Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany, 1800-1870

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Introduction

As a study of gender and religious culture, this text explores the transformation of Judaism during a period of profound change. In the early and middle part of nineteenth-century Germany, Jews became integrated into the surrounding society, achieved an outstanding degree of socioeconomic upward mobility, embraced bourgeois culture, strove for political emancipation, and adapted the features of their religion and culture to the modern world. This work explores changes related to women's place in Jewish culture in those crucial decades. Indeed, the account of how women gained in importance and visibility in nineteenth-century Jewish culture constitutes a central narrative of the book.

When German Jewry rose into the middle classes, women moved from the margins of Jewish society and culture to a more prominent position. At the same time, however, the gender analysis that I develop in these pages serves as a lens to focus on a larger process in Jewish history. Women's increasing importance in German Judaism formed part of a set of fundamental shifts in Jewish life, cultural and religious practices, and sensibilities in the nineteenth century.

The Judaism of pre-modern eras had been a culture defined by male learning and ritual observance. Halakhah (Jewish law) and men's study of rabbinic texts had reigned supreme. Over the course of the nineteenth century, though, Judaism became the religion of a modern, middle-class population and evolved into a culture of bourgeois religiosity that addressed women as well as men. In the bourgeois Judaism that arose in Germany between 1800 and 1870, sentiments, aesthetics, Bildung (the harmonious formation of the heart and the intellect), and Sittlichkeit (morality) came to possess overarching importance. This modern Judaism relied heavily on the family, on women's particular contribution to Jewish culture, and on both genders' emotional and religious sensitivity.

Women's status in Jewish religious culture rose in nineteenth-century Germany, but women did not achieve religious 'emancipation.' Nor were
they “liberated” in any sense, and they did not gain access to offices in the synagogues or governing boards of Jewish communities. In fact, women did not fight for equality within Jewish society or for greater inclusion in religious practices, and they tended not to publicly articulate their desires and preferences in regard to Jewish ritual. However, Jewish men and women together shaped a novel religious culture in which the differences between the sexes were significantly less pronounced than they had been in pre-modern Judaism. Hence, in nineteenth-century bourgeois Judaism, the hierarchical division between men and women that had characterized the gender order of Jewish culture for centuries subsided. The mechanisms that had held women at the periphery of Jewish religious life ceased to exercise their defining power.

Women had been excluded from the most highly valued practices of rabbinic Judaism—Talmud Torah (religious learning) and communal Hebrew prayer—and were exempt from the duty to perform certain categories of ritual obligations that carried much prestige. In the nineteenth century, the cultural importance of these religious practices declined, and many men ceased to engage in them consistently. Learnedness in rabbinic literature lost its preeminence as a yardstick of status and achievement within Jewish society. Concurrently, Jewish men increasingly founded their claim to masculinity and to male superiority on their privileged access to the public arenas of civil society, including politics, the university, and the professional world. At the same time, German Jews embraced ideas of a cultivated and aesthetically and emotionally meaningful domestic life, and Jewish men found new meaning in being devoted fathers and husbands.

Although men expected to experience bourgeois forms of Jewish religiosity within the family, it was women who gained particular recognition and esteem in the course of the privatization of Judaism that took place in nineteenth-century Germany. As mothers and mistresses of culturally refined German-Jewish households, they came to be highly valued as exemplars of and as experts in morality and religious intuition. In accordance with middle-class notions of gender characteristics, contemporaries stressed the significance of women’s beneficial influence on and indispensable role in religious culture. Nineteenth-century Jews prized femininity as a Jewish value. In fact, women as well as men engaged in religious practices that, according to the cultural norms of pre-modern Jewish life worlds, were gendered feminine. In the home and in the synagogue, the time-honored world of Talmud Torah-centered Judaism and its gender hierarchy fell into decay, and German Jews—across the religious spectrum from Reform to modern Orthodoxy—embraced a new, bourgeois culture of religious sensitivity. This embourgeoisement and modernization of Judaism and the transformation of the gender order of Jewish culture are the two interrelated strands of the story that I tell in this book.
WOMEN, MEN, AND THE RECASTING OF JUDAISM

