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THE VIENNESE JEWS' SEARCH FOR INTEGRATION THROUGH THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

A historical museum is a place of memory. It represents a setting for the exhibition of specific objects through which a particular historical narrative is proposed. The purpose of this narrative is to explain and structure history from a certain perspective as well as to serve as guidance in the present. It compensates for the loss of tradition, which used to be a definitive part of life but has become irrelevant in a context that has changed due to modernising processes.[1] Thus, the need for a re-interpretation of the past emerges when tradition has been rendered obsolete in the present. Construing a particular memory is a reflective approach to the past, prompted by the dissolution of tradition.

The Viennese Jewish museum, which is the central, but not exclusive topic of this article, opened in 1895. It was the first of its kind in the whole world, although it took only a few years until other Jewish museums came into being in Central Europe.[2] It could be argued that certain influences conducive to setting up museums were felt more strongly and at an earlier time in Vienna than in other cities. However, the founding of the Viennese institution has to be seen as marking the beginning of a new development noticeable in and beyond Austria rather than as a solitary event that can be explained merely by circumstances in the Habsburg metropolis. This assertion prompts an inquiry into the cultural and socio-political context propitious to the establishment of Jewish museums in general, not only in the Austrian capital. Another question closely connected with the delineation of the political and cultural circumstances, concerns the reasons why the founding of museums did not take place before the end of the nineteenth century. What distinguished the period around the turn of the twentieth century from earlier decades? The answer will be found by focusing on the historical consciousness of the Jews in the nineteenth century and the extent of their social integration.

In its historical approach, the Viennese Jewish museum laid great emphasis on a positive evaluation of the traditional Judaism that had to a great extent 'become historical,' a part of the past, once Viennese Jews had set out on the course of acculturation. What was the reason for the consider-

1 P. Nora, *Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (4th edition, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), pp. 19–20.

2 K. Rauschenberger, *Jüdische Tradition im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik. Zur Geschichte des jüdischen Museumswesens in Deutschland* (Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2002), pp. 59–65.

able rise in interest in traditional Judaism among Jews, when the majority[3] had for decades been seeking to discard it for full integration into society at large?[4] Does the remarkable preoccupation with traditional Judaism at the museum indicate a change in the goal of cultural adaptation to the non-Jewish population?

Nostalgia was, as Richard I. Cohen has stated, a major factor in the presentation of Jewish tradition at the museum.[5] But nostalgia alone is hardly a sufficient explanation for the remarkable 'turn to tradition.' What were the other reasons for this development? This question will be answered by taking into account that the portrayal of the past is always done from a particular angle, based on the specific concerns of the present.[6] In order to recognise the interests expressed through the exhibitions at the Viennese museum and set the focus on Jewish traditions, it is necessary to study the members of the *Gesellschaft für Sammlung und Conservirung von Kunst- und historischen Denkmälern des Judentums* (hereafter referred to as 'museum society'), a body in charge of the museum. From which social strata did members of the society come, and what were the goals they wanted to achieve by displaying at the museum a kind of Judaism that most Jews had long striven to minimise?

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The Viennese Jewish museum presented a historical narrative that fundamentally differed from the historical perspective of traditional Judaism. Still, it was not the first endeavour to tackle the Jewish past on a non-religious basis. The early beginnings of a modern historical approach examining Jewish history without reference to God as an intervening agent could be observed among some *maskilim*, the adherents of the Jewish Enlightenment *(Haskalah),* in the late eighteenth century.[7] The real breakthrough and the introduction of contemporary standards of 'scientific' historiography came with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the early nine-

3 S. M. Lowenstein, 'Das religiöse Leben', in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit 3, 1871–1918,* ed. S. M. Lowenstein (2nd edition, München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2000), p. 101.

4 This is not to say that Viennese Jews were intent on shedding all traces of Judaism. Instead, it points to their willingness to abandon strict orthodoxy for a variant of Judaism that was more adapted to particular (liturgical as well as cultural) standards of non-Jewish society.

