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The Formation of a Modern Rabbi: The Life and Times of the Viennese Scholar and Preacher Adolf Jellinek by Samuel Joseph Kessler (review)

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as board games, illustrations, sets of colored engravings, party games, fashion accessories, and music boxes. During the turbulent times of the Napoleonic Wars, productions of the opera and its music became propagandistic vessels for both sides. Kate Hopkins's "Staging *The Magic Flute*" vividly illustrates the continued fluidity of the opera on stage throughout the decades, citing productions by Oskar Kokoschka, Marc Chagall, Maurice Sendak, and David Hockney, among others. More recent stagings exhibit greater interpretive deviation, filling the stage with clowns, Teletubbies, businessmen, and other imaginative transformations. The same is true for plot variations, for example, having the Queen and Sarastro murder each other or having Pamina and Tamino recover in hospital beds after escaping from a submerged car. Ultimately, Hopkins focuses on the productions by David McVicar (2003) and August Everding (1978), both of which maintained popularity through creative artistry while taking Schikaneder's libretto seriously.

This volume amply delivers on its promise of "engaging reading matter," and its extensive bibliographies for further reading provide an "indispensable" resource.

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Samuel Joseph Kessler, *The Formation of a Modern Rabbi: The Life and Times of the Viennese Scholar and Preacher Adolf Jellinek*. Providence: Brown University, 2022. 228 pp.

Adolf Jellinek (1821–1893), who served most prominently as Vienna's de facto chief rabbi from 1865 until his death, was indisputably one of the most important figures in modern Austrian Jewish history; his sermons and published works were read during his lifetime as far away as the United States. Today, however, his name is hardly known outside specialist academic circles. Samuel Joseph Kessler's intellectual biography makes a valuable contribution to remedying this, positing Jellinek as the "prime exemplar" (3) of a new kind of preacher-rabbi who embodied the transformation of Judaism in modernity and laid the foundations for the kind of congregation-oriented Judaism that characterizes especially Anglo-American Jewries in the present day.

Based on Kessler's religious studies dissertation, defended at the University

of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2016, this sleek and unillustrated volume is intensely textual in orientation: Endowed with an impressive twenty-six-page bibliography and emerging from a long-term research project conducted at American, German, and Israeli institutions, the work is concerned less with classic biographical data than with the larger nineteenth-century intellectual currents (both specifically Jewish and more broadly European) in which Jellinek moved and which he in turn synthesized in the service of a modern iteration of Judaism.

For a Jewish studies work, especially one written from a religious studies perspective, this biography is refreshing for the consistent manner in which it situates Jellinek's formation in the broader culture of the modernity developing in nineteenth-century Central Europe, especially the intellectual and political currents of the liberalist heyday. Rather than viewing Judaism as alien to and/or divorced from modern European culture, Kessler here demonstrates how Jellinek's brand of modern Judaism emerged in interactive conversation with the complex intellectual developments of the time, although the problematic and self-contradictory discourse of Jewish "acculturation," so common to the Jewish studies field, still abounds in this work. While broadly chronological in structure, the biography focuses consistently on Jellinek's intellectual and theological formation through the various waystations of his life: from his schooling in Habsburg Moravia to his studies in Leipzig, where he established himself as a seminal scholar in the burgeoning field of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and finally in his turn toward popular erudition in his role as preacher-rabbi in the growing Jewish community of Vienna, which by Jellinek's death had become one of the largest and most influential in the world.

The work's most laudable premise is simultaneously also its most weakly executed, however, as the contextualization of Jellinek's life in broader Central European history is in many respects sadly underdeveloped. In Chapter 6, for example, which deals with Jellinek's arrival in Vienna (the context with which I am most familiar), many mistakes and errors of interpretation become apparent, beginning with Kessler's erroneous claims that Leopoldstadt (the historic focal point of Jewish life in the city) lies "east" of the city center (the historic Leopoldstadt lies more to the north) or that it lay "on land formerly part of the private estates of the emperor" (this is confusing the Prater with the Leopoldstadt proper, 107). This was also not a "neglected outlying region" but one of the principal *Vorstädte* of the imperial capital since early modernity, and notably all *Vorstädte* lay outside of the defensive fortifications of the

historic city, so this topographical circumstance cannot so simply be read as a “metaphor” of the ostracism of Vienna’s Jewish population (109). Notably, the Nordbahnhof was also not “the main site for the deportation of Vienna’s Jewish community” (fn. 26, [111]); that infamy is held by the former Aspengartenbahnhof in the third district.

