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# Was There a Habsburg Jewish Experience?‡

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**Abstract**

There are any number of arguments against the idea that it is possible to write the history of Habsburg Jews, or even to locate a common, coherent, Jewish experience in the Habsburg lands. These include the inherent disunity of the empire itself, the geographic dispersion of its Jewish population, and the multiplicity of legal jurisdictions under which Jews lived. This essay nevertheless makes the case for a Habsburg Jewish experience that surpassed differences in geography, legal jurisdiction, local culture. The Habsburg monarchy itself, in its quest for imperial expansion, administrative and legal reform, and social control, had much to do with this process. So, too, did the consolidation of an Ashkenazi rabbinic leadership that was both authoritative and distinctive to Central Europe, and the laying down of an intricate network of cross-regional family and communal ties, which themselves were partly a response to repressive state legislation. Jews in the Habsburg Empire moved about, reassembled and regrouped in ever new ways, while maintaining an overarching structure of human connection.

**Keywords:** Jews; Habsburg Empire; Rabbinic culture; Familiantengesetze; Normalschulen; Jellinek family; migration; Moravia; Hungary; Edicts of Toleration

## Can One Speak of "Habsburg" Jewish History?

Imagine, if you will, a collage of photographs from the last two centuries of Jewish life in the Habsburg Empire. In it we can make out a graduating class of the Bais Yaakov school for Jewish girls, founded in Kraków in 1917; Jewish attendees at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest in 1900; the Galician Haskalah scholar Nahman Krochmal (1785–1840); the Jewish activist and feminist Bertha Pappenheim (who also became famous as a patient of the Viennese neurophysiologist Josef Breuer under the pseudonym "Anna O."); Sigmund Freud's examining room at Berggasse 19 in Vienna; the Talmudic academy of Moses Sofer (1762–1839), one of the creators of modern "Ultra-Orthodoxy," in Pressburg (Pozsony/Bratislava); Franz Kafka at his writing desk in his parents' apartment on Pařížská street in Prague; and Adolf Jellinek (1821–93), the modern "preacher" and later chief rabbi of Vienna, in full academic regalia wearing a neatly folded prayer shawl. Before our eyes, then, stands a fragmented landscape divided by region, language, religious practice, culture, and politics; a panoply of difference and diversity; an implicit "no" to the question posed in the lecture's title: was there a Habsburg Jewish experience?

One can easily enumerate the reasons why it would be difficult, if not impossible, to locate a coherent, collective Habsburg Jewish history. In fact, the editors of the most recent issue of *Pardes: Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies in Germany*, devoted to "Intersections Between Jewish Studies and Habsburg Studies," are clear on this point. "The very complexity of Habsburg Central Europe," they write, "both in synchronic and diachronic perspective precludes any singular historical narrative of

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'Habsburg Jewry.'"[1] To test this statement, I have done online searches for books devoted to a survey of Habsburg Jewish history. Not counting Josef von Wertheimer's 1842 classic, *Die Juden in Österreich* (which I will not count, as it does not include Hungary and is mainly concerned with law), I found but one book: William McCagg's *A History of Habsburg Jews*.[2] Interestingly, it is quite compact—fewer than 300 pages, including notes, bibliography, and index. McCagg manages to achieve this control by narrowing his thematic focus to what he calls "assimilation"—a term he defines as the creation of a Habsburg Jewish bourgeoisie—and by limiting his attention in any given chapter to a paradigmatic regional example. The book is an admirable achievement, certainly, but a singular example (in the English language, at least); and this, in contrast to several magisterial surveys that do exist for Habsburg history writ large, works by C. A. Macartney, Robert A. Kann, and, most recently, Pieter M. Judson.[3]

What, then, are the main arguments *against* the possibility of writing of a Habsburg Jewish history, or even the notion of a common, coherent, Jewish experience in the Habsburg lands? To state the obvious, the Habsburg monarchy never constituted a unified or integrated whole. It also expanded over time as territories were attached to dynastic holdings or, later, to a growing monarchy: Lower Austria; the Bohemian Crown Lands; the Kingdom of Hungary (following the Battle of Mohács in 1526, then through a series of victories over the Ottoman Empire); Galicia (from the first and third partitions of Poland-Lithuania); Bukovina (from the Ottoman Empire in 1774–75); Tuscany (between 1737 and 1859); and so on. The Jewish populations of these regions were just that: regional populations, divided at times by language, religious leadership, social aspirations, and historical experiences—as well as geography. Note, however, that regional distinctiveness did not prevent the historians mentioned above from attempting the more complicated task of writing a general Habsburg history. Admittedly, there was little in the way of monarchy-wide legislation regarding Jewish life. With few exceptions, Jews lived under local and regional jurisdictions until the period of enlightened absolutism and modern state formation in the late eighteenth century. And when Joseph II issued his famous "Edicts of Toleration" in the 1780s, he did so separately for his various lands and kingdoms: Bohemia first, followed by Lower Austria, Trieste, Moravia, Hungary, and ending—in its most radical formulation—in Galicia.[4] It was not until the revolutionary years of 1848–49, followed by the decade of neo-absolutism, that Jews fell generally under a single legislation encompassing the empire as a whole.[5]

If we shift the focus to Jewish culture and society, does the picture change? Was there a unitary Jewish religious culture? A common language? Hebrew, certainly, for prayer and study. Yiddish perhaps, but not all Habsburg Jews were Yiddish speakers in, say, the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries (think of Trieste, Venice, and the Sephardic population of the Balkan Peninsula). There were also numerous dialects of Yiddish, and, in any event, the use of Yiddish fell away in many urban Jewish communities in the nineteenth century as Habsburg Jews accultured to one or more languages of state. As for religious culture, what did the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia have in common with their "cousins" in Galicia,

[1]Björn Siegel, Mirjam Thulin, and Tim Corbett, eds., *PaRDeS: Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien eV/Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies in Germany*, "Intersections between Jewish Studies and Habsburg Studies," 29 (2024).

