

DIVIDED SOULS:
THE CONVERT CRITIQUE AND THE
CULTURE OF ASHKENAZ,
1750-1800

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LEO BAECK MEMORIAL LECTURE 46

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In 1781, Johann Conrad Leonhard published a treatise in Nuremberg in which he proposed to prove conclusively that rabbinic tradition directly opposed the true message of the Bible and had been leading Jews astray for centuries.¹ Leonhard had many other observations to make about the state of Judaism and the Jews. They were all negative and not terribly original. He contended that the educational system of Ashkenazic Jews taught young people nothing valuable or practical, while even the religious studies concentrated exclusively on the text of the Talmud. Jews did not systematically study the doctrines of their faith. Some of his contemporaries among the rabbis, he complained, could reach the ripe old age of 60 or 70 and pass from this world without even knowing the names of the major branches of science, let alone the first thing about their contents. No Jewish university existed in which the higher academic subjects or fine arts could be pursued; for three or four centuries, he lamented, Jews have gone without "Wissenschaft." They had become useless dependents in all the European states, afraid to apprentice their children to Christian craftsmen for fear of violating Sabbath or kosher laws. Who could have believed the state into which Jewry had fallen? That a nation so gifted by nature should have fallen into such a miserable state?² Leonhard's book left scarcely an aspect of Jewish life and practice unexamined by his censorious eye, finding fault with everything from the prayer services to the gender discrimination to the many rituals and practices that had multiplied over the years.

Scarcely a year later, in 1782, Naphtali Herz Wessely published his treatise in Berlin, *Divre shalom ve-emet (Words of Peace and Truth)*.³ Stimulated by the Edict of Tolerance of Habsburg emperor Joseph II, it too excoriated the Jews in Ashkenaz for "being the one people in the world who have neglected the education of their youth in the laws of etiquette, sciences and the arts. Many learned men among the Jews, pious and steeped in God's teachings, have not heard of or studied human knowledge... Fundamental principles of their faith are not taught systematically."⁴ He disapproved of Jewish occupational distribution and economic activities.

Some of these objections strike such similar notes that one cannot help but wonder about the comparative fate of these two books. Leonhard's book was

widely ignored by his contemporaries and subsequent scholarship rarely recalls it.⁵ How different was the fate of Wessely's treatise. It is widely considered to be the manifesto of the *haskalah* movement, touching off a firestorm of controversy and energizing a generation of young idealistic Jews to begin the long transition to modernity.⁶ Wessely's responses to his rabbinic critics far exceed the length of his initial statement and demonstrate his commitment to working within a legitimate Jewish framework while conceding no ground to his rabbinic critics.⁷

Johann Leonhard was a convert out of Judaism, and the larger context of his literary effort was the Christian critique of Jews and Judaism. Leonhard's apprehension that his book would be greeted with the same distrust and neglect as the converts themselves proved to be well founded.⁸ If his work was not literally consigned to the dustbin of history, it was surely condemned to complete obscurity, neither Jews nor Christians manifesting much interest in what he had to say. The strong parallels between these specific elements of his message and Wessely's raise larger questions about the place of converts out of Judaism within our understanding of German Jewish history, and particularly about their role in dissemination of the Christian critique of Judaism within the Jewish world. Can it be sheer coincidence that the specific examples cited in the condemnation of Jewish tradition and contemporary Jewish life by converts out of the faith closely resemble those in the works of reformers determined to activate changes within the Jewish world?⁹ The issue merits closer examination.

In their conspicuous roles as negotiators of the Jewish-Christian divide in German lands, converts such as Leonhard in the late eighteenth century were certainly no parvenus. From the early sixteenth century converts occupied a special place in the culture of Ashkenaz.¹⁰ Collectively, their voice, their conduct and their literary *oeuvre* filled the cultural landscape in a distinctive manner. In early-modern German lands political circumstances, historical timing, and the growth of printing contributed to a climate for converts that differed both from its medieval Ashkenazic predecessor as well as from other contemporaneous European models of Jewish conversion.¹¹

All conversions are products of specific circumstances and particular personalities, yet they are also the products of broader cultural and historical forces. In medieval Christian Europe, able converts from Judaism bore a unique responsibility to dramatize the potential for further Jewish conversion, to serve as a proselytizers, and to transgress against and reject the faith and culture of their ancestors. When they became instruments in the hands of their converters, converts often aroused greater loathing and sharper polemical barbs than the gentile persecutors.

Medieval Jews erected mighty cultural barriers to conversion. Martyrdom reflected the highest value of their community in its attempt to define itself against Christendom, while conversion, even under duress, signified a failure to attain the ideal.¹² While medieval Jewish polemicists carefully read works by prominent converts the better to refute them, their specific critique of aspects of Jewish religion and culture can scarcely have penetrated to the Jewish community in any constructive way.

During the early-modern period, profound changes took place concerning the place of conversion in the culture of Ashkenaz. As the numbers of converts slowly rose, their role as critics diminished. The sense of crisis within Jewish society became more acute and more professing Jews voiced social and religious criticism of the status quo. As conversion became more commonplace it began to lose its oppositional sting. It is important to remember, however, that even at their highest point, early-modern conversions never constituted a dominant or even very statistically significant phenomenon.¹³ Precisely because their actual numbers were negligible these converts compel attention, for they occupied a highly visible place as mediators between German Jewish and Christian society.¹⁴

Several characteristics distinguish the early-modern German conversions from their medieval predecessors and from other models of conversion. The religious and political landscape of early-modern Germany provided a unique backdrop for Jewish converts. Unlike the Italian proselytizing campaign inaugurated under the mid-sixteenth century Counter-Reformation Catholic church,¹⁵ there was no central religious institution in German lands. To the contrary, Luther's Reformation initiated a period of denominational rivalry, confessional strife, and intermittent war over religion that threw German theologians and their institutions into a state of prolonged turmoil. No German state had the political resources or the will to throw its weight behind a uniform missionary campaign of the kind undertaken by the Iberian monarchs.¹⁶ The religious conflicts and the long process of uniting the German principalities did not really abate until well into the nineteenth century. The three criteria that demonstrate a serious commitment to missionizing, as Robert Chazan has outlined, were all absent from the German sphere.¹⁷ These include the allocation of significant resources to training personnel and coercing Jewish submission, regularizing techniques for confronting Jews, such as requiring attendance at sermons, and introducing effective and innovative arguments. None of these criteria could be met in the conflict ridden and politically atomized conditions of Reformation-era German lands. Jews seeking to live beyond their communities found a different kind of Christianity available, a distracted Catholic church, a more attractive Protestant one, and an array of

confessional choices. Some became serial converts and in some families, members were converted into different denominations.