In pre-modern Jewish society, as in other Western cultures, gender difference has formed the ground for male privilege and concepts of male superiority and female inferiority. This division has gone hand in hand with ideologically charged ideas of masculine and feminine characteristics and rests on divisions of social spheres into privileged male and less valued female domains. Or, as the historian Paula Hyman has phrased it, “in patriarchal cultures virtually all social roles and most character traits are ascribed to sex, with the positions of highest status and the most highly prized characteristics... reserved for men... The position of women in Judaism rests upon this patriarchal sex-role differentiation and the concomitant disparagement of women.”

Yet the gender order of Jewish culture distinguishes itself from that of other Western societies. In Jewish communities, the difference between men’s and women’s religious practices plays a crucial role in determining men’s distinct and privileged position. In Ashkenaz (the area of Jewish settlement and Jewish culture in Western and Central Europe) in the early modern era, gender was negotiated within what Chava Weissler has called a system of “sociology of religious knowledge.”

Gender differentiation and gender hierarchy in pre-modern Jewish society was not grounded in men’s access to and women’s exclusion from the public, economic, or political realms as they were in Western cultures. In fact, an analysis of Talmudic literature lets us trace a distinctive Jewish gender order back to antiquity. Their authors (the rabbis of ancient Palestine and Babylonia) created the foundation of what became known as rabbinic Judaism. The role of this literature in shaping Jewish life for centuries is significant, and in these texts we encounter a Jewish model of masculinity that diverges from Western ideals of male identity. The men described here do not derive their claims to maleness from power in the realms of politics, the military, and economy. Male identity, rather, is constructed, tested, and maintained when Jewish men study Torah. Within the gender order of rabbinic Judaism, “Torah as a gendered activity... produces the hierarchically ordered categories of men and women.”

In early modern Ashkenaz, women could engage in business and be active in the public and economic spheres, but their access to rabbinic study, to Hebrew learning and communal prayer, remained severely restricted. Thus, if we follow Joan Scott and understand gender as emerging in the social relationships between what contemporaries position as the two sexes, women in pre-modern Jewish society were inferior to men because of their exclusion from Talmud Torah. In Jewish society throughout the ages, Talmud...
Torah has formed the most highly invested cultural practice, and the pursuit of Talmud Torah played a key role in defining masculinity and male superiority. Consequently, when Jewish men disengaged from these practices in the nineteenth century, their withdrawal could not fail to have dramatic implications for Jewish society, for Jewish religious culture, and for how German Jews thought about gender. Jewish men renegotiated what it meant to be men, and women assumed important roles in the new, family-centered bourgeois Judaism.

The culture of nineteenth-century Jewish religiosity stood out with German Jews’ high regard for women, for family life, and for religious experiences and practices defined as feminine. Yet in all of these aspects, German Jews built on traditions in rabbinic Judaism and pre-modern Jewish culture. For centuries, Jewish women had not only enjoyed protection and respect, but Jewish texts also attached importance to women’s contributions in daily life and Jewish history. These texts also emphasized feminine virtues. Jewish societies in early modern Ashkenaz accordingly valued women's piety and relied on women’s religious competence in realms such as the preparation of food and the observance of sexual purity laws. Moreover, concepts of the power of the feminine were particularly common in mystical texts, and from Talmudic times on, Judaism understood certain aspects of God as female and motherly. In a similar vein, rabbinic literature called upon men to embrace and to enact femaleness. Nevertheless, in premodern Jewish society and within the cultural system of halakhic and rabbinic Judaism, women occupied an inferior and marginal position. They failed to have a voice in the discourse of rabbinic scholarship that shaped Jewish life. They were acted upon, even if in predominantly respectful ways. Within the legal and religious system of Halakhah itself, women suffered a variety of disabilities. In the spiritual economy of the pre-modern Jewish world, where merit primarily derived from the fulfillment of divinely ordained ritual commandments and where Talmud Torah ranked highest among these duties, called mitzvot, women had less access to piety and distinction than men. Exclusion from the communal practices of religious study and Hebrew prayer thus had a profoundly negative impact on their role in the religious life of the Jewish community.