[2]Josef Ritter von Wertheimer, *Die Juden in Österreich, vom Standpunkte der Geschichte, des Rechts und des Staatsvortheils*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1842); William O. McCage, *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington, IN, 1989).

[3]C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790–1918* (New York, 1969); Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526–1918* (Berkeley, 1974); Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

[4]The Familiants laws of 1726–27, which will be discussed below, while imperial in origin and authority, applied only to Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. See Ivo Cerman, "Familiants Laws," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/163); Michael L. Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution: The Jews of Moravia in the Age of Emancipation* (Stanford, 2010), *passim*; and Miller, "Absolutism and Control: Jews in the Bohemian Lands in the Eighteenth Century," in *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands*, ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Philadelphia, 2021), 65–73. For the *Toleranzpatente*, see Michael K. Silber, "Josephinian Reforms," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/175); Joseph Karniel, *Die Toleranzpolitik Kaiser Josephs II*. (Gerlingen, 1985); Derek Beales, *Joseph II*, Vol. 2, *Against the World, 1780–1790* (Cambridge, 2009); and Miller, "Absolutism and Control," 79–83.

[5]Hillel J. Kieval, "Unequal Mobility: Jews, State, and Society in an Era of Contradictions, 1790–1860," in *Prague and Beyond: Jews in the Bohemian Lands*, ed. Kateřina Čapková and Hillel J. Kieval (Philadelphia, 2021), 114–19; Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 188–92, 221–38.

Bukovina, or Upper Hungary (today's Slovakia)? Religious reform, growing secularism, the loss of mastery of Hebrew and Jewish texts, and various forms of linguistic acculturation: all these developments contributed to the increasing fragmentation of Jewish culture and identity in the monarchy.

The rise of competing national mobilizations in the second half of the nineteenth century, based on vernacular—as opposed to imperial—languages, and the *Ausgleich* of 1867, which created a "Dual Monarchy" named Austria-Hungary—two legislatively and bureaucratically distinct halves—constituted two final disintegrating factors. The former may have destroyed whatever linguistic unity there had been among Jews up to that time, bringing pressure to bear on Jewish families and individuals to alter well-worn patterns of acculturation and, in effect, distancing Jewish communities from one another even as they prompted new strategies of integration and new visions for the future. The awarding of full political autonomy to the Kingdom of Hungary—outside of military and foreign affairs—followed by limited regional autonomy in Galicia and Croatia, once more created separate political and legal spheres in Habsburg Jewish life, seemingly moving Habsburg Jews a few steps closer to premodern conditions.[6]

The nay sayers appear to have the upper hand. Nevertheless, perhaps foolishly and in the face of some very good arguments, I prefer to side with the defense, that is to say, with the proposition that one can indeed make the case for a Habsburg Jewish experience that is more coherent than fragmentary. In a superb chapter, "The Making of Habsburg Jewry in the Long Eighteenth Century," which appeared a few years back in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Michael Silber writes that, although it took a while for the various Jewish sectors of the early modern Habsburg monarchy to meld into some kind of whole, meld it did. "Certain trends," Silber points out, "could be discerned during this period, drawing the diverse parts together to form a 'Habsburg' Jewry: a shared sense of dynastic loyalty; then patriotic sentiments about the land and its inhabitants; and, eventually, even adumbrations of modern nationalism."[7] What, then, produced "Habsburg" Jewry, and what were its core features?

In the early modern period, I would argue, Habsburg Jewish identity was built on two social and cultural foundations: the consolidation of an Ashkenazi rabbinic leadership that was both authoritative and distinctive to Central Europe, and the laying down of an intricate network of cross-regional family and communal ties. Rabbinic institutions—Jewish courts, schools, and academies, as well as the transnational moral authority enjoyed by a select number of individual rabbis—functioned as an overarching cultural netting, one that could be mapped onto (though not subsumed by) the boundaries of the monarchy. These institutions operated in such a way as to break down local and regional barriers to communication. It achieved this, first of all, through the peripatetic movement of students, rabbinic candidates, and local religious figures, movement which paradoxically helped to connect the places where their feet came temporarily or more permanently to rest.

