

Zeitschrift: Zeitschrift für pädagogische Historiographie
Herausgeber: Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich
Band: 9 (2003)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Multiple historical narratives of Jewish educational reform
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-901856>

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Multiple Historical Narratives of Jewish Educational Reform

(Red.) Seit mehreren Jahren wird die historische Aufarbeitung der jüdischen Erziehung in Deutschland intensiv betrieben. Eine neue Reihe, herausgegeben von Ingrid Lohmann und weiteren Forscherinnen und Forschern, erschliesst neue Quellen, enthält die Übersetzung des historiographischen Meilensteins von Mordechai Eliav in die deutsche Sprache und publiziert neue Studien zu diversen Themen und Zeiträumen seit der Aufklärung. Marjorie Lamberti unterzieht diese Reihe eines zwar nie ganz vergessenen, aber in der Geschichtsschreibung doch lange Zeit nur marginal behandelten Themas einer kritischen Würdigung.

■ Marjorie Lamberti

The editors of this new series of publications on the history of Jewish education in Germany have opened new avenues for research with a treasure trove of primary sources on the founding of the first modern Jewish school in Germany in 1778, the initiatives for Jewish educational reform, and the Prussian government's policies on the schooling of the Jewish minority from 1760 to 1825. Ingrid Lohmann and her coeditors are pursuing two worthy goals in this series: to examine the history of the education of the Jewish minority in relation to, and not apart from, the surrounding social and cultural world and to integrate it into the historiography of German education. Although the regional studies of Claudia Prestel and Dorothee Schimpf indicate that this subject has not been neglected in historical research on the German Jews (Prestel 1989; Schimpf 1994), much work remains to be done to extend and deepen our knowledge. Whether by intention or lucky coincidence, the first monographs in this series can be seen as hallmarks in the historiography of German education. First published in Israel in 1960 and written by an émigré from Germany, Mordechai Eliav's book is a pioneering study of Jewish education in the years of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation. Britta Behm's

recent work exemplifies the new approaches and directions in historical scholarship on the Haskalah – the Jewish Enlightenment in the eighteenth century – since the publication of the classic works of Eliav and his distinguished mentor Jacob Katz.

The two hefty volumes of documents edited by Lohmann extend beyond an institutional history of a private Jewish school that was opened in Berlin for boys from the community's lower bourgeoisie. With a keen understanding of the meaning of this event for the society of those times, Lohmann places the Jüdische Freischule and Jewish education in the context of a great epoch of social change, first in respect to the transition of German Jewry from the isolated cultural world of the ghetto to social integration in an emerging modern capitalist society, and secondly in respect to the history of the dialogue between Jews and Christians in Germany. The documents reveal the everyday life of pupils and teachers in the school, the aspirations and educational programs of the Jewish reformers, and the encounters between Jews and Christians in the enlightened milieu and the state administration. Earlier studies made casual references to the influence of the Philanthropist pedagogues on David Friedländer, Naphtali Herz Wessely, and other Jewish innovators. Now we have a deeper understanding of how much the reform of Jewish education was a part of the history of German education in the eighteenth century.

For the German edition Eliav brought his book up to date mainly in the footnotes, and publications since 1960 have been added to the citation of the secondary sources that he used. In spite of the passage of time, his book still remains the starting point for research on the subject. As he pointed out, educational reform was at the center of the concerns and task of the Haskalah and of the public debate on the emancipation of the Jews from the 1770s on. His account underscored the initiative of the Jews in the modernization process. Even before Emperor Joseph of Austria issued his Tolerance Edict of 1781 and Christian Wilhelm Dohm wrote *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, the maskilim (Jewish Enlighteners) with the support of an acculturated elite of merchants and bankers made attempts to reorganize Jewish education according to modern precepts. The breadth of Eliav's research

has yet to be surpassed. He noted the regional differences in the reception of the Haskalah, and argued persuasively that historians should not generalize from the modernization process in Berlin or underestimate the capacity of Orthodox Jews to change and make adaptations to secular studies in their schools.