This situation changed in German lands in the nineteenth century, when a new cultural formation replaced the Judaism of early modern Ashkenaz. Marion Kaplan and Paula Hyman have pioneered an analysis of this phenomenon by describing this modern Jewish culture as a “domestic Judaism” in which women became the main transmitters of the Jewish religion and of Jewish identity, as many Jewish men abandoned synagogue attendance and neglected Jewish ritual. Hence, in Imperial Germany women not only played a central role in the social and cultural embourgeoisement
of the Jewish population by building and maintaining a respectable and culturally refined German family life, but also by cultivating Judaism and Jewishness in the domestic realm. Women appear to have held on to Jewish piety longer than men, who spent more time in an increasingly secular world beyond the home. Through foodways and family customs, women continued to provide their husbands and children with a Jewish experience. Thus, in societies in which Jews integrated into the middle classes and adopted bourgeois lifestyles and value systems, the “privatization of much of Jewish behavior” was a Jewish response to the demands of modernity that led to a greater role for women in Jewish culture. At the same time, the development of a Judaism that was sustained by women and lived out in the home represented the Jewish variant of what scholars have called “the feminization of religion” in Western societies in the nineteenth century. Contemporaries ascribed women a particular aptitude and responsibility for religiosity, and religion became a female and feminine domain, as it played a smaller role in civil society than it had in pre-modern life worlds. The church or the synagogue and the home were the sites to which contemporaries tended to restrict religiosity.

In the first part of this book, I discuss the confluence of femininity, religiosity, and domesticity in German and German Jewish religious culture, and I describe how a bourgeois Judaism emerged, took hold, and unfolded in German lands in the decades between 1800 and 1870. This bourgeois Jewish culture had traits of a domestic Judaism. Male Jewish leaders created and promoted a modern Jewish religiosity in the early and eminently influential Jewish German-language periodical *Sulamith*, in new devotional literature for women, in women- and family-oriented homiletics, and in a variety of other Jewish publications. In these publications, reformers, ideologues, educators, rabbis, and preachers assigned women a decisive role. They lauded Jewish women as mothers and as guardians of their families’ and children’s commitment to Judaism—and criticized women for any perceived lack or decline of religiosity. According to the male leaders, Jewish women fulfilled their holiest duty in the domestic realm. Yet the modernizers also put a novel emphasis on women’s presence in the synagogue, welcomed Jewish girls in newly devised programs of religious instruction, and included female students in confirmation ceremonies. Moreover, rabbis as diverse as Samson Raphael Hirsch and Adolf Jellinek not only addressed women and stressed the female contribution to Jewish life, but also propagated a Judaism inspired by feminine values. They declared that Judaism, as a civilization and a religion, had always been family oriented and was driven by feminine principles. Thus, this study confirms that Jewish women rose in status and importance in nineteenth-century Jewish culture, and
that their improved status and visibility partly resulted from factors inherent in bourgeois culture, such as the emphasis on an emotionalized religiosity, notions of women's high propensity for the religious, and concepts of the home as a female and a religious sphere.

The new culture of bourgeois religiosity that German Jewry created was a feminized Judaism for women as well as for men. Nineteenth-century bourgeois Judaism did not primarily constitute a domestic Judaism from which men withdrew. Bourgeois Judaism, rather, was a feminized, privatized, and emotionalized culture of religiosity that both men and women cultivated in the home as well as in the synagogue. Men, too, prized the domestic realm as a site of religious experience and emotional fulfillment, and they sought moral elevation and edification in the synagogue. The new religious practices of nineteenth-century German Judaism addressed both sexes, who now—as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, daughters and sons—occupied significantly more equal positions than men and women had held in previous eras.

