

Colonialism and the Jews in German History: From the Middle Ages to the 20th Century

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There exists a longstanding rift between the disciplines of Jewish studies and colonial/post-colonial studies, in part as a result of the contested relationship between Zionism and colonial history (a pioneering attempt to redress this rift is Bryan Cheyette's *Diasporas of the Mind* [2013]). Over the past decade or so, however, stimulating new scholarship has begun to study the vast unexplored terrain where they intersect, challenging us to rethink the sources, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that have informed both fields of study, and highlighting rich spaces of interconnection and entanglement (e.g., Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, eds., *Colonialism and the Jews* [2017]). In Jewish historiography, the belated "colonial turn" is evident in growing numbers of publications and conferences exploring how Jewish life was impacted by contact with nineteenth- and twentieth-century overseas empires. Jews often inhabited an indistinct middle position in colonial hierarchies: positioned somewhere between colonizer and colonized, they were neither fully equal citizens nor oppressed subjects, beneficiaries to some extent of the colonial racial system while also objects of antisemitic discourse. Their experiences and encounters pose important questions about both Jewish modernity and about colonial thought and practice.

Stefan Vogt's new edited volume, which explores the relationship between German-Jewish and German colonial history from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, is a welcome contribution to this burgeoning literature. The book emerged from several sessions at the annual German Studies Association conference between 2016 and 2019 as well as a workshop held in Berlin in July 2018, and it showcases the work of some of the most important scholars shaping research in the field. The book is dedicated to Jonathan M. Hess, one of the pioneers in this area, who was due to give the keynote address at the Berlin workshop when he suddenly and tragically passed away. Following an introduction by Vogt, the volume is made up of eleven chapters divided into three sections examining the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras.

Vogt acknowledges from the outset the politics underlying the enduring separation between Jewish and colonial history in Germany in particular. These relate not only to Israel-Palestine, as they do in the broader field, but also the "great sensitivity" (3) in Germany around perceived attempts to contest the Holocaust's uniqueness: Vogt notes that there is "a fear that contextualizing Jewish history will obliterate its uniqueness in favour of an unspecific history of minorities and violence" (9). While he stresses the importance of challenging taboos, he is also careful not to dispute "the singularity of the Holocaust" (3) and takes pains to clarify that "contextualizing German-Jewish history with respect to the history of colonialism in no way minimizes the uniqueness of this history but is in fact the only way to truly appreciate its uniqueness, its significance and its far-reaching implications" (4). There are hints throughout the volume that these issues remain close to the surface.

A key theme of the book is the notion that German colonial racism and antisemitism were not distinct ideologies but developed alongside and in close connection with one another. The chapters that make up the first section trace aspects of this intellectual history. Claudia Bruns argues that the connections between various "premodern images and

practices of essentialized difference” are crucial for fully understanding the long “history of race-ing” (26-27). Using a few iconic artefacts and texts as a lens through which to study these interrelationships, she demonstrates how discourse about Jews served as a framework for describing other “foreigners” not only in Christian Europe but also in the colonies, and maintains that anti-Judaism became important in the formation of colonial racism, while the latter, in turn, helped to shape the transition from anti-Judaism to antisemitism. Focusing in on the work of the Göttingen philosopher Christoph Meiners (1747-1810), who played a key role in the formulation of modern German racism, Felix Axster contends that the scientific theory of race was from the outset shaped by the interconnection between racism and anti-semitism. Susannah Heschel explores how nineteenth-century German scholarship on the relations between and influences among Christianity, Judaism, and Islam was fundamentally shaped by contemporary anxieties about colonialism. Jonathan Hess, in a groundbreaking 1998 essay reprinted here, compares two key texts on Jewish emancipation produced in the early 1780s by Christian Wilhelm Dohm and Johann David Michaelis, respectively one of the most prominent Christian advocates of emancipation and a resolute opponent. While the solutions they proposed to the “Jewish question” were in many senses diametrically opposed, Hess shows that both were, at core, advocating programmes of colonial expansion. Through these and other examples, Hess emphasizes the extent to which public debates on Jewish emancipation and visions of political modernization were shaped by ideas about colonialism.