The professional biographies of some of the more famous rabbinic office holders in the Bohemian Lands are cases in point. Take, as an example, the career of Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525–1609), the famous "Maharal" of Prague, whose name came to become associated (ahistorically, as it turns out) with the Golem of popular legend. His career spanned most of the sixteenth century and was marked by periods of significant travel: from Poznań (his home town) to Prague where he married the daughter of a wealthy merchant; from Prague to Nikolsburg (Mikulov) in Moravia, where he served as chief rabbi for two decades (1553–73); back to Prague for ten years or so, where he established a *kloyz* or private house of learning; on to Poznań for a brief sojourn and finally back to Prague in 1588, where he held the position of chief rabbi until his death in 1609.[8] Or the career of Ezekiel Landau (1713–93), one of Europe's two most influential rabbis in the second half of the eighteenth century (the other being Elijah Gaon of Vilna). Born in Opatów, Poland, Landau attended yeshiva in Brody, where he would also be appointed *dayan*

[6]Hence, the absence of integrative histories of Austro-Hungarian Jewry? Consider the chapter titles for the post-1850 period in McCagg's *History of Habsburg Jews*: "Galician Deadlock," "Hungarian Success," "Vienna Confused."

[7]Michael K. Silber, "The Making of Habsburg Jewry in the Long Eighteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 7, *The Early Modern World, 1500–1815*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge, 2019), 763.

[8]On Judah Loew ben Bezalel, see: Alexandr Putík, ed., *Path of Life: Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, ca. 1525–1609* (Prague, 2009); Elchanan Reiner, ed., *Maharal: aḳdamot: pirḳei ḥayim, mishnah, hashpa'ah* (Jerusalem, 2015).

(rabbinical judge) at the age of thirty-one. In 1755, following a brief sojourn in Jampol (Yampil) in today's Ukraine, Landau was appointed rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva in Prague, positions that he would occupy until his death in 1793. Across the span of his long professional life, Landau loomed large as a magisterial figure whose writings and legal opinions, Talmudic training, and communal regulation enjoyed tremendous authority throughout Central and Eastern Europe.[9]

The consolidation of rabbinic culture in Habsburg Central Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with a parallel decline of *yeshivot* in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Michael Silber argues that the center of gravity in Talmudic studies *shifted* during these years to the lands of the Habsburg monarchy and to a few communities to the west. "But it was Prague, above all," he writes, "which attracted the largest number of students from all over Europe to attend its various *yeshivot* and to hear lectures from such charismatic academy heads as Abraham Broda, Jonathan Eibeschütz, and Ezekiel Landau." By the early nineteenth century, "when the *yeshiva* had all but disappeared in Germany and had begun to decline in Prague … it was Pressburg that rose to pre-eminence during the incumbency of Moses Sofer … as the largest and most important *yeshiva* in Europe."[10]

Rabbinic leaders and their institutions, then, both consolidated religious authority and expanded family networks across large parts of the monarchy. An equally important factor—external to Jewish control—turns out to have been an unintended consequence of royal legislation in the early eighteenth century whose goal had been to *prevent* Jewish population growth in the Bohemian Lands. The so-called Familiants Laws (*Familiantengesetze*) of 1726–27 were designed to control, if not reduce, the Jewish population in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia by putting an absolute cap on the number of Jewish households allowed legally to reside there. Initially, the laws limited the number of Jewish family heads in Bohemia to 8,451, in Moravia to 5,106, and in Silesia to 119, based on the recommendations of a "population reduction commission." They remained in effect, with some modifications, until 1848.[11]

As Michael Miller points out, the Familiants Laws "wreaked havoc on community life, tore apart families, [and] reinforced social hierarchies." The one thing they did *not* seem to do very effectively, however, was actually control Jewish population growth. According to official statistics, the Jewish population in Moravia (including Silesia) nearly doubled between 1754 and 1848 (from just over 20,000 to just under 40,000) while in Bohemia the growth was even more impressive (from 29,000 in 1754 to more than 75,000 in 1848). Of course, the rate of growth in the Jewish population would probably have been even higher had the government not tried to control it. But there were monarchy-wide consequences to these restrictions that were unforeseen by their royal enactors.[12]

To me, what stands out most about the *Familiantengesetze* are the *strategies* Jewish families adopted *in response* to them. In principle, only the eldest son in a Jewish family had the right to inherit his father's Familiants number, marry, and establish a family of his own. Jewish girls might be expected (or hope) to marry a male number holder, but younger sons were, for the most part, out of luck.[13] One might try to

[9]Landau's highly influential work, *Noda bi-Yehudah* (Known in Judah, a reference to Psalms 76:2) a collection of some 850 legal responsa written over forty-eight years, was perhaps the most influential Jewish legal work of the eighteenth century. On Landau, see Pavel Sládek, "Ezekiel Landau (1713–1793): A Political Rabbi," in *The Enlightenment in Bohemia: Religion, Morality, and Multiculturalism*, ed. Ivo Cerman, Rita Krueger, and Susan Reynolds (Oxford, 2011), 233–51, and Maoz Kahana, *Meha-Noda' bi-Yehudah le-Hatam Sofer: Halakhah ve-hagut le-nokhah etgarei ha-zeman* (Jerusalem, 2016).

[10]Silber, "The Making of Habsburg Jewry," 773.

[11]Cerman, "Familiants Laws" and Miller, "Absolutism and Control," cited above.

[12]Miller, "Absolutism and Control," 71.

