
REZENSION

Jonathan Karp/Adam Sutcliffe (eds.): The Cambridge History of Judaism

Jonathan Karp/Adam Sutcliffe (eds.): The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume VII: The Early Modern World, 1500-1815. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018, 1136 p., ISBN: 978-0-521-88904-9, £150.

Reviewed by Maria Diemling.

The publication of this ambitious and, with over 1,100 pages, hefty book, appearing as volume 7 in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* is timely. In the past three decades, scholarship on early modern Jewish history and culture has flourished, and this authoritative and critical survey of our current understanding of this period provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on the current state of the field and its future potential. Written by established authorities in the field, the book aims to reflect the ‘current breadth, diversity, and dynamism’ (p. 11) of the study of early modern Jewry in 41 often interdisciplinary chapters. In the brief introduction, the editors Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe explain the organizing principles of the volume and remind us of the criticism the term ‘early modern’ has attracted and the still debated question of its exact periodization. The editors rightly chose a ‘soft opening date’ around 1500 that permits necessary forays back into the 15th century, and the end of the Napoleonic wars (1815) as the end date. The latter not only contributes to a better understanding of the upheavals of the revolutionary era, but also aims to address the different historical developments in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, which a more fluid periodization allows.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first and third part each discuss two distinct phases in early modern Jewish history: the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period (c. 1500–c.1650), and the transition under the influence of the Enlightenment towards modernity (c.1650–1815). These chronologically structured parts of the book are linked through ‘Themes and Trends’, the longest part that focus on specific topics, often spanning over the whole period under discussion.

Part 1 sets the scene with surveys of Jewish lives in the three main religious spheres that early modern Jews resided in – Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam –, all of which, just like Judaism, changed enormously during the first half of the period covered in the book. Other contributions discuss the political and legal dimension of early modern Jewish life, its economic and institutional structures, and cultural and religious practices. They skilfully weave together in-depth analysis of primary sources and surveys of key secondary literature in an accessible way, making the chapters relevant to both advanced students of Jewish history and specialists in the field.

Kenneth Stow’s chapter on the Catholic Church and papal Jewry policy discusses baptism and (forced) conversion from the First Crusade in 1096 to the kidnapping of a young Jewish woman in 1749. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia demonstrates how central Judaism

was to the self-definition and identity of the Protestant Reformation. Joseph Hacker surveys the rise of Ottoman Jewry as a result of expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula that led to a demographic shift in the eastern Mediterranean and, within a relatively brief time span, to well-organised and flourishing 16th century Ottoman Jewish communities. Andreas Gotzmann outlines the complex shifting legal and political status of early modern Jews in the Holy Roman Empire. The comparison with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also with the vast peasant population, demonstrates the political acumen Jews had as active agents negotiating unfavourable conditions. Francesca Trivellato's chapter on Jews and the early modern economy covers a variety of economic activities across the Jewish world and highlights that the status of a 'stateless diaspora' could be both an advantage and a disadvantage for Jewish commercial networks relying on family and group solidarity. In her survey of the institutions of Jewish community life, Elisheva Carlebach notes the 'astonishing variety of political organizations' set up by early modern Jews in a 'conscious effort [...] to organize and adapt creatively to political circumstances that changed over time' (p. 168). She demonstrates that Jews were judicially far more integrated into the prevailing legal system and Jewish communities less autonomous than previous research assumed.

The second part of the book, *Themes and Trends in Early Modern Jewish Life*, covers a wide range of topics. David Graizbord's chapter on 'Judeoconversos' on the Iberian Peninsula and Israel Bartal's chapter on Poland-Lithuania after Jewish mass migration to the East discuss the complex and distinct process in which Jewish identities emerged in the early modern period. Matthias Lehmann and Jean Baumgarten's chapters on Ladino and Yiddish respectively demonstrate how Jewish languages shaped the formation of Jewish identities in times of upheaval and change. Emile Schrijver analyzes Jewish book culture while Theodor Dunkelgrün examines the Christian study of Jewish books. These are thoughtful analyses of the transmission of knowledge by and about Jews and Jewish books in the centers of learning of the time. Contributions also highlight how religious authority was seriously challenged in the early modern period. Jay Berkovitz shows this for rabbinic culture and the development of the Halakhah. Yosef Kaplan analyzes processes of social cohesion and identity formation in the Western Sephardic Diaspora for which he employs the concept of confessionalization, here defined as the 'process whereby barricades were erected around each church group'. Mark Saperstein compares education (often idealized in Jewish collective memory but at the time also vehemently criticized) and homiletics across the Jewish world, showing that sermons reflected concerns about a rapidly changing society, from warnings about spending leisure time in coffee-houses to expressions of loyalty and patriotism.

