

**Review of Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman and Paul Lerner, eds., *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012, 242 pp., ISBN 978-0253002068**

BY BJÖRN KRONDORFER, NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY, USA

This edited volume is a result of the efforts of a working group on gender and German Jewish history, particularly a 2005 conference in San Diego, where the group tackled the theme of masculinity. The majority of the contributing authors are historians, most of them focusing on Jewish and German/European history, but they also include scholars from the disciplines of cultural studies, sociology, and psychiatry. Each chapter introduces a specific aspect of Jewish masculinity in Germany. With the exception of Chapter 1, which looks at the 17th-century masculinity of an Ashkenazi man, all others stay within the period of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This historical frame offers coherence to *Jewish Masculinities*, a volume which otherwise contains a diverse range of topics, each of them exemplifying the probing and investigating of the interrelated categories of 'German', 'Jew', and 'man'.

In the helpful Introduction, the three editors address the conceptual problematics of such a project, since each combination of terms – 'German Jew', 'Jewish man', 'Jewish-German masculinity', so on – operates within a culture that has complicated (and, at times poisoned) the relational quality between them. Can we say 'German Jew' without having to include the history of antisemitism that wanted to negate such pairing of terms? Should we think of 'Jewish men' in Germany as a difference to 'Jewish women' or a difference to 'German men'? Is 'Jewish-German masculinity' distinct from, say, Polish-Jewish masculinity, and if so, do we need to include national ideologies in the analysis of ideals of masculinity? How do we account for the tension between the *maskilim* (adherents to Jewish Enlightenment) and Eastern European ideals of masculinity – such as the *gibor* (hero) or the virtue of *Edelkayt* (gentleness) – that had to be negotiated by Jewish men as they moved between cultures?

The editors suggest that one way to address these complications is to pay attention to the normative effects of 'regimes of power' (2012: 5) that differentiate and discriminate between men and women, men and men, German and Jew. Since each categorical term (German; Jew; man) implies an Other – sometimes overtly, at other times subtly – it is important to remain attentive to the relational qualities that are ascribed to or imposed on subjects. 'The study of German Jewish masculinities', the editors state, 'forces a consideration of the operation of difference on several levels, as it interrogates the workings of regimes of both gender difference and Jewish difference in German history and historiography' (2012: 5).

Theoretical and historiographical challenges are further taken up in the Introduction. For one, the editors acknowledge Daniel Boyarin's work on Jewish masculinities in his book *Unheroic Conduct* (1997). The editors recommend that Boyarin's 'provocative and controversial claim' of a 'distinct Jewish gender order and a unique Jewish mode of masculinity' ought to be critically reevaluated by historians through 'empirical historical research' (2012: 3). The volume actually understands itself as offering such empirical research in response to Boyarin, an issue to which I will return in the end.

Second, the editors affirm David Biale's caution on not framing 'Jewish' history as distinct from the local cultures in which it evolved. Keeping this in mind, most contributors proceed in their analysis with an eye on both 'German history and Jewish history' so as to be able to 'reveal the rich and complex interrelationships between Jewish and non-Jewish worlds' (2012: 7).

Among the themes that emerge in the multifaceted volume is, for example, the question of honour and honour codes. Andreas Gotzman's chapter on Veith Kahn, who, in 17th-century Frankfurt, failed both in his economic ventures and marriage life, examines dishonourable masculinity. Kahn was called by his extended family a *shmendrik* (weak, stupid) and *schmuck* (contemptible) who brought *Schimpf* (dishonour) to the family and failed as a *baal habayit* (proper house father). Lisa Fetheringill Zwicker also looks at the issue of honour. She does so through the lens of Jewish fraternities in the Wilhelmine period (with forays into the Weimar Republic), arguing that these fraternities helped Jewish students not only to defend themselves against antisemitism but also to assert their manly self-respect.