[13]As Miller explains, the Familiants Laws "created a fairly rigid hierarchy" within Jewish families. At the top of the pyramid were Familiants and their first-born sons, followed by an even smaller number of "supernumeraries." These "supernumeraries" received permission to marry, but they could not pass this privilege on to their sons. Next came the "later-born sons," that is, the second-, third-, and fourth-born sons of Familiants who were forbidden to marry but could still apply for a Familiants number if one became available, for example, upon the death of a Familiant with no male heirs. At the bottom of the pyramid were the illegitimate sons—males born out of wedlock or to couples whose marriages were not recognized by the state. They were not even eligible to apply for vacant familiants numbers." (Miller, "Absolutism and Control," 71–72).

evade the oversight of the state by entering into an unsanctioned marriage, but the punishment for breaking the Familiants Laws could be severe. It appears that in Bohemia most Jewish younger sons spread out to the countryside, seeking refuge in the village properties of the nobility, while a minority migrated to nearby Hungarian and Polish territories. State supervision tended to be stronger in Moravia, where the majority of Jews lived in market towns. Here, importantly, Jewish sons for the most part chose to migrate to Hungary, most of whose territory had been freed from Ottoman occupation only at the end of the seventeenth century. These Moravian Jewish migrants settled mainly in northwest Hungary, not far from their places of origin. In the Slovakian highlands, which Hungarian Jews came to call Oberland, they constituted—in the words of Michael Silber—"a mirror twin of Moravian Jews." Some 30,000 to 35,000 Jews migrated to Hungary in the half-century following 1735, rendering the northwest region of the kingdom virtually a Moravian Jewish colony.[14]

In a parallel fashion, a wave of Jewish migrants from southeastern Poland (Galicia following the partitions) began to settle Hungary's northeastern counties: about 25,000 before the mid-1780s; another 45,000 by the 1830s.[15] As for what would become in 1873 unified Budapest, it was not until 1783 that Jewish settlement was allowed in its commercial core, Pest. Yet in subsequent decades the numbers of Jews ballooned, reaching close to 13,000 by 1850—primarily the result of migration from the nearby countryside—making Pest the largest Jewish community in the kingdom. By 1869, the Jewish population of Pest stood at more than 39,000 and would only grow exponentially from there.[16]

Finally, in addition to elite rabbinic culture and long stretches of internal migration, it was the Josephinian enlightened absolutist reforms of the late eighteenth century and the democratic movements of 1848/49 that contributed most to the creation of a Habsburg Jewish experience. I mentioned near the start of this article that Joseph II issued his Edicts of Toleration for Jews separately for each of his various realms. This made sense as an acknowledgment of the distinct political and administrative structures and legal systems of the Habsburg lands. But the reformist decrees of the 1780s—with a few important exceptions—imposed a more or less uniform set of regulations on Jewish education, courts, communal structure, occupational choices, naming practices, and military service: reforms that could, in theory, apply to the monarchy as a whole, or wherever Jews were permitted to reside. In short order Jewish *Normalschulen*, which taught an approved curriculum in the German language, were established throughout the monarchy: one each in Trieste and Görz, twenty-five in Bohemia, eighteen in Moravia, thirty-six in Hungary, and ninety-three in Galicia (rising to more than 120).[17] In tandem with these state-sponsored schools, the children in wealthier families were taught privately, but no less assiduously, in the home in European languages, mathematics, history, and literature. The *Normalschulen* themselves, Michael Silber writes, functioned to help integrate the Habsburg monarchy's various Jewries.

> Communities noted the precedents in the curricula set by Trieste and Prague and accepted or rejected them. Moreover, the circulation of teachers moving from Bohemia and Moravia to Galicia and Hungary, and some going on to the German lands also served to create a network of young Jewish intelligentsia. For those teachers—perhaps most of them—who were *maskilim*, the Josephinian school system gave them opportunities, resources, and authority to carry out at least a truncated vision of the Haskalah.[18]

[14]Michael K. Silber, "Hungary before 1918," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/13); Silber, "Map 24. The Beginnings of Hungarian Jewry: Eighteenth Century," in *Atlas of Modern Jewish History*, ed. Evyatar Friesel (New York, 1990), 35.

[15]Silber, "Hungary before 1918." Michael Silber has shown that there was no great influx of Jews to Budapest before 1900. In 1869, for example, only about 5 percent of Pest Jews were of Galician origin. Miklós Konrád, meanwhile, writes that the total number of Galician-born Jews living in Hungary in 1900 was 15,749, representing 1.89 percent of the Jewish population at the time. Miklós Konrád, "A galiciai zsidó bevándorlás mitosza," *Századok* 152, no.1 (2018): 31–60, here 56.

[16]Michael K. Silber, "Budapest," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/1411). See also Howard N. Lupovitch, *Transleithanian Paradise: A History of the Budapest Jewish Community, 1738–1938* (West Lafayette, 2022).

[17]Silber, "Josephinian Reforms."

[18]Silber, "Josephinian Reforms." On the German-Jewish schools in Bohemia, see Louise Hecht, *Ein jüdischer Aufklärer in Böhmen: Der Pädagoge und Reformer Peter Beer (1758–1838)* (Cologne, 2008). On Galicia, see Dirk Sadowski, *Haskalah und Lebenswelt: Herz Homberg und die jüdischen Schule in Galizien 1782–1806* (Göttingen, 2010).

Sometimes we miss the generative effects of small details, such as the decision to have the language of instruction in Jewish schools (with the exception of Trieste), or the language of communal record keeping and contracts, be German. This move may have seemed obvious and trivial to royal officials. Yiddish, the "Jewish dialect," was understood to be a corrupt form of German in any case. It needed to be "improved," raised to the level of standard German, and, of course, no longer written in Hebrew characters so that the state could properly oversee (surveil) Jewish behaviors. Now, all Jews in the monarchy would speak, read, and write the same language, the language of state. Gradually, but increasingly, laws affecting Jewish communities and individuals would become more uniform and less discriminatory.

