

GHI RESEARCH

HOW GERMAN JEWRY TURNED BOURGEOIS: RELIGION, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE AGE OF EMANCIPATION

Simone Lässig
Research Fellow, GHI

In 1851, the magazine *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* reported the following from Dresden: "Previously, one felt with all five senses, as if seized by the pushiness of it all, something of the ghetto or the Jewish Quarter in Prague. Crooked faces and rag-clad figures loafed about by the dozen, schlepped unsanitary packages, haggled with hisses and screams, and harassed more or less every passerby. Today," continued the anonymous reporter from the well-known Stuttgart literary journal, "the crooked noses and black beards haven't disappeared completely from their usual haunts, but the groups have become more respectable. At the most, one in ten wears an unclean *Kittel*."¹

Fourteen years earlier, the Jewish newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* had proudly published the following commentary, written by the famous *Conversation-Lexikon der Gegenwart*: "The fact that emancipation was so difficult for the Jews was perhaps not without a great gain for their general and religious *Bildung*. For every force there is a reaction, and the spirit of the Jews has blossomed here as nowhere else on the continent as a result of this dialectic struggle, which has been carried out in Germany for years with the greatest effort."²

These two very different quotations express both astonishment about the cultural, religious, and social transformation that the German Jews had undergone since the beginning of the emancipation debates, and pride in this change. This was a transformation that affected very different, seemingly autonomous spheres, and in this sense had no counterpart elsewhere in Europe: In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the German Jews had produced a uniquely Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*; they invented a modern and pluralistic Judaism; and they brought about what amounted to an almost collective advancement into the middle and upper middle class.³

As late as 1800, probably no one would have thought this possible, because at that time more than two-thirds of all German Jews were living

in poverty. They also seemed anything but “bourgeois” in terms of culture and mentality: The traditional everyday life of the Jews appeared almost diametrically opposed to the Enlightenment’s call for reason, usefulness, and education, or to use the more precise German term, *Bildung*.

But by the closing years of the nineteenth century, the signs seem almost to have reversed. The German Jews had by then established themselves in bourgeois society socially, economically, and culturally. They no longer exemplified a deficit of bourgeois virtues, but were almost model pupils of *Bildung* and *Bürgerlichkeit*.⁴ By *Bürgerlichkeit* I mean the complex of cultural values and practices that characterized the bourgeois way of life and education.⁵

It is hardly surprising that this rapid transformation soon became a focus of research and the subject of important work.⁶ However, this research often gives the impression that it was somehow inevitable that the German Jews, even the poor ones, took the bourgeoisie as their point of reference. In fact, there was nothing inevitable or self-evident about this transformation. This is clear on the one hand from general social trends in Germany, where there was only very limited social mobility and even an expansion of the lower classes during the same time period.⁷ On the other hand, the experience of Jews in other countries shows that “embourgeoisement,” or the process of becoming bourgeois, was by no means the only “normal” Jewish path into modern times. Many Jews in England, France, and the Netherlands also profited from the development of capitalist economic structures, and there were certainly also bourgeois Jews in these places. But a Jewish underclass, and before long a proletariat as well, also continued to exist in these countries—classes that had practically vanished in German cities.⁸

But why was it in Germany, where the emancipation process had dragged on for such an excruciatingly long time, that the Jews were able to unleash such dynamic change not only in their social circumstances but also in their cultural and religious life as well? Did this happen despite or because emancipation had been “made so difficult” for the Jews, as the above citation suggested? I would like to discuss this question in three steps. First, I will outline previous explanations and put forward further considerations; second, I will outline the central pillars of the embourgeoisement of the German Jews; and third, I will place this development in its international and its German context.

* * *

Historians have offered a number of explanations for the extraordinary success of the German Jews, including their long experience in commerce and banking, a tendency toward advancement and mobility that is often

present in minorities, specific family structures, and a traditional esteem for learning. However, such arguments, which refer only to a Jewish context, cannot explain why this success story held only for *German Jewry* and not for Jews elsewhere. Thus we have to reconsider peculiarities of German history, too. And one of the most important peculiarities in this context is that “emancipation” was not regarded as a basic right, as in France or the Netherlands, but rather as a reward for successfully passing through an educational process. As far as the orientation (and the goal) of this “education” was concerned, officials mostly applied their own system of values, above all bourgeois values, such as learning, aesthetics, order, and cleanliness. Self-improvement and a special work ethic were also decisive. Basically the point of this approach, which was tied to the catch-phrase *bürgerliche Verbesserung*, was to bind the German Jews to this new bourgeois cultural model.⁹

