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Cornelia Aust. The Jewish Economic Elite (Verena Kasper-Marienberg)

Cornelia Aust

AJS Review

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demonstrates convincingly that Joseph ben Tanḥum Yerushalmi (obviously of Jerusalemite background and writing in Egypt) set himself on equal footing with the Iberian Judah al-Ḥarizi by laying out an alternate historical trajectory of Hebrew culture. Whereas al-Ḥarizi presented himself as the heir of the Andalusian poets descended from Jerusalem exiles and depicted Eastern authors as derivative of and inferior to himself, Yerushalmi presented the Andalusian school and himself as two prongs of the same Jerusalemite heritage (“equilibration”). The chapter on Isaac ha-Gorni and Abraham ha-Bedersi of Provence argues, based on the notion of “de-territorialization” as framed by Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986]), that the poets sought to “unravel the ties between language and territory which the majority literature takes for granted” (143).

The book is full of fine readings and insights. Ironically, as Kfir notes, members of the periphery often assert their arguments using the idiom of the center, measuring their accomplishments by the yardstick of existing standards—and in the process amplify the center’s preeminence. Kfir is a sensitive and logical reader of literary texts who employs literary theory with comfort and clarity. As is true of any book that seeks to interpret literary texts, some readings are more convincing than others. I am not persuaded, for example, that Elazar ben Ya’akov ha-Bavli’s justification of a grammatical point through an appeal to Andalusian precedent was necessarily a geographically motivated “silent rejoinder” to an assault by Judah al-Ḥarizi (101). However, Kfir’s other arguments about the same poet are persuasive. Of course, there is always more that can be done to unpack the dynamics that are detected in this book. The data exists, for example, to delineate in more detail how the image of Andalusian superiority emerged; one might return to the manuscripts to look at scribal inscriptions and processes of anthologization that produced representations of authorial personae and geographic predominance. One could also extend the dynamics here further in time, for example, to Solomon Bonafed (fifteenth century) who described the poets of his age as following a poetics that was both “old and new” and, in one instance, imagined an extended dialogue between himself and an apparition of the long-deceased Ibn Gabirol. Kfir’s book offers an important reorientation away from the sometimes descriptive and mechanical treatments of medieval Hebrew poetry to investigate a dynamic cultural process as it unfolded.

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Cornelia Aust. *The Jewish Economic Elite: Making Modern Europe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 218 pp.
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Two narratives circulate about the central role that Jewish elites played in the structural change of Europe’s economies from feudal to modern capitalist systems.

One tells of court Jews who turned international bankers and draws a direct line between the Jewish economic elites of the eighteenth century and those of the nineteenth century. Another, competing, narrative is about a newly emerging Ashkenazic middle class, rising to wealth from the ashes of European ghettos in the early nineteenth century after a decline in the influence of the old Jewish elites in the mid-eighteenth century. Both narratives obscure our profound lack of data on how Jewish economic elites were affected by the multitude of European conflicts (the Seven Years, Russo-Turkish, Revolutionary, and Napoleonic Wars) during the second half of the eighteenth century, the decline of economic centers like Amsterdam and Leipzig, and the dissolution of long-standing political entities like the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Cornelia Aust chose case studies of Ashkenazic economic elites from this transitional period, which ranges from the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. Contrasting five European cities and regions and three Jewish mercantile families, her work casts a wide geographical and multigenerational net to trace continuities and changes in the profile of these representative members of the Jewish economic elite. Her core methodologies are a transregional perspective from western to eastern Europe and a focus on family networks rather than individual biographies.

The book centers around three urban case studies: Amsterdam (chap. 1), Frankfurt an der Oder (chap. 2), and Warsaw (chap. 5). The inclusion of the shifting borderlands between Prussia and Poland (chap. 4), as well as Praga, a smaller settlement then still outside Warsaw (chap. 5), are important addenda, since they widen the perspective to less-urban and suburban spaces of Jewish life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The first chapter traces the family network of the Ashkenazic Symons family in mid-eighteenth-century Amsterdam, their marriage patterns across Europe (especially towards Frankfurt an der Oder), and their strategic use of family networks for credit and mercantile activity. As Aust explains, the key economic function of Amsterdam-based Ashkenazic merchants was to connect their colleagues or family members in central and eastern Europe to Amsterdam's credit market, via jointly liable and repeatedly endorsable bills of exchange. Without them, this credit market was hardly accessible to eastern European Jewish mercantile elites who were still navigating cash-based economies. At the same time, the Symons, like other merchants from Amsterdam, deliberately expanded their family network eastwards in order to access the booming textile trade in eastern Europe.