Admittedly, the Revolutions of 1848, which spread throughout the Habsburg monarchy, produced uneven results for Jews. The constitutional document that was being considered by the revolutionary parliament in Kremsier (Kroměříž) in April 1848 would have established freedom of religion and conscience, the right of Jews to acquire property and to practice any trade or occupation, and full equality under the law. The imposed constitution of 1849, while more reserved regarding Jewish rights, nevertheless proclaimed the equality of Jews and Christians in matters of public and private law. Significantly, had the March Constitution been fully put into practice, it might have applied to all the monarchy—Hungary included.[19] Alas, it was revoked in 1851, but the principles of the free practice of religion and equality under the law (with some exceptions) appear to have been maintained in practice, with no new restrictions being placed on Jews. In fact, in the decades following the revocation of the 1849 constitution and before the achievement of formal emancipation, some Jews appear to have enjoyed political rights in their local municipalities.[20] Imperial decisions in 1860 removed the last remaining barriers to occupational choice and economic activity, to the movement of Jews throughout the monarchy, and to the ownership of most forms of real property. Formal emancipation, however, a by-product of the 1867 *Ausgleich*, was instituted separately for Cisleithania (1867) and Hungary (1868).[21]

The period of absolutist and constitutional reforms coincided with additional territorial expansion involving unprecedentedly large Jewish populations. The annexation of southeastern Poland-Lithuania to the Habsburg monarchy in 1772 and 1795—territories that were renamed Galicia—and of Bukovina in 1774 not only added huge numbers of Jews to the monarchy (449,000 for Galicia in 1857; about 14,000 for Bukovina) but extended and intensified early modern patterns of migration and communication. Over the next century, Galicia would overtake Moravia as the source of most Jewish migration to Hungary, while Bohemian officials complained bitterly in the 1830s and 1840s of the uncontrolled presence in Prague of *bocherim*—yeshiva students (presumably not native to Bohemia) working as tutors. The establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867 hardly slowed this crossing of internal borders in search of economic and social opportunity; rather, it accelerated Jewish migration from Galicia to Hungary and from both regions to Vienna.[22]

[19]Kieval, "Unequal Mobility," 115–16. Regarding revolutionary Hungary, Silber writes: "Not until the summer of the following year [1849], in the very last days of revolutionary independent Hungary, was a law emancipating Jews passed (on 28 July) by the rump parliament in Szeged. By this time, only the most radical MPs were left, and after an impassioned speech by Prime Minister Bertalan Szemere, the bill was passed. Typically, the formulation bore Kossuth's fingerprints, with clauses limiting immigration and convening a Sanhedrin to institute necessary reforms ungenerously tacked on. With this law, Hungary became the last country in revolutionary Europe to emancipate Jews, four months after reactionary Austria's imposed constitution did so in a straightforward, unconditional fashion." (Silber, "Hungary Before 1918").

[20]Kieval, "Unequal Mobility," 116; "Juden," in *Oesterreichisches Staatswörterbuch* 2, 182–84, 186, 191–92. The young Emperor Franz Joseph announced on 1 January 1851: "After careful consideration of every aspect, we find ourselves pressed by our duty as sovereign to declare the … constitutional document of 4 March 1849 to be annulled. The equality of all citizens before the law, as well as … the laws regarding abolition of all peasant serfdom with compensation … remain in force." (Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 215.

[21]Kieval, "Unequal Mobility," 116; Silber, "Hungary Before 1918."

[22]In 1869, 21 percent of Jewish fathers in Vienna had been born in the city; 13 percent had been born in Moravia; 10.5 percent in Galicia; and over 42 percent of Jewish fathers had been born in Hungary. By 1900, the percentage of Jewish fathers from Galicia had grown to 20.7; from Hungary, it had declined somewhat to 33.6; while the number of Viennese-born Jewish fathers had fallen to 16.2 percent. See Marsha Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany, 1983), 22. On the issue of *bocherim* in Bohemia, see Kieval, "Unequal Mobility," 92–96, 108–9.

A fascinating example of the potentially discordant convergence of internal Jewish migration, cross-regional communal ties, and absolutist reform can be found in the efforts of Prague's Jewish community in 1840 to appoint Solomon Judah Rapoport (1790–1867) to the jointly held positions of Rabbi of Prague and head of its rabbinical court (*Av bet din*). At issue was an imperial decree of 1834, which had mandated that henceforth no person could be installed as rabbi who had not completed *gymnasium* and university studies at a domestic, that is, Austrian, institution.[23] Rapoport, a native of Lemberg (Lwów/Lviv), who wore a full beard and dressed in an "East European" fashion, was also known to combine traditional Jewish learning with modern, critical scholarship. However, he was largely self-taught in Western humanities and did not hold a university degree.

