

Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur, ed. Dan Diner, Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, (Stuttgart – Weimar: Metzler, 2011-2017), 7 Voll.

by Ulrich Wyrwa

Jewish encyclopaedias – reference works in which information about Jewish lore is presented in alphabetical order – have a tradition dating back to the beginnings of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or Science of Judaism, in the 1800s. Moritz Steinschneider and David Cassel submitted the plan for a *Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums* in 1844; Jakob Hamburger published a *Real-Encyclopädie des Judentums* in three volumes during 1870-1901. In 1901 the first of ten volumes of the pioneering English-language *Jewish Encyclopedia* was published in New York; a similar project began publication in Russia shortly thereafter. 1927-1929 saw the publication of the *Jüdisches Lexikon* in German as a five-volume encyclopaedic handbook of Jewish culture and concepts. The initial volumes of the *Encyclopädia Judaica*, also in German, appeared in 1928. The whole was envisioned as a fifteen-volume compendium to complete publication in German within the next few years, but only the first ten volumes had actually been issued before the coming to power of the National Socialists put a stop to the project.

Publication resumed forty years later in Israel. The new English-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica* appeared in 26 volumes in 1971; a revised and expanded edition of this was published in 2006.

Another few years later, Dan Diner, former director of the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture in Leipzig, was commissioned by the Saxon Academy of Sciences to produce the first volume of an ambitious new reference work on Jewish history and culture. With the publication in 2017 of the seventh volume, the new project is now complete. Some five hundred authors have contributed to the new encyclopaedia, most of them from Germany, the USA or Israel. Only a small number are from other European countries, with two each from Russia and Poland, one from the Czech Republic, and three from Italy. In all, they have submitted over eight hundred entries on an approximate total of 4,200 pages. The chronological focus of the new *Encyclopaedia of Jewish History and Culture*, or EJGK, is on the period from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century, with occasional references to earlier times and to the present. Center stage is the era of secularization and the fundamental social changes which has also had a profound impact on all aspects of Jewish life in Europe and worldwide.

But the aim of this new instrument for navigating the “histories and cultures of the Jews,” as the introduction, using these deliberately pluralized forms, explains, was not to come up with yet another reference work structured in a familiar format with alphabetized headwords, names, terms or events.

The aim of the editorial staff working under the direction of Markus Kirchhoff was rather to do away with the conventional, the familiar, and the trite attaching to the terms and the buzzwords of Jewry’s life worlds. The means for achieving this was an “alienating approach,” making it possible to single out elements that are most significant and emblematic. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, a literary device based on evoking a sense of alienation rather than identity and empathy in the viewer, had originally been introduced by Bertold Brecht in the first half of the 20th century as a revolutionary way for epic theatre to proceed; it was now to be deployed in the compilation of an encyclopaedia. The objective was to stupefy, to astound, and to make curious.

The EJGK accordingly contains no biographical entries and no conventional headwords. It resorts to a different intricate system to compile its choice of entries. Alongside articles the introduction labels “factographic” are lemmas which, in Diner’s words, make use of “the mode of iconic figures of thought,” taking their bearings from loci of remembrance, a calque from “*lieux de mémoire*.”

The Encyclopaedia of Jewish History and Culture is, thus, no encyclopaedia in the conventional sense of the term. Anyone consulting this reference work without prior preparation is likely to be led astray, irritated, or astonished.

To benefit from the new reference work, readers must first familiarize themselves with its underlying concept and the principles guiding its organization and writing. To do this, it is indispensable to pore over the editor’s introduction as well as the project description written by the editor-in-chief, Markus Kirchhoff, and titled *Jüdische Kultur als europäische Tradition. Die ‚Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur‘ im Kontext*¹.

¹ In *Denkströme. Journal der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2 (2009): 192-205 [http://www.denkstroeme.de/heft-2/s_192-205_kirchhoff].

These prefatory texts spell out the systematic underpinnings of the EJGK, elucidating both the notion of “factographic” entries and the part of iconic contributions oriented toward *lieux de mémoire*.

The former is a concept borrowed from the French historian Pierre Nora, who used it to address the history of the French nation at a time of the disappearance of national history; the same principle informs the way Jewish history is approached in the EJGK. But as for the latter term, the concept of *lieu de mémoire* and its associations are left out of the introduction. The introduction also makes the apodictic announcement that keywords ending with *-ism* are not included. The encyclopaedia thus passes over in silence concepts which, as Richard Koebner wrote in 1953, “had a leading role in the shaping of political catchwords” and “provoked the greatest surge of emotions,” and which have also become extremely significant in connection with the Jewish *Lebenswelt* and historical experience.