The second part of this book details how the equalization of men's and women's roles in Jewish life played out in some key sites of Jewish practice and ritual. In the synagogue, where women had occupied a marginal position in the culture of pre-modern and rabbinic Judaism, female worshippers gained visibility in nineteenth-century Germany. They were integrated into choirs and confirmation ceremonies, and contemporaries valued their presence. Concomitantly, men adopted an increasingly passive role in the synagogue, where worshippers expected to be edified and morally uplifted by beautifully phrased German-language sermons and by the dignified and aesthetically appealing tone of the service. In the synagogue and beyond, men engaged in religious practices that, according to the gender organization of pre-modern Jewish culture, constituted women's realms and in which nineteenth-century Jews believed women to excel. Jewish men came to pray in the vernacular “like women” and adopted female modes of prayer. Rabbis and preachers earned the respect of their coreligionists as experts in morality and religious sensitivity rather than as distinguished Talmud scholars.

In a religious culture in which German Jews prized German Bildung, decorous and culturally refined forms of worship, and emotionally meaningful religious experiences at least as much as Talmud Torah and Hebrew prayer, the gap between men and women and between men's and women's status and position in Jewish culture narrowed. In the past, the responsibility for, the right to, and the commitment to regularly reciting the Hebrew liturgy in a prayer quorum of ten had privileged men. This and other religious practices in which women had played a marginal role lost some of their supreme status in the nineteenth century. Many men neglected their
religious duties and thereby abandoned men’s prerogatives. The cultural practices and norms that had been central to the gender differentiation and gender hierarchy in Jewish society for centuries no longer formed the all-defining axis of Jewish life. Bourgeois values, instead, competed with and eroded the Jewish culture of religious learning and of halakhic observance. In the new culture of Jewish religiosity, men’s and women’s religious practices were more similar than they had been in pre-modern Judaism.

Along these lines, when nineteenth-century Jewish men adapted the performance of burial rites and the commemoration of the dead in voluntary associations to contemporary needs and tastes, newly founded and independent women’s societies came to fulfill religious functions that matched those of their male counterparts. In these female voluntary associations, women assumed roles in a public realm of civil society—while contemporaries (and later, scholars) tended to locate women, religion, and women’s religious functions primarily within the home. Thus, the feminization of nineteenth-century Judaism had traits that we associate with the privatization of religious practices. On a more fundamental level, however, the transformation of Jewish religious culture and of its gender order was contingent upon a landmark change: the most highly valued religious practices of rabbinic Judaism, most of all Talmud Torah and Hebrew prayer, had ceased to define Judaism, the synagogue, the rabbinate, and Jewish associational life.

This transition from a Torah- and Halakhah-focused Judaism to a Judaism shaped by modern notions of religiosity and new religious practices characterized the process of modernization of German Jewish culture as a whole. Bourgeois Judaism was not specific to the Jewish Reform movement. Thus, this book traces the emergence of the culture of bourgeois religiosity across the ideological divisions into Reform, modern Orthodoxy, and positive-historical Judaism. And even though modern Orthodox Jews rejected mixed-sex choirs and confirmation ceremonies in which women experienced a remarkable degree of inclusion in Jewish worship, the preeminent leader of modern Orthodoxy in Germany, Samson Raphael Hirsch, was a protagonist of the cult of Jewish motherhood and of a feminine Judaism. Bourgeois Judaism did not necessarily entail the repudiation of Halakhah and religious observance. It rather distinguished itself from premodern Jewish culture by reframing values, devising a new style of worship and devotion, and reconceptualizing what religion and religiosity meant. German Jews embraced the modern culture of religious sensitivity, irrespective of their ongoing commitment to, their outspoken renunciation, or their tacit negligence of Jewish ritual law.

The fact that the leaders of the Jewish Reform movement failed to amend Halakah and to emancipate women within Jewish law confirms
this analysis. Reformers showed great concern for women's role in modern Jewish culture and assigned women a central place in the religious economy of the modern Jewish community. Yet their heightened esteem for women did not translate into a reform of Talmudic law; this failed to happen because the culture of halakhic Judaism retreated into the background in nineteenth-century Germany. As German Jews entered modernity and forged German-Jewish culture, the essence, meaning, and character of Judaism changed. Halakhic Judaism was never entirely eclipsed. However, in bourgeois Judaism, a deep cultural shift and the rise of modern forms of religiosity rendered the reform of rabbinic law obsolete.