5 R. I. Cohen, 'Self-Image through Objects: Toward a Social History of Jewish Art Collecting and Jewish Museums', in *The Uses of Tradition. Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era,* ed. J. Wertheimer (New York, 1992), p. 212.

6 G. Echterhoff and M. Saar, 'Einleitung: Das Paradigma des kollektiven Gedächtnisses. Maurice Halbwachs und die Folgen', in *Kontexte und Kulturen des Erinnerns. Maurice Halbwachs und das Paradigma des kollektiven Gedächtnisses,* ed. G. Echterhoff and M. Saar (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002), p. 18.

7 S. Feiner, *Haskalah and History. The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), pp. 19–25.

teenth century.[8] It borrowed its methodology from the school of historicism,[9] adopted the concept of development, and, on this basis, questioned extant traditions.[10]

To a certain extent the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* served as a precursor of the Viennese Jewish museum in that it modernised historical thinking among the Jews. In the religious tradition, Jews had hardly been aware of the notion of 'time passing by' thus rendering phenomena as historicised, or of a rupture in the history of their Diaspora.[11] Since the destruction of their state and the subsequent exile, the Jews' idea of the future was tied to the notion of the coming of the Messiah. The entire period between the beginning of the Diaspora and the advent of the Messiah was usually considered to be of very little interest, and was therefore not divided into various periods succeeding each other progressively.[12]

Concerning its narrative, however, the *Wissenschaft* differed greatly from the Viennese Jewish museum. In this respect, and in contrast to the modernisation of historical thinking, it cannot be regarded as its predecessor. Whereas the former hailed the Biblical period and Sephardi Jews, thereby holding Ashkenazi Judaism, the Talmud and the rabbinate in disdain, the museum extolled this repudiated part of history.

The museum's focus on the past not only differed in its perspective from the *Wissenschaft's* concept of history, but also reflected the different interests of its members in comparison to the ambitions of the Jews affiliated with the *Wissenschaft*. The latter's intention was to deal with Judaism scientifically, to interpret it in a non-religious, historical way. The outcome was a version of Judaism that had a twofold goal. On the one hand it was designed to refute anti-Jewish stereotypes directed at the purported antiquatedness of Judaism, which was assumed unable to adapt to new developments. On the other hand its aim was to provide Jews eager to acculturate with a kind of Judaism that did not hinder their integrative efforts into a non-Jewish world, and thereby prevented their conversion.[13] Judaism should thus be presented as being largely adaptable to the culture of society at large.

The Viennese Jewish museum pursued an entirely different strategy. It also tried to ease social integration for the Jews, but this was not to take place through acculturation. In contrast to the *Wissenschaft's* aim of providing an alternative to traditional Judaism that was strictly against cultural adaptation, the museum presented an alternative to 'assimilation,' i.e. to an

8 I. Schorsch, *From Text to Context. The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), pp. 149–65.

9 See F. Jaeger and J. Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992), pp. 21–37.

10 M. A. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity. Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), p. 48.

11 Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Erinnere Dich! Jüdische Geschichte und jüdisches Gedächtnis* (2nd edition, Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1996), pp. 49–50.

12 Yerushalmi, Zachor, p. 37.

13 Schorsch, From Text to Context, p. 207.

attitude according to which Judaism played only a minor role in the identity of the Jews. The museum thus supported a stronger awareness of one's Jewishness. As much as the two approaches of the *Wissenschaft* and the museum diverged in their cultural perspectives, they were similar in their social goals, namely to advance integration into society at large.

THE NEW INTEREST IN HISTORY IN THE 1890S

The *Wissenschaft*'s turn to history was an unprecedented step, a new and almost revolutionary development. The museum's preoccupation with the Jewish past was quite different. It took place at a time when Jews displayed an increased interest in history. This was not yet the case in the 1880s, but was a conspicuous tendency in the subsequent decade.