To a greater extent than Eliav had done in his research, Behm adopts a social-historical and integrative approach that places events in the Jewish community in relation to developments in the surrounding culture. The attempts of a new Jewish bourgeoisie to reform the traditional Jewish education, which was exclusively religious and devoted to the study of the Talmud and which created a deep cultural isolation from the majority culture, are examined as part of a larger process of social change. Although Behm understands the historical circumstances that led scholars who proceeded from a national-Zionist perspective to judge the Haskalah negatively as the beginning of an inevitably flawed process of assimilation, she questions the validity of this interpretation, as David Sorkin and Shulamit Volkov have done. She handles carefully the maskilim's criticism of the traditional institutions of Jewish education and the Yiddish-speaking schoolmasters who came from Poland. Whereas Eliav states that their criticism of the hederim and the Talmud schools was bitterly ironical and exaggerated (Eliav 2000, p. 53), Behm attributes more substance to their perceptions. She notes that as early as the first half of the eighteenth century, changes in the practices of private education in the homes of prosperous Jewish families indicate that the new demands and needs of these bourgeois groups could not be satisfied by the traditional school curriculum. The instruction of secular subjects and the German language by Jewish and Christian tutors was by no means an exceptional phenomenon in the homes of wealthy Jews who were active in commerce and finance and had to communicate with Christians in the government administration. The maskilim's criticism of the traditional education later in the century was based on the experiences and needs of the representatives of these groups (Behm 2002, p. 73).

Behm's reconstruction of Moses Mendelssohn's role in the efforts to achieve an educational renaissance within Jewish society is at variance with Shmuel Feiner's thesis that Mendelssohn was «apathetic» toward the projects of the maskilim and did not take part in the founding of the Jüdische Freischule. Feiner portrays Mendelssohn as a «philosopher and pessimistic thinker far removed from the enthusiasm of the Haskalah's reformist intelligentsia and its ideology» (Feiner 1995). Behm discusses at length Mendelssohn's enlightened anthropology in the *Kohélet Musar*, a moral magazine that he edited in 1758. His views on the nature and vocation of man and his understanding of the human capacity for perfectibility were a philosophical means of refuting essentialist anti-Jewish prejudices

and arguments for the denial of legal equality to the Jews. «Damit legte Mendelssohn den Grund für die von jüdischer Seite aus entwickelte Konzeption einer erneuerten Erziehung, in der ein jüdisch-bürgerliches Menschenbild allmählich an die Stelle der mit dem (Erziehungs-)Ideal des Talmid Hacham verbundenen Vorstellungen trat» (Behm 2002, p. 97). The new educational ideal of the «virtuous citizen» corresponded to the values and norms of the emerging bourgeoisie. The connection between educational reform and the embourgeoisement and acculturation of German Jewry is made more concrete in the author's description of parental attitudes toward childhood and the private education of children in Mendelssohn's home.

Mendelssohn was aware of the discrepancy between the Philanthropist program for an education based on Enlightenment precepts and the discrimination and prohibitions that limited the future horizon of Jewish children. His realistic assessment of the conditions under which the Jews lived did not prevent him from participating in the initiatives to modernize Jewish education. Social gatherings at his home became a forum for the discussion of Jewish educational reform in the 1760s and 1770s. Although he did not pen polemical critiques of the hederim and the Talmud schools, he turned more or less explicitly (ibid., p. 159) against the characteristics of the traditional Jewish education with his German translation of the Pentateuch, which Behm interprets as a project of educational reform (ibid., p. 157). She constructs a persuasive argument that Mendelssohn was supportive of the plan for a modern Jewish school even though no document mentions him among the founders. Intent on avoiding conflicts between the maskilim and the rabbinate, he was extremely cautious in taking public positions on educational issues that would become a bone of contention.

