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Enlightening and Enlighteners: German Jews and Education in the Maskilic Age and Beyond

Editor's Introduction

FROM TIME TO TIME, the editors of *JQR* seek to take stock of novel trends in the field of Jewish studies by identifying clusters of scholarship that either shine new light on an old subject or push through to uncharted terrain. The forum before us falls into the former category. It focuses on a subject that has been of recurrent interest to Jewish historians since the nineteenth century: the Haskalah movement. A significant body of research, from Heinrich Graetz onward, has trained its lens on developments in Germany in the eighteenth century, seeing that milieu as the laboratory in which Jews developed new social, cultural, and educational values. In that body of scholarship, the figure of Moses Mendelssohn emerges as the grand presence, lending his unique personality and distinctive erudition to a self-identified Jewish Enlightenment movement.

Other researchers have sought to expand the focus beyond Germany, portraying the educational and political initiatives of maskilim as pan-European. A more recent current, represented by Olga Litvak, has repositioned the Haskalah in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century and disentangled its previously close association with the Enlightenment.

The two framing essays by Micah Gottlieb and Rachel Manekin mark out the extent of the Haskalah's reach in German and Habsburg lands, ranging from Frankfurt am Main to Lemberg in Galicia. They also call out two key, and often dialectical, motifs in the Haskalah project: the state imposition of cultural and social values in the name of a new ecumenical society; and the not unrelated, and complex, forms of Jewish mimesis—cultural borrowing in the name of self-improvement. Gottlieb's "Oral Letter and Written Trace" explores the persistent allure of the Hebrew Bible beyond the late eighteenth century, when it was seen as a

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source of Judaism's universalism and distinct contribution to humanity. Gottlieb traces the central role that the Bible played in the thought of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the noted nineteenth-century Orthodox rabbi. The mature Hirsch adapts the long-standing Christian distinction between the letter and spirit of the law to a reading of the Jewish Oral and Written Law, to assert paradoxically the spiritual supremacy of rabbinic talmudism. Gottlieb juxtaposes Hirsch's approach to biblical commentary to that of other German Jews such as Ludwig Philippson to demonstrate how "embattled conservatives" are no less capable of introducing innovations into tradition than are "progressives."

The second framing essay, Rachel Manekin's "Gaming the System," offers a close reading of the path followed by Abraham Kohn to the position of district rabbi in mid-nineteenth-century Lemberg. Kohn is best known for his demise—he was killed by poison placed in his soup by a local Jew in 1848, as chronicled by Michael Stanislawski in *A Murder in Lemberg*. Manekin examines carefully the web of state-mandated procedures for selecting a rabbi in each of the nineteen districts of Galicia as the backdrop to the unlikely ascent of Kohn to the position of district rabbi over a seemingly more qualified competitor, the widely respected Zvi Hirsch Chajes.

Manekin's analysis of the interplay between state aims and communal desires points to the landscape on which the Haskalah movement—or better, movements—unfolded. Taking rise at a high point of state-based social engineering, the Haskalah was subject to the pressures, but was not a mere pawn, of government officials intent on social reform. At the same time, maskilim evinced a clear instinct to reform themselves, as they sought to refashion themselves and their community into a status worthy of gentile respect.

The praxis and diverse effects of cultural mimesis are explored in a number of the essays in our Haskalah forum. Iris Idelson-Shein takes up, in the first of them, a curious irony: Haskalah advocates saw to the translation of a number of prominent works of children's literature from German into Hebrew. And yet, the fact that Hebrew was the target language guaranteed that almost no Jewish children would be able to read the books, since they were speakers and readers of Yiddish, but not of the holy tongue. This irony prompts Idelson-Shein to conclude that the Haskalah translation project was largely a "symbolic act" intended to perform the maskilim's ambition of individual and communal reformation.

The centrality of the Bible to the maskilic project is seen through new lenses in Dorothea Salzer's treatment of children's Bibles in Hebrew produced by maskilim. Noting an impulse similar to that found in Idelson-

Shein's essay to use literature to engineer social and cultural change, she analyzes two examples of bilingual (Hebrew-German) biblical story-books revolving around Adam and Eve. The juxtaposition of Peter Beer's *Sefer toledot Yisra'el* and Immanuel Moses Neumann's *Sefer torat ha-Elohim* yields different moral messages. In the first case, the story of Adam and Eve is cast as a prototype of good Enlightenment-era sociability and communal engagement. In the second case, the biblical tale seeks to instruct in the norms of respectable marriage practices in which a woman lovingly serves her husband in good bourgeois fashion.

Andreas Brämer pushes the pendulum from the pole of Jewish internalization of gentile expectations to that of state imposition of educational reform. He surveys nineteenth-century Prussian state policy regarding Jewish schools, beginning with the 1824 edict to create a Jewish elementary school system under state authority. This development not only marked the beginning of the end of traditional *heder* education but also set in motion a process by which the acquisition of German language and values in the new school system ultimately diminished its utility—to the point of disappearance.

The final essay in the forum, by Eliyana R. Adler, moves away from the German-speaking world and into late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Eastern Europe. It places at its center two autobiographical works by women activists and authors, Puah Rakowski and Anna Vygodskaia. Borrowing the Haskalah's reliance on autobiography, these two works reflect what Adler calls a *bildungs romance*, a romance with education, albeit with a twist. That is, as women in a still patriarchal culture, Rakowski and Vygodskaia had to struggle in order to gain access to education that otherwise was denied to women. Their autobiographies chronicle their distinctive journeys toward educational liberation. As such, their efforts at self-empowerment add yet another element to the delicate balance that undergirded the Haskalah, which was constantly recalibrated by the movement between state imposition and creative mimesis of Enlightenment educational ideals.

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