Given this background, it was only logical that authors such as David Sorkin, George Mosse, or Marion Kaplan established the terms *Bürgerlichkeit* and *Bildung* as central categories of modern German-Jewish history. My own research is greatly indebted to their work, as well as to that of Shulamit Volkov, who sees the German Jews as a “paradigm of em-bourgeoisement.” By asking the apparently simple but in fact little-investigated question, “How did they do it?” Volkov posed a problem that I have found enormously gripping but also puzzling.¹⁰ On the one hand, Volkov’s essay focused attention on the importance of cultural factors, particularly in shaping a bourgeois mentality. On the other hand, however, it led to a dead end. Volkov, too, proceeded from the assumption that only those Jews who had already advanced economically behaved like the bourgeoisie culturally. But this could not explain how so many families made the actual jump from poverty to affluence, and how the German Jews actually managed their move to the middle class as a collective process and experience.

This question had occupied me for a long time, and it was initially the Leo Baeck Institute in New York and then the work of a brilliant sociologist that inspired me to turn Volkov’s fruitful approach upside down. Again and again I came across sources and histories of previously *moneyless* families that showed that bourgeois values, in particular education and bourgeois behavior, played a great role long before their economic advancement.¹¹ There were many young people, such as the bank apprentice Lesser, who got together after a long day at work to learn foreign languages, to go to concerts, or to discuss literature.¹² I also encountered many young men such as Adolph Arnhold and Markus Mosse, who came from poor families but still graduated from a university.¹³ These new graduates had hardly any economic assets, but they did tend to lead their lives in good middle-class fashion and were held in high regard by non-

Jewish citizens as well as by wealthy Jewish fathers-in-law. This was true not only for doctors or lawyers. The life histories of men such as Gotthold Salomon, Eduard Kley, Zacharias Frankel, and Benjamin Ginsberg demonstrate that many teachers, preachers, and rabbis also married into respected merchant families.¹⁴ In other words, these representatives of the new Jewish educated elite had hardly any economic capital, but they did have social prestige. And above all, they had children who succeeded in making an impressive leap into the academic elite or, more often, the upper economic bourgeoisie. Adolph Arnhold and Marcus Mosse for example were communal doctors who treated the poor, and their children ended up becoming noted figures in the banking and business worlds.

But what does all this signify? Had *Bildung* in the meantime gained a sort of economic value? And how should one deal with the fact that a truly dramatic jump—practically from peddler to millionaire—occurred very rarely, whereas the above-mentioned model of advancement stretching over two or three generations was very common?

While I was occupied with these and similar questions, for which I found only insufficient explanations in *historical* research, I came across several of the works of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He has analyzed the social and cultural practices that establish elite groups and repeatedly stabilize them by means of subtle but enormously important differences. Bourdieu sees material capital as only one component of success. Just as important are non-economic factors, such as ties to certain networks, a good reputation, and also education, aesthetic judgments, and public behavior; as Bourdieu so succinctly says, these are cultural and social capital. I found particularly inspiring Bourdieu's thesis that economic, cultural, and social capital are mutually convertible, and that the lack of one type can thus be compensated for by a surplus of another sort of capital.¹⁵ For our German-Jewish question, this means that if poorer families were also able to succeed in acquiring education, culture, and a bourgeois mentality, then they had gained *cultural* capital that helped them, or at least their children and grandchildren, to advance into the bourgeoisie in social and economic terms as well. The assumption that the accumulation of cultural capital constitutes the foundation of the German-Jewish success story seemed especially plausible insofar as the development of the bourgeoisie *and* the emancipation debates in Germany were in large part *cultural* phenomena.

Historians have generally been critical of this conditional emancipation, but for the German Jews it was also attractive because the message was that whoever adopted the bourgeois cultural model would be accepted as a member of the middle class and later as a citizen regardless of his social origins and religious faith. "Membership" or "inclusion" in these terms was not derived primarily from a common history and origin

but rather from cultural practices. In this respect, the German states promised “their” Jews a different, primarily culturally defined form of “equality.” But this also had social consequences. In the liberal states of Western Europe, it was up to each individual Jew to decide how he would become part of the modern world and which social reference point he would take. The German states, by contrast, wanted to regulate the modernization of Jewish life from above. German officials thus judged the entire group down to the peddler according to this bourgeois standard, which otherwise was only relevant for a small elite group in society.