Aside from the Viennese and other museums that were founded in the early twentieth century, the *Vereine für Geschichte und Literatur*, the first of which was organised in Berlin in 1892,[14] paradigmatically attest to this development. Other institutions displaying an inclination to explore, preserve and/or transmit knowledge of Jewish history were, for instance, the *Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden*, established in October 1905,[15] and the *Jüdische Volkskunde* in 1898. Rabbi Max Grunwald, the founder of the latter, called the aim of *Volkskunde* "Rückwärtsschreiten zu den Wurzeln der Menschheit [a going back to the roots of humankind],"[16] i. e. harking back in history in order to discover testimonies that were important to people in the present.

All these institutions made an effort to establish a narrative whose function was to help them to accomplish specific goals, especially integration into society at large. By exploring Jewish history, particularly the pre-emancipatory past, Jews brought into relief a cultural heritage designed to be appreciated by non-Jews. On the basis of such a positive evaluation of their culture, Jews thought that they would be acknowledged by the non-Jewish population as a part of society.

The increased interest in history thus presents the background against which the founding of the Viennese Jewish museum must be seen. Its establishment is hardly conceivable without the attention that Jews in the 1890s gave to their past. Still, the discussion of this context does not indicate why the Viennese institution was not founded in previous decades, for instance around the turn of the nineteenth century when the first non-Jewish museums came into being.[17]

14 A. Margolius, 'Der Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur in Berlin', *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* 28 (1927), p. 167.

15 B. Welker, 'Das Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden', in *Tuet auf die Pforten. Die neue Synagoge 1866–1995* (Berlin, 1995), p. 227.

16 M. Grunwald, 'Zur Volkskunde der Juden', *Israelitische Monatsschrift* 6 (1897), p. 22.

17 G. Friedl, 'Die Pyramide des Louvre. Welt als Museum', in *Die Verortung von Gedächtnis*, ed. M. Csáky and P. Stachel (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 2001), pp. 306–7.

An explanation for the delayed establishment of the Jewish institutions can be found in the fact that in the early nineteenth century Jews were still unaware of a break between (past) tradition and (present) modernisation. The history of exile was still thought to be largely a temporal continuum. To cause a rupture, the cognisance of which being a major impetus for founding museums, was definitely intended by the *maskilim*, but had not yet been brought about. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of Jews in the early nineteenth century were still steeped in the religious orthodoxy that had, as mentioned above, not adopted modern historical thinking, i.e. was still indifferent to non-religious concepts of the past. Against this background, there was simply no demand among the Jews for the establishment of museums.

THE ROLE OF ANTISEMITISM

The members of the 'museum society' belonged to the (upper) middle class in Vienna. Among them were people like Wilhelm Stiaßny, Adolf Ritter von Sonnenthal, Max Fleischer, etc.[18] They were very successful in their professions, widely acculturated, and greatly upset by the rising wave of antisemitism that gained momentum in the late 1880s and reached its crest in the early 1890s.[19] In this atmosphere they pondered over a way to stem the tide of anti-Jewish hostility, and considered a museum to be a proper medium for this undertaking.[20] Thus the Viennese Jewish museum was – at least partly – designed as a medium through which to counteract anti-Jewish hostility. This was to be done by presenting a positive image of the Jews.

Antisemitism was not only the catalyst for setting up the Viennese Jewish museum, it also played a decisive role in the establishment of other organisations dedicated to Jewish history, such as the *Vereine für Geschichte und Literatur*. Judaeophobia and the Jewish 'turn to history' in the 1890s were thus closely connected. Still, even though the *Vereine* and the Jewish museums arose to a large extent in reaction to antisemitism, there remained an important difference between them. Whereas the former were more 'inwardly directed' and served rather as a means to enhance Jewish consciousness than to tackle the hostile atmosphere outside the Jewish community, the museums addressed their messages to the general public through exhibitions. Thus, the museums were considered to be more powerful instruments to ward off antisemitism. In Vienna anti-Jewish hostility was experienced in a more threatening manner than it was in any other part of Central Europe, because it was 'officially legitimised' by Karl

18 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 43 (1897), p. 861.

19 P. Pulzer, *Jews and the German State. The Political History of a Minority, 1848–1933* (3rd edition, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. 105.

20 *Die Neuzeit* (1899), p. 356.