The peak of German colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries corresponded with the critical period during which Jews were negotiating their position in German society post-emancipation, and political antisemitism was rising. In the section on the colonial era, four chapters chart the entanglement and mutual influences of these developments. Jews participated in the colonial project alongside other Germans but were also active in anti-colonial activities; antisemitic discourse was replete with colonialist tropes, while colonialist discourse, in turn, was infused by antisemitic ideas. Ulrike Hamman argues that established antisemitic frameworks in the Kaiserreich functioned as an ideological basis for colonial racism. Few studies have addressed the ways in which non-Whites have sometimes been racialized as Jews, and while the examples Hamman offers do not always fully support her claims, she stakes out important terrain for further research. Stefan Vogt uses the case study of the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League) to demonstrate the importance of considering antisemitism and colonialism together as complementary, though not identical, ideological formations. In his analysis, the League’s development from colonialist pressure group to prominent antisemitic organisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was rooted in ideological continuity, “a transposition of already existing ideas from one realm into another” (134-135). Antisemitism and colonialism were not two separate sets of ideologies and politics but rather overlapping elements of a *völkisch* conception of German nationhood, both “necessary means to secure the existence of the German Volk” (146). Axel Stähler examines representations of Bernhard Dernburg, one of the most prominent Jewish figures engaged in the German colonial enterprise (though he did not identify as Jewish), in the imperial satirical press across the political spectrum. Mark Gelber’s chapter wades into the thorny debate about the relationship between Zionism and colonialism, using the historical lens of the African-American repatriation project in the nineteenth century — and particularly its most important leader, Martin Robinson Delany — to suggest that modern Zionism in Central Europe be conceived primarily as a repatriation rather than a colonialist movement. The elaboration of superficial comparisons between Delany and Zionist leader Theodor Herzl instead of deeper conceptual links diminishes somewhat the force of Gelber’s argument.

The encounter between Zionism and colonialism is also the subject of Christian Wiese’s chapter in the final section on the postcolonial era. Focusing on the influential German-Jewish intellectuals Hans Kohn, Robert Weltsch, and Hannah Arendt, Wiese demonstrates the profound impact of anti-colonial thinking on their developing attitudes toward

Zionism. Christian S. Davis, whose 2012 monograph *Colonialism, Antisemitism, and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* was the first to look explicitly at colonialism and the Jews in German history, examines how Jewish involvement in Germany's colonial past had to be rewritten to fit into Nazi antisemitic discourse, using the example of the German-Jewish colonial hero Emin Pasha. The final chapter, by Atina Grossmann, which uses her parents' biographies to consider German Jews' "excruciatingly ambivalent" (254) experiences as displaced refugees as well as "oddly privileged" (254) Europeans in Iran and India after 1933, offers the volume's only sustained analysis of concrete Jewish encounters with colonial realities.

Unsurprisingly for an edited volume, the chapters are of varying substance and quality. Some take on big, overarching issues, while others present narrow case studies; some arguments are substantiated more convincingly than others. Intellectual histories predominate; apart from Grossmann's chapter, there is little substantial engagement with the everyday experiences and attitudes of German Jews in the colonies or of those involved in colonial governance. But there are limits to what one volume can do, and work in this area is in its infancy. That the book includes within its purview the pre-colonial period is a helpful expansion of the scope of discussion, as is the gesture towards material encounters beyond the metropole. The collation of the most important work on German Jews and colonialism into a single English-language volume also makes it easily accessible to interested scholars and students. This is a valuable contribution to a growing and stimulating field that is certain to encourage further research on a wider diversity of contexts.

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Like Snow in the Sun?: The German Minority in Denmark in Historical Perspective

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In comparison to other European regions, the German-Danish borderlands, with their respective Danish and German minorities, have received relatively scant attention in English-language scholarship. Despite two short but intense wars in the nineteenth century that redrew the regional boundaries, a dramatic plebiscite in 1920 that once again fractured the region, and a painful period of Nazi occupation that pitted neighbors against one another, the lands comprising the German federal state of Schleswig-Holstein and the former Danish County of South Jutland (known to its German minority as North Schleswig) have not generated the same level of interest evident in the literature addressing other contested European borderlands. When they are featured, the German-Danish borderlands typically appear, on the one hand, as the site of an exceedingly complex dispute amounting to a significant alteration for Danish history, a preamble in the emergence of the German nation-state, and an otherwise modest footnote in the history of modern Europe. On the other hand, they sometimes draw interest within the context of more recent events as an exemplary frontier, where the stability of the border and the absence of outright conflict may offer clues for other regions still struggling to achieve peace. In this second iteration, the