The first prominent converts in early sixteenth century German lands catapulted to public attention without the backdrop of ostentatious disputations or royal patronage that had characterized earlier European and Iberian missionizing until the end of Jewish life in Spain and Portugal.¹⁸ Two prominent figures, Victor von Carben and Johannes Pfefferkorn stood at the forefront of this development.¹⁹ While Dominican sponsorship may have initially propelled them into the public eye, they charted a new course that would change the nature and character of convert activity. Both of these converts took advantage of the printing press to publicize their causes. Both attempted to steer the Jewish-Christian polemic beyond the theological to the social, cultural, and political realm. Victor von Carben's *De Vita et Moribus Judeorum (On the Life and Customs of the Jews)* did not draw nearly as much attention as the writing of his contemporary Johannes Pfefferkorn. As a result of his *Kulturkampf* with Johannes Reuchlin, every literate German could follow his pronouncements about Jews and Judaism. His works on Jewish ceremonial and liturgy achieved far greater circulation and notoriety than those of any previous convert in German lands.

These sixteenth century German converts struck a new template for convert activity. They disseminated their ideas in illustrated print, and beginning with Pfefferkorn, in the vernacular. The early sixteenth century works precipitated an outpouring of writing by converts over the next two centuries. The genres they pioneered, autobiographical writing and polemical ethnography (*Jüdisches ceremoniel*) persisted into the modern era. Let us focus on these literary strands as they matured and evolved through the eighteenth century, as for they remained the most significant vehicles of convert critique. Some elements of their critique bear striking parallels to those of Jews who fostered movements of regeneration within Judaism and renewal of the status of Jews in Christian Europe, including the Jewish enlightenment, reforms of the Jewish religion, and civil emancipation. In this respect, converts expressed or anticipated some of the ambiguities of Jewishness that became the hallmark of the struggle to create a new image of Jews and a new place for them within the European order.

Autobiographical Writing and the Critique of Judaism

In his masterful analysis of Hebrew autobiography of the nineteenth century, Alan Mintz describes "the apostasy narrative in the autobiographical mode." The pivotal point in these life stories "is the moment of apostasy: the sudden realization that the received belief...is no longer possible... The pathos of this event is underscored by the origins of these young men. Typically, they originated from the most devout and scholarly circles of Jewish society."²⁰

Mintz is referring to a loss of faith rather than a literal conversion out of the faith, and his subjects in late nineteenth-century Eastern Europe no longer have the consolation of Haskalah as deliverance from the benighted beliefs of their youth. Nor can we claim that any strands of influence linked the pre-nineteenth century converts to these later figures. The early-modern German "real" apostates had few if any interested readers of their life stories in any subsequent Jewish societies. Yet their use of their individual life stories as the literary vehicle to describe the world they had lost, to outline the crises afflicting it and driving away its best young men, and to deliver their critique of Jewish society was groundbreaking.

Historian Steven Lowenstein has perceptively noted about the conversion of Jews in late-eighteenth-century Berlin that "The crisis was not merely a crisis of conversions; it was a crisis of identity."²¹ While most converts in the early-modern period emerged from different social classes and utterly different backgrounds than those of the urban Berlin elite (and Lowenstein himself has warned against a Berlin- or even urban-centric German Jewish historiography)²² their personal narratives nevertheless testify to individual crises that resulted in the sharp break from their families and religious and social communities of origin. Since the converts told their stories within the conventions of conversion narrative, in order to understand what they are really saying, we must look beyond the ubiquitous formulaic religious-polemical messages that frame their work. These first person accounts are central to the phenomenon of conversion in this period and milieu.

Christian convert narratives grew out of the literary tradition beginning with Paul's account of his conversion and unfolded in a completely new fashion with Augustine. Confession autobiography for ordinary people revived with the Lutheran reformation, as many Germans embraced the reformed churches with their requirement that mature converts articulate the reasons for their conversion.²³ (This cultural imperative may explain the relative paucity of such first person expression in other Jewish conversion traditions. English Jews, for instance, although no less literate than German, produced few similar accounts of their conversion experiences.)²⁴ Some German Jewish convert autobiographies followed a sudden illumination Pauline model of conversion while others depicted a journey with many stops until they achieved clarity. Some converts wrote their life stories themselves, others had Christian editors, and still others published revisions of the sermons preached at their baptism, providing personal background information. Some of these were published as free-standing pamphlets, others as introductions or appendices.

Although converts reconfigured their memories to conform to Christian expectations, the individual's deepest voice occasionally erupts through the scripted drama. Stripped of the requisite theological clichés, the texts allow

us to glimpse the individual experiences behind the programmatic statements. We can hear the voices of (primarily) young men who were highly mobile, leaving their birth communities more often than any other Jews.²⁵ They traversed great distances, often alone, to study in a distant yeshivah, to apprentice to a relative in another land, or to pursue kinship ties elsewhere. Many recalled being deprived of a father figure: either they were orphaned, their fathers spent a good deal of time on the road, or because they had come into conflict with their father or with the community. In the course of their travels many became aware for the first time of the variety of Jewish customs and cultures, as well as the diversity of Christian denominations and regional practices. Some came to a new understanding of the role of religion in human society, developing a skeptical and worldly attitude to the constraints of the confessional communities of their past. For these young men, leaving the fold was often an expression generational rebellion, or seeking some wider frontier for their existence. While such young people may not have been drawn to Christian doctrines and practices, they could find no alternatives to baptism for their newly reconfigured selves. As Mordechai Breuer put it succinctly in the opening line of his social history, "Confessed belief is not identical to existential belief."²⁶

In striking contrast to most maskilic autobiographies, stories of converts' Jewish childhood and youth did not necessarily portray a negative picture of their Jewish upbringing. To the contrary, through the eighteenth century, many claimed to have been excellent students who mastered the traditional texts with ease; they claimed as well that their families had been economically comfortable. Some claimed to have been happily married, or to have fine prospects awaiting them. Professionally, they emerged from the class of religious functionaries of the second rank, such as local rabbis, melammedim (school teachers), and cantors. In fact, these professions demanded a highly peripatetic lifestyle and the subsistence pay was so meager many lived on the economic margins. These converts needed to demonstrate that converts were not leaving Judaism because they had failed or had been reduced to penury. Many ended up as tutors or professors of Hebraic and Judaic subjects, so that their boasts of good Jewish education served as their professional calling card, supporting their claims that they were competent to speak to the Christian world about the Jews. Convert autobiographies maintained the delicate balance between their portrayals of themselves as paragons of personal success and a religious culture that they retroactively characterized as fundamentally flawed.