Another theme in *Jewish Masculinities* relates to the question of physical strength as advocated most prominently by Max Nordau with his idea of creating a *Muskeljudentum* in order to counter charges of Jewish effeminacy. Both Etan Bloom and Sharon Gillerman's examples actually go beyond the geographical borders of Germany, with Bloom analysing of what he calls the 'modern Hebrew handshake' in Palestine/Israel, and Gillerman introducing a Jewish strongman who became a sensation in Poland and Central Europe. For Bloom, the emergence of the gesture of a manly handshake among Zionists is part of 'muscle Judaism'. For Gillerman, the public performances by Siegmund Breitbart, who, in the 1920s, stunned his audiences with his strength, are an intentional and ironic invention of a new Jewish masculinity. Called the *Eisenkönig* among non-Jews, he was admired among Yiddish speaking communities in Poland as *Shimson hagibor* (a modern Samson hero) and *unzer yiddisher gibor* (our Jewish hero).

Yet another theme that we can observe in the volume's contributions is the investigation of ambiguous and deviant masculinities. Sander Gilman

sheds light on the 'doubly alienated' (2012: 138) identity of a Jewish-German 'hermaphrodite' (the terminology used at the turn of the century), exemplified in the person of Karl M. Baer, who published his autobiography under the pseudonym 'N. O. Body' in 1907. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (currently director of Berlin's Center for Research on Antisemitism) introduces what she calls the 'soft manliness' (2012: 103) of the Jewish business man in Königsberg, Aron Liebeck. Liebeck, she writes, lived a thoroughly bourgeois life, yet in his autobiographical self-presentation he embraces a *Gefühlskult* that foregrounds emotions and manly courage, but rejects military values. Ann Goldberg investigates the ambiguous figure of Friedrich Gundolf, a literary scholar at the turn of the century, who tried to reconcile both his bohemian lifestyle with his belonging to the homosocial *Männerbund* around Stefan George as well as his conservative fondness for Wagner (his 'Jewish Wagnerianism', 2012, p. 186) with his love relationship to an emancipated woman, Elisabeth Salomon.

The three remaining chapters address separate issues pertinent to Jewish life in Germany. Benjamin Maria Baader demonstrates how in the 19th century Jewish rabbis in German speaking countries (from both the modern orthodox and reform movements) embraced the feminine spirit of Judaism. They participated in a larger trend of constructing a feminised bourgeois religiosity; Baader also wonders whether these rabbis (particularly Raphael Hirsch and Adolf Jellinek) may have inadvertently contributed to the image of an 'effeminate Jewish man' (2012: 64). Robin Judd asks whether the 19th century equation of masculinity with respectability, combined with the *Bildungsbürgertum's* fear of contagious diseases and bodily fluids, contributed to the controversy over circumcision and to the loss of moral respect for the *mohel* (ritual circumciser) and *shochet* (kosher butcher). Judith Gerson's chapter, finally, examines 'practices and expressions of masculinity' (2012: 210) among German Jewish men who became refugees when fleeing Europe after 1933.

What is missing in this volume – and the editors acknowledge this openly in their Introduction – is an investigation of Jewish masculinities in Germany during Hitler's dictatorship and in Nazi-occupied Europe during the Holocaust. Here, we can only wish that scholarship on masculinities, Jewish & German history, and Holocaust studies will eventually join forces to fill this gap in the current research.

*Jewish Masculinities* pays far more attention to the historical and cultural expressions of masculinity than to religious aspects. This focus may, perhaps, explain the slight disconnect between Daniel Boyarin's work (more located in religious studies) and the more historical empirical research of the contributing authors. Mostly, the criticism voiced toward Boyarin has to do with a binary that he sets up between a gentle and more effeminated Jewish masculinity and a hegemonic ideal of a strong, muscular Christian masculinity. Specific studies do not seem bear out such an idealised alternative of modern Jewish masculinities, as demonstrated, for example, in Zwicker's chapter on the honour code of student fraternities in Wilhelminian Germany; in Baader's chapter on the bourgeois gentility of 19th century rabbis; and in Gillerman's chapter on Breitbart's performances of a Jewish strongman. But Boyarin may not have intended his readings on counter-hegemonial Jewish masculinities to be empirically accurate for all historical instances. Instead, he may – at least to equal degree – have pursued an ethical-hermeneutical agenda that reclaims alternative, gender-bending

masculinities as they emerge in the contested historical process of cross-cultural conversations.

A few additional chapters with a sustained analysis of the impact of Judaism as religion on modern Jewish masculinities in Germany might have made this otherwise excellent volume a little more interesting for scholars in comparative religious studies, Judaic studies, *Religionswissenschaften*, and the emerging field of gender and theology.