Following this flawed historical overview, the chapter closes with a discussion of Jelinek’s sermon at the inauguration of the Leopoldstädter Tempel, in which Kessler expends a long paragraph interpreting the reference to a “stone [...] from Zion’s holy and consecrated ground” as a “metaphor” for “God’s enduring presence in physical space” (118). One would expect a specialist work on Jelinek and the formation of Vienna’s Jewish community to know, since it is discussed in various published works in the field, that this was by no means a metaphor, but an explicit reference to an actual rock brought by the Jewish community functionary Ludwig August Frankl from Mount Zion in Jerusalem to be placed in the foundations of the new synagogue (a twin rock also brought by Frankl was placed under the Votivkirche, which was built at the same time). These are all embarrassing oversights for a work that explicitly aimed to foreground the historical context and are moreover compounded by manifold errors in citation and translation of German terms, which are sadly still common in English-language scholarship on Central European history (for example, one would expect a native English speaker to understand that *Wissenschaft* in the humanities context is not translatable as “science”).

Kessler claims in the introduction that “Central Europe” constitutes a “niche topic in the history of Judaism” in the “Anglophone world” (12), but does not himself engage with the significant body of scholarship emerging in this field in recent years, much of which has been published in English, for example citing Carl Schorske as the most recent work (1979!) to deal with the role of Jews in the emergence of modernist culture in Austria (104). As such, this work is itself sadly representative of the lack of reception or engagement with the field in some Anglophone scholarship, especially in the field of Jewish studies. This also explains some of the other questionable assumptions concerning Central European cultural history underlying this work, for example citing “Austrians” as one “people” alongside many others in Habsburg Vienna (including Jews as a separate “people,” [13]), which fails to recognize that “Austrianness” in the nineteenth century was an overarching category that was entirely open to all Habsburg citizens, including Jews, as Adolf Jelinek himself stated on many

occasions in his published sermons (see for example his *Reden bei verschiedenen Gelegenheiten*, [72–75]).

A final, but major, shortcoming in this work is the complete lack of attention given to the formation and history of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in Vienna in the nineteenth century, a uniquely unitary Jewish community organization, in which Jellinek played a decisive role and which in turn informs Jellinek's lifelong concern with maintaining the “*Einigkeit Israels*,” as he put it in an 1864 sermon (see *Sieben Zeit-Predigten*, [1]). This is sadly true of most scholarship in this field; the history of the IKG is evidently a work still waiting to be written.

Such shortcomings, of which there are many more in this work, are sadly disappointing given the otherwise promising tenets pursued here. Nevertheless, Kessler's book deserves credit for returning well-deserved attention to this formative Jewish thinker of nineteenth-century Central Europe, especially for the deep influence he exerted (albeit hitherto largely uncredited) in the formation of a modern style of Judaism that, as Kessler concludes, would go on to shape Anglo-American Jewries, which today encompass about half of the Jewish population worldwide. Even if a little unfortunate in its realization here, Kessler's core approach of viewing even inner-Jewish theological debates against the backdrop of broader global developments is absolutely commendable, and one can only hope this approach will be pursued more rigorously in Jewish studies research in the future.

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Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2023. 406 pp.

How did the Habsburg Empire establish itself as a legal sovereign entity in the nineteenth century, especially after it became a dual monarchy? How was it dissolved? And how were the successor states created? These are the fundamental questions that Natasha Wheatley raises in her legal history of Austria-Hungary in *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty*. The author rejects the notion that the