This brings me to the second point, the question of how the German Jews took up and transformed this offer from the state. Taking my cue from David Sorkin, who has done pioneering work on the religious and cultural transformation of German Jewry, but who has hardly examined its social and economic relevance, I will concentrate on three pillars of cultural integration: schools and education, the public sphere, and religious practice.¹⁶

Regarding schools and education, the Jews are considered a people of books and learning. But at the end of the eighteenth century, it was precisely this sphere of activity that came under criticism. The reason was that in traditional Judaism, “learning” was primarily concerned with the Holy Scripture, the Hebrew language, and the observance of religious rules; in other words, with knowledge that was diametrically opposed to Enlightenment principles such as “reason,” “usefulness,” and “individuality.” Thus it is not surprising that this is where the Jewish reformers saw the greatest need for work. By 1815 there were at least fifteen Jewish schools in Germany and countless private teachers who were passing on knowledge and skills that anticipated the demands of the developing capitalistic society. A focal point was the German language, which up until that time only a few Jews had mastered properly. Now, however, instruction in orthography, grammar and style, rhetoric, and the composition of proper letters was on the lesson plan, often to a greater extent even than in the schools that were recently founded to meet the needs of the new middle class, especially of merchants and factory owners.¹⁷ The new Jewish schools could also compete with the latter in other areas, including the teaching of modern foreign languages and mathematics. Even in small towns such as Gröbzig, math lessons also encompassed bookkeeping, accounting, and statistics. Additional subjects included natural sciences such as geography, natural history, physics, as well as history, religion, ethics, drawing, singing, and calligraphy. The new Jewish schools could also compete with the new *Realschulen* with regard to the social and cultural skills that pupils were supposed to acquire; the focus was on raising children to be industrious and independent with a will to achieve, to take pleasure from work, but also to exercise self-

control and self-discipline. In general, pupils who completed these schools were equipped to live according to middle-class principles and to climb the social ladder.¹⁸

That is significant because the new Jewish schools taught primarily *poor* children, which meant that in social profile, the Jewish schools were comparable to Christian elementary schools, which taught students of the lower classes at this time. But in the subjects they offered and the methods they employed, these Jewish institutions were similar to the new *Bürgerschulen*, which set high standards and were oriented to the ideal of the educated merchant. While the bourgeoisie was stabilizing its social position, in part by means of this very education system, the Jewish educational offensive was aimed more at *overcoming* social barriers. "Even the lowest classes are filled with the ambition of attaining scholarly cultivation," said Ludwig Phillipson in 1836. "No wish inspires the Israelite elders of each class more than the wish to 'let their children study something.' [. . .] The intelligentsia is becoming important."¹⁹ The reformed schools signaled the start of an educational program that went far beyond the standards of German society and became the catalyst for social mobility precisely because it encompassed so many poor children. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Hamburg Freischule in 1840, Eduard Kley estimated that very few of his students returned to retail trade or stumbled in their chosen paths in life. In the memorial publication, he writes that "the formerly common sight of families that had persisted for generations as beggars has been wiped out; since good schools have been established, the daily encounter with poor begging Jewish children of both sexes has disappeared forever."²⁰

The second pillar of the embourgeoisement of the German Jews was the development of a specific public sphere. This likewise represents a new phenomenon. The early advocates of the Haskalah still published in Hebrew because they wanted to address a solely Jewish audience. But the modern era lived from transparency and exchange, thus demanding that the Jewish community also open up to the outside and develop new models of communication even *inside* the Jewish field. This included, first of all, the establishment of Jewish publishing that used the German language even for internal Jewish exchanges. The starting-point was the periodical *Sulamith*, which began publishing in Dessau in 1808. By the mid-nineteenth century, German Jewry already accounted for half of all Jewish periodicals worldwide.²¹ It is precisely this pioneering achievement, claimed Abraham Geiger in 1844, that testifies to the active intellectual life and dynamism of German Jews. It is evidence of "a joyous awareness of the true riches of *Bildung*" and proof of "an existing interest in living development [. . .] In any case, just as before, Germany now

stands alone in terms of the richness of its Jewish life; other countries show little independent power in this area."²²

This was also true of Jewish associations, which were sprouting up like mushrooms at the same time. Young Jews had already attempted to organize religious fraternities according to new principles around 1800. They replaced religious obligations and abstract piety with Enlightenment values such as ethics, honor, and morality. They thereby laid the foundations for a modern system of associations that also took over some of the functions that synagogues had previously performed: Jews who wanted to learn and communicate or to initiate marriage or business connections were now drawn more to an association than to the synagogue. Soon there were modern Jewish associations for all purposes and dimensions of life, from social life and education to welfare and religion.