The rise of the Kabbalah and the Sabbatean movement were developments that swept through early modern Jewish communities: Lawrence Fine's chapter on the Kabbalah from the Spanish expulsions to the beginnings of Hasidism employs a broad, comparative perspective that outlines the influence Kabbalistic thought had on Jewish communities from North Africa, Italy, the Ottoman Empire to Eastern Europe, reaching all levels of Jewish society. This links well with JH Chajes' insightful chapter on mysticism, Matt Goldish's analysis of Sabbatai Zevi and the Sabbataean movement and Moshe Rosman's lively contribution on the rise of Hasidism. Adam Shear examines science, medicine and philosophy as occupations of early modern Jewish intellectual culture. Lois

Dubin and Adam Teller analyze the economic activities of Jews engaging in the European Expansion and in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, respectively. Glenn Dynner and Elliot Horowitz look at the religious life of early modern Jews through practices of piety and devotion in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean world, whereas Edward Breuer analyzes the impact of the Enlightenment and the development of the Haskalah. Marc Michael Epstein's far too short chapter on Jews and visual art discusses material objects. He shows that not only aesthetic choices, but the political significance of increasingly refined objects reflect upon the Jewish engagement with art and the active involvement in the creation of secular fine arts in the early modern period. Equally interesting is Edwin Seroussi's chapter on early modern Jews and music. Through case studies from different geographical and social settings, he is able to show how Jewish musicians negotiated the boundaries between Jewish and Christian or Muslim settings.

In Part 3, 'The Jewish World, c. 1650-1815', the chapters are mainly organized according to geographic entities that discuss the emergence of the nation state and the growing significance of specific state policies towards Jews for their national affiliations and loyalties and their self-perception in general. This section highlights the remarkable expansion of the Jewish world in this period. Deborah Hertz and Michael Silber outline the distinctive trajectories of Jews in the Holy Roman Empire. Hertz notes a 'slow fading of Judaism in the German lands' (p. 761) in the three centuries under discussion, while Silber analyzes how state interventions shaped a distinctive Habsburg Jewry. François Guesnet examines the development of the Jews in Poland-Lithuania from a 'constitutionally secure, estate-like community to a religiously diverse, socially divided minority' (p. 829). Joseph Hacker challenges the term 'early modern' in his discussion about Jews in the Ottoman Empire as fundamental changes comparable to those associated with Central European Early modern history happened here only in the 19th century. Francesca Bregoli offers a revised reading of the history of Italian Jews in a period often dismissed as 'the age of oppression' (p. 864). She demonstrates that rather than 'an unmitigated low point in the history of Italian Jews' (p. 864), Italian Jews actively engaged with the Christian society and developed political awareness and confidence. Bart Wallet and Irene Zwiép focus particularly on the somewhat neglected Dutch 18th century, which they see as a *Sattelzeit* that underwent decisive transformations in terms of demographic shifts, localization, politicization and acculturation. Jay Berkovitz also aims to shed more light on a less well researched period. He discusses French Jews during the *ancien régime* and argues that there was greater continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary era than previously thought. Todd Endelman demonstrates that the transition to modernity in Britain happened with no particular state interference or inner-Jewish intellectual reform movements, but in line with secularizing currents of the majority society. Wim Klooster's discussion of Jews in the Caribbean and the Atlantic World sheds light on a relatively small number of enterprising Jews who sought out new opportunities in the 'New World'. Bill Pencak's chapter on Jews in early North America introduces us to Jews, often upper-class and with valued skills, as agents of empire who became part of an elite, but also faced antisemitism. Jews also embraced economic opportunities, as part of European colonialism, in parts of Africa and Asia, particular in port towns and along trade routes. Tudor Parfitt outlines how Jewish merchants in Yemen, Ethiopia, Southern Africa and India laid the foundations for thriving

communities. The brief discussion on the Jews in Iran by Vera Moreen shows that the history of Iranian Jewry was distinct and shaped by specific internal struggles between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims and the struggle for civic equality for Iran's minorities. These chapters are all very welcome expansions of our understanding of the early modern Jewish world, although somewhat uneven in length and methodological approach, with some chapters being more descriptive than analytical, but arguably reflecting still less well trodden paths in scholarship.