In the books by Eliav and Behm and the two essays by Feiner and Lohmann that serve as an introduction to the two volumes of sources (Feiner 2000; Lohmann 2000a), the Jüdische Freischule is integrated into different historical narratives of Jewish educational reform. Feiner opens his essay with a string of stimulating questions related to the historian's quest for «the traces of the relevant story that bears with it a vibrant meaning for the society in which he lives and for the burning issues of his time» (Feiner 2000, p. 6).¹ What is the historical narrative that the founding of a Jewish school in Berlin in 1778 deserves to be an integrated part of? From the perspective of a Jewish and Israeli historian, who is looking back at this event over two hundred years ago, he sees the history of this school and the debate over the modernization of Jewish education in the Berlin Jewish community as «part of the annals of the Jewish Kulturkampf that began at the end of the eighteenth century and has yet to draw to a close» (ibid., p. 7).²

Feiner's account stresses the revolutionary impli-

cations of the founding of the first modern Jewish school. Before 1778, secular learning in the Jewish community was confined to the private education of the sons and daughters of the mercantile and financial elite and to the autodidactic studies of a new secular intelligentsia. The great innovation of the Jüdische Freischule was that it «institutionalized that same aspiration to escape the cultural and linguistic ghetto» (ibid., p. 8) and offered access to secular culture to other strata of Jewish society. From the modest goals of its founders in 1778, the school underwent «radical» curricular changes after 1806 under the direction of Lazarus Bendavid, who «stroved for social and cultural assimilation, the deletion of Jewish languages and studies from the curriculum and the reduction of Judaism to the principles of the universal natural religion» (ibid., p. 10). Why did the traditionalists oppose the intrusion of the new conception of education into the Jewish world? Feiner contends that what seemed to be simply a modification in the school curriculum was in fact «a radical move that led to a change in the very nature of Jewish identity» (ibid., p. 11). Until the end of the eighteenth century Jews had an all-embracing Jewish identity that encompassed their religion and its canonical literature, rituals, and commandments and the life style of the community. With the integration of the Jews into the modern, liberal, and secular world and the institutionalization of the new education, Jewish self-understanding was split into three elements: Jew, citizen, and man. At the heart of the Orthodox defense of traditional institutions and modes of thought and behavior was the struggle «to restore Jewish identity to its former unity and uniqueness» (ibid., p. 12).

For Lohmann, the relevant story to which the Jüdische Freischule belongs seems to be suggested by the question that she poses as an educator concerned about «den gegenwärtigen Bemühungen um eine theoretische Fundierung *interkultureller Bildung*» (Lohmann 2000a, p. 16): what lessons can be drawn about education in a multicultural society from the reconstruction of German-Jewish history? She is less interested in the conflicts between the maskilim and the rabbinate than Eliav and Feiner are. Instead, she recasts the history of the first modern Jewish school and educational reform with a sharper focus on the policies of the Prussian state administration, and with a strikingly different interpretation of Bendavid's pedagogical goals and intentions. Her discussion of the directors' plans and reports in the various stages of the school's development up to its closing in 1825 clarifies their intentions in respect to the place and contents of religious studies in the curriculum. In her interpretation, Bendavid's conception of education embodied universal principles (ibid., p. 28) related to the integration of Jews into a society of general humanity and civic rights as well as self-willed particularism. The separation of religious and secular instruction for Jewish youth was not considered desirable

by Bendavid (ibid., p. 52), she contends. To separate institutionally the acquisition of secular knowledge and practical skills and the cultivation of moral character and religious consciousness was not acceptable to the Jewish reformers, «auch und schon gar nicht für einen an der Philosophie Immanuel Kants geschulten Kopf wie Bendavid» (ibid., p. 51).

Lohmann traces the state's increasing interest in the education of the Jewish minority after King Frederick William II came to the throne and set up a commission in 1787 to propose improvements in the Jewish schools, and following Prussia's annexations of Polish territory in the 1790s. While some enlightened officials promoted the idea of designating the Jüdische Freischule as a royal school, the authorities could not be moved to grant state support to it. The government's policy was determined by the political line that the Jewish Gemeinden had to provide funds for the maintenance of Jewish schools or Jewish children had to attend Christian public schools in which they would be exempted from participation in religious instruction. As an official report stated in 1805, the harmful separatism of the Jews from Christians (ibid., p. 438) would be eradicated if Jewish children went to Christian schools. The political positions of Protestant churchmen and academic educators in the school administration were not homogeneous. Lohmann contends, «dass, entgegen einer heute gängigen Sichtweise, auf christlicher Seite keineswegs alle Akteure gegenüber den Juden schlichtweg assimilationistische Ziele verfolgten» (ibid., p. 81). Espousing an enlightened tolerance, Nolte and Bellermand, for example, accepted the idea of a separate Jewish education and saw the Jüdische Freischule as a model institution.