The first waves of convert autobiographical writing contributed to the modern phenomenon of this genre as critique of the world of one's past. While documentation of the self was far from unknown within early-modern Jewry, a vast literature on autobiographical writing has concluded that

undifferentiated memories of the past are never sufficient for true autobiography. Autobiographers seek to impose a narrative shape on the past, and in order to do that they must have attained some distance from it. Such distance can emerge most dramatically with a deep and traumatic break from the writer's past.²⁷ Conversion autobiography presupposes that traumatic break with the past, and it is within this genre that the roots of autobiography as a tool to criticize Jewish society are to be located. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, some of the convert autobiographies begin to strain the genre and ultimately to break the earlier mold for conversion autobiography. Rather than adhering to the earlier models consisting of briefer, more programmatic statements, they crossed over into new categories. The evident pleasure of the writers in recounting the details of the development of the self, the textured chronicling of their adventures in the world, the humor and critical eye cast at every society with which they come into contact, convey an altogether different sensibility than earlier stodgy and rather straightforward autobiographical accounts. More converts were emerging from prosperous business circles. They had less need to prove their credentials as Jewish specialists and could concentrate on their critique of Jewish life. Outstanding among the more elaborate literary works of later eighteenth century practitioners are those of Friedrich Albrecht Augusti and Gottfried Selig.²⁸ The latter's autobiography meanders on through three substantial and vividly drawn volumes. Without approaching the moderns' sense of chronicling interiority, their detailed examination of the life trajectory, reflection on the changing self in many settings, and the balance between distance and proximity to the Jewish world was unprecedented in convert writing.

The sense that converts were living on the threshold of a new age in which the relationship between Jews, Christians, and converts was undergoing profound change pervaded the writings of later eighteenth century converts. They begin to refract messages of enlightenment, albeit in areas that reflected their own particular interests most closely. It is startling to find expressions of some of the most radical Enlightenment ideas hidden within the standard pieties of converted writers. These remarks betray the desire of some converts not merely to exchange one institutional religion for another but to escape the trammels of traditional society altogether. They strengthen our contention that many converts were looking for a new way to live their lives. Weary or disdainful of the Judaism of their childhoods they broke their ties with it. They did not necessarily become insincere Christians, but the search that led them to Christianity was more of a quest for change than for Christianity per se. Baptism seemed to them the only way out of traditional Jewish society which still allowed them to remain in the European world. Ironically, it did not allow them to abandon their posture as solitary individualists battling a rigidly structured society.

Rather than universal brotherhood, most converts entered a life of bitter loneliness. Those who converted usually did so as solitary individuals (exceptionally, parents, usually fathers, converted together with their minor children) very rarely in concert with even one other Jewish adult. These men, and sometimes women, struck out against every convention ingrained throughout their upbringing, questioned many layers of traditional and communal authority, and often came to agonizing decisions about leaving the comfort of family, community, and hometown. By the same token, the range of life choices available to them was severely limited. Christian society shunned the converts, relegated them to the lowest professions, and with the exception of the Jewish salon women, rarely married them. Rather than opening new doors, conversion tended to cut off past and future. The suspicion and hostility with which these converts were regarded for most of their lives meant that their role as outsiders and critics continued long after their baptisms.

Let us listen to some of their interjections. In the course of his complex and lengthy conversion autobiography of the late eighteenth-century, Salomon Markus (after his conversion, Johann Friedrich Heinrich Selig) recounted the following incident that occurred when he was a young man.²⁹ A professional bookbinder, he approached a local farmer and requested permission to bind his books, including some Bibles. A young Christian bystander said to him: "Is it not peculiar that a Jew should wish to bind Christian books?" "Why is that?" Markus asked him. "Because it is well enough known, and there is no shame in admitting it, that you Jews are very zealous in your faith. How is it then that you would contribute to the external embellishment of a book that so opposes your faith? I would have thought that a Jew would prefer to see these books torn and unusable." Markus replied to him, "It is true that our people are as full of prejudice as any that has ever was, but not every one of us is equally afflicted. It would be a foolish prejudice indeed, since this refusal would not prevent the books from being bound and used. Our religion permits us any business through which we can serve human society. When we have learned a craft that is not fully needed by our own people, why should we not serve other folks with it? We do not think of you as people of a different faith, but as people whom the creator has put into this world with us, with bonds so that we may be of help to one another.... Do not think of us so poorly, as most Christians do."³⁰

Even if we regard this statement with the full skepticism this autobiography merits, and discount these sentiments for the teenaged Markus, it is still relevant that they are being expressed by the adult Selig. He has wishfully refashioned traditional Judaism into a universalistic and humanist creed, if only for some of its adherents. He censures Christians for assuming that all Jews are intolerant, and only Jews.

A much bolder assertion of the universal humanity of adherents of both religions can be found in another conversion autobiography of 1778. Johann Speyer recalled that when he told a Christian of his desire to convert, he encountered incredulousness: "Was I foolish? Did I really wish to undergo such folly? Did I want to ruin my reputation as a learned person? Did I not know that these days it is understood that when one lives a virtuous and sober life, it is the same whether one is Christian, Jew, or Muslim?" In another place in the same account, he uses this presumed equality of religions to prove that his conversion could have had nothing to do with a desire for advancement: "Our contemporary world is so tolerant that an upright Jew who conducts himself modestly can acquire the same repute as in any other religion. I myself experienced this: the confidence of Christians toward me in my medical practice was so strong when I was a Jew, that I cannot expect a higher level now that I am a Christian. If I had hoped to achieve some advantage, the Christian religion surely could not accomplish this."³¹

Such optimistic appeals to common humanity, or even to a confessionless society, enlightened ideals that died with romanticism in German philosophy, appear only as faint glimmers within some texts. It is surprising to find any such statements in the generally apologetic writings of converts. Their presence indicates that the current of skepticism or religious relativism that runs beneath some of the sincerest-sounding religious conversion statements reaches greater depths than initial readings would have us imagine. Such universalist ideals could not carry them far. Ultimately, their narratives and life trajectories, bounded by the political, social and civil impediments still firmly in place in eighteenth-century German lands, led most to the same conclusions: that conversion to Christianity was the only way for them to escape their Jewishness and participate in this universal human brotherhood. The enterprise was doomed from the start.