David Sorkin coined the term "subculture" for this phenomenon, which he traced back to the rejection of Jews by public associations.²³ But this interpretation is problematic; for one thing, it overlooks the fact that many Jews held multiple memberships. In Karlsruhe, for instance, those Jews who had been admitted into the elite association *Museum* were also members of the similar Jewish club *Harmonie*, and in Mannheim the bankers Ladenburg and Hohenemser founded a parallel Jewish society after they had been admitted as the first Jews ever in the society *Harmonie*.²⁴ Sorkin focuses one-sidedly on integration. However, looking from the perspective of embourgeoisement, it becomes clear that poorer Jews in particular could learn middle class practices much better in purely Jewish surroundings. In Dresden, for instance, a Jewish reading society was formed around 1810 in order to create a "unifying point for knowledgeable people and literary patrons [. . .] to fulfill the former's wish to be useful through their knowledge and to provide the latter with a productive activity in their free time that will be useful for the cultivation of their mind and spirit." At the same time, the association placed particular emphasis upon integrating the "lower classes among our Jews" as well. This goal was explained with the statement that "the larger segment of our nation lacks culture and scientific knowledge," and with the complaint that the "great, indolent crowd is unused to reading [. . .] and becomes a burden because of its ignorance."²⁵ German emancipation ideology is quite obvious here: Since the individual Jew was promised equality only at the moment at which the last dawdler would meet bourgeois standards, it was above all the "educated" who spared no effort to ensure that the "swarm" were trained to live according to middle-class principles.

The modern Jewish associations, like the initially separate schools, were thus much more than an involuntary retreat to a purely Jewish public sphere or a "makeshift solution." Instead, they were a midwife and

a vital laboratory for Jewish *Bürgerlichkeit*. This applied particularly to those Jews who, because of their social status, would not have had access to bourgeois associations even as Christians. Only within the Jewish public sphere could poorer Jews accumulate cultural capital that would serve the next generation's social advance and integration with gentiles—if they strove for integration at all, which should by no means be taken for granted.

There are definite connecting lines from this to the third and last pillar of the German Jews' embourgeoisement: religion. Germany was the birthplace of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah, and the starting point for the reform of religious practice. There one finds the most important attempts at a historicization of Judaism, and it was there where, parallel to Reform Judaism and earlier than anywhere else, a Jewish orthodoxy also developed that closely united piety and *Bürgerlichkeit*.²⁶ In France, an adequate process of religious modernization began only much later; in the Netherlands, this was a marginal phenomenon up until the end of the nineteenth century; and in Great Britain, at most 10 percent of Jewish families were considered followers of a modern Judaism. Thus it seems obvious to ask: Was there a causal connection between these two special characteristics—that is, religious modernization on the one hand and the social success of the German Jews on the other hand? Was the social and cultural embourgeoisement of the German Jews also supported or even accelerated by the changes in the religious domain?

Around 1800, this question would probably have evoked peals of laughter. For Christian and Jewish representatives of the Enlightenment, the religious laws were a symbol of formalism, rigidity, and irrationality. That was the one side. The other side, however, shows an everyday Jewish life that was strongly or predominantly shaped by religion until the mid-nineteenth century. In this sense, religion stood in the way of the embourgeoisement project, but nonetheless this project could not be realized in opposition to religion because then it simply would not have reached the majority of Jews. Thus there was only one choice: the aspired-for collective embourgeoisement process also had to be supported by, or perhaps even emanate from, the religion.

That, in turn, was possible only if Halachic Judaism reformed itself. The forms and also the content of religious life were not to be oriented to Christian criteria, as one often reads, but primarily to bourgeois criteria. Questions of aesthetics and order, manners and taste, played a central role here. Again and again the reformers complained of unclean and improperly dressed people, insisting that it can no longer be acceptable that someone "is called to the Torah in a cap or other inappropriate head-covering or that they [...] enter the synagogue inappropriately dressed, for example in slippers or sheepskin clothing."²⁷ The same was

true of “noisy moving about and entering and exiting,” as well as prayers spoken in an “excessively loud, crying, or mournful” way, sitting on the floor, or uttering loud laughter or expressions of thanks. Additionally, the following behaviors were frowned upon: “chanting a few bars ahead as a prelude, prompting or hurrying others, [. . .] rising ceremoniously, swaying, rocking back and forth, opening and closing the pews, and any other kind of disruptive behavior.” These also included ritual practices such as loud shouting and wailing, swaying during prayer, baring one’s feet, audibly kissing the ritual fringes on one’s garments, and at times even parading with the Torah. Criticism was also aimed against the “unnatural stretching out” of the prayer rites, which promoted “thoughtless repetition and a soulless performance of rituals.”²⁸ Rabbi Elias Grünebaum of Landau once observed that “no person can remain for such a long period in a state of deep devotion [*Andacht*], if he does not bring it to the point of statue-like asceticism, that is, or *Ochsen-Eremiten* who occupy their spirit with screaming and yelling; for that reason alone, ignoring questions of form and content, all pious silence [*Andacht*] vanishes from the house of prayer, disorder and noise set in, and mere lip-service takes the place of inner elevation and growth.”²⁹