The historian David Sorkin has laid the foundations for understanding the embourgeoisement of German Jewish culture as I present it here. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German Jewish men developed new forms of group cohesion, identity, creativity, Judaism, and concepts of Jewishness; these coalesced at the intersection of German and Jewish cultural matrices. Likewise, in my account, the modern religious culture that Jewish men and women of nineteenth-century Germany and their (male) leaders created emerged through the interplay between discursive and sociohistorical practices, as German Jews recast Judaism within the parameters of the nineteenth-century culture of Bildung. In this process, Judaism took form as a religion in the modern sense, distinct from politics, science, commerce, and other “secular” realms of modern society. Jewish women and men, like their Christian counterparts, engaged in religious practices that suited their tastes and emotional needs. Affiliation with a religion developed into a matter of choice, personal preference, and identity, and the performance of religious rituals took on new meanings.

The privatization and feminization of the nineteenth-century Jewish religion formed an important dimension of this cultural and social modernization of Judaism, and a similar development had set in in Christianity. Yet for German Jews, the creation of a culture of a bourgeois Jewish religiosity was also a vehicle for and an expression of integration into German society. Moreover, within Jewish culture, the impact of the restructuring of gendered spheres of activity and responsibility was particularly profound, since in pre-modern Jewish life worlds the privileged access of men to a set of religious practices had formed a cornerstone of the society’s social organization. In nineteenth-century Germany, an age-old Talmud Torah-centered Judaism and its gender order made room for the new cultural formation of bourgeois Judaism. Thus, this book is a case study of how middle-class formation, the creation of a modern religion, and a fundamental shift in the gender organization of a diaspora culture in the process of adjusting to modernity interrelated in a European society.
Introduction

THE BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, societies in Western Europe had embarked on a process of economic, political, technological, social, and cultural transformation that was to alter all realms of existence. In France, the old society of estates had perished in the revolution of 1789, and in England, industrialization began to undermine existing political and economic structures. In fact, on the entire continent, the Enlightenment had already in the eighteenth century laid the intellectual and cultural foundations of modern society and had paved the way to introduce novel forms of social organization. The nineteenth century, then, was to reshape the character of European civilizations, and the decades between 1800 and 1870 marked a period of extraordinary structural change in German Jewish history.

Under the Napoleonic occupation, from 1806 to 1815, many German Jews had their first encounter with full civil liberties. Not until 1871 did they achieve a more lasting legal emancipation, with the establishment of the German Empire. In the intervening years, however, legal conditions improved slowly, though steadily. At the same time, the social, economic, and cultural profile of the German-Jewish population underwent dramatic transformation, and German Jews integrated into the emerging middle classes. By 1871, more than 60 percent of Jews in the German Empire had attained at least a middle-class income level, and poverty constituted a marginal phenomenon. As a distinctly urban group comprising 1.2 percent of the total population, German Jews had reached a high degree of integration and were well established in the commercial realm. As early as the 1840s, Jews formed more than 2 percent of the student body at German universities, and many Jewish families had adopted bourgeois values and cultural habits.

A century earlier, Jews in German lands had lived very different lives. Inhibited by an array of legal disabilities in dozens of separate kingdoms, duchedoms, and free cities, German Jews of the late eighteenth century had formed an impoverished population. Vagrancy and robbery was not uncommon, and, apart from a small stratum of wealthy and privileged Jewish families, the overwhelming majority of Jews led a precarious existence on the margins of German society. Members of the Jewish elite, who had ful-filled an important function in the early modern economy, had had access to the world of European courts since the seventeenth century. By the 1770s, however, under the impact of the Enlightenment, other Jews began to gain entry to newly rising social circles. In the emerging Enlightenment society, the desire for self-improvement, and the personal integrity of the
individual rather than a person's place in the corporate society, held paramount importance, and Jews were able to overcome social and cultural isolation. Initially, this development affected only a very limited number of Jewish families. Yet in the course of the nineteenth century, the social world of the Enlightenment expanded into civil society, the German middle classes came into existence, and the process of acculturation and integration into these new social and cultural formations reached increasingly larger segments of the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{12}