Jüdisches Ceremoniel

Having stepped outside the charmed circle of Jewish traditional identity and into a place on the margins of Christian society, early-modern converts made a foundational contribution to a literature of polemical ethnography that we can call *Jüdisches Ceremoniel*. It demonstrates their continuing engagement with Jewish culture and identity long after their baptism, whether in a detached, hostile, or protective mode. Its primary purpose was to open up daily Jewish life to the critical scrutiny and polemical mockery of Christians. These works provided as important a psychological bridge between their Jewish and Christian selves as their autobiographies did. This innovative and polemical literary activity catalogued and interpreted Jewish culture, its symbols, religious and domestic rituals, and synagogue liturgy, in light of Christian sensibilities. These polemical ethnographies served several distinct

purposes. Most overtly, they forged another link in the chain of polemic against Jewish law and ritual that stretches back to earliest Christian writings. Every prominent convert from von Carben, Pfefferkorn, and Margaritha in the sixteenth century, to Carl Anton and Gottfried Selig in the late eighteenth-century, wrote similar compendia focusing on one area or encompassing all of Jewish ritual life. Dozens, if not hundreds of works on Jewish ceremonial appeared during this period, each one reflecting the double alienation of the convert and his two-pronged appeal, to Jews to jettison their non-scriptural and irrational traditions, and to Christians to cease misinterpreting the foolish as demonic and to judge Jews more accurately.³² More subtly, as a result of their influence in some circles, and the ubiquity and longevity of this genre, they became vehicles for transmitting the Christian critique of Judaism into the Jewish world, forcing Jews to become more self-conscious about their cultural and religious practices. By adopting the Christian stance which viewed Judaism as a superstition, and then mocking aspects of Jewish tradition, from midrash to various ceremonies which seemed to them irrational or ludicrous, they were the first to articulate criticism that Jews came to internalize and often adopt as part of the modernization process. Finally, the converts chastised Christian society for often misreading Jewish practices as evil and demonic when they were at worst merely superstitious and gratuitous. Some took Christian society to task for failing to make good on its promises and to live up to its own ideals.

Let us cite some particular examples to illustrate what I've been saying. The first comes in late eighteenth-century convert Gottfried Selig's recollection of trouble over Jewish burial practices:

When we became ill... an elderly Christian woman was hired to nurse me. Suddenly, my father was arrested. We later found out that...this terrible woman claimed to the authorities that when I lay close to death, my father put a stone and a knife on the bed near me, saying if I should happen upon the crucified Christ on my way to eternity, I should use these tools to wound him...One would think such an absurd charge would automatically be dismissed, but it cost my father dearly to defend himself. He had to send to the university for their experts to pronounce an opinion whether the accusation was false or not. The woman died before the proceedings were finished.

But the question remains. Could the woman have invented such a charge purely out of her own imagination, or must there be some truth to it? It could not have been completely invented.... It cannot be denied that Jews have all manner of superstitions and awful customs when it comes to burial of their dead.³³

Selig cited this story twice, once in his autobiography, and later in his weekly subscription journal, *Der Jude*. This incident served to chastise Jews for clinging to strange rituals that have neither scriptural nor rational basis.³⁴ At the same time, Selig used it to reproach Christians for taking an equally irrational stance, attributing a malevolent motivation to harmless domestic rituals. This episode served as his opening to rebut many of the irrational and false beliefs that Christians held concerning Jewish ritual, culminating in the ritual murder libel. With a handful of exceptions,³⁵ even the converts who were most critical of Jews and Judaism repudiated the worst of Christian misconceptions concerning Jews. For example, Leonhard, whose work railed vehemently against the entire structure of rabbinic tradition and against many phenomena of contemporary Jewish life, nevertheless strongly defended Jews against what he regarded as a Christian superstition: "I can assure you upon my honor and upon my conscience... that there is nothing at all to the entire accusation...I am perplexed that this unfounded suspicion still prevails among Christians today.... I think that nowadays people should know better, given the general revulsion of Jews to blood, which goes so far that before they cook a piece of meat they salt it in order to draw out the blood, than to accuse them of consuming human blood (I cannot say it without shuddering). I truly wish I had the power to entirely eradicate from Christendom such a loveless accusation, which so goes against the grain of humanitarian love, and can do so much damage."³⁶

As the eighteenth century progressed, the penetration of Enlightenment concepts and standards into the convert literature on Jewish ritual and beliefs became more pronounced. Convert writing ultimately transformed the Christian theological critique of the Jewish religion as it was practiced into a rationalist critique of meaningless rituals and superstitious beliefs. At the same time, converts became much more strident in upbraiding Christians for not relinquishing their traditional and irrational beliefs concerning Jews. Carl Anton, eighteenth century convert to Judaism and tutor of Hebraica at Helmstedt University, published a treatise in 1755 concerning the subject of the Wandering Jew (*Ewige Jude*).³⁷ Anton's opinion of it was unequivocal. It should be discarded by Western society because the entire idea was simply contrary to reason. Anton's treatise is unremarkable, with two exceptions: the first is the furious response it provoked. The wife of one colleague published a mocking rebuttal, in which she claimed to have seen the Eternal Jew with her own eyes. He seemed exactly like the images of him published over the centuries with one small change. He had developed osteoporosis of the vertebrae and was now somewhat shorter in stature than his earlier description. In an appendix to the work she claimed that she had not only seen the Jew, but also his wife, the Wandering Jewess, an innovation in that literature. The second is Anton's reasoning which represents a notable development in convert literature. Almost a century earlier, another convert

from Judaism, Friedrich Albrecht Christiani, had published a treatise on the same subject for the same purpose, to lay the legend of the Wandering Jew to rest. The earlier piece considered the legend on basis of theology: it was so close in nature to Jewish superstitions he had just rejected; he was shocked to see Christians adhering to such Jewish-like beliefs. The eighteenth century convert appealed not to theology but to reason and this is a turn worthy of note. That he was immediately refuted in the most derisive and mocking tone augured poorly for the reception of Jews even in enlightened Christian circles.

While the earliest sixteenth-century converts added a political dimension to their religious polemics, casting Jews as a dangerous and loathsome element in the body politic, by the mid-eighteenth century their critique of Jewish society had focused on Jewish economic activities. Their comments can be linked to the larger discourse on poverty and productivization of groups regarded as socially marginal, most notably in the Prussian state.³⁸ Converts found themselves in an uncomfortable predicament when it came to pronouncements on this subject. On the one hand, they strongly endorsed the prevalent critique by Christian society of Jewish economic specialization, and like many Christians, minimized or dismissed the role of Christian restrictive legislation that had led Jews to specialize in these few economic activities in the first place. But they could not endorse the whole scale retraining of Jews for professions and crafts because they accepted that removal of such discriminatory status would make Jews feel more comfortable and secure as Jews and would remove one of the more urgent motives for conversion. Thus, many ended up speaking out against Jewish traditional occupations, but advocating for change only among converted Jews. Many converts chastised Jews for abusing Christian trust in their business dealings with them, and Salomon Markus made a career out of it as a customs inspector exclusively for Jewish trade. Leonhard cautioned Christians to know whom they were dealing with if they transacted business with Jews and damned Jews with faint praise when he noted that not as many of them were caught up in deception as is commonly believed.³⁹

Given the prevalent image of Jews as engaged in theft or fencing stolen goods, especially from churches,⁴⁰ and the false stereotype that lasted well into the nineteenth century of Jews as hagglers and usurious money lenders, converts from well-to-do backgrounds such as Selig felt the need to specify exactly how their fathers went from rags to riches. Most court Jews felt extremely vulnerable to suspicions concerning the roots of their wealth.⁴¹ Because of their special pleading, converts did not call as sharply for overhauling Jewish economic activity as they did in many other areas. Nevertheless, their role as mediators conveying each society's critique to the other was not negligible either. Economic activities became their trope for

standards of morality, and they internalized the Christian assertion that the New Testament inculcated a higher morality than the Old, so that Christians had a more highly developed sense of right and wrong than Jews. They portrayed Jews who cheated and deceived Christians as fulfilling Jewish religious imperatives, while they held Christians who acted in the same way to be anomalies within Christendom.