Lueger's election as mayor in 1897.[21] Thus it comes as no surprise that the first Jewish museum was founded in the especially fierce antisemitic atmosphere of the Austrian capital. Nowhere else could a museum be as important and necessary as in Lueger's city.

Anti-Jewish hostility had not been unknown to the Jews before the new wave of enmity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, the circumstances under which Jews had to face antisemitism in this period were unprecedented. They encountered the resurgence of Judaeophobia at a time when they were more than ever before intent on being accepted as equal citizens by society at large. In past decades, even in the late 1870s, anti-Jewish hostility had been perceived by Jews mainly as a hindrance to their occupational mobility, something that could be overcome by strengthening their competitive skills. In the 1890s, many Viennese Jews had already achieved their occupational goals, whereas their social integration was still far from being complete.[22] They realised that their by and large successful professional life had not led to the cultural adaptation that was considered to be the ultimate ticket to social integration. They still formed a social group with their own particular culture. This is not to say that Jews had not undergone acculturation at all. Rather, it means that they had retained certain cultural characteristics, such as a peculiar language,[23] certain gestures, etc. that were not shared by non-Jews. These differences set the Jews apart socially and marked them as social outsiders.

Even worse than their failed cultural adaptation was the looming danger that antisemitism might actually reverse their still incomplete social integration. Aside from the poignantly felt hiatus between occupational success and lack of full integration, the fear that the future might hold worse in store also played a role in the perception of Judaeophobia in the 1890s as more alarming than in earlier decades. This state of mind found its vivid expression in the emergence of the Zionist movement, the major impetus of which was the fear that antisemitism would never come to an end but, due to its new racial dimension, might even worsen.

21 On the development of Austrian antisemitism see G. E. Berkley, *Vienna And Its Jews. The Tragedy of Success, 1880s–1980s* (Cambridge, MA: Madison Books, 1988), pp. 61–95; B. F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution. A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 27; P. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (2nd edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 200.

22 S. Volkov, 'The Dynamics of Dissimilation. Ostjuden and German Jews', in *The Jewish Response to German Culture. From the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, ed. J. Reinharz and W. Schatzberg (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), pp. 198–9.

23 J. Toury, 'Die Sprache als Problem der jüdischen Einordnung im deutschen Kulturraum', *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte,* Beiheft 4 (1982), pp. 75–96; P. Freimark, 'Language Behaviour and Assimilation. The Situation of the Jews in Northern Germany in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 24 (1979), pp. 157–77.

THE INVENTION OF TRADITION

Faced with a new tide of antisemitism and the frustration of their attempts to gain full integration into broader society, Jews relinquished their efforts to acculturate and took recourse to Judaism. This move was twofold: first, it was a reaction to society's unwillingness to fully acknowledge them as citizens, a goal that Jews had been trying to attain for around a century.[24] In this case drawing upon Judaism was a defensive act, employed due to a lack of alternatives. Second, it was a revised effort to continue their long-held goal of social integration. Since the circumstances under which Jews had been living had changed, they also had to modify their course in order to accomplish integration. Under the new circumstances, falling back upon Judaism instead of aiming at acculturation seemed to be the proper approach.

The shift from assimilation to asserting one's Jewishness did not, however, introduce a process of 'dissimilation,' as is widely believed.[25] Understood as the direct opposite of assimilation, dissimilation denotes a process not only of cultural, but also of structural segregation. Consequently, dissimilation would mean a process launched by the Jews to establish their own socio-occupational structure. Yet, this was not the endeavour of the Jews in the 1890s who founded the new organisations mentioned above, and especially not of the Viennese 'museum society'. Instead, their goal was much more complex. On the one hand, they favoured the establishment of a separate Jewish cultural sphere; on the other hand, however, their aim, most explicitly evident in the museum, was to advance opportunities for Jews to integrate into society at large. There was no contradiction between the two. On the contrary, the integrative efforts were to be made by asserting the Jews' cultural heritage and pointing out that this was largely in congruence with the values and standards of the non-Jewish element of society. Jewish traditional culture was even displayed as a model worthy of emulation. Whereas in previous decades the Jews pursued their course of integration by adaptation to the culture of the majority population, in the 1890s they switched to a stronger self-assertion. Jewish integration was still the goal, but the means to attain it changed. Instead of acculturation, an emphasis on Jewish culture was thought to be the most propitious path.