At about the turn of the nineteenth century, German Jews thus began to embrace bourgeois culture and commenced an extraordinary socioeconomic ascent. These years also marked the inception of religious reform. Although rabbinic Judaism had over the centuries of its existence constituted a flexible system of practices and beliefs that had undergone considerable changes, it had been stable in its structure. Rabbinic Judaism had invariably formed the main legal, social, and cultural framework for diaspora Jewries since antiquity, and for centuries Halakah—the law that learned men extracted from the Talmud and other rabbinic literature—had shaped Jewish life almost entirely. Halakah had formed the legal code of Jewish communities and had regulated social conduct and daily life. The Talmud, more than anything else, had informed the worldview of pre-modern Jews. This situation started to change in early modern Europe, when states gradually seized direct juridical control over their subjects, and Jewish communities began to lose the legal autonomy they had possessed for centuries. Moreover, with the introduction of the printing press, a larger number and a wider variety of texts than ever before came to circulate among the Jewish population. In particular, mystical writings undermined the authority of rabbinical leaders, who struggled to maintain control over the minds and the actions of the Jews of Europe.\textsuperscript{13}

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Jewish reformers began to argue that Judaism needed to be adapted to the emerging civil society envisioned by the Enlighteners. From the first decade of the nineteenth century on, pioneers of Jewish religious reform introduced changes into Jewish worship, some of which conflicted with established norms of Jewish practice. Many of the synagogue reforms, however, bore a primarily aesthetic character, and at the core they aimed to express and to cultivate new, bourgeois cultural sensibilities. Most importantly, in the decades that followed, Jewish communities throughout Germany enhanced decorum in public worship, introduced German-language sermons and choirs, abbreviated the liturgy, and expected rabbis to fulfill pastoral functions. At the same time, German Jews began to relinquish the systematic observance of ritual commandments. An increasing number of Jews neglected dietary laws, Sabbath rest, and daily prayers. Talmud Torah, the study of rabbinic literature,
Introduction

came to hold less prestige than it had in previous eras. Some—often university-trained German rabbis and scholars—headed this movement away from ritual observance by arguing that Halakhah may have lost validity in modern society. Other communal rabbis attempted to reconcile the needs and wishes of the reform-minded and progressive members of their communities, their own respect for Jewish tradition, and their commitment to a new, scholarly, historical, and critical approach toward Judaism that became known as Wissenschaft des Judentums (Scholarship of Judaism).14

By the mid-nineteenth century, a Reform movement had constituted itself in Germany. The movement’s leaders, though diverging on many issues and often trying to justify change with halakhic precedents, had adopted a common program: They believed that Judaism possessed a core and a spirit distinct from Halakhah, and that this core needed to be preserved. They also held that Judaism, Jewish law, and Jewish practice had evolved historically, and that the Jewish religion needed to be further adapted to a new age. The status of Halakhah in modern society was thus open to negotiation, and some changes in Jewish worship, such as the introduction of an organ into the service and the abrogation of prayers expressing hope for a return to Zion, became hallmarks of Jewish Reform.

Jewish Reform, however, by no means formed a unified, well-organized movement like the Reform Judaism of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America. Different German Jewish communities adopted various changes in worship and ritual at different times, and the movement lacked a clearly defined membership and a leadership that had formal authority. Even the term Reform Judaism is problematic. Contemporaries used a variety of terms, such as reformiertes Judentum (reformed Judaism) or progressives Judentum (progressive Judaism). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, liberates Judentum (liberal Judaism) became a common reference.15

In the 1840s, three rabbinical conferences played an important role in the formation of what we call Jewish Reform, also prompting the establishment of modern Orthodoxy in Germany. In particular, the events of the second rabbinical conference are of significance for the history of the third branch of modern Judaism—positive-historical Judaism. Positive-historical Judaism found its institutional home in the Jüdisch-theologisches Seminar (Jewish theological seminary) of Breslau in 1854. Yet even earlier, German-Jewish traditionalists had begun to organize themselves in separate, modern Orthodox congregations. Adherents of modern Orthodoxy, also called Neo-Orthodoxy, distinguished themselves from ideological Reform and indeed soon differed from the majority of German Jews by insisting that Halakhah was divinely revealed, eternally binding, and immutable.