The writings of eighteenth-century converts convey a pronounced sensitivity to the aesthetic aspects of religious worship, their critique of Judaism broadening beyond religion to the shortcomings of Judaism as a culture. Many identified Christian worship with a sense of order and harmony, in contrast to Jewish worship with its informality and dissonance. Several mention first being touched by hearing Christian services or singing: Johann Phillip Bleibtreu remembered passing a church with his sister and hearing such beautiful singing that his heart was filled with joy.⁴²

Finally, convert criticism of Judaism in the late eighteenth century isolated rabbinism from other elements in Judaism as the cause of Jewish cultural backwardness and moral turpitude. While Christian theologians had long marked the Talmud as one of the significant obstacles to Jewish conversion, the convert critique included much of contemporary Jewish communal life. Their demand did not focus on the elimination of the Talmud as deviation from the biblical text, although that was surely included, as on the purging of all rabbinic influence on contemporary Jewish life.⁴³

The anguish of Jews who felt oppressed by the burden of their Jewish identity on their place in Christian society led to many attempted solutions. One was the acceptance of baptism without the pretense of concomitant commitment to Christian doctrine and religious transformation. David Friedländer's famous overture to Provost Teller was an effort on part of a small circle of enlightened and well-to-do Berlin Jews to escape the civil burdens of Jewishness.⁴⁴ As for the individuals who cynically accepted baptism to pave the way for social advancement, I will cite Heinrich Heine anachronistically, for he said it best. When asked about the nature of his conversion, Heine replied.

"In my latest book, *Romancero* I have explained this transformation that took place within me regarding sacred things. Since its publication many inquiries have been made, with zealous importunity, as to the manner in which the true light dawned upon me. Pious souls, thirsting after a miracle, have desired to know whether, like Saul on the way to Damascus, I had seen a light from heaven; or whether, like Balaam, the son of Beor, I was riding on a restive ass, that suddenly opened its mouth and began to speak as a man? No; ye credulous believers, I never journeyed to Damascus,

nor do I know anything about it, save that lately the Jews there were accused of devouring aged monks of St. Francis ... Nor have I ever seen an ass, at least any four-footed one, that spake as a man, though I have often enough met men who, whenever they opened their mouth, spake as asses."⁴⁵

The more particular and less pervasive their critique of Judaism and Jewish life, the closer the converts' message converges with the message of enlightened Jews who were simultaneously calling for similar changes as the only means of salvaging Judaism for the modern world. If we read the words of a near contemporary of Leonhard, Lazarus Bendavid (b. Berlin, 1762-1832) one of the radical figures of the late German Haskalah, who directed his critique of Judaism to Jews, the areas of confluence between the message of converts and that of Jewish enlightenment figures stands out more starkly. Bendavid recalled his own experience as a teenager in which he became alienated from traditional observance and attracted to the aesthetic element of Christian worship: "All at once I stopped praying the Jewish prayers. I stopped observing the commandments and visited the synagogue only when my parents insisted. More than once, I peeked into churches in order to enjoy the music of the organ and to uplift my spirit upon hearing the words of the preachers."⁴⁶ Bendavid's radicalism consists of two separate and equally significant departures: he refuses to reconsider his rejection of all forms of Jewish ceremonial; at the same time he refuses to accept the blandishments of Christianity, even if it appeared aesthetically superior. Any institutional religion and its ritual expressions were anathema to him as incompatible with natural religion. Bendavid pleaded with more conservative minded Jews to abandon their insistence that Jewish ideals with their high values and morals were inseparable from a large number of ritual observances:

"You complain about the bad character [middot] of the youth...and you blame it on the Haskalah. Blame it on yourselves. ...In the education [the youth] he received from you, the ritual precepts and moral teachings occupied the same plane in his conscience. His conscience tortured him equally if he had touched a stick on shabbat as if he had stolen or converted. Once he has overcome his conscience to violate the ritual laws, he knows no boundaries; he sees in the most sacred things outmoded superstition, no criminal act is beneath him....

Then as a result of [a crisis], poverty, or illness, he takes a look at his conscience and he is horrified by the absolute shambles of his moral life. He will never return to the superstition of his forefathers, or very rarely, but he cannot remain as he is. What happens? The youth who had been struck by blindness turns into a deliberate

sinner, or if his religious feelings have not been entirely snuffed out, he tries to convince himself that he will turn into a better person if he accepts Christianity. The Christian church is required by its own principles to accept him into her arms, and you are fortunate if your child becomes improved as a result. But his condition won't improve, it will deteriorate further, it must. Without belief in Christ, for you know that no baptized Jew, with or without a printed catechism, understands enough to accept the mysteries of Christianity. Without belief in Christ and the Holy Ghost he declares his belief in the Trinity. Because of his mind that you neglected and his heart that you corrupted he cannot understand the fundamentals of morality that the man of the cloth wants to teach him. He learns the words without the concepts, despises the priest who demands the same of him as his father did, and with his baptism, as though a mockery of both religions, his condition is worse than before. Now, although all branches of economic opportunity are open to him, he hasn't learned a thing. As a Christian he must now imitate the Jewish figure, just as he imitated the Christians while he was a Jew. As a bad Jew and a bad Christian he is hated by both, eaten away by pangs of conscience, and he dies sooner or later with a curse on his lips and despair in his heart."⁴⁷

Bendavid illustrated his dire warning of the fate of Jews who converted insincerely to Christianity with a personal case study. "I knew a Jew in Berlin who converted in his 35th year, and died recently at age 76.... His last days fell at about the time the Jews observe their Day of Atonement and I visited with him then. Since his years were about evenly divided between Christianity and Judaism, he was totally confused, and as his mind grew weaker, he truly didn't know to which religion he belonged. With each attack...a prayer would escape from his lips, sometimes a Jewish prayer and sometimes a Christian prayer. When his mind cleared, he preferred Judaism to Christianity; it is of course natural that he should do that, for those were his first experiences. To my question he responded entirely differently: He said that he prayed the prayer of Holy! Holy! Holy! with great intensity at the exact time it was being chanted in the synagogue and this increased his output of urine more than any Christian prayer. He died some days later, and anyone who has read Klopstock's *Sterbendes Gottesläugner* knows what his condition must have been upon his death."⁴⁸

Bendavid advocated a Judaism purified of all ritual, a natural religion through which Jews could come closer to the rest of humanity. Bendavid's ideal Jew severed his ties to all the ritualistic aspects of religion and adhered to the religion of reason and nature, retaining only such doctrines as monotheism, providence, and immortality of the soul.⁴⁹ Solutions to the

problem of Jewish identity seemed to advocate that Jews become Christians without Christianity or Jews without Judaism.