In chapter 2, the Schlesinger family in Frankfurt an der Oder serves Aust as an example of the central position of Jewish economic elites in communal hierarchies. Using the *pinkas*, a type of communal record book, Aust shows that Jewish merchants with the largest assets were also leaders within their communities, confirming the plutocratic nature of Jewish communal leadership in Ashkenaz. Their credit potential through networks via Hamburg to Amsterdam was put into use for communal purposes as well, serving their communities in situations of financial threat. Aust further argues that the Seven Years War and the partitions of Poland set in motion an eastward migration of Jewish mercantile elites from

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Frankfurt an der Oder and the borderlands between Prussia and Poland. She describes the challenges, but also the opportunities that arose for Jewish merchants from the repeated changes in political authority, including the opportunity to supply several armies during wartime.

Following the traces of these Jewish elites' migration to the East, the third case study (chaps. 4 and 5) is set in Praga and Warsaw. It follows the Jakubowicz family, which rose from being all-round merchants to army suppliers, leaseholders, and finally bankers. While family founder Szmul represented yet another group of immigrants from Polish villages who were drawn to urban spaces like Warsaw, his third wife Judyta migrated from Frankfurt an der Oder and enabled her husband to connect to her family networks in central Europe. Maneuvering their business between Prussian, Polish, and Russian governments, the couple, and later Judyta Jakubowicz alone, turned their army supply business into a business supplying state loans and holding considerable land. Eventually, the family operated one of several private Jewish banks in Warsaw. At the same time, the Jakubowicz family successfully navigated and combined different religious affiliations among family members: some leaned towards Hasidism, others towards Haskalah, and some converted to Christianity. Highlighting the heterogeneous religious and cultural profiles of Jewish elite family networks like the Jakubowicz adds another layer to Aust's examination of the process of transformation of blended Jewish economic elites, especially in eastern Europe.

Aust's book is written in accessible prose and includes introductory paragraphs on the different geographical areas, their political history and economic profiles, making it suitable for classroom use as well as for a general audience. From a scholarly perspective these introductions take away some space from the fascinating Jewish and non-Jewish primary source material that Aust has found in numerous archives all over Europe. Her ability to integrate primary sources and scholarly literature in five languages (Dutch, German, Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish) is truly exemplary. While Aust has thankfully included many of her archival findings in statistical or prosopographic data sheets, one may wish for a more detailed evaluation and citation and less paraphrasing. An academic reader might also appreciate a more thorough reflection on underlying categories like modernity, ethnicity, elite, or the ideas of East and West and how they remain useful in a transitional period like the one under review.

A strong focus and rich archival material on Prussia and Poland-Lithuania influences all chapters and gives even the chapter on Amsterdam a strong outlook towards the East. Aust's conclusions therefore seem to work mostly as a paradigmatic model for Jewish economic elite profiles in eastern Europe, only marginally referencing elites in then-newly developing hubs like London. This, however, does not diminish the value of Aust's study. This book is the first one I am aware of that consistently applies the "family network" concept in an Ashkenazic context without losing sight of the composite nature of the Ashkenazic world and its different, yet deeply connected, regional developments. Her work's foremost value is in validating the importance of family networks underlying transregional credit and commercial relations between East and West. Aust shows that the more these networks were adaptable to change in their mercantile profile, the more

successful they were; yet, they remained more coherent in their religious and ethnic character compared to Sephardic mercantile networks. Her continuous emphasis on entanglements of Christian and Jewish business networks, and the limited scale of Jewish credit and mercantile activity in the larger economic context, helps prevent any simplistic overemphasis of the role Jewish economic elites had in the making of modern Europe. Most of all, Aust's book shows the strong effect that conflicts, especially the Napoleonic Wars, had on Jewish economic activities at the turn of the nineteenth century. The impact of these wars on the restructuring of the economic activities of Jewish mercantile elites in eastern Europe appears similar to the effects of the Thirty Years War on central European Jewish elites in the seventeenth century. Aust's book is a significant addition to the field of Jewish economic history and to the study of eastern European Jewish history. It provides a new focus on mercantile elites beyond the Sephardic world and sets a high benchmark for future approaches to transregional studies.

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Eve Krakowski. *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. 350 pp. doi:10.1017/S0364009419000205

Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt is a wonderful example of the scholarship undertaken by a new generation of scholars of the Cairo Geniza. The accessibility of so many documents, some of which are epistolary, rabbinic responsa, and court records, enables the serious investigator to explore avenues that have not been previously or sufficiently examined. In this case, Eve Krakowski opted to delve into the world of the female adolescent in medieval Egypt from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries. Her goal was to analyze the roles of kinship and the law as reflected in documents concerning these girls as they faced the most significant transition of their lives.

The book begins with a solid introduction to these young women and their kin in what is often termed “Geniza society”; these explanations are essential for those less familiar with this milieu. Explanations as to the nature of the documents are also helpful, as the author clearly lays out the aim and structure of the book. One immediately perceives that by using these sources, Krakowski will attempt to qualify the significance of Halakhah versus kinship in these young women's lives. The centrality of networks of kinship and patronage among the merchant class in particular is well established; it is worthwhile and useful to determine how influential these ties were in women's lives.

Krakowski clearly wants to stake her own ground in the field and to differentiate her findings from those of the most eminent social historian of Geniza

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