Among the “factographic” headwords are the term “encyclopaedia” itself and terms such as *Alliance israélite universelle*, *Ansiedlungsrayon*, *Colleggio Rabbinico*, *Landjuden*, “historiography,” and “philosophy,” along with a large number of terms drawn from Jewish religious life such as “rabbi” and “rabbinical seminary,” as well as articles on Jewish legal traditions (the “*Zentrum alles Jüdischen*,” according to Diner) and terms connected to Jewish Studies and research in Jewish culture, such as the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* or the concept of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The “factographic” entries also include articles on events and historical developments such as the Auschwitz-trial, the Balfour Declaration, the Berlin Congress, the Dreyfus Affair, the Hep Hep riots, the Hilsner Affair, the Jewish census commissioned by the German War Ministry during the First World War, Cossack persecution, the New Deal, and the Slánský trial.

The “factographic” category also contains entries treating Jewish history as an element of European history as a whole, such as an entry on the Prussian Emancipation Edict of 1812 and terms pertaining to parliaments in the German Reich and the Habsburg Monarchy, as well as an entry on the People’s Front.

As mentioned, alongside the “factographic” entries, some of which ultimately prove quite conventional in their encyclopaedic format and structure, the EJGK contains articles on Jewish places of remembrance penned in the “mode of iconic figures of thought.” Headwords such as “Hebrew University,” “Leo Baeck Institute,” and “Paulskirche” are examples of perfect capture of the idea of *lieu de*

mémoire. But the aim here is selective and conceptual, dispensing with biographical headwords; the articles based on iconic figures of thought combine biography with the history of ideas. The reader thus comes across details of Alfred Döblin's biography in connection with "Alexanderplatz," the life of Theodor Herzl under "Altneuland," Walter Benjamin under "Angelus Novus," Primo Levi under "Atempause," and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in the article on the "Dialektik der Aufklärung." The entry on the Freimann Collection, the extensive Judaica holdings at the University Library in Frankfurt am Main, also provides biographical details about Aron Freimann, head librarian at Frankfurt City Library until 1933. However, the entry makes no mention of the fact that this impressive collection is now available online in its entirety (at <http://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann>). The lemma "Kabbala" makes reference exclusively to Gershom Scholem, the one on class consciousness centers solely on Georg Lukács, and the entry on "Lebensgeschichte" [Life History] is all about the autobiography of Salomon Maimon. "Mass" introduces Elias Canetti, and under "Mimesis" we read about Erich Auerbach. "*Nichtjüdischer Jude*" [Non-Jewish Jew] is entirely about Isaac Deutscher. Biographical detail also hides under entries such as "*Reine Rechtslehre*" describing the life of Hans Kelsen and "Reportage" the life of Egon Erwin Kisch.

Consistent adherence to its chosen principle of "alienating access" is an issue for EJGK. This comes to the fore especially in the very different modes of writing resorted to in the entries concerned with cities. Thus "Algiers," to cite one example, does not go into the history of Algerian Jewry or the Jewish community of the city of Algiers, but instead informs the reader that the "administrative seat of the French department of Algiers... from 1940 was under the control of the Vichy regime." "Antwerp," by contrast, discusses the special features of Jewish Antwerp, and "Birobidzhan" is about the area in the eastern Soviet Union declared an autonomous Jewish region in 1934. "Budapest" begins with the proclamation of the Soviet republic in 1919, goes on to a brief outline of the history of the rise of the city, and concludes with additional detail about the Soviet republic and its suppression. Somewhat differently, "Damascus" is completely taken up with the blood libel of 1840 known as the Damascus affair and the international response which it provoked, while "Hamburg" is a classic-style report on the Sephardic Jews of the city.

The uninitiated reader is also bound to be disappointed by the entries under "Mecca" and "Mexico City." The former is as uninformative about the city in Saudi Arabia as the latter is about the capital of Mexico. Rather than provide any

information about the area where Islam originated, “Mecca” is an article about *The Road to Mecca*, an autobiographical novel by Leopold Weiss; no less surprisingly, “Mexico City” elaborates on the fate of the group of exiled German communists who clustered around Paul Merker during 1941-1946 in Mexico.

Even so, other city name entries do put forth the anticipated kind of summary overviews of the history of their cities’ Jewish communities. Such are the articles on Johannesburg, Marrakesh, Metz, Posen, and Cracow. In “Krakow,” the history of the town’s Jews unfurls in due chronological order, beginning from the earliest settlements and including the brief period when Cracow enjoyed the status of a free city, following this up with notes about Cracow under Habsburg rule until the end of WWI. Similarly, “Leipzig” also sketches an outline of the history of the Jews in the trading town from the earliest traces of a local Jewish community through the 19th century and the Weimar Republic, to close with the destruction of the community under the Nazis. The article on Łódź covers the history of the Polish industrial city with its large Jewish working class, and then goes on to the Holocaust and the post-war period. Some city name entries focus on the special significance these cities had for Jewish culture and history overall; thus “Odessa,” where the city is cast primarily as a center of Jewish writers and periodicals.

