

Rotraud Ries, J. Friedrich Battenberg, eds.. *Hofjuden-Ökonomie und Interkulturalität: Die jüdische Wirtschaftselite im 18. Jahrhundert.* Hamburg: Christians Verlag, 2002. 395 pp. EUR 30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-7672-1410-1.



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This rich and informative volume grew out of a five-year research project at the Technische Universität Darmstadt that culminated in an international conference at the Moses-Mendelssohn-Akademie in Halberstadt in 1999. More than just a record of conference proceedings, this book contains twenty-five essays that, taken together, make significant strides in exploring the fascinating roles that Jewish financiers and the Jewish economic elite played in both the rise of the modern state and Judaism's own encounter with modernity. Given the wide attention paid to the 1996 exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York and the impressive volume that grew out of it, *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patronage and Power, 1600-1800*, Ries and Battenberg's anthology is bound to be of interest.[1] Particularly because it brings together the work of well-established scholars with research by relative newcomers to the field, this book will prove itself useful to anyone interested in the unique role of the Jewish economic elite in the early modern period.

As Rotraud Ries emphasizes in her introductory essay, the goal of this volume is to examine the connections between the economic functions

of court Jewry within the absolutist state system and the cultural transformations in German-Jewish life in the long eighteenth century. The one question that returns again and again in the various essays is whether court Jews were agents of internal Jewish modernization, and the collective response that the essays give here is, appropriately, a richly ambivalent one. Clearly, in terms of material culture and lifestyle, many court Jews internalized the norms and mores of aristocratic court life. Their identification with the Christian elite and with secular culture, however, typically went hand in hand with a deep commitment to Jewish community life, whether this allegiance took the form of support for traditional institutions of Jewish scholarship and charity or, particularly in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a growing interest in Enlightenment-inspired Jewish religious renewal. Economically, as Ries points out, again court Jews tended to be conservative, committed to the preservation of their status quo vis-à-vis absolutist power. At the same time they tended in their behavior, in their pragmatic individualism, to exemplify distinctly modern economic principles. And culturally, as Michael Schmidt points out in his contribution to the vol-

ume, the individuality with which court Jews absorbed and engaged with the values of the court and secular culture--the "interculturality" referenced in the volume's title--also seemed presciently modern, an "individual emancipation" long in advance of the "social emancipation" of nineteenth-century German Jewry (p. 40). In this sense, this volume offers a helpful supplement to recent books in the field that have attempted to shed new light on eighteenth-century Jewish intellectuals' encounter with modernity.[2]

With twenty-five contributions of varying length, style, and format, this book is not overwhelmingly reader-friendly. The volume is nevertheless clearly subdivided into six main sections: a set of introductory essays by Rotraud Ries, Michael Schmidt, and Rainer Goemmel; a group of essays on the functional transformation of Jewish urban economic elites by Wilhelm Kreutz, Natalie Burkhardt, Thelka Keuck, Gabriele Schlick, Hiltrud Wallenborn; contributions by Birgit Klein, Richard I. Cohen, Michael Studemund-Halévy, Martina Strehlen, Lucia Raspe, and Eva Grabherr on the relations between the Jewish economic elite and the official Jewish communities; a cluster of essays on generational shifts among court Jews by J. Friedrich Battenberg, Britta Wassmuth, Fritz Backhaus; reflections on court Jews in small German territories by Jörg Deventer, Dina van Faasen, Diter Blinn, Kerstin Hebell; and, finally, essays by Deborah Hertz, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, and Steven Lowenstein that reflect in general terms on the results of the conference and articulate questions for further research.

In terms of methodology, the volume manifests great diversity, and this is clearly a strength. Detailed microhistorical reconstructions of individual court Jews' lives dominate, and in this sense, the volume is able to address its questions in a much more differentiated fashion than Selma Stern's classic 1950 study of court Jewry.[3] At the same time, the editors include numerous essays that reflect innovatively on a variety of themes:

on court Jews as art collectors (Richard Cohen), on gravestone inscriptions and Jewish memory books (Martina Strehlen), on the lending library and reading society founded by court Jews in Hohenems (Eva Grabherr), on the Rothschild family's unique commitment to Judaism (Fritz Backhaus), etc. The flip-side of this methodological heterogeneity is that the volume tends, at times, to lack unity, both at the level of its major trajectories and at the level of some of the individual essays. Several essays consist of more than 50 percent endnotes, and some fail to make clearly identifiable arguments that would contribute to the main questions under study in the volume. The volume also would have benefited from tighter editing and a more substantial introduction; all too frequently, individual contributions, several hundred pages into the book, supply a level of introductory information--about the Enlightenment, about the privatization of religion, etc.--that seems out of sync with the highly specialized nature of the material.

Against this backdrop, the volume's three final essays, all of which reflect on the volume as a whole, are particularly welcome and do manage to bestow a level of unity on the volume. Deborah Hertz and Steven Lowenstein in particular offer illuminating comments about the topic, reflecting on issues in general terms, raising large questions that are not always explicitly apparent in some of the other essays. In this sense, the volume is hardly a definitive study, but it accomplishes precisely what it sets out to do: revitalize our thinking about court Jewry in the early modern period and provide fertile impulses for further research in the field. The fact that the editors elected to include a comprehensive index to the volume will ensure that this book will be mined for the great resource that it is.

Notes

[1]. Vivian B. Mann and Richard I. Cohen, eds., *From Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patron-*

age and Power, 1600-1800 (Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1996).

[2]. See here, for instance, Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); and Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

[3]. Selma Stern, *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of the Period of Absolutism in Central Europe* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950).

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