Although Lohmann could develop with more clarity her thesis about the conflict between two universals (ibid., p. 81f.), namely, the enlightened idea of tolerance and the maxim of civic equality, in the government's deliberations on Jewish educational issues, she is correct in pointing out that the concept of tolerance even among the state's reform-oriented officials had holes. Gymnasium directors who admitted Jewish boys to their schools did not think of conceding a place to Jewish religious instruction in their institutions and recruiting Jewish teachers for it. The legal equality granted to the Jews in the Emancipation Edict of 1812 did not extend to matters related to the religious community and education of the Jews. The edict left the regulation of these matters up to future legislation; in effect, Judaism was denied legal parity with the Christian confessions in the state. The separate status of the Jewish religion had far-reaching effects on government policy-making and Jewish educational affairs throughout the nineteenth century (see Lamberti 1978b).

After 1806 the Jüdische Freischule began to admit Christian pupils, whose parents wanted their sons to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for commercial occupations. Bendavid hoped that the

education of Jewish and Christian youths together – except for the religion lessons – would foster mutual respect and social integration. In the reactionary political climate after the Congress of Vienna, officials in the Kultusministerium decided to prohibit Jewish teachers from giving instruction to Christian children. Justifying this policy in 1816 was the claim that «der Unterricht, den Christenkinder durch Juden erhalten, wenn er auch nicht gerade die Religion betrifft, doch immer auf ihren Charakter und die Richtung ihres Geistes einwirkt» (Lohmann 2000b, p. 855). The thinking behind this prohibition spread throughout the Prussian school bureaucracy and developed into a pattern of discrimination that continued down to the end of the monarchy a century later (Lamberti 1978a).

The examination of the connections between education and the social integration and acculturation of German Jewry is carried forward in time to the Kaiserreich in Hoffmann's research on the schooling of the sons and daughters of Jewish liberal parents of the middle and upper classes in Hamburg. Although he found in the archival records of the Hamburg school administration ample material to reconstruct an institutional history of the three private schools, which Jewish families of the banking and mercantile elite chose for their children, his sources related to the Jewish youth and this social stratum of the community are sparser so that this case study of Hamburg does not produce an analysis that is as informative and rich as other recent studies of the Jewish communities in Breslau and Königsberg (Rahden 2000; Schüler-Springorum 1996). The Thomsen-Schule to which he gives considerable attention was a Vorschule, a preparatory school that pupils attended only up to the age of nine or ten before going to secondary schools. Would a historical investigation of the education of middle- and upper-class Jews extending through the secondary schools in Hamburg reveal more about the effects of formal education on Jewish-identity formation and acculturation?

This series on the history of the education of Jews in Germany will undoubtedly stimulate new research, and it seems appropriate to conclude with some thoughts on this agenda. The large collection of documents edited by Lohmann offers the possibility for a more probing and nuanced study of official policy concerning Jewish education in the German states and of the interactions between Jewish representatives of reform and Christian officials in the state administration. Historians have yet to appreciate fully the role that educational issues played in the political behavior of German Jewry and in the governmental deliberations on regulations for the Jewish community in the years before and after the emancipation edicts. In Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, and other cities, educational concerns were among the determining factors in the political alignment of Jewish citizens with the left-wing liberal parties in the Kaiserreich (Palmowski 1999).