Other cities, by contrast, are discussed exclusively in terms of their significance in connection with the Holocaust: Lisbon is a vital port of refugee transit, Munich is DP grounds in the immediate post-war period, Nuremberg is the city of NSDAP Reich Party Conventions and the International Military Tribunal during the Nuremberg trials, and the article on Kovno, after a brief summary of the pre-WWII history of Lithuania’s Jews, centers on the murder of Lithuanian and German Jews during 1941-1943, to conclude with some post-war notes.

Other entries in the same cluster take up the history of Jewish migration, such as the entries on Montevideo and Melbourne. “London” and “New York” have the same theme as a centerpiece, accompanied, respectively, by images of the Jewish East End and the Lower East Side.

The entries on Prague, Riga, Thessaloniki, Tangier, Tunis, Vienna, and Vilnius offer substantial, thoroughly informative presentations of the Jewish history of their cities. Of urban Italy, the cities of Mantua, with its flourishing intellectual Jewish life of the early modern period, Livorno, Trieste, and Venice have been included in the EJGK, but not Rome, despite this city’s being home to the oldest Jewish community in Europe.

Some of the entries under city names are perfect instances of the *lieu de mémoire* principle in that the toponyms function as references to landmark historical events associated with them – thus making them loci of remembrance for Jewish history. Most of the events are pogroms; this is the case of Kishinev, the urban setting in Bessarabia where anti-Jewish violence erupted in April 1903, leaving forty-nine Jews dead and hundreds more injured; Lviv, the scene of pogroms during the First World War; the Romanian city of Iași, where almost ten thousand Jews were murdered in 1941; Jedwabne, the site of a pogrom in north-eastern Poland in July 1941; and the Polish city of Kielce, where Holocaust survivors were collectively murdered in July 1946. The entries in this list do not concentrate on the historical reconstruction of the details of the pogroms to the exclusion of all other information; thus the entry on Iași also contains a brief overview of the history of the Jews in Romania.

“Warsaw,” on the other hand, contains only a few lines about the city’s Jewish community prior to 1939; the article is mostly a study of the German occupation during WWII, thus occupying a middle ground between the “factographic” and the “iconic” categories. Many other toponym entries are echoes of significant events connected with the Holocaust; thus “Ravensbrück,” “Shanghai,” “Sobibór” and “Treblinka,” to cite a few.

“Stalingrad,” by contrast, is not an article about the city on the Volga or the WWII Battle of Stalingrad; the entry is devoted instead to the literary reworking of the Second World War in Vasily Grossman’s epic *Life and Fate*.

Entries connected with music produce a *Verfremdungseffekt* similar to the one evoked by some of the place name articles. Alongside pieces on topics such as “cantor” or “organ,” which address the role of music in religious life, “Klezmer” adheres to a conventional enough type of encyclopaedia format in describing the development of this secular genre of wedding and festival Eastern European Jewish music up to the time of its most recent revival. Strangely enough, the article on “Music” pure and simple is taken up exclusively with Richard Wagner’s anti-Semitic essay on “*Das Judentum in der Musik*.” The lexicon also contains an extensive piece titled “Misuk,” an artificial word coined by Bertold Brecht to designate the use of music in epic theatre. The history of jazz, which, according to the EJGK text, has been largely “shaped by the contribution of Jewish musicians,” is also treated with encyclopaedic breadth, from the emergence of jazz in the USA to European jazz and the post-WWII years. The piece titled “*Kabarett*” in the German text describes the development of the cabaret from its beginnings in

Berlin and Vienna in the early 20th century to the time of the Weimar Republic and the First Republic of Austria, and concludes by taking a glance at the role it had in concentration camps and in exile. “*Operette*” is similarly encyclopaedic in extent and scope, in addition to posing the question about the “Jewish legacy” in this musical genre. There is an entry on the “*Offenbachiaden*,” which treats of the musical theater of Jacques Offenbach; “Polytonality” is largely about the French composer Darius Milhaud. “Mediterranean Style” describes the musical orientation of Jewish composers in 1930s Palestine and in Israel in the 1950s. The entry “*Matthäuspasion*,” on the other hand, deals solely with the rediscovery of this one of Johann Sebastian Bach’s works by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and its re-performance in 1829, while “Palestine Orchestra” describes the history of the orchestra founded in 1936 through the efforts of Bronisław Hubermann, which became the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra after the birth of the State of Israel in 1948.