The Jewish community petitioned the *Gubernium* in 1838 to validate Rapoport's appointment, but the request was rejected. Fortunately for Rapoport's supporters, the mayor of Prague appears to have been more favorably disposed—won over, we are told, by the personal qualities and demeanor of the candidate. He recommended that Rapoport be appointed despite the lack of a "Latin diploma." Prague community leaders had argued that it was often impossible to merge yeshiva with university studies and that the rabbi's self-education in the humanities should be acceptable. "The saintly [Moses] Mendelssohn," the community officers noted, "if he were still alive and a local resident, would by strict adherence to the letter of the law never be able to receive a rabbinical position in Bohemia." In the end, on 28 December 1839, Emperor Ferdinand I signed a special dispensation for Rapoport with the words "I shall graciously overlook his not being a native [of Bohemia] and the lack of university credentials."[24]

There is another story that I like to tell to illustrate the degree of internal migration and cross-regional connection that continued to occur even after the period of reforms. This tale is a bit long and involves three brothers from a Moravian Jewish family and the radically different paths their lives took. To set the stage, let us make our way to Vienna's city moat by the Neues Tor on the morning of 23 November 1848, where twenty-five-year-old Hermann Jellinek (1822–48) awaited execution by firing squad for his role in Vienna's revolutionary movement. A journalist and political philosopher who had been writing for the *Allgemeine Österreichische Zeitung* and *Der Radikale* since arriving in Vienna from his hometown in March 1848, Hermann Jellinek had been tried and convicted by both a military and a civilian court on the charge of "open incitement to armed insurrection." His writings, it was claimed, had advocated armed uprising against the Austrian government, a charge Jellinek vigorously, if disingenuously, denied.[25]

On the eve of his execution, Jellinek was visited in prison by his companion, a Protestant woman by the name of Amalie Hempel (1823–52), who recently had given birth to their daughter, Hermine. Later that night, he composed a testament as well as farewell letters to his father and younger brother, Moritz. During the predawn hours, he engaged in a long conversation with Leopold Breuer, who was standing in for Rabbi Isak Noa Mannheimer of Vienna—revealingly, not on the topic of religious belief, about which Jellinek declared himself to be "fully sorted out" ("ganz im Reinen mit sich selbst"). In the moments just before his execution, Hermann Jellinek continued to proclaim his innocence, arguing against the logic of the verdict against him. Then, collecting himself, he shouted, "Now, shoot me dead!"[26]

A most disturbing end to a promising life, cut short by what might well be regarded as a judicial murder. And how distant, it seems, from his origins and upbringing! The Jellineks were a family of religiously Orthodox village Jews residing in Drslawitz (Drslavice) outside Ungarisch (Uherský) Brod, where the father, Isak Löw Jellinek, leased a distillery from a noble family. Hermann (also known as

[23]On this episode, see Carsten Wilke, *"Den Talmud und den Kant": Rabbinerasusbildung and der Schwelle zur Moderne* (Hildesheim, 2003), 509–11.

[24]Wilke, *"Den Talmud und den Kant,"* 510.

[25]Wolfgang Häusler, "Hermann Jellinek (1823–1848): Ein Demokrat in der Wiener Revolution," *Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte* 5 (1976): 125–75, here 170. On Hermann Jellinek's journalistic activity during the 1848 Revolution and his subsequent execution, see Klaus Kempter, *Die Jellineks 1820–1955: Eine familienbiographische Studie zum deutschjüdischen Bildungsbürgertum* (Düsseldorf, 1998), 65–104, and Häusler, "Hermann Jelinek."

[26]The report on Hermann Jellinek's final minutes comes from the major who was commanding the firing squad. See Häusler, "Hermann Jellinek," 172; based on *1848: Der Vorkampf Deutscher Einheit und Freiheit. Erinnerungen, Urkunden, Berichte, Briefe*, ed. Tim Klein (Munich, 1914), 403.

Herschel) was the second of three sons born to Isak Löw and his wife, Sara, each embarking on a different career. The older brother, Adolf (Aron, 1821–93), already a rabbi in the modern style by the time Hermann became a revolutionary, gained fame over the years for his dynamic preaching—his carefully crafted sermons delivered in exquisite German—as well as for his scholarship on rabbinic *midrash*, and would eventually become chief rabbi of Vienna. The youngest son, Moritz (1824–83), as we shall see, would move to the Hungarian city of Pest with the encouragement of his older brother, where he would more than make his mark on the economic development of the city.[27]

Herrmann Jellinek experienced in his brief life many of the historical circumstances—opportunities as well as barriers, hopes bounded by frustrations—that shaped Jewish fortunes in the post-Josephinian era. The father's occupation as leaseholder to a noble family harked back to an early modern system of settlement and protection that bypassed the control of hostile urban competitors. Like his older brother before him, Herrmann attended both the traditional, Jewish primary school in Ungarisch Brod and the newer German-Jewish *Trivialschule* that was a product of Joseph II's reforms. This blending of "tradition" and "modernity" continued into his yeshiva study in Prossnitz (Prostějov). In his case, however—and in contrast to his older brother—it was a combination that would lead to inner conflict and turmoil and, ultimately, with an open and radical break from the Judaism of his parents.