Do the early-modern German converts matter? For some time now I have been pondering the place of converts in the history of German Jewry. According persons or historical phenomena their rightful place within the historical narrative does not necessarily mean according them a positive role. From the point of view of the history of the Jewish people, those who formally severed their ties to the Jewish religion and adopt another have been lost to the Jewish people. Conversion as an individual phenomenon, even when considered in the aggregate, represents a historical dead end, a development out of which no further developments, positive or negative can ensue. Yet as any city planner knows, dead ends are an integral part of the topography, sometimes a pleasure to live on because nobody goes there, sometimes a nuisance when we make a wrong turn. Failure is often a step on the way to success, and knowing the historical byways and roads not successfully traversed can nevertheless enrich our understanding of the past. Erosion and loss contribute to the study of the historical landscape as surely as growth and development. More ink has been spilled on the tortuous transition to modernity by German Jews than any other. Yet the experiences of converts out of Judaism as bellwethers in modern Jewish history has only recently begun to attract the important place it merits. Pride of place for this development belongs to historian Todd Endelman, whose interpretation of conversion as an element in English Jewish history invites comparison to the experience of German Jewry, particularly for the period before 1800 when German Jews stood on the cusp of modern developments.

Jews in German lands, who were willing to dispense with marks of distinctiveness, and even those who converted, were not easily accommodated or tolerated in most sectors of German society. Unlike the English examples of drift and defection which culminated in baptism after several generations of weakening affiliation to community and commitment to its rituals, German Jews until the late eighteenth century usually emerged out of the world of full blown Ashkenazic tradition ill prepared for any other social milieu.⁵⁰

Prior to the nineteenth century few of these converts rose to any position of prominence, either cultural, intellectual or economic. Hampered by a lack of cohesion, they never developed an ideology that incorporated their Jewish pasts into their Christian presents. Indeed, they often saw each other as rivals for the sympathy and attention of generous hearted Christians. Still, they left an imprint that historians of German Jewry ignore at their peril. Converts can teach us a great deal about the phenomenon of "escape from Judaism." They are the first Jews to portray Jewish society to the modern Christian world, often to its detriment, but sometimes to its benefit. They are the first

to write about traveling as Jews from the inside of Christian society. They are the first German Jews to act on their belief that they had a place in the majority culture if only they would shed their Jewish values and its communal coordinates.⁵¹

In his exquisitely rendered and pain filled novel, *Timyon*, translated into English as *The Conversion*, Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld creates a conversation between two of his characters. One of them, a recent convert out of Judaism, has just defended himself against a drunken gentile peasant in a barroom brawl:

"You have to teach the goyim a lesson," said Freddy.

"Don't say 'goyim,' say 'drunkards,' " Martin reproached him.

"Why?"

"Because we're goyim too."

"I'm not a goy."

"You're mistaken, my dear fellow. From the moment Father Merser baptized you, you've been what the Jews call a goy."

"I'm not a goy," he insisted. "I'm an apostate." [meshummad]

"Okay. Fine."

"I'm an apostate, not a goy," he repeated.

"But, honestly now, why not a goy?"

"The word disgusts me. By no means do I want to be called a goy.

An apostate—yes."⁵²

This anxiety of identity, although not its particular resolution, mirrors the disquiet of generations of converts out of Judaism, along with that of Jewish and Christian society toward them. Appelfeld writes in the grim shadow of the Holocaust, in which definitions of Jewishness, 'goyishness' and conversion have assumed new resonance. This fragment of a conversation brilliantly captures a persistent theme in the history of conversions out of Judaism: the dilemma of identity that haunted many converts, and the sense of liminality, alienation, and ambivalence that emerged from an existence on the margins of two societies and at the center of neither.

NOTES:

¹ Johann Conrad Georg Abraham Gottfried Friedrich Leonhard, *Erweiss, dass die Rabbinen schwurstracks wider das Mosaische Gesetz lehren. aus den Kirchen=Gesetz=Büchern der heutigen Juden geführt, und mit Erzählung seiner eigenen Bekehrungs=Geschichte in einem Gespräch vorgeragen* (Nürnberg: Ad. Gottl. Schneiderischen Buchhandlung, 1781).

² Leonhard, *Erweiss*, pp. 183-195.

³ *Divre shalom ve-emet li-khal 'adat yisrael, ha-garim be-artsot memshelot ha-keyzar ha-gadol ...Jozejus ha-sheni* (Berlin: n.p., 1782).

⁴ Excerpts in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 70-74.

⁵ Leonhard's book is listed in the bibliography to Johannes Graf, *Judaeus conversus: christlich-jüdische Konvertitenautobiographien des 18. Jahrhunderts* with Michael Schmidt and Elisabeth Emter (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1997). See the fascinating section on the selling and circulation of convert writings in a saturated market, pp. 98-115. These books were not only ignored by their contemporaries, they were neglected by later scholars and readers as well. The pages in the copy of Leonhard's book in the Leo Baeck Institute Library, New York, had never been separated. I thank Deborah Thorne for arranging to have them opened expeditiously.

⁶ On the public controversy over Wessely's book, see Shmuel Feiner, *Mahapechat ha-ne'orut: tnuat ha-Haskalah ha-yehudit ha-me'ah ha-18 [The Jewish Enlightenment in the Eighteenth Century]* (Jerusalem: The Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2002), pp. 164-191.

⁷ Wessely's responses are included in later editions, each with a separate title page. The (Vienna: Anton Schmidt, 1826), edition of *Divre shalom ve-emet*, includes his "Rav tov le-vet Yisra'el" to the rabbis of Trieste, "Eyn mishpat" to the rabbis of Italy, and "Rehovot." For an evaluation of Wessely's double alienation from both zealous traditionalists and extreme modernizers, see Edward Breuer, "Naphthali Hertz Wessely and the Cultural Dislocations of an Eighteenth Century Maskil," in Shmuel Feiner and David Sorokin, eds., *New Perspectives on the Haskalah* (London and Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), pp. 27-47.

⁸ Leonhard, *Erweiss*, intro., p. i.