Faith instead of law, aesthetics instead of meaningless ritual—that was what mattered above all else when the reformers introduced such new elements as synagogue regulations, choral singing, sermons, or confirmations. Religion was to awaken the capacity for inwardly-guided behavior and provide orientation for dealing with rapidly changing everyday life. These challenges were met by the new appearance of sermons in the German language, documented for the first time in 1808—a change that had reached even small religious communities within three decades and thus had accelerated the progress of the language change. But above all, the sermons conveyed decidedly bourgeois orientations, an aspect that has hardly received any attention in research. Cultural practices and models of identity and interpretation, indispensable for the everyday life of a citizen, were now being conveyed with religious impetus in the synagogues. In addition to a new gender model and responsibility for the education and upbringing of children, this also included the confirmation of bourgeois virtues such as order, modesty, or thriftiness, as well as an ethic of work and responsibility, recalling Weber’s *Spirit of Capitalism*. This concerned rational use of time as well as the fact that “work” and “profession” now had a basically positive connotation. “Only he who lives in the happy consciousness of faithfully fulfilled obligations,” said Zacharias Frankel, “is truly free.”³⁰ Gotthold Salomon preached, “Be aware of what luck it is, [. . .] to work in one’s profession for oneself and for others, and to be helpful to yourself and others.”³¹ For the Hamburg rabbi it was a biblical commandment to “belong fully to and live com-

pletely for one's profession." He reminded listeners that "neither the sweetest joys nor the greatest pleasures should tempt us to remove ourselves from our calling from this hour to the next [. . .] for we should experience the sweetest pleasures, the greatest enjoyment in our work itself, which is a task God gives to humanity, a daily service to God, as Moses considered it."³²

Religious action thus was no longer to be realized through strict observance—the traditional Talmud Jew was now criticized as an idler—but rather through one's profession and the daily fulfillment of obligations. "It is God's will that the Law be fulfilled," Eduard Kley pointed out, "but it cannot be fulfilled here in temple but outside in life. In the house of prayer, you receive no sign that prayer will make you holy or adept, but outside the true prayer service begins."³³ "Achieve perfection," admonished Ludwig Philippson in one of his model sermons. Published in 1834 in his journal *Israelitisches Predigt- und Schulmagazin*, it was intended to be widely copied. "And in which way can one achieve perfection? Not by practicing vain arts in which one excels, not through beautiful garments, or delicate gestures, or deceptive ways of speaking, but perfection through the fulfillment of one's calling, perfection through the love of service, perfection in reverence before God! Whichever calling you may choose, achieve perfection in it, be it scholarship, science, art, trade, or craft! Do not be satisfied with incomplete knowledge or sloppy work [. . .] Idleness is deadly, lack of follow-through is deadly, neglect is deadly."³⁴

If one now asks to what extent cultural capital was able to promote the social embourgeoisement of the Jewish lower classes, these new mentality themes surely played an important role. Moreover, many preachers spoke about the transparency of the social borders and the transience of possessions, and warned the poor not to surrender fatalistically to their fate but rather to become active. These, too, were interpretive and behavior patterns that exactly suited the needs of the new capitalist society. *This* Judaism suddenly did not seem unworldly anymore. In contrast, it integrated experiences and challenges from everyday Jewish life in worship, and thus indirectly conveyed the message that *Bürgerlichkeit* could be combined with, indeed was even compatible with, "Jewishness." Since this hardly infringed upon the Halacha, but only placed it in a new cultural framework, the "improvement program" could really be reinterpreted as a *Jewish* project, and could be anchored comparatively widely, even within the orthodoxy.

* * *

It should be clear by now that the social advancement of the German Jews was based above all on their cultural and religious embourgeoisement. If one asks why this development applied only to individual Jews in other

countries, but covered the majority of Jews in Germany, then the German path to emancipation of the Jews must be seen above all—and quite in keeping with the initial quotation—as having had enormous impetus. Certainly in revolutionary France the state and the bourgeoisie also desired integration of the Jews. But this was to grow out of emancipation and not be made a prerequisite. The question of how far the minority would assimilate could thus be answered on an individual basis. Education, ethics and morals, or even religious reforms barely played a role in the expectations of the state. The primary reference point was Jews' acknowledgment of the nation and their readiness to participate actively in the process of nation-building.