The measures taken to strengthen the Jews' consciousness took various forms. Two approaches advanced by the Viennese Jewish museum will be delineated in more detail in the following pages. The first approach was the introduction of a particular Jewish historical perspective, while the second was the exhibition of a specific feature of Judaism through which the 'museum society' intended to improve the Jews' image among the broader population.

24 S. Volkov, 'Erfolgreiche Assimilation oder Erfolg und Assimilation: Die deutsch-jüdische Familie im Kaiserreich', *Jahrbuch des Wissenschaftskollegs zu Berlin* (1982/83), p. 274.

25 O. Baschke, 'Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit im Spannungsfeld des neuen Konfessionalismus von den 1830er bis zu den 1930er Jahren', in *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche. Zur Geschichte von Vielfalt und Differenz 1800–1933,* ed. A. Gotzmann (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2001), p. 63.

THE VIENNESE JEWS' ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF HISTORY

Contemporary reports indicate that antisemitism was not the only reason for the establishment of the Viennese Jewish museum. The other motivation was the ignorance displayed by the city's non-Jewish museums towards Jews.[26] With the exception of the *kaiserlich-königlichen Hofbibliothek*, that owned and exhibited some Hebrew manuscripts, Jews and their history were not considered worth being displayed at any other museum. Apparently, they were not deemed to be part of the history and culture of society at large. Since a historical consciousness is an essential facet of a person's identity,[27] their exclusion from society's historical narrative was tantamount to a perseverance of the notion among the non-Jewish population that Jews were strangers to the national community. In this context, the design of a historical memory that included the Jews was of ultimate importance for them.

The members of the 'museum society' were all widely integrated into society and wanted to advance this status or at least to counteract any reversing, segregating tendencies due to the upsurge of antisemitism. Against this background they were especially concerned about the 'officially legitimised' historical negligence towards the Jews. They attempted to compensate for the exclusion of Viennese Jewry from society's historical memory by pointing out to the non-Jewish public that Jews had lived in the midst of the Viennese population for a long time and had therefore contributed to its history. This was considered best done through the medium of a museum, which was consequently established in 1895. It was thus destined to serve as a setting through which the interwoven relations between Jews and non-Jews would be made perceptible, and to provide pertinent proof of the Jews' claim that they belonged to society and its past. The 'museum society' maintained that they would reach this goal by displaying the Jews' most precious contributions to the cultural history of humankind.[28]

The Jews' introduction of their own interpretation of history was by and large a new development. As mentioned above, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ushered in a historical perspective that emphasised the Biblical period and the history of the Sephardi Jews, but disapproved of Ashkenazi history. One of the reasons that the Jews affiliated with the *Wissenschaft* hardly evinced any interest in dealing with their own recent past was their ambition to fit into the mainstream narrative. Proposing their own particular view of history was to claim a specific place outside society.[29]

26 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 45 (1897), p. 908.

27 A. Assmann, 'Gedächtnis als Leitbegriff der Kulturwissenschaften', in *Kulturwissenschaften. Forschung – Praxis – Positionen,* ed. L. Musner and G. Wunberg (Wien: WUV-Universitätsverlag, 2002), p. 35.

28 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 51 (1900), p. 909.

29 G. L. Mosse, 'Jewish Emancipation. Between Bildung and Respectability', in *The Jewish Response to German Culture. From the Enlightenment to the Second World War,* ed. J. Reinharz and W. Schatzberg (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), p. 14.

In the 1890s this approach changed fundamentally. Although the members of the 'museum society' did not give up the *Wissenschaft's* goal of being recognised as part of society at large, they pursued this aim by emphasising their own perspective of history that not only included but also emphasised their recent past. This found its expression in the appeal of the 'museum society' made to the local Jewish community to bestow objects worthy of exhibition to the museum.[30] Thus it collected and displayed objects from a time period that had not long since passed, but of which Viennese Jewry still had testimonies to be shown, i. e. a more recent than distant past.