⁹ Calls for reform of aspects of Ashkenazic Jewish life predate the eighteenth century movements. R. Judah Loewie (Mahara"l) of Prague initiated a strain of criticism of the educational practices of Ashkenazic Jews that fed into the Enlightenment period. See Simhah Assaf, *Mekorot le-toldot ha-chinukh be-Yisrael*, (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1925), I: xviii-xxvi; Morris Fajershtein, ed. and transl., *The Libes Briv of Isaac Wetzlar* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996=Brown Judaic Studies no. 308), esp. pp. 40-41. In the late eighteenth century, as Fajershtein notes, pp. 28-29, both Jacob Emden and Wetzlar were calling for structured Jewish education for Jewish girls. This critical strain did not look directly to the Christian world as a model, but cf. the comment of Marion Aptroot, " 'In galkhes they do not say so, but the laytsh is as it stands here'; notes on the Amsterdam Yiddish Bible translations by Blitz and Witzelhausen," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 27, 1-2 (1993):143, "It must be understood that referring to other Jewish translations, i. e. the Sephardic, was a legitimate means of criticising the Ashkenazic tradition without referring to the example of the Christians."

¹⁰ On this subject see my *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹¹ The converso population in late medieval Iberia differed so greatly in the magnitude, the dynamics, and the context of conversion as to defy comparison. The reactions of 'old' European Christians against them, however, bear striking parallels. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: the Iberian and the German Models," (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1982: The Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, 26).

¹² Ivan G. Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 463-472.

¹³ Martin Friedrich, *Zwischen Abwehr und Bekehrung: die Stellung der deutschen evangelischen theologie zum Judentum im 17. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988), pp. 150-63, found a total of 85 conversions mentioned in German language printed sources for the half century from 1600-1650, an average of fewer than two each year.

¹⁴ In recent years, converts out of Judaism in German lands in the early-modern period have received increasing scholarly attention. For the sixteenth century, see Gustav Hamman, "Konversionen deutscher und ungarischer Juden in der frühen Reformationszeit," *Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 39 (1970): 207-237; Ilava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, "On the Periphery of Jewish Society: Jewish Converts to Christianity in Germany during the Reformation," *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Hayim Hillel Ben-Sasson*, ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson, Robert Bonfil, and Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 623-654 (in Hebrew). *Germania Judaica*, eds. Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995), vol. 3, parts 1-2, contains a tremendous amount of primary source material on converted Jews in German lands until 1519. For the seventeenth century see my "Converts and their Narratives in Early-Modern Germany: The Case of Friedrich Albrecht Christiani," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 40 (1995): 65-83; Deborah Hertz, "Women at the Edge of Judaism: Female Converts in Germany, 1600-1750," *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Trends Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, Menachem Mor ed. (Lanham: University Press of America; Center for the Study of Religion and Society, Creighton University, 1992), pp. 87-109. For the eighteenth century, see Martin Jung, *Die Württembergische Kirche und die Juden in der Zeit des Pietismus (1673-1780)* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1992); Binyamin Zev Keddar, "Continuity and Change in Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Eighteenth Century Germany," *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Period*, eds. E. Etkes and Y. Salmon. (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 144-160 (in Hebrew).

¹⁵ For the papal conversionary drive see Kenneth R. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555-1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977).

¹⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Robert Chazan, "The New Christian Missionizing of the Thirteenth Century." (Wyner Memorial Lecture, Cambridge, 1988).

¹⁸ For a sense of the ad-hoc and sporadic nature of the disputations conducted in various German principalities, see e.g., Stephen G. Burnett, "Calvin's Jewish Interlocutor: Christian Hebraism and anti-Jewish Polemics during the Reformation," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 55,1 (1993):113-123; Johannes Isaac's report of a dispute he held in the house of R. Eliezer Treves with five rabbis, *Defensio veritatis hebraicae sacrarum scripturarum* (Cologne, 1559), cited in Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, "On the periphery," p. 119; Antonius Margaritha's description of his disputation with Josel of Rosheim, Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 50-51; Joseph Stadthagen, *Religionsgespräch gehalten am Kurfürstlichen Hofe zu Hannover, 1704* ed. A. Berliner, (Berlin: Louis Lamm, 1914).

¹⁹ For Carben, see Maria Diemling, "The Image of Women in the Writings of Victor of Carben," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 12-B, (2000): 91-100; for Pfefflorkorn, Hans-Martin Kirm, *Das Bild vom Juden in Deutschland des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1989: Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early-Modern Judaism, 3).

²⁰ Alan Mintz, *Banished from their Father's Table: Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 4-5.

²¹ Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family and Crisis, 1770-1830* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 133.

²² Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Mechanics of Change: Essays in the Social History of German Jewry* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992=Brown Judaic Studies no. 246), p. 24. Lowenstein counts on average 110 Prussian Jews converting to Protestantism each year in the first half of the nineteenth century, of whom a disproportionately large number lived in Berlin. Cf. Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, transl. Elizabeth Petuchowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 39-43.

²³ Graf, *Judaicus Conversus*, p. 68, notes that none of these works bore the title autobiography. Instead, they were called *Leben*, *Lebensbeschreibung*, *Bekennnis*, *Konfession*, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, *Memoiren*, as well as somewhat later, *Bericht*, *Geschichte*, *Nachricht*, etc.

²⁴ Graf's bibliography alone counts 53 autobiographical works in the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century in German, and it is far from exhaustive. It also does not include the writings of Jewish salon women who converted.

²⁵ On particular age cohorts as a separate taxonomy of conversion, see William Chester Jordan, "Adolescence and Conversion in the Middle Ages: A Research Agenda," in Michael A. Signer and John van Engen, eds. *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2001), pp. 77-93. It appears that by the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries the more vulnerable age was the late teens to early twenties for young men. On the high level of Jewish mobility in the early-modern period see Jacob Barnat, *Shabia ut: hebetim hevrat'im* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2000), pp. 69-90.

²⁶ Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 1.

²⁷ See my discussion in *Divided Souls*, pp. 88-91, and the analysis in Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, forthcoming), introduction.

²⁸ Friedrich Albrecht Augusti, *Merckwürdige Lebens-Geschichte Friedrich Albrecht Augusti Pfarrers zu Eschenberge im Herzogthum Gtha, welcher vor seiner Bekehrung, unter den Nahmen Josua Ben Abraham Herschel, die Stelle eines Jüdischen Rabbi in Sonderhausen bekleidet, aus der Urkunden gesammelt von einem Freunde* (Erfurt, 1751). Gottfried Selig, *Geschichte des Lebens und der Bekehrung Gottfried Seligs LECT. PUBL. seiner drey Schwwestern und einiger naher Anverwandten, welche sämtlich das Judentum verlassen, und treue Bekenner Jesu geworden sind. Von ihm selbst aufrichtig beschrieben.* Leipzig: 1 (1775); 2 (1777); 3 (1779). Graf's text in *Judaicus conversus*, contains volume 1 with some abbreviations.