In contrast, in Germany the discussion always had a cultural and collective pattern; the starting point was the—unrealistic—belief that equality for the individual was only possible when *all* Jews had undergone bourgeois improvement. The new Jewish elite that took shape around 1800 in the environment of the salons and the universities founded on this expectation. They gave up and followed a path into modern times mostly as Christians. But with this the path was free for another group of major thinkers who, because they worked as preachers, rabbis, and teachers, could not profit from baptism, and therefore sought a collective and explicitly Jewish answer to the state's demands. They spared no effort to raise the lower classes to the bourgeois standard as well, precisely because this also seemed to be the only guarantee for the emancipation of the individual. However, at the beginning of this process, the fact that the German Jews thus also accumulated cultural capital, which advanced the social-economic embourgeoisement of the following generations, was neither intended nor foreseen.

In any case, two points must be emphasized in conclusion. First, that which I have called a "collective embourgeoisement" or "project" did not, of course, run according to a sort of master plan, and especially not according to any plan by the state. The German Jews had in fact only adopted those demands that corresponded with the *Zeitgeist* and with their identity. In contrast, other initiatives fizzled out. For instance, the attempt to force poorer Jews permanently into the track of skilled trades or agriculture failed. They remained primarily faithful to commerce, at first denounced as unproductive, because with the shaping of a market society, it offered quite new, attractive chances. The adoption of bourgeois values had by no means led to uncritical assimilation. It did not allow "Jewishness" to erode, but rather transformed it for a modern world and adapted it for life in that world.

Second, what I have described here are the strands of development that succeeded in the end, those that were dominant. However, there were also always Jews who did not succeed, or who did not even want to

follow the bourgeois path. Potential for resistance and obstinacy can be found in all religious communities; the modernization of everyday Jewish life did not proceed as quickly, smoothly, and without conflict as a paper that is intended to show the major trends might lead one to believe.³⁵ How strongly traditional elements also shaped the mentality of those who considered themselves modernizers can be illustrated by a journal entry by Hermann Baerwald. This *Gymnasiast* had visited a small synagogue in 1847 and had seen how even educated Jews submitted themselves to the traditional ceremony:

Thus an intelligent man stands there in such an environment and prays right out of the book [. . .] Thus is man a slave to custom. I remember that in the past I thought about my parents and prayed with true fervor. To me these reminiscences were sweet, and as far as I am from such things today, in a moment I would be taken away and pray everything just as it was written. I did not omit passages that fully contradicted my beliefs, because it would be disruptive. I would have begun to have doubts while praying and begun to think, and that would have torn me away from my paradise: so I just recited all of the prayers. Why? I did not know then and I do not know now. Perhaps in order to put myself again in the position of a pious Jew, in that cozy, modest state. Afterwards, I conversed with N. about many things, including [Wilhelm] Meister.³⁶

The tension in which this generation grew up, in which they became educated and defined their Judaism anew, could not be more aptly described.

What has often been misunderstood as assimilation and has been interpreted as acculturation therefore manifests itself as a complex process of hybridization, in which various identities—Jew, citizen, and German—overlapped, supplemented, and mixed with one another, in a process in which both sides, the Jewish and the non-Jewish, changed, although by no means always at the same speed. Whereas the Jewish reformers adapted the central ideals of the Enlightenment—that is, education and morals—and tried to bring them closer to “their” people, Christian thinkers were coming up with other values that were much less attractive for the Jews: the romantic orientation to the German nation and the unity of church, *Volk*, and state. By the time the ideal of *bürgerliche Verbesserung* had become attractive and popular on a broad front in the Jewish microcosm, the other side had already taken leave of it. But this also meant that the German Jews self-confidently reinterpreted the emancipation ideology as a Jewish project, a project that ended in a success story that was as extraordinary as it was precarious. It was precarious

because the coveted “normality” was not quite achieved and the distance between Jews and other Germans was not quite abolished, but only changed in form.

The German Jews were henceforth perceived as the success group par excellence abroad as well; there, too, their success seemed to be rooted in a “broader cultural outlook” and a special “cultural baggage.” In the judgement of Todd Endelman, “their rise from poverty to prosperity [was] the most rapid of any immigrant group at the time.”³⁷ In this respect, the “German Jew” soon developed into a *cultural* category, a symbol. Just as the “Polish Jews” had been symbolized during the Enlightenment discourse by the poor, uncultivated, haggling Jew or the Talmud-studying, aesthetically repellent idler, so the “German Jew” also took shape as a type, especially overseas: a type that was also primarily culturally defined, and a type that also embraced a decidedly social component. But this time it was embodied by the opposite of poverty: a remarkable economic *success* and a maximum of *Bürgerlichkeit*.