By proposing their own narrative the 'museum society' wanted to complement the 'official' historical perspective or, as it was stated, to "fill the gap" in the 'official' memory.[31] This statement about the museum's objective indicates that the exhibitions were not intended to bring forth a perception of the past that paralleled the given narrative or substituted it with a Jewish one. Rather, the new historical perspective was to be interwoven with the 'official' one, recognising it to a large extent, but also enlarging it by interspersing it with some additional views taken from a Jewish context. In this way Jews made clear that they had their own interpretation of the past, and did not consider it at variance with the 'official' narrative, but thought that it had a complementary function. Jews thus stated implicitly that they wanted to share the historical memory of society and be part of the broader population.

The Jews' historical approach was in consonance with other attempts to become fully recognised members of society at large. All of these endeavours were predicated on a stronger self-assertion, but did not aim at social segregation from the non-Jewish population. Social and cultural movements were thus directed at different goals: culturally, Jews strove to set their profile in relief, whereas socially, they set out for integration.

Trying to define the Jews of the late nineteenth century as a social entity can also corroborate the hypothesis that cultural and social processes diverged. In pursuing this task various terms have been employed. Jews are held to be a *subculture,*[32] an ethnicity *("situative Ethnizität"),*[33] a *"Teilkultur",*[34] etc. Despite the variety of notions, in one aspect the terms were in full congruence with each other: this was with respect to relations between Jews and the broader population. All the descriptions of the Jews indicate that they formed a social group the structure of which was no hin-

30 See *Führer durch das jüdische Museum,* ed. Curatorium (Wien, 1906).

31 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 45 (1897), p. 908.

32 D. Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 107–37.

33 T. v. Rahden, 'Weder Milieu noch Konfession. Die situative Ethnizität der deutschen Juden im Kaiserreich in vergleichender Perspektive', in *Religion im Kaiserreich. Milieu, Mentalitäten, Krisen,* ed. O. Blaschke (Gütersloh, 1996), pp. 409–34.

34 J. Borut, 'Vereine für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 41 (1996), p. 112.

drance to integration into society at large.[35] Rather, Jews seemed to be intent on enlarging the basis on which they could interact with non-Jews.

The willingness to mingle with Gentiles came to the fore paradigmatically at the annual meetings of the 'museum society'. In the course of these gatherings, selected speakers delivered papers that dealt with a particular aspect of Judaism, thereby presenting the Jewish religious and cultural heritage very favourably. Present at these events were representatives not only of the Jewish community, but also of the 'non-Jewish world,' such as representatives of the major Christian denominations, politicians, or members of the local university staff.[36]

In this way the museum simultaneously served as a medium for Jewish self-assertion as well as providing a meeting-ground for interaction between Jews and non-Jews. The focus on Judaism was used to enhance the image of the Jews among the Gentiles and thus advance opportunities of socialising with them. In its pursuit of this goal the Viennese Jewish museum reflected the trend among Central European Jews in the late nineteenth century.

THE JEWISH FAMILY

The strengthening of Jewish consciousness undertaken to support the Jews' integration into society at large was pursued not only by drawing up a Jewish historical narrative but also, as mentioned above, by taking recourse to Judaism. This does not mean that Jews drew on a kind of traditional Judaism that they had already left behind in the course of their cultural adaptation to society at large. In the late nineteenth century, Jews in Central Europe, and especially the members of the 'museum society,' were too acculturated as to be intent on taking up religious tradition. Liberal Reform Judaism was not their choice either. It had been discredited by its close association with the failure to bring about social integration. The recourse to Judaism meant rather that Jews chose a new form of Judaism, which was the result of its re-interpretation from a contemporary and largely 'scientific' angle.

Judaism came to be seen as the answer to the most important questions of the present, and as providing a solution to the most urgent problems. One of such concerns, allegedly faced by contemporary societies, was a sharp drop in the birth rate, which purportedly implied an imminent decline in the stamina of a people and ultimately its death.[37] The performance

35 Blaschke, 'Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit' in *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche. Zur Geschichte von Vielfalt und Differenz 1800–1933,* ed. Gotzmann, p. 40.