²⁹ *Johann Friedrich Heinrich Seligs, eines Bekherten aus dem Judentume, eigne Lebensbeschreibung. Nebst einem doppelten Anhang, welcher die Apologie des Verfassers und eine Geschichte und Beschreibung des Zucht- und Armenhauses zu Waldheim enthält* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Gottlob Sommer, 1783). Vol. 1, with some sections abbreviated can be found in Graf, *Judaicus conversus*, pp. 260-369. For an assessment of the economic activities of this convert, see Michael Schmidt, "Schacher und Wucher. Ein antisemitisches Stereotyp im Spiegel christlicher und jüdischer Autobiographien der Goethezeit," in *Menora: Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte*, 1(1990), pp. 235-277.

³⁰ Johann Selig, in Graf, *Judaicus conversus*, p. 294.

³¹ Duitsch, cited in Graf, *Judaicus conversus*, p. 56-57, note 168.

³² On this literature see Maria Diemling, "Christliche Ethnographien über Juden und Judentum in der Frühen Neuzeit: Die Konvertiten Victor von Carben und Antonius Margaritha und ihre Darstellung jüdischen Lebens und jüdischer Religion" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1999); Stephen Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 275-87.

³³ Gottfried Selig, *Geschichte*, in Graf ed., *Judaicus conversus*, pp. 167-68; repeated in his *Der Jude*, 5 (1770): 154-55.

³⁴ On a similar practice related to birthing ceremonies see Shalom Sabar "Childbirth and Magic: Jewish Folklore and Material Culture" in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), pp. 696-97.

³⁵ These exceptions include Ernst Ferdinand Hess, *Speculum Judaeorum* (Cologne, 1602); Samuel Friedrich Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreiffter Schlangen-Balg* (e.p. Nürnberg, 1614; repr. in Johannes Willfer, ed. *Theriacum Judaica ad Examen Revocata*, Nuremberg, 1681); Dietrich Schwab, *Detecum velum Mosaicum Iudaeorum nostri temporis* (Cologne, 1616); Paul Christian Kirchner, *Jüdisches Ceremoniel, das ist: Allerhand Jüdische Gebräuche welche die Juden in und ausser dem Tempel* (Erfurt, 1717; Nuremberg, 1724); Paul Wilhelm Hirsch,

Sefer Megalleh Tekaphot (Berlin, 1717); Jacob Fundam, *Schatkammer der Talmud* (Amsterdam, 1737); Caspar Joseph Friedenheim *Yehudi me-ba-hutz: das ist der äusserliche Jud* (Witzburg, 1785).

³⁶ Leonhard, *Erweiss*, pp. 39-40. Graf, p. 59, cites several additional examples of converts who repudiated the charge: Franciscus Xaverus, *Tractatus de fabulis et superstitione Judaeorum inde a nativitate usque ad circumcissionem* (Hamburg, 1719); Friedrich Albrecht Christiani, *Judischer Glaube und Aberglaube* (Leipzig, 1713); Aloys Sonnenfels, *Juedischer Blut-Eckel; oder, Das von Gebrauch des unschuldigen Christen-Bluts angeklagte, untersuchte, und unschuldig-befundene Judenthum* (Vienna: Joh. Ignatz Heyinger, 1753).

³⁷ Carl Anton, *Commentatio historica de Judaeo immortali, in qua haec fabula examinatur et confutator* (Helmstedt, 1756). See further, George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Brown University Press: Hanover and London, 1965).

³⁸ Christopher M. Clark, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

³⁹ Graf, *Judaeus conversus*, p. 61; Leonhard, *Erweiss*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ For reports of a Jewish theft ring, blending fact and fiction, see Paul Nicol Einert, *Entdeckter Jüdischer Baldober* (Coburg: J.G. Steinmark, 1737).

⁴¹ Michael Schmidt, "Schacher und Wucher. Ein antisemitisches Stereotyp im Spiegel christlicher und jüdischer Autobiographien der Goethezeit," in *Menora: Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdisch Geschichte*, 1(1990): 235-277. Schmidt notes that Germans used the word "schacher" only in disdainful reference to Jews engaged in petty trade, while such trade was in fact engaged in this period by many German Christians as well, including well known figures such as the philosopher Hamman.

⁴² Johann Phillip Bleibrey, *Der erleuchtete Meyr* (Frankfurt am Main, 1687).

⁴³ See the anonymous (attributed to Christian Ernst Wüch), *Rabinismus; oder Sammlung Talmudischer Thorheiten. In einer Reihe von Briefen, als ein Zuruf an die jüdische Nation, von dem Taumel der so äusserst elenden Vorurtheile zu erwachen* (Amsterdam: Schönfeld, 1789) and my discussion in *Divided Souls*, 230-234.

⁴⁴ David Friedlaender, *Sendschreiben an seine Hochwürden, Herrn Oberconsistorialrath ... Teller ... von einigen Hausvätern juedischer Religion* (Berlin: August Mylius, 1799).

⁴⁵ Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, transl. John Snodgrass (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, [e.p. 1882]), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Lazarus Bendavid, "Selbstbiographic," M.S. Lowe, *Bildnisse Jetztlebender Berliner Gelehrten mit ihren Selbstbiographien* (Berlin: J.F. Starcke, 1806), cited in Michael Graetz, intro. to Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charakteristik der Juden* (Leipzig, J. Stabel, 1793), 60-64. Facsimile reprint ed. with Hebrew trans. Havah Fraenkel, *Atashehu le-ofyam shel ha-Yehudim*. Intro., Michael Graetz (Jerusalem: The Dinur Center, 1994), p. 13.

⁴⁷ Bendavid, *Etwas*, pp. 60-64.

⁴⁸ Bendavid, *Etwas*, pp. 63-64, note.

⁴⁹ Bendavid published a complicated treatise aligning the Jewish calendar with the Gregorian. Lazarus Bendavid, *Zur Berechnung und Geschichte des jüdischen Kalendar: aus den Quellen geschöpft* (Berlin: Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1817).

⁵⁰ Of the great literature of rejection of converted Jews, see from the same year as Leonhard's conversion, the derisive picture in "Der getaufte Jude: weder Jude noch Christ," (Vienna: Sebastian Hartl, 1781). I thank Michael Silber for bringing this treatise to my attention.

⁵¹ On the characterization of West European Jewry as a model for modernization see Gershon David Hundert, "A Reconsideration of Jewish Modernity," *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Michael Graetz (Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000), p. 321.

⁵² Aharon Appelfeld, *The Conversion*. Transl. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: Schocken, 1998), 100-01.

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