The focus on different geographical entities works well and allows for useful comparisons that highlight how much specific Jewish cultures were shaped by different political systems. For example, Jews in 'German lands' and Jews living under Habsburg rule in Austria-Hungary were both settled in the realm of the Holy Roman Empire but, as Deborah Hertz and Michael Silber demonstrate in their respective chapters, their specific living conditions led to different experiences and self-perceptions. In the case of Habsburg Jewry, the increasingly centralized bureaucracy of the Habsburgs 'created shared experiences in education, the military, citizenship, etc., that brought them closer together, while distancing them from other European Jewries' (p. 795). The comparative approach also indicates how scholars differ in their assessment of specific historical events. Edward Breuer and Deborah Hertz reach quite different conclusions in their assessment of the Haskalah. Breuer presents a nuanced evaluation of the European Enlightenment and Haskalah and argues that the latter appears to be 'less directly derivative of the eighteenth-century Enlightenments than generally assumed' (p. 653). Hertz sees the movement as the (only) 'innovative contribution' (p. 760) that arose in German lands and supported its gradual civil emancipation and internal reform processes.

The book concludes with two chapters that ask more probing methodological questions. Adam Sutcliffe, one of the editors of the book, is "rethinking the roots and routes of 'Jewish Emancipation'". David Ruderman, arguably the most influential historian of early modern Jewry in the past two decades, is 'rethinking Jewish Modernity in the Light of Early Modernity'.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the volume is how the threads woven through its chapters present a vivid and diverse tapestry of early modern Jewish life across the globe. Several contributions highlight how interconnected early modern Jewish societies were. Chapters by Rosman, Horowitz, Trivellato, Dubin, Fine, Shear and others employ multiple lenses and perspectives that provide nuanced appraisals of historical phenomena. Social stratification and class are equally important dimensions of early modern Jewish identity. While these dimensions are not systematically explored, several chapters (by Kaplan, Teller, Hertz, Silber, among others) indicate for example that belonging to a specific social group mattered enormously. Conversion, forced and voluntary, is another theme referred to in several chapters (Stow, Graizbord, Kaplan and others). The complex identities of Spanish and Portuguese 'Judeoconversos' and their negotiations of Jewishness raise important questions about family kinship and belonging, but also about authority and transmission of identity. The study of economic activities is particularly well presented (see, for example, Trivellato, Dubin, Teller, Klooster, Pencak and Parfitt) and provides many specific details about how early modern Jews earned a living from India to the Caribbean. Reading these chapters together

provides a vivid picture of the variety of occupations and entrepreneurial spirit of early modern Jews, from male single peddlers in North America walking long distances to peddle their modest wares to the 'Baghdadis' north of Bombay, wealthy merchants with Iraqi roots, earning a fortune from the opium trade to China.

A surprising omission is that of gender, which only plays a very minor role as an interpretative category. This may reflect the fact that only seven of the 43 contributors to the book are women (just over 16%) but doesn't explain that the overall approach of this volume is rather traditional and male-orientated. The construction of gender roles in traditional societies and Jewish masculinity have, in recent years, attracted important scholarship and it is regrettable that this volume does not address these findings in more depth.¹ Even the chapter by Elliott Horowitz that explicitly discusses female experiences presents an exclusively male gaze and shows little awareness of how different a feminist reading of the sources would be. It is jarring to read pejorative comments about a woman's sexual behavior or to dismiss 'liaisons' between masters and servants as 'weaknesses of the flesh' and not see them as a very unequal distribution of power where the female partner was in an extremely vulnerable position. JH Chajes' comment about the removal of 'remarkable female mystics' from later published versions 'may have been in reaction to the prominence of visionary women among Sabbatean enthusiasts' (p. 486) but raises the question if the purging of women leaders from sacred texts is not an all too common practice that displays the discomfort traditional societies have with female agency?

The book is generally carefully edited, but I couldn't help noticing some inconsistencies in referencing and the concise bibliographies. There are some factual errors that even a cursory perusal of recent research could have prevented (for example, Hsia repeats long-debunked facts about Anthonius Margaritha's family background and his supposed conversion to Lutheranism).²

These quibbles aside, the collection is an impressive scholarly achievement and indeed presents a 'rich and detailed exploration' of early modern Jewish culture. It is a major intellectual feat that will stand the test of time and serve as an important reference work for years to come.

¹ See, for example, Deborah Hertz, Monika Richarz and Claudia Ulbrich on German-Jewish history, Roni Weinstein on Italy, Francois Soyer on Spain, Ada Rapaport-Albert on Jewish mysticism, Chava Weissler on women prayers, Moshe Rosman on Poland, Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld on Amsterdam.

² See the work by Stephen Burnett, Maria Diemling, Peter von der Osten-Sacken and Michael T. Walton that have examined Margaritha's biography and writing in detail.

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