The unprepared reader will be astonished to see that “Anti-Semitism” in the first volume of the EJGK merely references the lemma “Conspiracy” to be found in the last volume, but not “*Judenfeindschaft*,” also included in the EJGK and containing a concise historical overview of hostility toward Jews from antiquity to the 19th century. Leafing through the first volume, the reader comes across “*Berliner Anti-Semitismusstreit*” [Berlin Anti-Semitism Controversy], another entry unreferenced elsewhere under any of the obviously related headwords. The sixth volume includes an entry on “*Verschwörung*” [Conspiracy], written by the editor, Dan Diner, and outlining the history of the “anti-Semitism” as a modern neologism. Diner emphasizes the secular character of anti-Semitism in contrast to the “theologically underpinned traditional hostility towards Jews.” According to Diner, the background to the new kind of anti-Jewish hostility was the “misunderstood rejections” of the social upheavals of the 19th century, leading to inventions about Jews and conspiracy-theoretical imaginings.

A number of headwords are problematic in various ways. Thus the “Enlightenment” lemma, which gives neither detail about the diversity of the European Enlightenment movement nor insight into the fundamental significance it had for Jewish history in Europe. Nor does the lemma note the fact that European Jews continued to adhere to Enlightenment principles even after it had been dismissed as outdated or was mocked by non-Jewish intellectuals. The entry limits itself instead to a consideration of anti-Jewish statements to be found in Voltaire’s writing, but without placing them in the context of Voltaire’s general criticism of religion. The opportunity is thus lost to conceptualize the

Enlightenment – in a way befitting the EJGK’s self-proclaimed systematic approach – as a locus of remembrance for Jewish history.

Similarly, the entry on “Europe” is largely made up of ideas about being European, and does not address either the problem of Europe as a locus of Jewish history or the concept of Europe in Jewish historiography. This despite the fact that EJGK as a whole was conceived – and is still thought of – as a European project, as is emphatically pointed out by Diner, the EJGK editor, and despite the fact that Diner – who, incidentally, is not the author of the entry – has published in-depth essay discussions of the meaning of Europe for Jewish history.

The editor’s summary announcement, in the introduction to the first volume, about excluding all *-isms* fails to be lived up to: besides “Cubism” and “Nationalism,” there are entries on “Pluralism” and “Realism.” But in substance the EJGK’s self-proclaimed exclusion of *-isms* is not actually violated thereby, since “Nationalism” is primarily a bio-bibliographical and historical piece about Hans Kohn, “Pluralism” comprises a similar-structured entry on Horace Kallen, and Hans. J. Morgenthau, a political scientist, forms the focus of “Realism.”

While the EJGK’s third volume includes, under “Holocaust,” a substantial essay on intellectual history and the evolution of concepts, the fifth volume contains the entry “*Schoa*” (corresponding to “Shoah” in English spelling), which makes mention only of the film of the same name, made by Claude Lanzmann. “*Judenfrage*” [The Jewish Question], by contrast, deals exclusively with the work of Karl Marx, but not with the pamphlet authored under this title by Bruno Bauer, the proto-anti-Semitic text that Marx roundly criticized.

To round out the alphabet: “*Żydokomuna*” [Jewish Commune] belongs among the factographic entries. The lemma, tracing the use of the anti-Semitic catchword first coined among the nationalists and the clerics of Poland after the Russian Bolshevik Revolution and then widely used in Europe, concludes the sixth volume of the EJGK.

All in all, this encyclopaedia, which refuses to be an encyclopaedia, is a reference work more appropriate for aimless browsing than for targeted searches. Anyone consulting the EJGK in the hope of quickly obtaining reliable answers to specific questions is likely to be misled by the EJGK’s organizing principles, and easily confused. The outcome, an alienation effect beyond the project’s original

intention, will usually combine surprise discovery on topics not previously thought about with a sense of frustration about issues one is actually researching.

How meaningful or productive can alienation of this kind be in a reference work? This is a question for readers to answer on their own. Considering the peculiar conception underlying the structure of the EJGK, the practical value of this encyclopaedia derives largely from the complete index provided in the last volume; this is where any attempt to use this encyclopaedia should begin. The index contains both a list of all EJGK articles and a register of all illustrations and maps; most important, it provides a register of people's names 209 pages long, a local index of 86 pages, and a 256-page subject index. A must for a reader looking for specific information.

But anyone prepared to wander along the expanse of Jewish lore like a visitor taking a leisurely stroll through the streets and squares of a great city, or wanting to be surprised by the "complex configurations [...] of interwoven perspectives," as the editor puts it in his introduction to the first volume, can well enter a maze of adventure and discovery in the volumes of the EJGK.

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