They endorsed full ritual observance and declared themselves

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uncompromisingly faithful to rabbinic Judaism. The followers of positive-historical Judaism likewise held on to Halakhah and to the fulfillment of Jewish ritual commandments, but unlike the Orthodox, they subscribed to the modern, critical study of Jewish texts within the parameters of Wissenschaft des Judentums. Thereby, the school of positive-historical Judaism took an ideologically and theologically more flexible approach to rabbinical Judaism.\textsuperscript{16}

In Germany, however, positive-historical Judaism remained an intellectual and theological movement rather than a social one. Followers of this brand of German Judaism, which continued to be based at its seminar in Breslau, did not form independent congregations. Only in North America did a congregational movement emerge that can be considered the heir of the German positive-historical Judaism, and that is known today as Conservative Judaism. Conversely, modern Orthodoxy became the praxis of a small group of separately organized congregational communities in Germany. Yet modern Orthodox Jews never constituted more than a minority of the German Jewish population, at most between 10 and 20 percent in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{17} By 1870, in fact, Jewish Reform had become the dominant form of Judaism in Germany.

Three distinct branches of Judaism (Reform, modern Orthodoxy, and positive-historical Judaism) thus evolved out of what had been one early modern Ashkenazi culture. Indeed, the history of the modernization of Western Judaism has often been understood as the history of the formation and consolidation of these three modern Jewish movements. However, despite significant differences in ideology, theology, and practice, Reform, Neo-Orthodoxy, and positive-historical Judaism also had much in common. Whatever their approach to Halakhah, observance, and tradition, they all agreed that in nineteenth-century Germany, Judaism had to be the practice and the faith of enlightened individuals and of respectable German-Jewish families. Jews were to be Jewish by religion and German by culture. Members of modern Orthodox congregations and synagogues, as well as Reformers, pursued emancipation, aspired to belong to German middle-class society, and embraced bourgeois culture. Nineteenth-century ideas of spirituality and religiosity informed the religious practices in all German Jewish communities.

In this book I will show in some detail how bourgeois value systems and aesthetics also came to shape modern Orthodoxy, even though halakhic observance and religious conservatism set limits to changes in Orthodox praxis. Orthodox Jews did not introduce organ music and mixed-sex choirs into their synagogues and disapproved of confirmation ceremonies. They continued to value Hebrew prayer and Talmud Torah highly, and their leaders were closely committed to preventing these time-honored practices...
(which were so central to rabbinic Judaism) from losing esteem in their communities. Nevertheless, in middle-class society, other cultural values and practices competed in rank and importance with traditional religious learning and with the merit and distinction gained by the performance of ritual commandments. Talmudic learning, Hebrew prayer, and ritual observance no longer defined the worldview of German Jews, regardless of how individuals, families, and communities related to Halakhah and to rabbinic Judaism.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Reform and Orthodox Jews alike—as well as many German Jews who did not identify strongly with either movement—practiced a Jewish religion distinct from pre-modern Judaism. Altgläubigkeit, forms of Jewish practice and beliefs that had been characteristic in the eighteenth century and before, had almost disappeared in Germany. Edification, religious feeling, moral ennoblement, and the spiritual experience of worship had gained importance for nineteenth-century German Jews, who emphasized what they believed to be “the spirit of the Jewish religion.” Contemporaries prized decorum and cultural refinement in their synagogue services. They expected rabbis to have university training and to be competent in the German culture of Bildung. German Jews considered themselves Germans, aspired to full citizenship, embraced bourgeois culture, and wished to cultivate an enlightened and heartfelt spirituality and religiosity. Thus, across the spectrum, Jews in nineteenth-century Germany practiced a middle-class religion—a “bourgeois Judaism”—that was shaped by contemporary values and ideas.

