important in relation to German history. The geographical range encompasses all German speaking areas. Each contribution to the series concentrates on eight subject areas: demography, political and legal status, socioeconomic structure, relations between Jews and non-Jews, family life, the Jewish community, Jewish religion and culture, and Jewish participation in the general society.

In sum, the clearly written contributions on Jewish life in the German regions from the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century provide an impressive collage of economic, socio-cultural, and intellectual experience. However, there is room for some criticism. In the introduction Meyer writes that the series is intended to view the history of the German Jews not "through the prism of the Holocaust" (p. x). Yet, the first volume presents German-Jewish history of the seventeenth and eighteenth century almost exclusively in the narrative of persecution and exclusion. Although this is understandable and even appropriate to a great degree, the authors as a result insufficiently explain the vitality and resiliency of the Jewish community, which continued to grow and flourish despite these adverse conditions.

This first volume opens with a long prologue (seventy-seven pages) by Mordechai Breuer on the Jewish Middle Ages. Until the eleventh century, Ashkenazi Jewry formed an insignificant peripheral part of the Jewish world (p. 2). This changed rapidly and dramatically in the following centuries. Breuer discusses the unique community structure, the *Kehilla*, which played an important role in the preservation of Jewish identity and relative autonomy. Effective communal organization, energetic economic activity, and relatively high levels of education set the Jews apart from most Christians. Jews, who on the eve of the First Crusade numbered only twenty to twenty-five thousand, lived segregated from Christians both by choice, to preserve their faith and customs, and by necessity, because they were excluded from most privileges and rights. In this prologue, Breuer presents a good overview of the central issues in contemporary scholarly debate as well as the institutional (Synagogues, schools, Rabbinate) and cultural character of the Jewish communities.

Time and again, Jews became the objects of intense hatred, which surged during periods of natural disaster and collective anxiety. In the eleventh century, for instance, the Crusaders began their righteous massacre long before they reached the Holy Land. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Jews in the German lands experienced an increasingly hostile environment. Though officially under the protection of the crown, the Jews fell victim to the violence of the crowd and the zealotry of monks, against the instructions of the official church. Charges of ritual murder were first brought up in the twelfth century. Breuer stresses that neither Humanism nor the Reformation produced any essential change in attitudes toward the Jews (p. 57). However, we also read about parallel developments in the Jewish community reflecting trends in the Christian world. Thus

Jewish mysticism and the orders of monks both stressed the importance of asceticism and martyrdom (the *Kiddush Hashem*). During this time, the post-Reformation era, Jewish communities often served as a pawn in the political game of chess of the competing authorities, notably the Holy Roman emperor and his local subjects. The reign of Charles V illustrates the complex and contradictory nature of official attitudes toward the Jews, especially when Charles insisted on protecting the rights of Jews against attempts by subordinate authorities to encroach upon his imperial privilege. The defense of the Jews, in other words, was inspired by power politics rather than a tolerant attitude by the emperor. But individual Jews still benefited from this division.

In Part One, "The Dawn of Early Modern Times," Breuer discusses the position of the Jews in the age of Absolutism. During this time the state increasingly intervened in the practices of the Jewish community, which previously had been largely autonomous. Simultaneously, the expanding state with its exclusive claim to violence provided more and better protection. The charge at the beginning of the seventeenth century that Jewish communities were trying to form a Synod when they continued their long established practice of discussing their collective response to new taxation and regulations, and the well-known Fettmilch uprising, illustrate these analogous developments. However, Breuer's assessment of the effects of the Thirty Years War gives a first example of the conflicting conclusions that occasionally mar his otherwise excellent narrative. For instance, he writes that the Jews suffered from the burden of war as much or perhaps worse than the Christian population (p. 94), but on the next page he concludes that the situation of the Jews in many localities remained more favorable than that of the general population.

Chapters on the Court Jew, Jewish merchants, and the Jewish minority in the Enlightened Absolutist state discuss the precarious and ambivalent position of privileged Jews who managed to rise to positions of prominence and wealth, but who always remained acutely aware of the vulnerable nature of their position. The overall economic condition of the Jews again leads to a contradictory conclusion when Breuer gives a long summation of the discrimination the Jews endured and then concludes that most Jews were spared the extreme material and legal hardship endured by the peasants and the serfs (p. 143). Nor do we learn much about the effectiveness of the policies of the absolutist state, the subject of Chapter Four. In this particular chapter, Breuer does not address the many forms of resistance and tacit compliance. Absolutist bureaucracies, it is important to remember, claimed a lot more authority than their overworked and understaffed agencies could ever dream to enforce.

Finally, the negative legislation and hindrances did not affect the overall demographic development of the Jewish population. Despite the repressive legislation and arbitrary persecution, the number of Jews in the lands of the Old Reich increased steadily throughout the eighteenth century, keeping pace with the growth of the general population in the region. More importantly, as Christopher Clark has shown in *The Politics of Conversion, Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728-1941*, even the kindness and accommodation of the pietists made no inroads in the Jewish community, which displayed an unwavering loyalty to its culture and religion.

Breuer continues his expose of Jewish life in the German lands with outstanding chapters on the community and domestic life, and on the traditional centers of learning. Here his work shifts from a social history approach to a discussion of the intellectual tenets of a vital and dynamic community. His discussion of the Sabbatian movement and its impact on German Jewry is excellent. In addition, Breuer's discussion of marginal groups in the Jewish community sheds an interesting light on the class dimension in the Jewish experience. In the world of the criminal, Jews found a field of cooperation with Christians which interestingly heralded new associational options long considered impossible. (In this milieu of robbers, a form of cooperation evolved between Christians and Jews that was based on complete equality). The discussion of this unusual cooperation between Christians and Jews opens an intriguing perspective on the many gray zones which are often ignored in discussions of the relations between Christians and Jews. Finally, although the author addresses class and social stratification frequently, some will be surprised to see a more extensive discussion of gender lacking in these chapters.

Michael Graetz wrote the second half of this volume, which discusses the Jewish Enlightenment. His contribution marks a significant shift from the institutional and social history of Breuer to an exclusively intellectual discussion which focuses on the role of Moses Mendelssohn and the Berlin milieu in the development of a Jewish Enlightened identity. As Graetz points out, the scholarly arena offered the prospect of social integration and bourgeois respectability more than any other field. Graetz provides a detailed account of the life and work of Mendelssohn, the most important figure in Jewish enlightened thought. He discusses Mendelssohn's connection with Christian thinkers, the disputes with

conservative Christians who challenged him to accept Christianity, and Mendelssohn's complex relationship with the Jewish community in which traditional authorities viewed his publishing endeavors with considerable skepticism and in which the charge of Spinozism remained a dangerous threat to the credibility of this original thinker.

However, the emphasis on Mendelssohn's contribution also points to the exclusive nature of the *Haskalah*, which encompassed only a small segment of the Jewish community. This segment arguably gained more influence outside the Jewish community than within. Graetz's account of the scholarly life is a careful depiction of the conflicted world that Jewish intellectuals inhabited. They desired to follow the new agenda of critical thinking without breaking their ties with their community.

Education, and especially the Jewish schools which flourished in part as an antidote to biblical schools that sought to convert Jewish youth, provided another powerful arena where the members of the Jewish Enlightenment could further their ideas and cooperate with like-minded Gentiles (p. 373). Clearly the late eighteenth century Enlightenment offered, for a brief period, the best opportunity for social and intellectual emancipation. Yet this process involved only a small group within the Jewish community. The vast majority of the Jewish community steadfastly held on to the bonding comfort of tradition, culture, and religion in an often-hostile environment.

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