Although considerable attention has been given to the special role of women as agents of acculturation and transmitters of religious tradition in the middle-class Jewish family in the Kaiserreich, we know much less about the impact of the institutions of formal education on Jewish girls and boys. Studies that trace the careers and beliefs of Jewish graduates of various sorts of schools would deepen our understanding of the role that schooling played in the process of embourgeoisement and identity-formation.³ Hoffmann states that wealthy Jewish families in Hamburg chose private schools not only for the sake of social exclusiveness but also because they wanted for their children a refuge from anti-Semitic hostility and harassment. «Dieses Refugium war in der Kaiserzeit in einer privaten Schule eher zu erwarten als an einer Volksschule» (Hoffmann 2001, p. 78). This contention makes good sense. Can it be documented with further research on the school life of the larger number of Jewish pupils who went to the public elementary and secondary schools?

Historical scholarship on the «German-Jewish subculture» has focused on the kitchen and hearth, the veneration of Bildung, and sociability and philanthropy. More research is needed on the formal transmission of the Jewish religious heritage. After 1880 Jewish Volksschulen with small enrollments were steadily closing down, and the percentage of school-age Jewish children who were instructed in public schools of their own confession declined. Religionsschulen were established by the Jewish Gemeinden to provide a religious education in the after-school hours for Jewish youths who went to public schools with a Christian majority. In the 1920s, the Gemeinden in Berlin, Breslau, and other cities appropriated funds for the opening of new Jewish schools that were attended by the children of Orthodox believers, Zionists, and East European immigrants. The ideological conflicts between the liberals and the other groups within the Jewish community over a separate or an integrated education for Jewish children are mentioned in some historical accounts of German Jewry during the Weimar era, but much more attention should be given to the development of the Jewish schools and the extent to which they contributed to the revitalization of a distinctive Jewish culture vis-à-vis the progressive secularization of German Jewry.

The editors of this series have charted a new and promising direction in the historiography of education in Germany: an integrative approach that positions the Jewish minority within German society and concentrates on the reciprocal relations between the minority and its social and cultural surroundings. The books by Behm and Hoffmann show how this methodological approach can provide a discerning analysis of the acculturation process of the German Jews. Behm has written the more ambitious work. Her extensive and meticulous scholarship enables her to advance her arguments with

considerable self-assurance. Her vivid description of the educational practices in middle-class Jewish homes in the eighteenth century and her perceptive contention that the founders of the Freischule selected and modified the adapted Philanthropist concepts on the basis of Jewish tradition and against the background of a Jewish path into the era of bourgeois modernity deepen our understanding of a crucial period of social transition for German Jewry and the Jewish encounter with the majority culture at that time.

- 1 For other comments on the historical narrative of educational reform, see Lamberti 2002.
- 2 The thesis in this essay is developed more fully in Feiner's book recently published in Israel. An English translation of this work, *The Jewish Enlightenment in the Eighteenth Century*, will be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2003.
- 3 The possibilities for this kind of research can be seen in Pickus 1999.

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Auf dem Monte Verità bei Ascona findet vom 31. August bis 5. September 2003 ein internationales Symposium statt. Das Thema lautet:

«Säkularität und Sakralität in der neuzeitlichen Pädagogik»

Referentinnen und Referenten aus Italien, Deutschland, Frankreich, England und der Schweiz werden zu dieser Fragestellung Thesen und Untersuchungen präsentieren.

Ziel ist es, die in der neuesten historischen und soziologischen Diskussion erneut in Frage gestellte These über die Säkularität moderner Diskurse und Institutionen im Feld der Pädagogik im Lichte neuer Forschungen zu bearbeiten. Ohne Zweifel ist der pädagogische Kontext sowohl für die Säkularisierung wie auch für die Kontinuität oder Neuformierung von Sakralität von grosser Bedeutung. Diese Bedeutung der Thematik reicht allerdings weit über die wissenschaftliche Diskussion hinaus in aktuelle bildungspolitische Auseinandersetzungen hinein.

Falls wir Ihr Interesse geweckt haben, würde es uns freuen, Sie an dieser Veranstaltung begrüßen zu dürfen.

Anmeldungen sind bis spätestens 15. Juni 2003 an folgende Adresse zu richten:
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