Notes

Translated by Jonathan Skolnik, GHI. I am grateful to Jonathan not only for translating this paper, but also for organizing this year’s joint Leo Baeck-GHI lecture.

¹ *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* (Stuttgart, 1851): 737f.

² *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (1839): 624.

³ For a more comprehensive and differentiated analysis, see Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum: Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2004).

⁴ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918, 1. Bd.: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich, 1990), 407.

⁵ Wolfgang Kaschuba, “Bürgerlichkeit nach 1800: Kultur als symbolische Praxis,” in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, vol. 2, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Munich, 1995), 92–127; Jürgen Kocka, “Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Problem der deutschen Geschichte vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in Jürgen Kocka, *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1987), 21–63; Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel: Zum Problem individueller Lebensführung im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 23 (1997): 340.

⁶ See especially: Jacob Katz, ed., *Die Entstehung der Judenassimilation in Deutschland und deren Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1935); Jacob Katz, *Aus dem Ghetto in die bürgerliche Gesellschaft: Jüdische Emanzipation 1770–1870* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988).

⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Bd. 2: Von der Reformära bis zur industriellen und politischen “Deutschen Doppelrevolution” 1815–1848/49* (Munich, 1987), 184f.; Jürgen Kocka, “Zur Schichtung der preußischen Bevölkerung während der industriellen Revolution,” in *Geschichte als Aufgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Treue (Berlin, 1988), 357–90; Hartmut Kaelble, *Soziale Mobilität und Chancengleichheit im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1983); Reinhard Schüren, *Soziale Mobilität: Muster, Veränderungen und Bedingungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (St. Katharinen, 1989).

⁸ Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1992); Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States and Citizenship* (Princeton, 1995); Frances Malino and

David Sorkin, eds., *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870* (Cambridge, 1990); Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1996); Paula Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace* (New Haven, 1991); Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley, 1998); Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, 2002), 79–180; Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor, 1999); Todd Endelman, *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656–1945* (Bloomington, 1990); Johan C. H. Blom, Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and Ivo Schöffer, eds., *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands* (Oxford, 2002), 164–90; Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, “Minderheiten in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: Juden in Amsterdam, Frankfurt und Posen,” in Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, 392–420.

⁹ See e.g. Reinhard Rürup, “The Tortuous and Thorny Path to Legal Equality,” *Leo Baeck International Yearbook XXXI* (1986): 3–34; “Judenemanzipation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft,” in Reinhard Rürup, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 11–36; David Sorkin, “The Impact of Emancipation on German Jewry,” in Frankel and Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community*, 177–98.

¹⁰ George L. Mosse, “Jewish Emancipation: Between *Bildung* and Respectability,” in *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism*, ed. George L. Mosse (Hanover, 1993), 131–45; David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York, 1987); reissued Detroit, 1999; George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Bloomington, 1985); Shulamit Volkov, “Die Verbürgerlichung der Juden in Deutschland als Paradigma,” in Shulamit Volkov, *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Zehn Essays* (Munich, 1990), 111–30; Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991).

¹¹ A sample of those memoirs can be found in Monika Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Bd. 1: Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1780–1871; Bd. 2: Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1976/1979).

¹² Stadtarchiv Dresden, Diary Louis Lesser/Dresden 13.10.1833–29.01.1837.

¹³ Elisabeth Kraus, *Die Familie Mosse: Deutsch-jüdisches Bürgertum im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1999); Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York: Arnhold Family & Bank, AR 2920, 2921, 2271.

¹⁴ Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege*, passim; David Sorkin, “Preacher, Teacher, Publicist: Joseph Wolf and the Ideology of Emancipation,” in *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870*, ed. Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Cambridge, 1990), 107–25

¹⁵ See e.g.: Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Raum und “Klassen”: Leçon sur la Leçon* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985); Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Sinn: Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987); Pierre Bourdieu, *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994); Pierre Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

¹⁶ David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York, 1987).

¹⁷ Simone Lässig, “Sprachwandel und Verbürgerlichung: Zur Bedeutung der Sprache im innerjüdischen Modernisierungsprozeß des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 270 (2000): 617–67; Andreas Gotzmann, “Vatersprache und Mutterland: Zur Sprache als nationaler Einheitsdiskurs im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt*, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen, 2002), 28–42.