After completing their yeshiva studies, both Adolf and Hermann Jellinek set their sights on the university, the big city, and the wider world. The obvious, most easily accessible, target was Prague, with Adolf arriving in 1838 and Hermann a year later. The two Jellineks came to the Bohemian capital as *bocherim*, yeshiva students from the provinces now in search of social mobility and different educational credentials. Neither had formally attended gymnasium and neither had sufficient wealth to devote themselves full time to self-education. Thus, like scores of other young men in a similar position, Adolf and Hermann Jellinek endeavored to make a living as private tutors, the very class of wandering young men against whom public officials as well as *Normalschule* teachers railed against as ruining the Josephinian reforms. Their example should give pause to hasty generalizations about the cultural and intellectual makeup of *bocherim* as a group or of their role in the education of middle-class Jewish children in the Bohemian Lands. The Jellinek brothers were in Prague as a first step in a more intimate engagement with Central European culture and society; they may have emerged from the institutions of traditional Jewish learning, but they were hardly likely to try to impress upon their young charges the ideal of a Jewish culture closed to the outside world.[28]

For Adolf, the years 1838–42 were spent tutoring the children of the Jewish banker Adolf (Aron) Rosenbacher, studying gymnasium subjects privately while attending the odd lecture at the university, listening to the German-language sermons of Rabbi Michael Sachs at Prague's Altschul—but also to *shiurim* (lectures on the Talmud) by Solomon Judah Rapoport. Hermann's financial difficulties, by contrast (his father, it seems disapproved of his studying at the university), forced him to take on so many private students that he had virtually no time for any other activities. Distressed and in poor health, he made his way to Leipzig in Saxony (at first illegally), determined to enter the university there while continuing to eke out a living as a private tutor.

Herrmann began to move in left-Hegelian intellectual circles (he claimed a spiritual affinity to Baruch Spinoza [1632–77] and Uriel da Costa [1590–1640]—Dutch Jews of Spanish-Portuguese descent, both of whom had been accused of heresy and excommunicated from the Amsterdam Jewish community) and to engage in the kind of radical politics that would eventually get him expelled from the Kingdom of Saxony (and later Berlin) and propel him to political and journalistic activism during the 1848 Revolution in

[27]Michael L. Miller, "Going Native: Moritz Jellinek and the Modernization of the Hungarian Economy," in *The Economy in Jewish History: New Perspectives on the Interrelationship between Ethnicity and Economic Life*, ed. Gideon Reuveni and Sarah Wobick-Segev (New York, 2011), 157–73. Buda, Pest, and Óbuda were not united to form Budapest until 1873.

[28]On the first generation of Jewish university students from the Bohemian Lands, see Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley, 2000), 65–94, and Kieval, "Unequal Mobility," 105–11.

Vienna. Adolf, meanwhile, followed a more conventional course. Armed with a letter of recommendation from Solomon Judah Rapoport, he arrived in Leipzig a year after Hermann, enrolled in the university, and completed an intensive course of studies in philosophy, philology, and oriental languages. He received his doctorate and soon after was named *Prediger* of the Leipzig synagogue, a position he held from 1845 to 1857, when he was appointed to the same position at the new Leopoldstadt synagogue in Vienna. Following the death of Isak Noa Mannheimer (Vienna's first official rabbi) in 1865, Jellinek moved into his position at the Seitenstettengasse synagogue as chief rabbi of Vienna until his own passing in 1893. Adolf Jellinek was a "modern" rabbi in several senses of the term: the holder of an advanced academic degree as well as a yeshiva graduate; a practitioner of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the critical historical study of Jewish texts, and one of the nineteenth century's leading scholars of *midrash*; and a polished public speaker known for his sparkling sermons.[29]

The career trajectory of the youngest brother, Moritz, moved in a direction completely different from that of the older siblings. In doing so, it reinforced the triangular relationship linking Moravia to both Budapest and Vienna. Information on Moritz Jellinek's school years is sketchy, but we can assume, I think, that his boyhood education in Moravia approximated that of Adolf and Hermann. While the two older brothers were pursuing university studies in the early to mid-1840s, however, Moritz appears to have been living with his father, first in Napajedl, a small village outside of Ungarisch Brod, where they leased a distillery, and then in the town itself. Correspondence among the brothers during this time (written in Judeo-German, hence in Hebrew characters) makes clear that the older two encouraged Moritz to pursue a business career, while it was Hermann who urged Moritz, as early as 1846, to move to Hungary, the place where so many Moravian Jews had been migrating to since the eighteenth century.[30]

The marriage, four years later, of Adolf Jellinek to Rosalie Bettelheim, the daughter of an affluent grain wholesaler in Pest, corresponded—in Michael Miller's words—"to the traditional Jewish pairing of wealth and learning" and opened "new economic vistas" for the youngest brother. Moritz moved finally to Pest in 1850 where he benefited from Adolf's father-in-law's connections to become a grain wholesaler, and eventually went on to play "a central role in many of the milestones in the economic modernization of Hungary."[31] By the time he was thirty-three years old he had helped to establish Pest's Cereal Exchange (1855) as well as the First Hungarian Insurance Company (1857). More impressive still, Jellinek helped found Hungary's first (horse-drawn) tramway company, "a forerunner," Miller writes, "of the electric tramway, trolleybus, and subway that would provide the necessary infrastructure for Pest's economic and physical expansion in the last four decades of the nineteenth century. In this respect, he can be considered the unsung father of Budapest's mass transport system."[32]

One could trace numerous other examples of trans-regional movement and interpersonal connection from the nineteenth and early twentieth century to flesh out the picture I am trying to draw of a "Habsburg" Jewish experience. Lemberg (Lwów/L'viv), Vienna, and Prague, for example, are linked in unlikely ways in the lives of the scholar of *midrash*, Salomon Buber, his grandson Martin—whom he raised in Lemberg and sent to a Polish gymnasium before leaving home for university studies in Vienna—and the Jewish university students in Prague who congregated in the Zionist fraternity Bar Kochba.