36 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 20 (1897), pp. 412–13.

37 W. Schallmayer, *Vererbung und Auslese. Grundriß der Gesellschaftsbiologie und der Lehre vom Rassedienst* (3rd edition, Jena, 1918), p. 212.

of Jewish rituals, however, seemed to counteract this development. The fecundity of the Jews, at least of those still living according to the rules of traditional Judaism, did not reflect the general trend of a decreasing birth rate.[38] In this context, those Jewish religious ceremonies that apparently contributed to high fertility were hailed. Thereby the original – religious – meaning of the rituals was circumvented and replaced by a secular interpretation that suited the interests of contemporary family policy. A case in point was circumcision.[39] In addition, Jewish family life was considered to be of ultimate importance for a high reproduction rate. This may plausibly explain the central position granted the Jewish family at the Viennese museum, as reflected in the exhibition of the *Gute Stube*.

The *Gute Stube* was a room designed for Sabbath celebration. In addition to its various purposes, it reflected the identity of the 'museum society.' The exhibition is partly evidence of the nostalgia felt by Jews towards traditional Judaism, which they had discarded in the course of their acculturation. The sense of nostalgia was paradigmatically articulated by the Russian-Jewish anthropologist Samuel Weissenberg. Upon his visit to the Viennese Jewish museum he wrote that the visitor is overwhelmed by wistful feelings for the long-lost good old days; he finds himself transported back to his childhood, and instinctively looks around, searching for his grandparents in order to wish them "a good Shabbes."[40]

In addition, the Gute Stube exhibition reveals Jewish efforts to re-engender Judaism, while circumventing its religious dimension. Taking recourse to the Sabbath meant that they referred to a component of Judaism that, in its traditional version, had a religious meaning. In pre-emancipatory times, the Sabbath had been strictly observed and had structured Jewish life. When, however, Jews forged links to the Sabbath through the exhibition of the *Gute Stube,* the day often went by without any religious observance. The Sabbath could only be drawn upon at the museum because the loss of its religious significance was counterbalanced by a supposed medical importance. A full day's rest without any work was thought to stave off various diseases.[41] Jews thus took recourse to Judaism in order to strengthen their consciousness, laying great emphasis on the Sabbath, which was appraised for its medical advantages.

38 M. Richarz, 'Die Entwicklung der jüdischen Bevölkerung', in *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit 3, 1871–1918*, ed. S. M. Lowenstein (München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997), p. 13.

39 K. Hödl, 'Die deutschsprachige Beschneidungsdebatte im 19. Jahrhundert', *Aschkenas* 12, no. 1 (2002), pp. 176–94.

40 S. Weissenberg, 'Jüdische Museen und Jüdisches in Museen. Reiseeindrücke', *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde* 23, no. 3 (1907), p. 87. Weissenberg wrote that "einen ein wehmütiges Gefühl über die nie mehr wiederkehrende, gute, alte Zeit (überkommt); man fühlt sich in seine Kinderjahre versetzt und man schaut sich unwillkürlich um, die Großeltern suchend, um ihnen 'a guten Shabbes' zu wünschen".

41 J. M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews. A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 112–113.

Through the assumed link between the observance of the Sabbath and the physical well-being of the Jews, the *Gute Stube* exhibition helped to refurbish the image of traditional Judaism and, consequently, of the pre-emancipatory past. That is to say, it supported the Jews in their search to establish their own narrative. In consideration of the purported health benefits of observing the Sabbath – given the wide array of literature on this topic, this claim was not doubted –, the circumstances under which its observance was most thorough had to be viewed as especially favourable. This was, in particular, the pre-emancipatory past, when religious norms determined the everyday lives of Jews, and keeping the Sabbath was a duty that could not be evaded. From the medical perspective the period of traditional Jewish life could thus no longer be dismissed as the heyday of rabbinical ignorance. Instead, it was extolled because it safeguarded the preservation of Jewish religious rituals and thereby contributed to the Jews' physical and mental well-being. The so-called Ghetto period was no longer associated with anti-Jewish oppression. Rather, it was seen as having provided the circumstances under which Jews were obliged to adhere to their – health-inducing – religious culture.[42]