The term bourgeois in the present text serves in many respects as the equivalent of the German word bürgerlich. Bürgerlich carries a set of meanings specific to the manner in which the categories of class, culture, and nation have overlapped in German history. In the most apparent sense, bürgerlich connotes class, as Bürgertum means bourgeoisie or middle class. Bürgerliche Gesellschaft, however, stands for civil society, reflecting the fact that during the Enlightenment, the nucleus of civil society in Germany and that of the middle class emerged together. While it seems at best awkward to use the English terms bourgeois or even middle class to characterize the social circles of Enlightenment society in the mid-eighteenth century, one would not hesitate to call them by the German word bürgerlich. Bürgerlich, indeed, refers to culture as much as to class. German historians, most prominently among them Jürgen Kocka, have proposed to understand the Bürgertum from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century not as a class but as a culture.  

The German Bürgertum, thus, consisted of a heterogenous social formation that was unified by a shared belief system in personal achievement honored by economic success, in associations of equals, in Bildung and aesthetics,
and in specific standards of family life and gender roles. Yet far from being class neutral, bourgeois culture had its roots in the social strata of the Bildungsbürgertum, consisting of civil servants, lawyers, university professors, physicians, ministers, artists, and other educated individuals and their families. The Bildungsbürgertum, again, stood in a complex relationship with the bourgeoisie, who were the property-owning merchant and entrepreneurial classes. Therefore, bourgeois culture needs to be understood as tied to economic change and ultimately to the rise of capitalism. Culture and class belong together, but they lack any clear-cut correlation. The embourgeoisement of the Jewish population in Germany fits well into this paradigm. Jews as a group became culturally bourgeois before they rose economically into the middle class. Jews entered German society and bourgeois society by embracing Enlightenment and middle-class culture. Through the process of acculturation, in fact, Jews did more than express their integration into bourgeois society. Their cultural embourgeoisement constituted the vehicle by which German Jews laid claim to membership in German society. By reading Goethe and Schiller, by cultivating the bourgeois culture of Bildung in their homes, and by behaving decorously in public, the Jews of German lands became German Jews. Jews certainly also hoped to attain full citizenship, and in the debate on emancipation, contemporaries often regarded the cultural and social improvement of the Jewish population as a prerequisite for emancipation. Becoming German, however, had more than political dimensions: German cultural values also gained influence beyond the geographic area of Germany. Though the boundaries of Germany are broadly defined in this text as the territory of the later Wilhelminian Empire, the scope of my investigation extends to the Jews of Vienna, Prague, and other Central European communities. By embracing German literature, music, and the standards of conduct of the German Bürgertum, Jews and non-Jews in Central Europe in fact, expressed Sittlichkeit (morality) and social status. They used German culture in order to establish themselves as middle class, or better, as bourgeois in the German sense. Bourgeois thus refers to Germanness, cultural sophistication, and moral integrity, as well as to a family’s social and economic standing. As a study on bourgeois Judaism, this book focuses on culture rather than on class. However, the embourgeoisement of Jewish culture and religion in the period between 1800 and 1870 cannot be understood without bearing in mind the massive social upward-mobility of German Jewry and the increasing integration of the Jewish population into the country’s middle class. Moreover, acculturation held out the promise of emancipation, so Jews broadly and enthusiastically welcomed bourgeois culture and its opportunities.
Jews refashioned themselves and their lifestyles, houses, manners, child-raising practices, and educational goals. Their religion did not form an exception but constituted an important arena for the development of new forms of identity and for the pursuit of moral, cultural, and social improvement. Whether Jewish families in Prague, Hamburg, or rural Wurttemberg had the economic resources of the middle classes or simply aspired to them, the religion of respectable and culturally refined German-Jewish mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, husbands and wives was bound to be an aesthetically appealing, morally uplifting German faith. That religion can aptly be characterized as bourgeois Judaism.