[29]Kempter, *Die Jellineks*, 32–40. See also Samuel J. Kessler, *The Formation of a Modern Rabbi: The Life and Times of the Nineteenth-Century Scholar and Preacher Adolf Jellinek* (Providence, 2022); Peter Landesmann, *Rabbiner aus Wien: Ihre Ausbildung, ihre religiösen und nationalen Konflikte* (Vienna, 1997), 42–44, 73–75, 106–10; and Marsha L. Rozenblit, "Jewish Identity and the Modern Rabbi: The Cases of Isak Noa Mannheimer, Adolf Jellinek, and Moritz Guedemann in Nineteenth Century Vienna," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990): 103–31.

[30]Miller, "Going Native," 159–60.

[31]Miller, "Going Native," 157.

[32]Here I might mention Adolf Jellinek's three sons: Georg, Emil, and Max. The eldest and youngest became university professors, while Emil (b. in Leipzig in 1853) became an automobile entrepreneur and Austrian diplomat. It was as an official of the Daimler Motoren Gesellschaft (DMG) that he was responsible in 1900 for commissioning the first truly fast automobile, the Mercedes 35 hp. Jellinek created the Mercedes trademark in 1902, naming it in honor of his daughter, Mercédès Jellinek. "This Day in Jewish History | 1889: A Luxury Car's Namesake Is Born," *Haaretz*, 16 September 2013. https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2013-09-16/ty-article/.premium/1889-luxury-cars-namesake-is-born/0000017f-efcc-d8a1-a5ff-ffce696c0000.

The Prague student Zionists invited the young Martin Buber to address their group on three occasions between 1909 and 1911 and for a while regarded the creator of neo-Hasidic literature as their spiritual guide.[33]

One might focus on Franz Kafka's deep involvement with the Lemberg Yiddish Theater Troupe that was in residence in Prague in 1911 and 1912; his close friendship with the Warsaw actor Yitzhak Löwy; the extensive descriptions in his diary of the plots of the plays, as well as the Talmudic narratives that Löwy related; his father's instinctive dislike of Löwy and his fellow actors; and Kafka's heroic efforts to organize a public reading of Yiddish poetry in Prague's historic Jewish Town Hall.[34] We could explore the ties between Sigmund Freud and the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, which linked Jewish Budapest and Jewish Vienna; or, indeed, Kafka's relationship to the Hungarian surgeon (and fellow tuberculosis patient) Robert Klopstock. Within the Freud family alone, we have a microcosm of the restless movement of Jewish fathers and sons from Galicia to Moravia to Vienna. Each exploration could yield fascinating insights into the Jewish experience of the Habsburg Empire. But do not worry. I do not wish to try your patience. Or, as Kafka put it to his Prague Jewish audience when he introduced the evening of Yiddish readings, "we do not want to punish you."[35]

In his famous essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," which first appeared in 1984, Milan Kundera argues that one ought not try to locate or describe Central Europe in terms of political frontiers, for these "are inauthentic, always imposed by invasions, conquests, and occupations," but rather by "the great common situations that reassemble peoples, regroup them in ever new ways, along the imaginary and ever-changing boundaries that mark a realm inhabited by the same memories, the same problems and conflicts, the same tradition."[36] He goes on to say that, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was the Jews of the Habsburg Empire—"aliens everywhere and everywhere at home"—who were its "principal … integrating element … a condensed version of its spirit, creators of its spiritual unity."[37] And if—as he proposes—Central Europe is "an uncertain zone of small nations between Russia and Germany," small nations being those "whose very existence may be put in question at any moment," are not the Jews "*the* small nation par excellence?"

Indeed, Jews in the Habsburg Empire did reassemble, move about, and regroup in ever new ways, often because they had little alternative. They confronted and traversed political and cultural borders, acculturated to new linguistic and social settings, and, through all this movement, dislocation, and relocation, Jews maintained connection and cultural coherence. I admit to being skeptical of the claim that Habsburg Jews acted as Central Europe's "principal integrating element," or its intellectual and spiritual cement. Such special pleading borders on essentializing and is, frankly, embarrassing. But Jews of the Habsburg Empire did share a common, overarching, boundary crossing, historical experience that emerged from centuries of familial, cultural, and ethnic ties across the empire. I imagine this means they were "Habsburg" to the core.

[33]On Martin Buber in Lemberg and Prague, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven, 2019), esp. 80–109; and Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York, 1988), 124–53.

[34]On these themes see Hillel J. Kieval, "Franz Kafka, Talmudist? Czech Language, Yiddish Theater, and Rabbinic Narrative in the Life and Writings of a Central European," *65th Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture* (Forthcoming, New York, 2025) and the literature cited there.

[35]Franz Kafka, "An Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language (1912)," in *Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization* (https://www.posenlibrary.com/entry/introductory-talk-yiddish-language), trans. Susanne Klingenstein, (2023).

[36]Milan Kundera, *A Kidnapped West: The Tragedy of Central Europe*, trans. Linda Asher and Edmund White (New York, 2023), 57. Originally published in French in *Le Débat* in November 1983; translated into English by Edmund White and published in *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984.

[37]Kundera, *A Kidnapped West*, 58.

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