Social integration was another purpose served by the *Gute Stube* exhibition. This was deemed feasible in that the *Gute Stube* was used as a medium for representing the Jews as a people with an extraordinary sense of family. The close association between Sabbath and family that had existed since around the middle of the nineteenth century was the consequence of the acculturation of middle-class Jews, who wanted to minimise the cultural differences between themselves and the broader population. Thus they attempted to get rid of the religious content of the Sabbath and secularise it. Instead of attending synagogue services, Jews spent the Sabbath with their families.[43] Dedicating themselves to playing with their children or visiting relatives became the Jews' major preoccupation on this day.[44] Sabbath and family life thus came to be closely associated.

The notion that Jews led exemplary family lives was an assumption or, as Paula E. Hyman has called it, "a powerful myth" that Jews did not question throughout the nineteenth century.[45] The conviction was so strong that it even contributed to the re-evaluation of the past, especially, as mentioned above, of the Ghetto period. A good example of this re-assessment is a description of the old Ghetto in Frankfurt, published in the journal *Ost und West* in 1902. Although delineated in very bleak terms, it gained its importance by providing the circumstances under which the Jewish family could

42 H. L. Eisenstadt, 'Die Renaissance jüdischer Sozialhygiene', *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 5 (1908), p. 727.

43 Sorkin, Transformation of German Jewry, p. 89.

44 M. A. Kaplan, *Jüdisches Bürgertum. Frau, Familie und Identität im Kaiserreich* (Hamburg: Dölling und Gallitz, 1997), p. 173.

45 P. E. Hyman, 'The Modern Jewish Family: Image and Reality', in *The Jewish Family. Metaphor and Memory*, ed. D. Kraemer (New York, 1989), p. 179.

thrive.[46] Family was something that the non-Jewish population held in high esteem as well. Jews that depicted themselves as family-loving people implicitly pointed out that they shared essential values with non-Jews. Jews could thus expect this cultural congruence to improve their image among the broader population and advance their opportunities for social integration. Their conviction was not mere wishful thinking, but was confirmed in various ways. For example, at the annual convention of the "museum society" in 1900 a certain Dr. Cornill, a Protestant theologian, delivered a paper in which he not only praised the "highly developed sense of family" among the Jews, but even claimed that if they continued leading their exemplary family life, antisemitism would certainly come to an end.[47]

CONCLUSION

As was the case with their own historical narrative, the Jews instrumentalised the concept of family life. They stressed it in order to enhance opportunities to integrate into society at large. While developing a process of cultural self-assertion, the Jews tried to advance their goal of social integration.

The Viennese Jewish museum represents a setting that mirrored the prevailing developments among Jews in Central Europe. It was thus a microcosm that reflected trends in the larger world. Such trends show that, while they dismissed acculturation, Jews did not desire dissimilation in the late nineteenth century. Even though cultural adaptation was no longer on the Jews' agenda, they still strove for social integration. Apart from a few notable exceptions – such as the Zionists, antisemitism did not engender a desire among Jews to segregate from society.

46 In the article it was stated that "ihre (the Jews') eigenen Stadtviertel oder Ghettos [...] ihnen angeblich zu ihrem Schutze angewiesen (wurden), in Wirklichkeit bezweckte man damit, *(cont. from previous page)* den Verfolgern das Erhaschen ihrer Opfer zu erleichtern. Dass unter solchen Umständen in den so eng zusammengedrängten Haushaltungen ein wahrhaft patriarchalischer Sinn, ein festgegliedertes Familienleben herrschte, war leicht erklärlich. Hatten sich doch zudem die armen Bedrückten einen weit höheren moralischen Standpunkt zu bewahren gewusst, wie ihre zahllosen Verfolger und Peiniger" (G. Bieneck, 'Im Altfrankfurter Ghetto', *Ost und West* 2 (1902), pp. 43–4.)

47 *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* 51 (1900), p. 909.