¹⁸ Simone Lässig, “Bildung als kulturelles Kapital? Jüdische Schulprojekte in der Frühphase der Emanzipation,” in *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche: Zur Geschichte von Vielfalt und Grenzen in Deutschland*, ed. Andreas Gotzmann, Rainer Liedtke, and Till van Rahden (Tübingen, 2001), 263–98.

¹⁹ *Israelitisches Predigt- und Schulmagazin*, ed. Ludwig Philippson (Magdeburg, 1834–36), volume 1 (1834), 284–85. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰ Cited in Ernst Müller, *Geschichte der Stiftungsschule von 1815 zu Hamburg*. Festschrift. (Hamburg, 1915), 74–75.

- ²¹ Robert Liberles, "Was there a Jewish Movement for Emancipation in Germany? Emancipation and the Structure of the Jewish Community in the Nineteenth Century," in *Leo Baeck International Yearbook XXXI* (1986): 35–70.
- ²² Abraham Geiger, "Jüdische Zeitschriften," in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 3 (1837): 390.
- ²³ Sorkin, *Transformation*.
- ²⁴ Lässig, *Jüdische Wege*, 508f., 551.
- ²⁵ Stadtarchiv Dresden, RA C.XXXII Nr. 50 (Jüdisches Leseinstitut).
- ²⁶ Michael A. Meyer, *Antwort auf die Moderne: Geschichte der Reformbewegung im Judentum* (Vienna, 2000); Andreas Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einheit: Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit* (Leiden, 2002); Andreas Gotzmann, *Jüdisches Recht im kulturellen Prozeß: Die Wahrnehmung der Halacha im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1997); David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge* (Portland, 2000); Simone Lässig, "The Emergence of a Middle-Class Religiosity: Social and Cultural Aspects of the German-Jewish Reform Movement," in *Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German Jewry*, ed. Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (Tübingen, 2003), 127–58; Simone Lässig, "Religiöse Modernisierung, Geschlechterdiskurs und kulturelle Verbürgerlichung im deutschen Judentum des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts," forthcoming in *Jüdische Geschichte als Geschlechtergeschichte: Themen, Thesen, Diskussionen*, ed. Kirsten Heinsohn and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Göttingen, forthcoming 2005).
- ²⁷ Landesarchiv Oranienbaum (LAO), Abt. Dessau C 15, Nr. 48, Bl. 55b.
- ²⁸ Salomon J. Cohen, *Historisch-kritische Darstellung des jüdischen Gottesdienstes und dessen Modificationen, von den ältesten Zeiten an, bis auf unsere Tage* (Leipzig, 1819); Salomon Herxheimer, *Predigten und Gelegenheitsreden* (Leipzig, 1838), 246ff.; Gerson Wolf, *Geschichte der israelitischen Cultusgemeinde in Wien (1820–1860)* (Vienna, 1860), 24f.; LAO, Abt. Dessau C 15, Nr. 48, Bl. 15a-17a; Gotzmann, *Jüdisches Recht*, 67; Lässig, *Jüdische Wege*, 243–290.
- ²⁹ Elias Grünebaum, *Zustände und Kämpfe* (Carlsruhe, 1843), 44.
- ³⁰ Zacharias Frankel, *Rede bei Gelegenheit der Feyer des Dankfestes, gehalten am 15. Sept. 1832 in der Synagoge zu Teplitz* (Teplitz, 1832), 22.
- ³¹ Gotthold Salomon, *Predigten in dem neuen israelitischen Tempel zu Hamburg gehalten* (Hamburg, 1820).
- ³² Meyer Kayserling, ed., *Bibliothek jüdischer Kanzelredner*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1870), 244; Gotthold Salomon, *Mose, der Mann Gottes: Ein heiliges Lebensgemälde in 21 Kanzelvorträgen* (Hamburg, 1835), 98–100.
- ³³ Kayserling, ed., *Bibliothek jüdischer Kanzelredner*, 81.
- ³⁴ *Internationales Predigt- und Schulmagazin* (1834), 40.
- ³⁵ Lässig, *Jüdische Wege*, passim.
- ³⁶ Hermann Baerwald Tagebuch 1.06.1847, archives of the Leo Baeck Institute New York, Baerwald Collection.
- ³⁷ Todd Endelman, "German Jews in Victorian England: A Study in Drift and Defection," in Frankel and Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community*, 57–87; Todd Endelman, "German-Jewish Settlement in Victorian England," in *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, ed. Werner E. Mosse (Tübingen, 1991), 37–56; see also Tobias Brinkmann, *Von der Gemeinde zur Community: Jüdische Einwanderer in Chicago 1840–1900* (Osnabrück, 2002), 450.